my youth is yours

by lynnearlington

Summary

“I hope we can be friends,” she says and Lena’s throat feels thick at the sound of it. “I care about you, you know.”

Heat spikes in the back of Lena’s eyes. “Friends,” she repeats. “Of course. Why couldn’t we be?”

The answer is obvious. They were never really friends, even when they technically were. Lena has zero idea how Kara plans to manage it now with all their history between them.

A sort of retelling of S2 under the premise that Lena and Kara went to college together and dated.

Notes

Thanks, as always, to @mooosicdreadmz who cheerleads me and fixes my terrible sentences and deletes a lot of commas and pours me scotch when I need it.

This is the semi-college au that no one asked for, but came out of my brain anyway. I had a lot of feelings and nothing else to do with them. I have a problem in which I can't help but keep writing break-up-make-up stories.

It loosely follows canon events, but also drastically changes a lot of them.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

The first thing Lena notices about National City after she moves there is that it’s almost perpetually sunny.

It’s appropriate, she thinks, considering a certain person she knows lives there. A certain person she’s been trying to avoid thinking about. It’s been four years since she’s seen said person and yet after moving to National City, Lena can’t stop thinking about the possibility of randomly running into her - at a coffee shop, at the bank, at dinner, on the street corner.

She spends the first few weeks after moving looking over her shoulder in a near constant paranoia. It’d be unlikely, she tries to remind herself, to run into one specific person in a city as big as National City. The thought calms her and she manages to stop obsessing over the idea.

Of course that’s about the time she walks into the lobby of Luthor Corp and she sees the exact person she’s been trying to avoid standing next to a laughing Clark Kent.

Kara Danvers. Ex-girlfriend.

Someone she’s entirely unprepared to run into despite the weeks she’s spent imagining the event.

She’s especially unprepared for the sight of Kara in her dress and pink sweater. It immediately transports Lena back to a different time, in the lobby of a different building and she feels a wash of memories hit her in the chest so hard she has trouble catching her breath for a second.

Neither Clark nor Kara has noticed her yet, but the man at the security desk is looking at her expectantly and she realizes then that she’s halted just inside the doors of her own office building, jaw dropped slightly as she stares.

It doesn’t help that Kara looks exactly the same as Lena remembers her and she’s just frozen as she takes in the image of her. Kara is gorgeous, as always, and Lena can’t help but drink it all in. The way Kara laughs at whatever Clark is saying, the way she reaches up to adjust her glasses, the sight of her strong jawline and blonde hair pulled up off her neck. Lena’s brain catalogs it all, files it far back into her heart where she keeps the rest of her memories of Kara.

The security guard’s voice breaks through her thoughts, “You okay, Miss Luthor?”

Recovering, she shoots the man a tight smile and strides forward, pumping forced confidence into her posture. She reminds herself that she’s Lena Luthor. Youngest CEO in Luthor Corp history, voted most powerful under 30 in National City and made of strong enough stuff to withstand a random meeting with the former love of her life.

Her heels click loudly against the tiles and she only gets a few feet before both Kara and Clark turn.

It’s a wonder Lena doesn’t trip and fall the minute Kara blinks her pretty blue eyes Lena’s direction.

Clark smiles politely, an expression Lena returns, but Kara just stares at her - wide eyed as if she were surprised. It’s a ridiculous reaction, Lena thinks. Her last name is on the side of the damn building. Surely Kara expected to see her.

“Mr. Kent,” she greets, ignoring Kara for the moment. “To what do I owe this visit?”
“I was hoping I could borrow a few minutes of your time, Miss Luthor,” Clark says, polite as ever.

Lena gives him a practiced smile, feels Kara’s stare on her like they were touching. “Of course.” She gestures in front of her. “Follow me to my office?”

“Certainly,” Clark says and Lena moves past them to the elevator bank.

They manage to make it into an elevator and towards her office without anyone combusting, but Lena feels like it takes hours. Hours where she has to keep her gaze on the numbers climbing slowly upward, listen to Clark Kent explain to her what prompted the current meeting and pointedly not notice the way that Kara still smells exactly the same as she did four years ago when they still meant something to each other.

“There’s a perfectly reasonable explanation for why I wasn’t aboard the Venture yesterday,” she hears herself saying, but she feels robotic in her motions. She strides across her office mechanically and hangs her jacket up, her purse next to it, trying to keep up conversation.

When she turns back towards the two people in her office, Kara is staring at her like she’s seeing a mirage and Lena knows the feeling acutely. Their gazes snap together and Lena has a hard time remembering what role she’s supposed to be playing in the moment, but she thinks she’s still talking so that’s good.

She hears Kara remind her that, “Supergirl was there too,” and Lena almost laughs. She remembers the day the news broke about some mysterious girl saving a crashing plane, how not long after it was announced that National City was host to another Super. Lena knew right there and then that it was Kara even without seeing the grainy images of her ex-girlfriend standing on the wing of a plane.

They look at each other for a bit longer than appropriate and Lena’s sure her expression is giving her away.

For the sake of Clark Kent, who is looking between them like there’s something there to piece together, Lena makes a quick decision and calls on all her considerable acting skills. She tosses an amused look towards Kara and a casual, “And who are you exactly?”

Kara answers her in that stuttering way she has and Lena knows it’s partly Kara’s natural cadence and partly the same turmoil Lena’s currently feeling twisted around her heart.

They manage to get through the conversation easily enough - Clark subtly accuses her of blowing up the Venture in that midwestern righteous way he has while Lena tries her best not to just outright stare at her ex-girlfriend. Kara’s doing a much less admirable job of it because Lena feels like there’s heat vision coursing over her face with the way Kara is watching her.

“I’m just a woman trying to make a name for herself outside her family,” she tells them, trying to ignore the sympathetic twist to Kara’s eyes and mouth - the memory of whispered conversations and confessions over late night coffee and ice cream swirls up into her brain. She hates that her voice breaks a little when she asks, “Can you understand that?”

“Yeah,” Kara says, her voice equally shaky and Lena has to stand up and do something just so she doesn’t have to confront everything that’s happening in her present day.

She paces across her office to grab the flash drive she knows has the information Clark Kent is here for and hands it to him, hoping it will at least make her current nightmare end. The nightmare where she has to look at a girl that was once her entire world and act like she’s nothing more than a
stranger.

Kara smiles at her before they leave, that soft shy smile that Lena remembers in her worst dreams. Lena can’t quite return the expression, just settles for watching Kara walk away and trying to settle the pounding erratic rhythm of her heart.

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Lena can’t concentrate on anything the rest of the day. It’s like her entire brain has reverted back to four years ago and can’t stop playing images of Kara Danvers on repeat. By mid afternoon she realizes she’s going to get exactly zero work done and concedes the battle.

Of course that’s about the same time there’s a drone attack on the helicopter meant to take her to her afternoon meeting. Flying is honestly the worst. She makes a mental note to speed up research on some sort of teleportation system that could eliminate the more archaic ways of travel but before she can think more of it, two figures in red and blue pop up in front of her helicopter and Lena sighs.

She had wondered how long it would take for her to meet National City’s resident alien crimefighter. It should have occurred to her that it wouldn’t take that long, especially after seeing Kara again, but she didn’t really imagine it would happen as she’s hurtling through the air in a crashing helicopter.

Yet, there was Supergirl. Pulling the helicopter back down to the helipad and ripping the door violently off its hinges.

Their gazes connect.

“Lena! Lena! Lena!” Kara’s voice is pulling Lena’s brain out of whatever heavy fog it’s in and she’s suddenly aware of the strong smell of gas and fire in her nose. When she blinks awake it’s pure chaos around her - she has trouble focusing on just one thing. The last thing she remembers is driving, crossing through the intersection at Angela and Freemont.

Now her eyes dart between the cracked windshield in front of her, the blown out airbag sagging from her steering wheel, another car flipped over and barely visible across the road. She blinks at everything and tries to put it all together, but her brain feels like it’s running through molasses and she can’t get her body to do anything.

That is until the door of her car is suddenly ripped off with a loud shredding sound and familiar hands are on her arms, a body shoving into the car to rip her seatbelt in half and pull her out of the vehicle.

“Lena,” Kara is saying and Lena clutches at Kara’s strong biceps, the feel of her girlfriend cradling her brings Lena just a little bit back to the present and she lets Kara lift her up and walk them away from the fiery crash scene. “Lena stay with me, are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Lena murmurs, her voice feeling scratchy and pained. “I’m fine.” She tries to run a soothing palm up Kara’s bicep, but when she does she sees the blood and dirt across the back of her hand and becomes acutely aware of the sharp pain in her forehead and the one in her lower back.

“You’re going to be okay,” Kara is saying, over and over again, still walking with Lena in her arms. “I’ve got you and you’re going to be okay. You’re safe.”

And Lena does feel safe. Secure in the solid embrace of Kara’s arms, the steady heartbeat under
her ear and Kara's whispered reassurances.

“Love you,” she croaks, her palm fitting itself against Kara’s chest.

Lena must black out again after that because the next thing she knows she’s waking up in a hospital bed with Kara curled up in the window seat to her right.

“You’re safe now.” It’s spoken so intimate and personal and Lena believes her, doesn’t think to doubt Kara, torn back into the present day crash by Kara’s knowing stare.

Irritation bubbles up inside her. “What the hell was that?”

“Someone’s trying to kill you,” Kara says with this tone of accusation Lena bristles at.

“That much I gathered,” Lena deadpans, narrowing her gaze at Kara.

“Let’s get you out of here and we can talk later.” Kara is running her hands over the helicopter pilot, checking his vitals Lena presumes.

Her hands shake where they try to take her seatbelt off and she fails about three times before Kara is suddenly steadying them with her own warm ones. Lena’s nerves settle in that way they always did at Kara’s comforting touch. Kara rips the seatbelt off the seat under Lena and helps Lena out of the helicopter.

It’s the first time Kara’s touched her in years and Lena starts shaking for an entirely different reason than before. Kara looks about how Lena feels and they both break away from each other as soon as Lena’s feet touch the ground.

“I have to-” Kara gestures at the helicopter pilot and Lena understands. “Don’t move,” Kara tells her. “I’ll be right back.”

With a quick blur Kara is gone and so is the pilot and Lena’s left standing on the helipad trying to steady the shake in her hands.

In just over a minute Kara is back, landing in front of Lena and shooting her a tentative smile. Her arms open a little and Lena looks at them with trepidation. “Can I give you a ride down?”

Instinct pushes Lena forward as if to walk straight into Kara’s arms, but she pulls back a little, hesitating.

“Lena, it’s a long way down,” Kara says softly, walking forward and all Lena can manage is a little nod - she’s not sure she could walk competently at this point anyway.

Kara scoops her up like it’s something natural, something she’s done a million times. It is, Lena supposes. It’s not the first nor the hundredth time she’s been lifted up into Kara’s arms like she weighs nothing.

She has no idea what to do with her hands so she just winds one over Kara’s shoulders and clenches the other in a fist in her lap.

It’s strange to be flying with Kara again after so many years. She thinks of her earlier comments as the helicopter was just taking off - *I hate flying*. It’s true and she *does*, but there was something about being midair with Kara that always felt safer, more secure. She hates that nothing has changed.
Kara smiles at Lena reassuringly and takes a step off the tall building. Her stomach swoops, but she’s not sure if it’s because of the way Kara’s hands feel cradling her legs and back or if it’s from the sudden feeling of falling.

“You okay?” Kara asks when they touch down.

Lena runs a shaky hand through her hair and steps away, desperate to put distance between them. “Yeah, thanks,” she manages to say through the dry feeling in her throat.

Kara looks at her like she doesn’t believe Lena, but nods anyway. “Well, I’ve got to-”

“Duty calls,” Lena says with a small smile.

With one last nod, Kara turns and speeds off in the direction Lena knows Superman is, presumably fighting the other drones.

It feels like it always does, when Kara flies away from her, and Lena presses a little to her sternum to try and push out the hollowness there.

She calls her assistant as she’s walking down the block towards her new apartment. There’s no point in going back to her office or trying to get to her meeting on time. She thinks major near death experiences qualifies as a worthy excuse to take the afternoon off (she tries not to acknowledge that the real reason is: I had a painful run in with the former love of my life).

“Jess, cancel my appointments for the rest of today,” she tells her assistant when the call clicks through. “I’m going to work from home.”

“Of course, Miss Luthor! I heard the crash and they evacuated us. Are you okay? I’m back in the office now, but I can-”

“I’m fine, Jess. Just please take care of my appointments.”

“Right away.”

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It was one of the longer weeks of Lena’s life and she had spent the majority of it in the engineering lab across campus trying to fix a prototype for her final project. By Friday she’s running entirely on shitty coffee from the basement kitchen and the few snacks she’d remember to snag from her dorm when she finally stopped by there to change clothes.

Kara had texted her, of course, to make sure she was eating and sleeping and had even stopped by a few times. But Lena had shooed her away with firm warnings not to distract her and that she’d be done soon.

She’s the only one in the lab and her eyes feel dry and tired as she tries to keep them open. She’s so close to being finished - in some respects she is, but she’s a perfectionist at heart and she’s just not happy with her work yet.

There’s a cup of coffee at her elbow and she takes a sip of it only to gag on the cold bitter taste. She’s sticking her tongue out, disgusted as she shoves the coffee cup away from here when she hears laughter behind her and turns.

“Kara,” she says with warning.
“I’m here to rescue you!” Kara announces with overly exaggerated bravado, hands on her hips and a wide grin. It makes Lena laugh, amused at her girlfriend’s antics.

“I told you not to distract me or I’ll never finish this project,” Lena says, fighting against her smile. She turns back around and tries to run her eyes down the list of calculations she has in her notebook.

“You’ll never finish this project if you fall over in the middle of working on it,” Kara retorts, now up against Lena’s back and running strong fingers over the tense muscles in Lena’s shoulders. She fights an indecent moan that she wants to let out.

“Stop that,” Lena protests, but Kara doesn’t, just runs her thumbs up Lena’s neck towards her hairline and Lena’s head sags forward with the feeling, her whole body going limp.

“Come on,” Kara entreats. “Let’s go take a quick nap, eat real food and recharge and then you can come back here and give it your all.”

It’s a tempting offer, but the desire to do so wars with an inner, deeper need Lena has to keep working, keep making everything perfect. Kara must sense it because she twirls Lena’s chair around so they’re facing each other, Kara’s hands on the arms of the chair as she leans down.

“I’m super about consent and everything and you are your own woman and I don’t control your life, but I’m also seriously invested in your well being and if I have to pick you up and fly you out of here so you don’t collapse, I will.”

The truth of the statement is right there in Kara’s face and Lena sighs, slumping back into her chair. “I’m not going to collapse.”

“You’ve been in here for over a day straight.”

Lena’s brows come together at that. Had she lost track of time that terribly? A glance at the clock on her computer tells her she had. “I didn’t realize,” she murmurs.

“Exactly,” Kara says firmly, standing and scooping Lena out of the chair. “So let’s go.”

Lena lets out a surprised exhale when Kara just plucks her up into her arms before laughing, her arms slinging around Kara’s neck automatically. “Kara put me down. I can walk.”

“I can fly,” Kara counters walking towards the exit to the lab and Lena looks around quickly at the admission, double checking no one else is there.

“Kara,” she hisses in warning.

“Oh, please,” Kara replies rolling her eyes. “No one else is crazy enough to be in here. It’s four in the morning on a Saturday.”

“Put me down,” Lena orders and this time Kara obeys, setting Lena back on her feet and looking chagrined. Lena puts her palm on Kara’s cheek to reassure her that she’s not actually mad.

“Can I at least get my stuff?”

Kara looks sheepish at that and laughs. “Yeah, sorry. Of course.”

Lena kisses Kara on the cheek before turning back to grab her things, stuffing it all into her brown messenger bag and slinging it over her shoulder. When she turns back, Kara is waiting, hand
extended forward and Lena takes it, sagging tiredly into Kara’s side and letting her girlfriend lead them back towards Lena’s dorm.

She doesn’t remember much after that - the exhaustion in her body takes over and by the time she’s back in her room she’s collapsing on the bed.

When she wakes up it’s to the smell of delicious coffee - the flavored kind that Kara favors - and a warm body pressed up against her side. Lena inhales deeply, feeling recharged and sated. She cards her fingers through the blonde hair near her shoulder and smiles when Kara blinks up at her sleepily.

“I made coffee,” Kara murmurs, snuggling up more firmly against Lena’s body.

“I smell that.”

“I’ll make breakfast too and then you can go back to work.”

“Okay, boss,” Lena jokes and Kara looks up concerned.

“I’m not trying to boss you around.”

Lena laughs, kisses the pout away from Kara’s face. “I know, sweetheart.”

“I just worry about you.”

It feels a lot like I love you to Lena and even though neither of them have said such a thing, she feels it in every little action Kara does. Sometimes it feels like Kara is screaming it at her. “I know,” she says quietly, tracing one of Kara’s eyebrows with her finger. “Thanks.”

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There’s a knock on her door that night and Lena doesn’t need to check her security cameras to know who it is. Even if the knock wasn’t so familiar, she doesn’t get many visitors. None, in fact. There’s only one person it reasonably could be.

When she swings the door open, Kara is there as expected. Glasses back in place on her face and supersuit traded for a pair of soft navy pants and a white shirt.

“Hi,” Kara says, softly with her hands held in front of her.

“Hi.”

“Can we talk?”

“Of course.” Lena ushers her inside, moves them into the kitchen because it feels like the safest territory, most impersonal.

“Drink?” Lena asks already reaching for a beer inside her fridge. The same brand Kara used to drink in college - the brand she keeps stocking in her kitchen despite rarely drinking it.

“Wow, I haven’t had this in forever,” Kara says, smiling at the label and twisting the cap off.

Lena pours herself a glass of scotch because she’s entirely sure she’s going to need it and the first peaty hit of it on her lips makes her feel just a little bit better.

“So…” Kara starts, picking at the label on her beer bottle and failing to meet Lena’s eyes for a long
Lena doesn’t answer, takes another sip of her drink instead and watches Kara over the rim of her glass.

“You look -” Kara’s mouth moves a little, but silent, searching for the words and Lena wants to laugh at it. She’s sure she looks nothing like the college student Kara remembers - faded jeans and sweatshirts now traded for power suits and heels - maybe she should have changed out of her work clothes before Kara got here. “You look different.”

It’s such a massive understatement that Lena almost laughs. Lena is entirely different than the last time she saw Kara - she left that version of herself behind with Kara, exchanged it for the costumes and the lines of the role she was born to play. For a brief, terrible moment Lena wonders what Kara will think of the new version of her, wonders if she’ll like her.

Here with Kara now, however, Lena feels a bit of her old self start to seep back into her. It’s a vulnerable and terrifying feeling.

“Good different, I hope,” Lena says, eyebrow arching as she glances down to observe herself. “I usually change after work, but my mind has been elsewhere today.”

“Of course it’s a good different. I think it’d be impossible for you to look bad,” Kara answers easily and it scratches rawly against Lena’s emotions. Kara’s casual honesty was always so hard to fight against and Lena finds herself falling back under its spell.

“You look good yourself,” she replies, attempting a smile and trying to stop her brain from memorizing the way Kara’s face looks, the way her eyes are still the prettiest shade of blue Lena’s ever seen. Kara doesn’t look different. She looks exactly as Lena remembers her and it’s completely unnerving. The only time Kara had looked remotely different was - “I especially like the new edition to your wardrobe.”

Kara looks at her like she’s confused for a second so Lena adds, “The blue and red one. With the cape.”

A grin adorns Kara’s face, her back straightening a little. “You do?”

“Supergirl, huh?” Lena teases and Kara blushes.

“Ms. Grant named me,” Kara explains, biting at her bottom lip. Lena gets distracted by the motion for a short second. “It wasn’t my first choice.”

“Cat Grant knows?”

“No, of course not. She just -” Kara waves her hand around vaguely. “Branded me, I guess. That’s what she’d call it.”

“Well, you’ve been all over the news,” Lena tells her. “Even in Metropolis.”

“Really?” Kara seems to brighten at the idea and Lena finds herself smiling genuinely for the first time all day.

“Yeah,” she laughs. “I’m happy you get to help people like you always wanted to.”

“Feels like a dream sometimes,” Kara says, soft.
“I’d imagine.”

“How did you know it was me?”

Lena arches an eyebrow. “You really have to ask?”

Kara shrugs, takes a swig of her beer and just waits for Lena to answer.

With a laugh, Lena leans over the countertop of her kitchen island and taps a finger against Kara’s glasses watching her ex go cross eyed at the motion. “Cute, but still useless. Your brilliant disguise doesn’t really work on someone that’s seen you the way I have,” she tells her in a soft voice and Kara’s eyes snap up to hers.

Lena swallows, pulls away quickly and feels her heartbeat start to stutter into a quicker pace. She tries to slow it, knowing Kara could hear it if she wanted and walks away a little to put some distance between them.

“So you’re CEO now,” Kara comments and Lena feels herself calm a little at the nervous way Kara twists her beer bottle around in her hands. At least she’s not the only one having a complete mental breakdown.

“Well,” Lena says, shrugging a shoulder. “There was a vacancy.”

“Yeah, I heard about-” Kara cuts off, and Lena’s jaw goes tight. “I’m sorry about Lex.”

It’s sincere - from someone that knew how Lena felt about Lex long before anything went dark, who had been there when he was the only one calling her during college or sending the occasional care package. It’s the first time she’s gotten sympathy for her brother’s madness that doesn’t make her want to punch something.

“Thanks,” she says quietly, smiling against the heat in her eyes.

“Do you want to-”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Lena cuts her off, somewhat sharply, but it’s a topic incredibly low on a long list of things she’s not emotionally prepared to discuss with Kara Danvers at this juncture.

“I understand,” Kara says gently and Lena takes another long sip of her scotch, lets the burn down her chest soothe her.

“So you’re a reporter for CatCo?”

“What? Oh, No.”

Lena’s brows come together. “Were you not interviewing me for the magazine with Clark?”

Kara shakes her head, laughs a little. “Oh, I was just tagging along, I’m not - I don’t - You know, I’m still figuring out what I want to do.”

Lena laughs a little at Kara’s stuttering. “You could have fooled me,” she says with a shrug and Kara just sort of gapes at her.

When it’s clear Kara doesn’t know what else to say, Lena goes for a subject change. “Did you find anything out about the attack today?”

It’s not exactly something Lena’s looking forward to debriefing because she has a pretty good idea
of who was trying to kill her, or at least who had hired someone to kill her. It’s painful to think her relationship with her once beloved brother has turned into this.

“Rao,” Kara sighs eyes going wide as if she’s just remembering that’s the reason she’s here - not to have some emotionally charged catch up with her ex. “I totally forgot. We need to talk about your rebranding ceremony thing tomorrow.”

Lena’s gaze narrows, confused at the connection. “It’s an announcement, not a ceremony thing. More like a press conference.”

Kara rolls her eyes, looks at Lena pointedly. “Well whatever it is, we need to talk about it.”

“What’s there to talk about?”

“Not having it.”

The idea makes Lena set her drink down and cross her arms defensively. She shoots Kara an incredulous look. “I am not cancelling,” she says. “Absolutely not.”

“Lena you have to cancel,” Kara argues, standing up to striding around the counter with an angry flush in her cheeks. It’s undeniably attractive and Lena swallows thickly, the distance between them suddenly lessened. If she reached out now she could touch Kara and she has to dig her nails into her bicep to restrain herself from doing so. “Someone tried to kill you today.”

“I’m not cancelling, Kara. This company is sinking and without someone to turn the ship around-”

“Just reschedule it, Lena,” Kara interrupts. “Until we can subdue the threat.”

“In case you’ve forgotten,” Lena says lowly, fire in her eyes. “My last name is Luthor. There will always be a threat.”

“Not one so immediate or deadly.”

“Renaming the company and getting it on a new track is my number one priority right now. You need to respect that.” It mimics a conversation from years ago that Lena tries not to think about it. Based on Kara’s expression, Lena’d guess Kara is trying not to think about it as well.

“I am well aware of where your priorities lie.”

It’s feels like a low blow, so unexpected that it almost makes Lena snap back, but she stays composed. “Then, like I said, respect it.”

“Your life should be a priority.”

“That’s not your concern anymore.”

Hurt flashes all over Kara’s face and Lena hates it.

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“Lena,” Kara warns, but she’s laughing, pulling Lena back down into the narrow little bed in Lena’s dorm room.

“Kara I have to get to class,” Lena says. Or at least she tries to, but she coughs about halfway through the sentence and the rest of the words get lost between the hacking and the sniffling.
“You have the flu. You need to sleep and drink plenty of fluids.”

“I can still go to class. Don’t be ridiculous.”

“You’ll never get anything done,” Kara argues, her grip firm on Lena’s wrist. She tugs gently, tipping Lena back over into the bed. “You need to take care of yourself.”

“I take care of myself just fine.”

“You are the worst at taking care of yourself,” Kara says knowingly. “Or was I hallucinating the week you pulled a double all-nighter and still went to class hopped up on Red Bull and adrenaline? And then you tried to convince me you could totally drive to Midvale that night.”

“I had a huge project and I didn’t want to miss Thanksgiving with your family.”

“Get in here,” is all Kara counters with, turning Lena over in the bed so they’re spooning. “Let someone take care of you for once.”

Lena coughs a little but can’t deny the desire to just stay in bed and fight the fever she can feel creeping into her body. She turns a little to look at Kara over her shoulder. “Don’t you have class?”

Kara shrugs, pulls Lena tighter against her body and the warmth seeps through Lena’s shirt comfortably, warding against the chills threatening to wrack her body. “I e-mailed my professors.”

“Kara you can’t skip class just because I’m sick,” Lena protests, but her eyes are fluttering shut and the soft feeling of Kara’s fingers stroking over her abdomen, lips against her shoulder. “I’m skipping class to take care of my girlfriend and it’s a totally reasonable excuse.”

“You’ll get sick too.”


Lena rolls her eyes, but sinks further into Kara’s embrace and allows herself the simple pleasure of being taken care of.

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“This city is my concern,” Kara says and her voice is shaky enough that Lena wants to take back her earlier words. She wants to wrap Kara up in a tight hug and tell her that she missed her and that feeling cared for again is like finding an oasis in the middle of the desert.

She doesn’t do any of that, though, and just let’s Kara keep talking, pleading. “And as a new prominent figure in this city,” Kara continues. “Your safety does concern me.”

“This argument is futile. Short of a court order, nothing is going to make me cancel the ceremony.”

“Lena, your life is in danger. Showing up to that press conference is like just asking someone to take a shot at you.”

“I have security, Kara. Don’t be dramatic.”

“Not enough security,” Kara all but growls at her.
“Are you going to be there?”

“What?”

“Is CatCo sending someone to cover the event?”

Kara adjusts her glasses, brow crinkled. “Well probably-”

“Then you’ll be there,” Lena say definitely. “So it’s fine.”

“It’s not fine, Lena. They’ll definitely try again-”

“And then you can catch them.”

Kara’s face clears then, jaw dropping a little. “I am not going to let you use yourself as bait.”

“That’s not what I’m suggesting-”

“That’s exactly what you’re suggesting.”

“It’s merely a consequence of the fact that this press conference is happening whether you want it to or not.”

Kara’s lips are pressed together angrily, her cheeks flushed, but it looks more adorable than menacing and Lena can’t help but feel warm at the obvious concern Kara has for her well-being. She tries to remind herself that Kara cares about everyone, that it’s not personal and doesn’t mean anything, but it wraps around her heart nonetheless. It reminds her of the many arguments between them in years past - of the stubborn way Kara always stood her ground even against Lena’s relentless logic.

The look on Kara’s face is still just as attractive as when they were in college and Lena tries to fight the urge to remember just how they used to resolve their arguments when they were together.

“Fine,” Kara sighs eventually and Lena lifts her chin a little in triumph.

“Good.”

“Fine,” Kara emphasizes.

It’s clear neither of them know what to say to each other anymore and Lena clenches her fist at the urge to reach out and stroke an errant blonde hair behind Kara’s ear. They’re silent for long moments, standing a few feet apart in Lena’s kitchen before Kara’s shoulders sag a little.

“This is so awkward,” Kara breathes out.

“Is it?” Lena asks, with a teasing tilt to her head - an effort to alleviate some of the tension.

Sure, it’s a little awkward to be standing in her kitchen with a girl she once loved so desperately she thought nothing would tear them apart. It’s a little awkward to be talking to each other like nothing has changed when so much has. It’s a little awkward, but Lena finds herself not wanting to be anywhere else, with anyone else.

It’s easy to fall back into old patterns with Kara. Too easy, really. Arguing with Kara, talking to her, caring about each other - it’s all way to comfortable, too instinctual for Lena to do anything about it. It’s awkward when she lets herself think about it for too long, but as always with Kara, Lena can’t seem to think that clearly for much long at all.
Kara rolls her eyes and huffs, breaking Lena from her thoughts. “I hope we can be friends,” she says and Lena’s throat feels thick at the sound of it. “I care about you, you know.”

Heat spikes in the back of Lena’s eyes. “Friends,” she repeats. “Of course. Why couldn’t we be?”

The answer is obvious. They were never really friends, even when they technically were. Lena has zero idea how Kara plans to manage it now with all their history between them. Even now, with Kara looking at her with open blue eyes, Lena can’t help but have very un-friendly thoughts about the other girl.

Kara looks like she’s going to step forward into Lena’s space for a quick moment and Lena’s body just reacts. Her skin starts to tingle and her mouth goes dry and every single cell in her body wants to press forward, push into Kara’s body and put their lips together.

From the way Kara keeps looking at her, Lena thinks maybe the action wouldn’t be rebuffed.

Except they broke up for good reasons. Reasons that still exist and are now only more solidified with everything that has happened in the world since they last saw each other. Lena has a company to rebuild and a family in shambles and Kara is tasked with protecting National City, building a career of her own. Rekindling their romance because Lena can’t get a hold on her own nostalgia would be idiotic at best.

It doesn’t mean Lena stops thinking about kissing her. It doesn’t mean the curiosity isn’t there - the voice in her brain that wants to know if Kara still kisses the same way, if her fingers still feel just as soft, if she still makes the same noises when Lena runs lips up her jawline.

For a brief moment the desire to answer all those questions is almost irresistible and they’re close enough that Lena wouldn’t have to move far to do it.

But then Kara is letting out a little wet sounding laugh and stepping backwards. “I should get going.”

“Of course,” Lena says, shaking the thoughts out of her head, clearing her throat and running a clammy palm across the fabric at her hip.

They walk to the door together and Lena is careful to keep enough distance between them to avoid the temptation to touch.

“Be careful, Lena,” is all Kara says to her before she leaves.

--

“What do you think you’ll do when you graduate?” Kara asks from her perch on Lena’s bed. She idly plays with a model rocket, zooming it through the air above her head.

“Work for Luthor Corp,” Lena says automatically because that question has only ever had one answer.

“Really?”

Lena looks over from her desk, brow furrowed. “Of course, really.”

“What?”

Lena shrugs. “Head of R&D to start. Lex says I’m fit to take over as CIO eventually.”
“CIO?”

“Chief Information Officer,” Lena explains, twisting in her chair and abandoning her work. “Why, what do you want to do?”

Kara keeps her eyes on the model rocket, letting it fly around a little before answering. “I dunno.”

“At all?” It’s a foreign concept to Lena who has known exactly what she’s going to be doing with her adult life since she was five.

“I mean I want to do something. I just don’t know what that is yet,” Kara says and Lena watches the subtle clenching of Kara’s jaw with interest. “I was sent to Earth with a purpose, you know?”

Lena nods, remembering Kara’s story of how she got here.

“And now that I don’t have to worry about—” Kara shakes her head, as if to herself before looking at Lena. “I just want to help people. Do some good.”

“Well you’ve got plenty of time to figure out how to do that.”

“I haven’t even picked a major,” Kara says softly, abandoning the model rocket and looking at Lena. “What if I’m not good enough for anything?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Lena says, moving to the bed.

“And I have all these—” Kara puts her hands up in the air, observing them, turning them over. “Strengths that I can’t really use.”

“I know, sweetheart,” Lena soothes, gripping a hand and holding it. “But you’re more than just super strength.”

“Am I?” Kara asks. “I could help so many people and instead I have to—”

“Kara, you have other strengths.”

“Like what?” Kara asks in a grumble, bottom lip pouting out just slightly.

Lena cups Kara’s cheeks in her hands, smiles down at her before pressing a swift kiss to her lips, laughing when Kara’s head comes up to chase the pressure. “You can do whatever you want to do,” Lena tells her. “I believe in you.”

Kara’s face lights up with a smile that Lena hopes never fades. “You think so?”

“I know so,” Lena says firmly, smiling down at her.

“Well you are a genius so you must be right,” Kara jokes, the somber expression from earlier now gone.

“I am indeed a genius,” Lena teases back and Kara laughs. “As I’ve been telling you for a year now.”

“So that’s where I heard it.”

Lena shoves her, but Kara grabs easily at her hands and pulls her down onto the bed where they tumble together in a mess of laughter and happiness.
Alex Danvers is the first person Lena notices when she heads outside to do final preparations for the press conference. Kara’s older sister is leaned up against a tree on the other side of the park, jeans, leather jacket and very obvious *don’t fuck with me* vibes.

Lena catches her eye and Alex just stares at her, expressionless. It’s almost as bad as seeing Kara and Lena can’t decide if she should go over and say hello or ignore Alex completely and try to focus on work.

They’re close enough to each other that Lena notices the challenging arch of Alex’s eyebrow and she sighs before handing her tablet to a nearby assistant and walking over.

“Alex,” she greets.

Alex is all thin lips and narrowed eyes. “Lena,” she says dryly. “Long time.”

“Are you here for the-”

“You seem to have warranted full FBI protection,” Alex answers and Lena gives her a *look*, well aware that Alex doesn’t work for the FBI. Rumors have circulated for years about a secret branch of government tasked with extraterrestrial happenings and Lena would bet her bank account that’s exactly what Alex does - ever the watchful big sister.

“Well,” Lena says with a tight smile. “I feel very protected.”

Alex hums. “Kara says she tried to talk you out of today.”

“She did.”

“Stubborn as ever, I see.”

“Kara and I are friends now,” Lena tells her without really meaning to. Alex is acting like she had when she first met Lena as *the girlfriend* over five years ago and it’s grating. Maybe she and Alex were never best friends, but they were on good terms and Lena knows Kara wouldn’t want them to be at odds.

“Friends,” Alex repeats in the same doubtful tone Lena had just the night before.

“Yes.”

“She’s my little sister.”

“I’m well aware.”

“You know she was a mess when you guys split,” Alex tells her and Lena *cannot* be doing this on the same day she has to stand up in front of the news media and announce the renaming of her family’s corporate enterprise. She went four years without having to deal with all of this and now she’s getting the tonnage of it in the span of two days.

“So was I,” Lena says evenly, gaze steady. “Is there a point to this standoff?”

Alex shakes her head, unreadable as always and shrugs. “No.”

“Then if you’ll excuse me, I have things to get done.”
Lena turns to leave, but Alex’s voice stops her for a moment. “Be careful, Lena.”

As she paces away, Lena can’t decide if Alex means it the same way Kara did the night before or if the older Danvers sister is talking about something different entirely.

--

Kara shows up minutes before Lena’s supposed to walk up to the podium and deliver her remarks. Her bright smile is both encouraging and terrifying as she joins Lena on the sidewalk.

“Nervous?”

“Not at all,” Lena replies, but she shoots Kara a teasing smile.

“This is quite a risk, Lena. There’s still time to reconsider.”

“Kara,” Lena says, stopping abruptly on the sidewalk. She glances at a reporter setting up a camera a few feet away. “This company is all that I have right now,” she says, in a voice so quiet she’s sure only Kara can hear. “You know what it means to me and why I can’t just walk away from it.”

“I’m not asking you to walk away from Luthor Corp, Lena,” Kara says stepping towards her. “I’m asking you to postpone the ceremony.”

“I can’t,” Lena says for what feels like the hundredth time, eyes pleading with Kara to understand.

It seems to work because Kara purses her lips and nods. “Okay.”

“Okay,” Lena repeats. She takes a steadying breath and turns to walk back towards the waiting podium.

“I’ll be here,” Kara tells her and it gives Lena just the extra ounce of calm she needs to step confidently up to the microphone.

“I want to thank you all for coming,” she starts, looking around the small crowd.

--

Lena hates having to go these kinds of events, but when you’re the youngest Luthor child and your family has buildings in their name all around campus you kind of have to attend. Her mother had called earlier that week all but ordering her attendance and Lena knows it’s all part of the grooming process - she’d seen Lex go through something similar when he was in school.

“You look great,” Kara says to her from where she’s lounging on Lena’s bed, flipping through channels on the television across the room. “Stop fussing.”

“I’m not fussing,” Lena grumbles, swiping a fingernail at the corner of her lips to insure her lipstick is perfect.

“You’re nervous,” Kara says knowingly and Lena rolls her eyes, picks up another bobby pin from the sink and fixes her hair.

“Not at all,” she argues. “I’m just annoyed that I have to go to this stupid thing.”

“You don’t have to.”
“Yes I do,” Lena laughs.

“What’s the worst that could happen?”

Lena shoots her a look. “My mother could call me.”

Sighing, Kara stands up from the bed, throwing the remote on the pillow and walks up to Lena.

“Do you want me to come with you?”

“No,” Lena answers, probably too quickly and too sharp. Kara’s eyes flash a little with hurt and Lena reaches out to soothe it. A press of her hand to Kara’s forearm and a gentle squeeze does the trick and Kara smiles a little. “You’ll be dreadfully bored and annoyed and I probably wouldn’t get to hang out with you much the whole night.”

Kara shrugs seemingly undeterred. “Is there food?”

Lena laughs. Food would be the selling point for Kara. “Sure, but do you want to spend your night eating small portions of caviar and canapé?”

“Cah-what?”

“Little crackers with cucumbers on it,” Lena explains - it’s not an exact description but she’d bet that’s what’s being served tonight.

Kara’s nose scrunches up in distaste, but she still smiles a little. “I’d suffer through for you.”

It charms Lena, like it always does and she can’t stop that warm feeling exploding in her chest. “Well, I’m not going to put you through that,” she tells her, placing a hand on Kara’s chest and leaning forward to kiss her quickly. “Enjoy your Friday night.”

“I’m not going to enjoy it without you,” Kara pouts.

Lena laughs. “You have other friends,” she points out - knowing that some of Kara’s friends from the astronomy club are throwing a party tonight. “Why don’t you go over to Blue Shutters and see what Josie and those guys are doing? Aren’t they throwing a moon landing party?”

“Lena,” Kara whines.

It’s not that often that Kara gets this clingy and Lena searches her face to find the source. Usually Kara jumps at the idea of a party or a game night or any chance to socialize. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Kara says, the sound of it genuine enough that Lena believes her. “I just know you hate these things and I want to be with you. I hate the idea of you being all by yourself.”

Lena swallows against the sudden thick feeling in her throat. “Kara,” she says softly.

“I know, I know, you have to go and I have to... not,” Kara says and Lena’s so ready to take it all back and just drag her girlfriend along with her.

“It’s not that I don’t want you there,” Lena tries to explain, but Kara shushes her with a finger against her lips.

“If it’s okay with you I’m going to stay here and mooch off your Netflix account until you’re done and then we can order takeout and watch that stupid medical documentary you wanted to last week.”
Lena’s brow furrows and she laughs if only to stop herself from crying at the soft way Kara loves her. “How to Survive a Plague?”

“Sure,” Kara shrugs.

“Okay, that documentary is not stupid - you haven’t even seen it!”

“Well it sounded boring when you explained it to me.”

“It’s a fascinating study of the AIDS epidemic and incredibly informative and heartbreaking and—” Lena cuts off at the smirk on Kara’s face and she shoves lightly at Kara’s shoulder even though it barely moves. “You’re teasing me.”

“Maybe.”

Pursing her lips, Lena wraps her arms around Kara’s neck and studies her. “You’re trying to make me feel better.”

“Is it working?”

It undeniably is. The dread and nerves Lena’s felt all day with the knowledge that she’d have to spend the night schmoozing in a fancy dress and impeccable makeup has ebbed away almost entirely. Just the knowledge that Kara will be here waiting for her at the end of the night is chipping away at the irritation and resentment she’s had for the event. “Yes,” she admits, feeling Kara’s hands at her hips, pulling them closer.

“Can I kiss you or will it mess up your lipstick?”

Lena sighs, sags a little in Kara’s arms. “I can fix it after,” she whispers before moving forward to press their lips together.

--

The first explosions rattle her forward so violently that her ribs press painfully into the rigid podium in front of her.

Then, everything descends quickly into chaos and Lena jumps immediately off the platform for safety, just as she feels the heat of a second explosion behind her.

She’s barely up the steps, eyes darting around looking for help - looking for Kara - when she sees a police officer she vaguely recognizes raising a gun towards her.

There is no time to react, but she doesn’t need to because the next thing she knows Alex is twisting his arm back and disarming him. Gasping she stumbles back a bit, watching as Alex fights with the man, trading blows with quick precision.

Lena feels incredibly vulnerable just standing there in her skirt and heels while Kara’s sister saves her life. She darts around for anything she can use as a weapon, something she could bash over his head or something to throw at the melee when she spots a fallen security guard not ten feet away.

She darts over, dodging a few people still fleeing the scene before dropping to his side and checking for a pulse. Knocked out, but his heart still beating.

“Just need to borrow this,” she says as she unholsters his gun. “Sorry.”

By the time she gets back to the fight, Kara has joined them and the police officer has Alex by the
throat, gun to her head. She hears the conversation Kara is having, something about Lex or her family, but the bitter taste of adrenaline in her mouth is making it hard to focus. All she sees is Kara’s sister in danger. In danger because Lena went ahead with a press conference she knew was dangerous.

The minute the officer gives her an opening she doesn’t hesitate, she raises the gun at the level of his chest and fires. His body flops forward as Alex twists away, grabbing at him as he falls to the ground.

Lena feels absolutely frozen. She’s shot guns before. More than a few times, but never **at someone like this. Never at a living breathing body that’s now pouring blood onto the pavement.**

She can tell Kara is staring straight at her even as she talks to Alex about the wound and how they need a paramedic. Lena can’t take her eyes off the blood, her muscles feel locked and she’s breathing hard, her spine rigid. *That’ll teach, Lex,* she thinks.

“Lena,” she hears, soft and soothing. “Lena, put the gun down.”

A warm hand covers hers where it’s tightly gripped around the weapon and Lena sags a little at the familiar touch. “Lena,” she hears again and she finally rips her gaze away from the blood to look at Kara’s careful face.

“He’s going to be fine,” Kara tells her. “But we need to get you out of here and to safety.”

Lena just stares at Kara and tries to get air into her lungs, takes big deep inhales before she feels like she can loosen the grip she has on the gun. “I shot him,” she says quietly.

“You saved Alex’s life,” Kara says.

The paramedics arrive after that, loading up the officer - John Corben, Lena learns - onto a stretcher.

--

Even as a freshman, Lena gets her own dorm room. Luthor money goes a long way after all and Lena doesn’t need the distraction of a roommate when she’s at college to study and study only.

By sophomore year her dorm is in the farthest corner of the building on the top floor. It’s isolated and quiet and Lena loves the privacy of it. Especially on nights like tonight when her otherworldly girlfriend tries to climb in through the window.

The knocking startles her so hard that she throws her highlighter across the room in surprise, her hand flinging to her chest to stop the sudden racing of her heart. The laughter that follows immediately after makes her calm down and she turns to glare at Kara. Her girlfriend is perched outside her window with a wide grin and a pizza box.

“You could use the door like a normal person,” Lena grumbles, opening her window to let her inside. “What if someone saw you?”

“No one saw me,” Kara insists, jumping through the window deftly and setting the pizza box on the bed along with her backpack. “I’m stealthy,” she continues, turning to kiss Lena hello. “Like a cat.”

“Sure,” Lena laughs, wrapping her arms around Kara’s neck and kissing her more soundly than before.
Kara laughs into the kiss, and scoops Lena up around the waist, pulling her off her feet and pressing their bodies together.

“*I missed you,*** Kara says when they break apart and she sets Lena back down.

Lena laughs. “*You saw me this morning.*”

Kara just shrugs, plops down on the bed and opens the pizza box. “*Still.*”

Lena grabs a piece and scoots over on the bed too so they’re both leaned up against the wall. “*Thanks for bringing pizza,*” Lena says before taking a bite.

“*Well as your girlfriend I have to make sure you’re getting all your major food groups.*”

“*Which food group is pizza?*”

“*The pizza group,*” Kara says, looking over at Lena with an expression that so clearly conveys *duh* that Lena laughs again.

They sit there on Lena’s bed quietly for a little while, eating pizza and just being together. After a bit, Kara sighs, presses a little closer to Lena’s side to tuck her head on Lena’s shoulder, still munching on a piece of pizza.

“You okay?” Lena asks, throwing her crust towards the pizza box with the knowledge that Kara will finish it later.

“*Just happy,*” Kara replies.

The response makes Lena smile. “*Yeah?*”

“*Totally,*” Kara says around a mouthful of food. “*You and pizza. What more could I need?*”

“*Potstickers,*” Lena answers sagely, but Kara pops her head back up from Lena’s shoulder with a grin.

“*Oh, those are in my backpack for later.*”

Lena rolls her eyes, but doesn’t stop Kara when she leans in to press a warm kiss against her cheek.

--

It’s suddenly like absolutely nothing in her life has changed since college because when she gets home that night, changes into her comfiest sweatpants and sweatshirt and pours herself a glass of wine, a familiar knock comes on the glass door to her balcony.

“*Kara?*** Lena asks, knowing Kara will hear her even through the doors.

Kara just gestures towards the door and Lena paces over, opens it to let her ex-girlfriend inside. “*What are you doing here?*”

“I came to see if you’re okay,” Kara says, stepping inside, still in her Supergirl suit, but holding a small bag. “*Can I change?***”

“*By all means,*” Lena says, making a gesturing motion towards the bathroom.
With a swift whoosh of air, Kara is gone and back, now in jeans and a t-shirt and looking at Lena with a strange expression, her gaze dropping towards Lena’s chest and then back up. The scrutiny makes Lena cross her arms tightly and curl a little into herself. At the motion, Kara’s face shifts to worry and she paces towards her.

“Are you okay?”

Lena’s chest tightens. Is this how it’s going to be now? Kara’s just back in her life, strolling into her apartment at night to check up on her, smiling at her, worrying about her, being around. Lena’s not sure she can handle it and stay sane. At the very least there’s no way Lena can manage some sort of renewed friendship with Kara if she has to jump into the deep end head first.

“Of course,” Lena says dismissively, trying to calm her heart rate and find the words to get Kara out of the apartment as quickly as possible without being rude. She walks back over to the couch and settles on it, plucking her glass of wine off the table nearby. “You needn’t have come all this way just to check on me.”

“Well I-”

“I can give you my cell phone number and you can check up on me that way.”

Kara looks a little lost at that, mouth floundering to find words and Lena sighs.

“Kara we can’t do this.” Biting the bullet and just talking about it seems to be the soundest strategy.

“Do what?”

“This,” Lena says, gesturing between them. She takes a long sip of her wine and watches Kara’s expressive face.

“I thought you said we could be friends,” Kara says, coming to stand in front of Lena, the coffee table between them.

“We can,” Lena says and she laughs a little, the sound coming out hollow even to her own ears. “But there have to be some…” She waves the hand holding her wine glass, trying to come up with the words. “There has to be some boundaries.”

“Boundaries?”

“Kara,” Lena sighs, setting her glass down and looking at her ex-girlfriend softly. “We were together for a while as friends and as girlfriends and it was…” Words escape her when she tries to think of how to possibly categorize the most formative relationship of her life.

“Intense?” Kara offers with a look on her face like she might cry at any moment. Lena feels that emotion so sharply in her gut that heat spikes in her own eyes.


“And now you need boundaries?”

Lena stands, tries to find the strength somewhere inside her to have this conversation when all she wants to do is run from it. Either that or run straight into Kara’s arms and forget their separation ever happened. It’s easy to remember what it felt like to be in love with Kara when they’re standing together like this, staring at each other with matching pain.
“I can’t just jump back into our friendship like this. With you just stopping by to check on me or showing up all the time.”

“Oh, Kara says slowly, nodding.

“It’s too confusing,” Lena says with a subtle shrug to her shoulders.

“Confusing?”

Lena bites at her lip, her stomach churning. “I think we just need to relearn how to be friends again.”

Kara stares at her with an open expression Lena doesn’t know what to do with.

When Kara keeps silent, Lena continues. “You do still want to be friends right?”

It takes a second for Kara to respond and when she does her voice sounds hoarse suddenly, like she’s struggling against something. “Yeah,” she says. “I want to be friends. And friends come and check on their friends when they go through something like you did today.”

Lena nods. “I know and I think we can get there. I’m just not ready for that yet.”

Kara’s jaw is tight, her eyes still watery and Lena tugs her arms around herself again, wrapping herself in the softness of her faded sweatshirt. Kara’s eyes watch the motion for a moment. “So you want me to stop coming over?”

“No, just for a little while,” Lena says. “Just until we can figure out how to do this. I mean, we haven’t seen each other in years. We’re different people.”

“No that different.”

Lena takes a deep breath. “We just got thrown back together by crazy circumstances. My family’s company is on its last legs, there’s someone out there trying to kill me, you’re Supergirl,” Lena explains. “Our lives are collectively insane right now.”

She doesn’t add the other part - that of all the things that are insane about her life, Kara was always the one thing that wasn’t. The constant force in her world that always made sense. Even now, with tears threatening to fall in both of their eyes, Lena feels centered, tethered to something. Her mind feels clear even as it gets muddled up by all that’s going on.

“I was so in love with you,” Lena confesses and it’s both a relief and immensely painful to let the words out, but she needs to put this out there between them if they have any hope of repairing their friendship. “Crazy, crazy in love with you.”

At this, Lena catches a tear falling from Kara’s eye. The other girl swipes at it quickly and lets out a watery laugh. “Me too.”

It spikes into Lena’s chest so painfully she almost gasps. “I think part of me will always be that crazy in love with you,” she says with a smile and a shrug. It’s the truth, one Lena is struggling to accept. “And seeing you again now, it’s…”

“Bringing it all back up,” Kara says.

“Yeah,” Lena says softly. “I have to learn how to put that part of our past away so we can start on a new chapter.”
Kara visibly swallows, her chin lifting a little and a look in her eyes like she’s bracing for something. “I understand,” she says.

“I just need some boundaries until we can figure all this out.”

“Okay.”

“So for now,” Lena says, glancing away from Kara’s expression. “Maybe you should just leave and we can start over, something small.”

“Your life is still in danger and—”

“I know,” Lena says firmly, cutting Kara off. “And if we have to see each other for reasons like that, that’s fine. But you can’t just come over here to check up on me. We need to start over.”

“Okay.”

Lena hates the forlorn expression Kara’s face, wants to wipe away her tears and soothe away the pain with soft kisses and this is exactly why Kara can’t be here right now. “Just give me space,” Lena says softly. “Space and time.”

Kara laughs humorlessly. “Space and time.”

Unable to resist it anymore, Lena moves around the table and puts a soft hand on Kara’s forearm where the muscles is tense and Lena strokes her fingers against the feeling. “We’ll get there,” she says with conviction. “I promise.”

Kara looks down at her for a long moment, their gazes locked. Lena’s heart thuds steadily against her rib cage.

“Okay,” Kara says again, but this time some tension flows out of her and when she smiles at Lena it almost looks normal.

“Okay,” Lena repeats.

“I should go then.”

Contrary to their entire conversation, Lena finds herself unwilling to let Kara leave. But she knows it’s what she needs in order to find some kind of steady footing in their relationship. She fights the desire bubbling up inside her and steps away, breaking their contact and shooting Kara a small, encouraging smile.

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Despite having told Kara about thirty times that Lena had firm plans to stay home that Friday and finish a physics project, Lena gets about sixteen texts by ten that night pleading with her to come out.

They vary in reasoning from I miss you come out! to they have your favorite rum. When she gets the this isn’t the same without you, Lena shuts her laptop down with an aggrieved sigh. After throwing on a clean pair of jeans and a nice black sleeveless shirt, Lena heads out of her building towards the address Kara had texted her earlier.

The party is in full swing when she arrives and she pushes through the crowd of people in the front of the house, stepping around discarded plastic cups and bottles as she searches for her friend.
Kara ends up finding her first, bursting through a group of people to suddenly appear in front of Lena with a bright smile. Her friend is dressed casually for a party, jeans and a faded crew neck sweatshirt with the picture of a puppy on it. Pugs not drugs is emblazoned on the front and Lena wants to laugh at it. Blonde hair hangs loosely around her shoulders and Lena fights the wave of attraction she always has when she first sees Kara.

“You came!” Kara practically shouts, wrapping Lena in a tight hug.

Lena rolls her eyes and lets her best friend manhandle her towards the kitchen. “I’m so glad you’re here,” Kara is saying as she fixes Lena a drink. “Jake hasn’t left me alone all night. He’s so annoying.”

Lena’s spine stiffens a little at the mention of Kara’s newest suitor Jacob Barber, junior quarterback. The ass keeps asking Kara out despite her many rejections and it makes Lena want to hack into all his bank accounts and bankrupt the bastard. “He’s an asshole that doesn’t understand what no means.”

Kara hands her the plastic cup she’s been pouring rum and juice into. “He’s not an asshole, he’s just annoying.”

Lena takes a long sip of her drink and shoots Kara pointed look. “He’s an asshole.”

Pursing her lips, Kara just looks at Lena for a moment. “Well, I’m glad you’re here now.”

“We can leave if you want,” Lena offers. It’s probably the best option if Kara’s actually feeling smothered by Jake’s advances. The idea of it is appealing - they could pick up hot dogs at that place around the block and go back to Lena’s dorm, spend the night binge watching whatever TV show Kara is obsessed with this week and being together.

“No.” Kara laughs as if the idea is ridiculous and picks up her own drink before looping an arm through Lena’s as they move away from the drink table - a gaggle of freshman girls descend upon the vodka the minute they step away. “But just stay next to me, okay?”

Lena glances over at Kara. “Always,” she says softly and probably too sincere for the context of their conversation. But she’s helpless next to the look in Kara’s eyes and Kara’s body warm where it presses against hers, even tighter as they move through the crowd.

“Thanks,” Kara says and she presses a quick friendly kiss to Lena’s cheeks. “You wanna dance?”

Lena thinks to answer, but Kara doesn’t wait. Strong fingers tangle with her own and Kara tugs her through the throngs of people and down into the basement where a makeshift dance floor is already crowded with bodies.

Kara presses in close, their bodies shaping together easily and Lena struggles to keep her drink from spilling as Kara twirls them around.

When they walk home that night, Lena has to fight the chill of the late summer night by rubbing her hands up and down her bare biceps, cursing the fact that she didn’t wear something warmer. There’s still a little layer of sweat from dancing all night and the soft breeze makes goosebumps spread across her skin.

Kara must notice her shiver, because she swings around in front of Lena and adds her own hands to the ones Lena has rubbing up her arms. “Cold?”

“A little,” Lena admits and Kara smiles at her before stepping away.
Kara grips the edges of her own sweatshirt and pulls it up over her head, blonde hair tumbling back down and the t-shirt Kara’s wearing riding up a little to uncover defined abs that Lena can’t help but look at. Suddenly, she’s not that cold anymore.

For the millionth time since Kara decided to befriend her, Lena curses whatever power-that-be who decided to play this joke on her. The attraction she feels towards her best friend gets harder and harder to ignore the more time they spend together.

“Here,” Kara says, offering the sweatshirt over.

“I’m fine, Kara,” Lena replies, pushing back at the offering.

Kara’s hand remains stubbornly outstretched with a look of challenge. “You’re cold. Take it.”

“Won’t you be cold?” Lena asks, but she’s already grabbing Kara’s sweatshirt and pulling it over her head.

“I run hot,” Kara explains with a shrug and a smile, turning back to twist their arms together and continue their walk down the path.

Lena feels instantly better once she has the sweatshirt on and she tries not to think that it’s less about being warm and more about something else.

They stop at Lena’s dorm first and Kara hugs her goodbye, thanking her again for rescuing her at the party. Lena shakes her head, tells her that’s what friends are for and moves to give Kara back her sweatshirt.

“No,” Kara says, stilling Lena’s hands with her own. “Keep it.”

“Kara-” Lena protests, but Kara is already skipping away in the direction of her own dorm yelling over her shoulder.

Lena just shakes her head at her and turns to walk up to her dorm.

When she gets into bed that night, she puts the sweatshirt back on and allows herself the simple pleasure of tucking her nose in its collar, inhaling against the scent of her best friend.

She knows this intense attraction she feels is eventually going to come to a head one day and the consequences threaten to be disastrous. Falling for your best friend often is. But for the moment Lena lets herself fantasize, lets herself think everything will be okay and Kara will want her back and they’ll be together forever. There will be no Jacob Barber sniffing around or no overbearing mother constantly reminding her that having a college fling is a complete departure from her priorities.

Lena lets herself believe that she’s just one of a thousand college students, ordinary and simple. She lets herself think about Kara’s bright smile, about the way it would feel if Lena leaned forward and kissed it and she imagines for a second what it’d be like if Kara kissed her back.

She falls asleep easily that night, tucked tightly into the warmth of Kara’s sweatshirt and with a smile on her face.

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Kara looks thoughtful as she walks back towards the balcony. When she turns to look at Lena, her hands come to her hips and she looks just a little bit less sad than before, her smile just a little less
morose. “Boundaries,” Kara says firmly, nodding like she’s deciding something. “I can do that.”

“I want this to work,” Lena says softly, trying to let Kara know that she doesn’t want to push her away. Quite the opposite. But if Kara wants to be friends then this is what Lena needs.

“Me too,” Kara says with a half smile. She opens the door to the balcony and steps out.

Lena follows, watches her with a hand on the door and Kara turns to give her another smile.

“You look cute in that,” Kara says with a smirk, instead of goodbye. With a gesture towards Lena’s shirt she looks up at the sky and jumps into it with a soft whoosh of air, flying speedily away.

As she fades from view, Lena looks down at her sweatshirt and only then realizes what Kara meant. An image of a small dog stares back at her with the now faded letters pugs not drugs. The sight of the old sweatshirt and the memories she associates with it cuts across her chest.

The tears are impossible to stop at this point. She barely restrains herself from full on sobbing.

Swiping at her eyes and trying to get air into her lungs at a steady rate, Lena slams the balcony door shut and heads straight back for her glass of wine.
Chapter 2

Kara respects the boundaries Lena set out and they don’t see each other for an entire week. Lena can’t decide if she’s grateful or disappointed.

It’s strange to realize that Kara’s a sort-of part of her life again. Like Lena could just pick up the phone to call her and it wouldn’t be weird. Well, not any weirder than normal.

They’ve breached that *we haven’t spoken in four years* wall and now Lena itches to see Kara all the time, talk to her, touch her. It’s like the months right after their breakup all over again, where she buried herself in her work to avoid calling Kara and begging her to come be with her.

Boundaries, she reminds herself. *Boundaries*. That’s the only thing that will help them rebuild a friendship they never really had. Lena can learn how to do this. She has multiple degrees and a working knowledge of most disciplines of science and technology. She can handle *this*.

She lives in National City now and Kara lives here too and it’s just a reality that their lives are going to keep colliding into each other.

The more distance she has from their last meeting the easier it is for her to focus on other things. She puts her energy into dealing with end-of-quarter financials and sorting through the tonnage of unfinished projects left lying around from her brother’s reign.

Which is how she ends up in the basement of L Corp Tower, where the R&D floor resides, a floor she hasn’t actually set foot on in almost a year. The musky smell of it and spartan look of the hallway sets off a wave of nostalgia for her first few years at L Corp when Lex was still in power and she spent all her time in labs like this.

“Miss Luthor!” A familiar voice calls out at her just as she’s walking towards the front door of their development labs. She turns with surprise to see Lana Lang walking towards her in a white lab coat and glasses.

“Miss Lang?!” Lena smiles, steps towards the other woman and shoots her a quizzical look, eying the ID badge hanging from Lana’s breast pocket. “I’m embarrassed to admit I didn’t know you were here.”

Lana waves her off, smirking a little. “The minute I heard you were taking over and moving HQ to National City, I got my ass out of Metropolis and applied for a transfer here. Your old job actually,” Lana says, tapping at where *Director - R&D* is written on her badge.

It’s weird to see someone from Metropolis in National City - someone she actually *knows*. Even if they were never very close. Lana had interned and later worked for the company back when it was still Luthor Corp and Lex ran the business.

“We’re lucky to have you,” Lena responds politely.

“What brings you down to the basement?” Lana scans them into the large lab there and they walk together towards Lana’s office.

“I’ve been going through the in-progress list and trying to purge it,” Lena explains. “I thought perhaps a more hands on approach would be beneficial.”

Lana arches a brow. “There are a lot of projects down here. Your brother was quite prolific.”
“I know,” Lena says, jaw tight. “But most of those projects need to be halted. Likely destroyed.”

Lana shrugs. “I guess I can’t disagree.” She waves around the floor. “Well the place is yours. Obviously.”

“Thanks,” Lena says with a tight smile.

She spends the next hour rummaging through prototypes and checking them off on a spreadsheet. It’s cathartic to actually be doing something with her hands - pulling apart objects and fitting them back together, studying how they work and what they do.

A majority of the leftover projects have to be completely scrapped and Lena makes notes on which ones to destroy, which ones to save. Some of the research is more worth salvaging than the project itself and Lena starts to compile as much data as possible, a list of new ideas forming in the margins of her notes.

Eventually a cup of coffee gets put next to her elbow where she’s leaning it on the desk, pulling apart a small object with a screw driver. She startles to see Lana Lang smiling down at her.

“Thought you might want some coffee.”

“Thanks,” Lena says, brow furrowed a little at the thoughtfulness. She picks the cup up and takes a quick sip before returning to her tablet and studying the innards of the device on the table. She makes a few notes with her stylus absentmindedly, but stops when she can still sense Lana’s presence to her right.

“That’s interesting shorthand,” Lana comments when Lena looks up.

It’s then that Lena looks at the tablet and realizes what she’s done. Her brain scrambles around as she stares at a language she hasn’t written in or thought about in years.

“Oh, yeah,” she says, trying to laugh it off, but closing the application on her tablet immediately. “It’s an old thing I made up in college. To keep prying eyes away. You can never be too careful these days.”

“Looked kind of familiar,” Lana says and Lena’s sure it does. Because she’s been writing her notes in *Kryptonian* like a complete idiot. She hasn’t done that since college when Kara first taught her the native language of her home planet. They’d taken to passing notes that way and Lena had found herself writing in it ever so often when she’d take quick notes during class or in the lab.

In an effort to turn Lana’s mind away from her slip up, Lena picks up one of the devices on the table. “What can you tell me about this?”

“Oh!” Lana says brightly, plucking it out of Lena’s hand. “It’s like a DNA scanner for aliens.”

“Pardon?”

The device is nothing more than a small box, a little crude in its design - definitely not market ready. Lana fiddles with it for a second. “So you put your finger on this part, right? And then it can detect if you have human DNA or something alien instead.”

Lena arches a brow, picking up the device herself. “Interesting,” she says, turning it over. A simple idea, really, but Lena can see the profits in such a thing. Especially with the sudden surge of more and more aliens coming out of the woodwork. Briefly, she thinks of Kara before forcing the thought from her mind and focusing on the tangible issues at hand.
“Do you think you could make me a more aesthetically pleasing prototype?”

Lana looks at her, surprised. “Sure. Are you planning on going ahead with this one?”

“It has promise,” Lena answers, shrugging a shoulder. “And I have a board meeting in a week. With the rumors that the president is to announce her Alien Amnesty Act it could be the perfect time to launch such a product.”

Lana hums, considering. “I suppose. I could have something ready enough for a presentation in a few days.”

“Perfect,” Lena says before returning to her work and dismissing Lana with a turn of her shoulder.

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It’s a Wednesday morning and Lena is dreadfully late to her 9AM physics class. She just barely made it out of her dorm on time, throwing on the nearest pair of jeans and a sweatshirt as she stuffed books into her bag. Her hair’s a mess, but hidden underneath a Metropolis Mammoths baseball cap, and she’s practically sprinting across campus and into the science building with little regard for any obstacles in her way.

Which is the only reason she runs straight into a taller form waiting in line near the small cafe in the lobby.

At first, she thinks she’s run into some new statute or wall because whatever she hits doesn’t even budge. It’s hard as rock.

It isn’t until she’s bouncing off said unidentified object, stumbling backwards unsteadily, that she realizes she’s run into a person. A girl, actually. A girl who is grabbing her around the waist to keep her upright with surprising strength.

“Whoa, you okay?” The girl is asking, clear concern etched into her pretty blue eyes.

Lena steps away from the touch immediately, rubs at her now sore right arm and eyes the stranger. “Yes, fine,” she answers, adjusting her messenger bag. “I apologize for running into you.”

The other girl just smiles at her and Lena hates the way her body reacts to that - she tamps down the natural reaction her whole being has when pretty girls smile at her. It’s so damn inconvenient. She plays with the sleeve of her sweatshirt, pulling it down over her hand as she eyes the stranger, taking in her skinny jeans and henley.

“No problem,” the girl is saying, fiddling with a pair of dark rimmed glasses on her nose. “You late for class or something?”

It reminds Lena that she is, in fact, extremely late for class and she jumps back into action. “Yes, actually. Thanks for -” Lena waves vaguely and moves past the stranger to stride quickly down the hall. “Sorry again.”

“Nice to meet you!” The stranger calls out and Lena just shakes her head, brow furrowed and doesn’t look back.

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Her reprieve from Kara lasts exactly nine days.
“Miss Luthor,” Kara greets when she walks into her office on the tenth day and Lena chokes a laugh back - an automatic response to Kara greeting her so formally. Her eyes rake over Kara’s form, taking it all in. As much as Lena’s wardrobe has changed in the years they’ve been apart, Kara’s has also. It concerns Lena how attractive she finds Kara in button downs and cardigans.

She waits for her office door to shut before eyeing her ex with a confused grin. “Miss Luthor? Really?”

Kara shrugs and takes a seat on the other side of Lena’s desk, setting her bag down. “We’re starting over, right?”

It’s asked with a smile Lena knows is genuine, but the words still chip away at Lena’s defenses. Even here, in her work clothes and in her pristine office, reminders of her own success all around her, Lena feels uncharacteristically vulnerable. She manages to plaster on her trademark professional smile anyway. “I’m not sure we need to start over that much. Should I be calling you Miss Danvers?”

Kara’s nose scrunches up with distaste immediately and this time Lena lets a laugh fall out of her. “That’s what I thought.”

“I was trying to be professional,” Kara grumbles, pulling a notepad out of her bag. It’s adorable.

“I heard you decided to give reporting a shot,” Lena says good naturedly. “A bit of a shock to hear my assistant inform me I had a meeting with a CatCo reporter by the name of Kara Danvers.”

Kara laughs. “It shouldn’t have been a shock. You suggested it.”

“Did I?”

“In your own way,” Kara says, voice low, personal.

Lena tries to stay composed, gives Kara a polite smile. “Well, are you enjoying it?”

“Actually you’re my first,” Kara says and Lena knows Kara doesn’t mean anything by the statement, but Lena has to recross her legs and fight a blush.

“Is that so?”

“Yup,” Kara answers, the word popping out of her mouth. “First assignment. Fingers crossed.”

“I’m sure you’ll do great.”

“I hope so.”

“So,” Lena draws out. “I must imagine that if you’re here on the same day the president is in town to sign her Alien Amnesty Act…”


“A Luthor,” Lena finishes for her with an unaffected expression. “Because my brother is the world’s most notorious alien hater and I’m his little sister, newly appointed CEO of the family company.”

“I know you’re not like that,” Kara says and it’s too knowing for Lena to deal with right now. Kara doesn’t know her that well, not anymore. Kara knows a different version of her, a softer one. If
they’re going to be friends again, it’s time for Kara to stop living in the past.

It occurs to her then that they’ve never really talked about the disclosure of their mutual history. “I must ask, Kara. Have you told anybody about-” Lena loses her words halfway through the sentence. They had both, by some unspoken agreement, played the part of strangers at their first meeting, but Lena’s not sure if that was by design or purely a reaction to the visceral shock they likely both experienced in that moment.

“How about what?”

She gestures between them, hoping that conveys the message.

“Us?” Kara asks and just thinking of them as a collective entity, an us, makes Lena’s gut clench.

“I’m just curious how many people know that you and I aren’t exactly strangers.” She laughs, playing it off as casual. “I’d imagine if your boss knew-”

“Just Alex,” Kara replies, quietly interjecting. “And only because she already knew.”

It’s strange to think that Kara wouldn’t talk about them to her friends, but Lena understands. It’s not as if she’s ever been able to talk about Kara to anyone in the four years they’ve been apart.

“Okay, good.”

“Good?”

“I imagine it would be complicated trying to explain such a thing to people,” Lena says which is completely ridiculous. It’s not complicated at all - she and Kara dated in college. That, on some level, is the whole of it. The troubling part is explaining why they aren’t still together, why Lena feels incapable of thinking clearly if she’s around Kara for more than a few seconds and why Kara keeps looking at her the same way she did when they first fell in love.

Kara must be thinking something similar because a confused sort of grin spreads over her face.

“Not that complicated.”

“There’s a lot going on right now,” Lena offers in exchange. “I think adding all of our…,” she falters, thinks of how to frame it, “relationship drama to it wouldn’t be the wisest course of action. If we’re leaving the past in the past then we should... leave the past in the past. It’s not that far from the truth anyway. We are basically strangers at this point.”

It sounds laughable when she hears it, but she doesn’t say anything else, waits for Kara to agree.

“Sure,” Kara says, but she looks entirely unconvinced.

“I would never deny it if asked,” Lena replies with a kind of honesty that bursts out of her unbidden.

A pause. Kara looks at her with just the slightest crinkle to her brow. “Neither would I.”

They fall silent for a bit, Lena trying to keep her heart from pounding out of her chest. She hates that Kara can probably hear it, is probably receiving a clear signal of exactly how all this is affecting her. “Anyway,” she says after a second, pulling her gaze from Kara and to a laptop at her right. “You’re here for a quote and I’ve taken us completely off track.”

Kara laughs. “That’s okay,” she says with a little wave. “The article is really just about the Alien Amnesty Act in general and I can-”
“Actually,” Lena interrupts, standing up if only to try and steady the shake in her hands. “Perhaps it would be a good time to promote a new product I’m considering rolling out.”

She walks over to a small, lead lined safe that she keeps on the side of her office and pulls out the prototype Lana had delivered to her just yesterday. She feels Kara follow her over.

“What is it?” Kara asks, peering at the device quizzically.

“An alien detection device,” Lena responds, holding it out.

“A what?”

“It scans for human DNA,” she explains. “Here, I’ll show you.”

She puts her thumb up to the scanner and holds it there, waiting for the light to change to green. “See?”

Kara’s brow is furrowed, confusion and apprehension all over her face.

Lena holds the device out again. “Here, you try.”

After a moment’s hesitation, Kara extends her thumb, presses it to the scanner and they both watch the light turn red. Lena pulls it back, pleased with the device. “Works perfectly,” she says, setting it down on her desk.

“Lena,” Kara says, and when Lena looks up there’s still confusion across Kara’s face. “Don’t you think that’s kind of-”

Kara hesitates and Lena moves back towards her desk chair to sit down. “Do I think it’s kind of what?”

“I mean, that seems contrary to what the president is trying to accomplish. And to everything America stands for.”

Lena crosses her arms, leans back in her chair and watches as Kara reseats herself. “Such as?”

“Freedom,” Kara offers vaguely. “America’s always been a country of immigrants.”

“I agree, but people are scared. Every day, you fight monsters and people see it on the news every night,” Lena argues. “This device could give people peace of mind. People have a right to know if their neighbor isn’t who they say they are.”

“You don’t actually believe that,” Kara says and Lena wants to snap at her. What part of keep our past in the past is so hard for them? Starting over as friends doesn’t really work when Kara’s so comfortable and confident in pointing out things about Lena’s character like that. They knew each other once, but that was four years ago and it’s time Lena makes Kara realize that they aren’t those same kids anymore.

“You don’t know me well enough to say that.”

Kara looks at her, a stubborn tension in her jaw. “Yes I do. And you know exactly why aliens want to hide. This will only - force them out of the closet and into danger.”

“What I believe,” Lena says, leaning forward on her desk and pumping all her CEO attitude into her posture. “Is that this device will make this company a fortune. Millions of dollars that we need right now.”
“At the expense of basic civil rights.”

Lena scoffs. “L Corp is in the business of making money, Kara. Not in playing politics.”

Kara is silent at that, observing Lena with a critical eye. Lena feels too exposed, but she forces herself to keep the gaze with Kara.

“You’re different,” Kara says. Soft and simple.

It shouldn’t hurt to hear such a thing - Lena knows it’s the truth - but it does. “I’ve been trying to tell you that.”

A wry smile crosses Kara’s face and she waves her pen at Lena. “So that’s where I heard it,” she jokes, but it comes out sounding broken.

Lena blinks rapidly and turns away from Kara, opening her laptop and typing in a few commands. “I don’t mean to be rude, but I do have some work to do. I hope you have enough for your article. If not, feel free to email any questions you need answered.”

“Of course,” Kara responds quietly before picking up her bag and exiting the office. “Thank you for your time.”

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There’s a coffee shop on the far end of campus that Lena likes to frequent. It serves espresso like she remembers from boarding school abroad and it’s never that packed - most of its inhabitants come to study, tucked away in their separate corners.

Which is what Lena is doing - headphones in, laptop open and eyes intent on her work - when she hears a bright, “You’re the girl that ran into me!” It’s loud enough that it breaks through the music in her ears and she pulls an earbud out, turning to look at the source of the voice.

It’s the stranger from a few days ago. The one Lena ran face first into on the way to class.

She pulls out the other earbud and tries for a polite smile. “I am,” she says slowly, pulling back a little from the enthusiastic grin on the other girl’s face.

“Kara Danvers,” the girl says, extending her hand so abruptly that Lena jumps back a little. It’s a good thing manners are something so automatic in her body because her brain is having a hard time catching up to what’s happening. “Lena,” she offers, reaching up to shake the girl’s hand. She declines to add her last name, imagines it’s obvious anyway.

“Nice to meet you,” Kara says before taking the seat across from Lena and smiling at her.

Lena looks around the coffee shop trying to figure out if she’s being pranked or something. “You too,” she says, fiddling with her headphones. It’d be rude to just put them back in and ignore the newcomer, but Lena can’t deny that she’s considering it.

“So I figured since you totally ran into me and like -” Kara makes a gesture with her hands that Lena presumes is supposed to simulate the way Lena practically bounced off her body. “I should probably buy you a cup of coffee.”

“That seems backward,” Lena answers.

Kara shrugs, eyes the small cup of espresso near Lena’s laptop. “I could get us muffins instead. I
“I’m fine, thanks,” Lena says and she puts one of her earbuds back in. She expects Kara to stand up and leave, but Kara stays seated, eyes intent on Lena.

Kara fiddles with her fingers, bites a little at her lip. “My sister says I should make an effort to make new friends,” she says.

Something unsettles her about the sad look in Kara’s face. They don’t know each other, but Lena can recognize the lost, lonely expression on Kara’s face. She sees a similar one in the mirror every so often. “Does your sister go here?” Lena asks, for lack of anything better to say.

“No,” Kara shakes her head with a sad smile.

They’re silent for a bit, just looking at each other before Kara speaks again. “So do you want to?”

“Want to what?”

Kara grins. “Be my friend?”

Lena’s not sure why of all the people at school that Kara would think Lena is available to be a new friend, but before her brain can catch up and tell her no, her heart answers with a casual, “Sure.”

The newest issue of CatCo magazine is in her inbox when she gets to work and Lena studies it for a second before picking it up.

It doesn’t take long to find the article in which she’s mentioned and Lena smiles a little at the Kara Danvers scripted under the title.

If she’s honest, she expects any mention of her to be rather unfavorable. With the way Kara had looked at her throughout the interview she can’t imagine what Kara would have to say.

Except it’s not unfavorable at all. Kara talks about Lena’s vision for turning around L Corp and the distance Lena’s been trying to make between herself and the legacy of her brother. There’s no mention of the prototype she had shown Kara, but there’s a blurb about Lena being a once in a generation executive that makes her heart start to flutter uncomfortably.

It contains next to nothing of the things they actually discussed in the interview and Lena knows Kara must have drawn from their considerable history together.

She shuts the magazine and drums her fingers on her desk, considering.

There’s an uncomfortable ache when she thinks about how they last left things and Lena does want to try this friends thing out. Kara is literally the only person she really knows in National City.

Now that she’s a reporter there’s both a personal and professional benefit to fostering their friendship.

She presses a subtle button on the underside of her desk that calls her assistant into the office. Jess studies her expectantly and Lena takes a breath before asking, “Can you tell Kara Danvers over at CatCo that I’d like to meet with her at her convenience?”

Jess nods obediently. “Right away, Miss Luthor.”
Kara shows up later that afternoon in a pretty dress and blue sweater and Lena should be more immune to the attraction she’s always felt towards the other girl, but she’s just not.

“I don’t mean to just drop in unannounced,” Kara says as she paces into the room. “I know we talked about that.”

“It’s okay, Kara,” Lena appeases from her place on her office couch. “You’re not unannounced. I asked to see you.”

Kara sits, deposits her purse on the ground next to her and gestures to an arrangement of flowers on the table. “Those are pretty,” Kara says, eying them with a little wonder.

“Plumerias,” Lena tells her. “Pretty rare, actually.”

“They remind me of my mom,” Kara says with a sad lilt to her voice. Lena wants to soothe the sound away and has to shift on the couch to stop herself. She remembers the quiet nights Kara told Lena all about her parents and Krypton - the way Kara had cried into her shoulder.

Before Lena can inquire exactly why plumerias of all things would remind Kara of her mother, Kara continues to talk, eyes on the flowers and voice soft. “You know, I have this AI program of her.”

“An AI?” Lena asks, curious. “What do you mean?”

“Yeah,” Kara says with a sad sort of nod. “It’s like a hologram in my mother’s image and with all of her knowledge. I talk to it sometimes. Tell it about my day even though I know it’s not her.”

“That must be…” Lena doesn’t know what to say to that, thinks it’s probably a more complicated thing than Kara is letting on.

“You should meet it,” Kara says suddenly, turning to look at Lena. “Or see it, I guess.”

“See it?”

“Yeah, why not? I mean, we dated for two years and you technically never met my birth mother,” Kara jokes, but it doesn’t sound that funny and Lena doesn’t laugh. Kara is still staring at her, her eyes so blue and wide and too trusting.

“Kara,” Lena says carefully, her heart starting to thud heavily at the direction the conversation is taking.

Kara must realize it too because she rips her stare away and swallows, jaw tight. “Sorry,” she replies, her hands twisting in her lap.

Lena has to clench her own to keep from reaching out.

For a moment, Lena wonders if Kara still has nightmares. She wonders if there’s anyone in Kara’s life that soothes that pain for her, that cradles her through the worst of the dreams and tells her everything will be okay. Lena’s not sure she wants to know the answer.

“I read the article,” Lena says, attempting to divert from the sadness she can see creeping into Kara’s face and her own spiraling thoughts. “You have a way with words.”

It does the trick and Kara’s face shifts as she turns to look at Lena. “Yeah?”

“To be honest I thought you’d do a complete hatchet job on me,” Lena confesses. “I was happily
surprised to see you didn’t. That was why I asked to see you. To thank you.”

Kara’s smile falters a bit, her brow contracting. “Why would I do a hatchet job on you?”

Lena shrugs, leans her elbow on the back of the couch and props her head up. “After our conversation the other day I assumed the article would have taken a different tone.”

“I wouldn’t do that,” Kara says and it’s serious, like she’s trying to convince Lena of something unspoken.

“We don’t exactly see eye to eye on certain things.” She bites against not anymore.

Kara smiles a little. “Disagreement doesn’t mean I’d write a disparaging article about you.”

“Well, I’m grateful for your journalistic integrity.”

Kara laughs and Lena smiles and everything feels okay for a second.

“I heard you met the president,” Lena says, laughing when Kara’s whole body goes almost rigid with excitement.

“I did!” Kara exclaims, clapping her hands together and turning towards Lena. “It was amazing.” Kara pauses, tilts her head to the side. “Well except for the part where she got attacked by Scorcher, I guess.”

Lena watches with an amused smile. She had watched the event on the TV in her office. It unnerved her to see Kara throwing herself in front of fireballs, shielding the president as they were attacked. “She was apprehended, was she not?”

“Yeah, eventually.” Kara’s head dances side to side for a second. “With some help.”

“I’m sure Supergirl did all the heavy lifting,” Lena teases and watches a smirk cross Kara’s face.

“Always,” Kara jokes, pulling a face and exaggeratedly flexing an arm. Lena’s stomach flips at the easy way they fall back into teasing and it makes her think that maybe they can make this work, maybe they can be friends as these new versions of themselves.

They’re quiet again for a moment before Kara starts to fidget nervously, her hands playing together in her lap. “Lena,” Kara starts and Lena’s not sure she wants to hear whatever comes next.

“Yes?”

“Do you want to have lunch this week?”

“Pardon?”

“Lunch,” Kara repeats. “With me.”

It feels entirely too much like the first time Kara ever asked her out and Lena feels her chest flush with anxiety. Just like that, Lena’s sure that they actually can’t be friends. There’s too much history that keeps blindsiding Lena every time they’re together. “Kara I don’t think that’s-”

“Or a drink,” Kara amends and Lena’s all ready to tell her that that’s not better, but Kara beats her to speaking and adds, “With my friends.”

“Your friends?”
“Yeah, it’ll be like a group hang thing. No pressure, and you don’t even have to talk to me if you don’t want.”

Lena just blinks at her. She doesn’t really know how to respond. The idea of hanging out casually with Kara and her friends makes her mouth go dry. “I’m not sure.”

“I’m not trying to -” Kara cuts herself off, shakes her head in that way Lena knows is because she can’t figure out all the right words to say. “We’re trying to be friends again, right? Start over and everything.”

“Yes,” Lena breathes.

“So this is like an easy step. You can hang out with all of us, meet some new people in National City. Hey, you know Alex! And you’ll like Winn, he’s a total nerd like you.”

The response is so automatic that Lena can’t stop it. “I am not a nerd.”

Kara snorts at that, shaking her head at Lena with familiarity. “Okay sure, nerd.”

“Says the girl who took a relativistic quantum field theory class at 8AM because she just needed to fulfill an elective,” Lena teases.

Kara looks at her softly. “You know that’s not the reason I took that class.”

An uncomfortable clench settles in Lena’s stomach and she tries to breathe through it, keeping an easy smile on her face. “Right,” Lena breathes out, fighting a cringe. Lena’s the one that set boundaries on their newly forming friendship - she should probably try to respect them herself.

“So you should come,” Kara entreats yet again. “Like I said, Alex will be there so there’ll be another familiar face.”

Lena has to glance away from the soft look in Kara’s face and take a deep calming breath. “I’m sure I’m not exactly on the top of your sister’s invite list right now.”

“You saved her life, Lena,” Kara says with a narrowing of her eyes. “She’ll be fine with you coming.”

The flash of memory - the feel of the gun as it went off, the blood on the ground - makes her fist clench, but she schools her expression into something neutral.

She does want to be friends. As painful and ridiculous as the idea may be. And it’s not like she has a busy social calendar since moving out to National City. Kara is at least someone she knows, and Alex is a familiar face and it’d probably be a more fun night than her usual plans - a bottle of cab franc and whatever work she decides to take home.

Except Kara is looking at her expectantly and she’s so pretty and Lena knows that hanging out is a very clear violation of the boundaries she keeps adamantly advocating for.

“Thank you for the invite,” Lena starts and Kara’s smile fades. The urge to put that smile back on Kara’s face thrums through her just like it always has and Lena swallows against the pain bubbling up in her throat. “But I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“It’s just a-”

“Kara,” Lena interrupts before Kara continues on stubbornly with her argument. Kara was always
so headstrong when she had an idea. “I can’t. Not yet.”

It seems to do the trick. Kara’s shoulders sag a little in defeat and she thins her lips when she grabs her purse and makes to stand. “I’m glad you liked the article,” she says softly and Lena stands up as well.

“Thank you for stopping by,” she says with a polite smile and Kara moves to the door. Lena stops her before she exits with a soft call of her name.

When Kara turns back to look at her, Lena takes a deep breath and looks everywhere but at Kara’s eyes.

“I’m not saying never,” she tells her. Hoping her meaning is clear. If they want to be friends they have to do it at Lena’s pace, slow and steady so she can handle the constant exposure to a part of her life she thought she’d left behind.

Kara just adjusts her glasses and shifts her bag over her shoulder. “Okay,” she replies, soft.

“I’m just saying not yet.”

It seems to put a little more life into Kara’s posture and her ex-girlfriend smiles, nodding a little before exiting the office.

--

“Kara, I’ve been meaning to ask you something,” Lena says one night - the fifth night Kara has unceremoniously just show up at her dorm room and demanded they hang out. They’re friends, Kara argues and Lena has no idea how to react to anything appropriately. She can’t remember the last time she had a casual friend.

Except she’s starting to think maybe they are friends or at the very least she’s not getting rid of Kara any time soon and Lena’d like to lay everything on the table early on if she can.

Kara turns to her with a potsticker hovered just in front of her face, wiggling in her grasp. “Okay,” she says smiling warmly before stuffing the food in her mouth. “What’s up?”

Lena thinks to laugh at the way Kara talks around her food, but doesn’t, takes a deep breath instead. “Do you know who - ” Lena pauses, considers, “You know my name right?”

“It’s Lena,” Kara says with a proud grin. “I know.”

“Right,” Lena says, narrowing her gaze. “But my full name, I mean.”

“Full name?” Kara looks completely confused, but it doesn’t stop her from snagging another potsticker and chomping down on it. “What do you mean?”

“My name is Lena Luthor.”

“Oh!” The confusion clears on Kara’s face. “I didn’t know you had a last name.”

“Didn’t know I - what do you - why wouldn’t I have a last name?”

“Naming conventions here are just so different,” Kara says sagely before her eyes go wide and she glances away. “I mean, some people don’t have last names right? That’s a thing. Here. On this plan-country. Which I am from.”
Lena’s brow comes together at her friend’s sudden babbling, but she lets it go and focuses on the point of the conversation.

“My last name is Luthor.”

Kara stares at her blankly. “Okay.”

It’s a bizarre experience to not have someone react to her last name in any way, good or bad. “You don’t know who I am, do you?”

“You’re Lena Luthor,” Kara says clearly having trouble following the conversation. “Didn’t we just go over that?”

“My family,” Lena starts, crossing her arms across her chest. “The Luthor Family.”

Realization seems to dawn on Kara and her jaw drops a little. “Oh! Your name is on a building!”

Lena laughs a little, if only in surprise, but she doesn’t correct her friend - Luthor is on more than just one building around campus. “That’s correct.”

“So you’re like a big deal,” Kara says wisely, gaze curious as she looks over at Lena. “That’s a big deal here, right?”

It occurs to Lena that Kara has a strange habit of referring to here as if Kara is from somewhere far away. But Lena knows Kara’s from Midvale and, sure, it might be a small middle of nowhere town, but it’s not that different from the rest of the region. Maybe the Luthors aren’t well known in Midvale.

“You really don’t know anything about me, do you?”

Kara sets her food down, turning to give Lena her full attention. “Well that’s what I’m trying to do.” Lena arches an eyebrow and Kara answers the unspoken question. “Get to know you.”

“Why?”

Kara’s brow furrows. “Why what?”

Lena shakes her head, laughs softly. “Why do you want to be friends with me?”

The usual answer is obvious to Lena. Most people have tried to befriend her in the past solely because of her last name and all that it means - money, connections, power. Even at a young age she’s a hot commodity in some social circles. Everyone always seems to want something from her, but there’s just something in the way Kara talks to her that makes Lena think this might be different.

“You crashed into me,” Kara answers easily with a small shrug.

“And that made you want to be friends?” Lena laughs at the absurdity of the answer and thinks maybe Kara is joking.

Except Kara’s face is serious when she tilts her head and answers Lena with a simple but sure, “Yes.”

--

They don’t see each other for another week and Lena spends the majority splitting time between
sorting through projects down in R&D and sitting in her office reading e-mails from her PR team about what charity to support or what type of fundraiser to throw.

On a particularly dull afternoon of sorting through e-mails, Lana Lang walks into her office holding a small box and a bright smile.

“Afternoon, Miss Lang,” Lena greets, closing her laptop and turning to give her visitor her attention.

“Miss Luthor,” Lana says, placing the box in her hands on her desk and sliding it towards Lena.

“What’s this?”

“We finished that prototype you asked for,” Lana tells her. “The DNA scanner? Alien detection device?”

Realization dawns and Lena pulls her fingers away from the box so violently that Lana jumps a little at the motion.

“Sorry,” Lena says, trying to compose herself. “I had completely forgotten about that.”

“You did still want it, right?” Lana’s expression is clear confusion and Lena tries to steady the beating of her heart.

The memory of her conversation with Kara slices back into her and despite everything she said to her, everything about business and playing politics and making money, Lena can’t fight the sick feeling she got at the look on Kara’s face.

“Destroy it,” Lena orders, pushing the box back towards Lana. “And all the associated research and paperwork.”

“Destroy it?” Lana asks, quizzical slope to her brow. “Why?”

Out of frustration, Lena exhales noisily and fixes her best glare on her face. “As far as I’m aware, Miss Lang, I needn’t explain my decisions to you.”

Lana’s eyebrows shoot up, but she takes the box off Lena’s desk. “Of course, Miss Luthor. My apologies.”

--

A few days later she gets a text from Kara.

friends can text right? It reads and Lena’s fingers hover over the keyboard for a long moment.

Of course. Lena replies though she’s not sure that’s the best idea. Opening up a line of communication with her ex could possibly prove disastrous.

But then all she gets back in reply is a series of indecipherable (though clearly excited) emojis and it makes her laugh so loudly that her assistant comes into her office to check on her.

--

On Tuesday, Kara sends her a picture of what must be her lunch - it’s a massive sandwich that Lena thinks might actually just be two separate sandwiches stacked together. Are you really going to eat all of that? Lena sends back, but Kara just sends her a flexed bicep emoji and no food is safe
On Wednesday, Kara sends her a *I just remembered I have to show you this donut place here that is - swear swear swear - better than Galaxy Donuts*. It’s followed by about sixteen donut emojis. Lena hasn’t eaten a donut in four years, but her mouth waters at the memory of the chocolate cake donuts Kara used to bring her during late nights in college.

On Thursday, *late* Thursday, Kara sends her a simple question - *chocolate is a vegetable right?*

*No*, Lena types back with a smile. She thinks back to how Kara was always trying to rewrite the food pyramid to suit her own needs.

*but it comes from cocoa beans, Kara argues. beans are vegetables*.

Lena doesn’t counter that, just sends back the chocolate bar emoji with a thumbs up.

On Friday, as Lena’s walking down the hallway outside her office, scrolling through email on her phone, Kara sends her a selfie and Lena unceremoniously drops her phone on the ground.

A passing intern scoops it up and hands it back to her with a smile, but Lena snatches it back so quickly and with such force that the intern scurries away immediately.

The photo stares back at her in their text thread, just Kara holding up a ridiculously sized ice cream cone and smiling, but Lena hasn’t seen her in days and it reminds her so acutely of college that she feels a cold wash across her skin.

She doesn’t respond. Just pockets her phone and paces back down the hallway to her office.

The text on Saturday just reads *brunch?* and Lena sighs when she reads it.

*I can’t*, is all Lena sends back without an explanation.

Kara seems to understand anyway, like she always has, and responds within seconds. *not yet?*

*Not yet.*

--

“So there’s this thing called Astrofest,” is all Kara says to her when she plops down in the grass next to Lena.

*A pamphlet is dropped over Lena’s open textbook where it’s laying against her lap. She leans back against the tree behind her and pulls an earbud out of her ear. “Hi, Kara,” she greets dryly.*

They’ve been friends for a month now and Lena is finally starting to get used to the way Kara just kind of randomly pops up wherever Lena happens to be.

*Kara grins and cross her legs. “Hi, Lena.”*  

*Lena picks up the pamphlet gingerly and eyes her friend. “Astrofest,” she repeats.*

“Yeah, so it’s this thing the astronomy club is doing this weekend. A bunch of people are going to hang out and bring their telescopes and we’re ordering a bunch of pizzas and stuff. Max thinks he’s going to get a good shot of the Cigar Galaxy which-” Kara scoffs. “I don’t know why he cares about that, but he seems oddly invested.”
Lena squints at her friend. “Cigar Galaxy?”

Kara nods, gestures with her hands. “The one that kinda looks like…” she draws a shape in the air that Lena tries to follow.

“Messier 82?” she ventures with a laugh.

“Yeah,” Kara nods rapidly. “So we’re all going out to that park about an hour off campus so we can get away from the city lights and stuff.”

“Sounds fun,” Lena comments, handing the pamphlet back to Kara and returning to her textbook.

“So you’ll come with me?”

It startles Lena and she looks back over at Kara. “So I’ll what?”

“Come with me. With us.”

Lena hesitates, eyes darting between Kara and the pamphlet clutched in her fingers. “I don’t know, Kara,” she says. “I have a lot of work to get done and-”

“Come on,” Kara pleads, abandoning the pamphlet to wrap strong fingers around Lena’s bicep, tugging lightly. “It’ll be fun. What’s the point in being friends if we never do stuff?”

“Fine,” Lena concedes if only to get Kara to stop looking at her like that.

It doesn’t help though because Kara practically squeals in delight before tackling Lena in a deceptively strong hug.

--

She’s working late in her office one night when the doors to her office get thrown open and the sound of her assistant apologizing quickly bursts in along with a determined looking Kara Danvers.

Lena stands at her desk and observes the scene with an amused grin. Kara looks intent and purposeful in that attractive way she always has, pacing into the office confidently like she belongs there. The sight of it squeezes Lena’s heart. It’s been days since they’ve last seen each other in person and Lena drinks in the image of her in real time for a long moment.

“I swear I just blinked and she got right past me,” Jess is saying and Lena bites against a laugh.

Kara puts her hand up towards Lena, face pleading. “Lena, I’m sorry. This is my fault-”

“She’s so fast.”

“I just need to talk to you,” Kara finishes.

There’s clear desperation in Kara’s voice that Lena feels utterly weak to. She smiles at her assistant. “Jess will you make a note downstairs that Kara Danvers is to be shown in right away whenever possible?”

“Really?” Kara asks with surprise as Jess moves away to do as she’s been asked. Lena gives Kara a look, her stomach fluttering at the open expression on her ex’s face. “Thank you,” Kara says softly.

Lena smiles and waits for the doors to her office to close before sitting back in her desk chair.
“So?” Lena asks, picking up a pen and fiddling with it. “What do you need to talk to me about?”

Kara paces forward towards the desk, wringing her hands together. “A friend of mine got involved in something shady,” she says.

“A friend?” Lena jokes with obvious skepticism.

“No, an actual friend,” Kara pushes and Lena chuckles.

“So this isn’t like the time you accidentally bought illicit narcotics from that-”

Kara cuts her off with a sharp glare. “We agreed never to speak of that.”

It makes Lena laugh again. “I apologize. You’re right. So tell me. What can I do to help your friend?”

“It’s actually-” Kara pauses, biting at her lower lip before dropping into the chair opposite Lena. “It kind of has to do with an old friend of yours.”

Lena’s eyebrows raise at that. An old friend? Lena could probably count the amount of friends she has - old or otherwise - on one hand. And one of them is currently sitting in her office. “Who?”

Kara’s lips thin for a moment as if she doesn’t want to answer. “Veronica Sinclair.”

It pulls a sharp laugh out of Lena. “I wouldn’t classify Roulette as a friend.”

“Well I don’t know what else you’d call her,” Kara retorts crossing her arms over her chest. “How about an old acquaintance from boarding school that I never liked?”

“Tight dresses,” Lena finishes for her, an amused smile playing at her lips.

“I just don’t like her, Lena,” Kara says with exasperation. “I know you don’t. And neither do I.” It was an old conversation between them. “What does she have to do with your friend?”

Kara leans forward. “She runs this sort of alien fight club thing,” Kara explains. “The invite list caters to people in your circles. I thought maybe you might be on the list.”

Lena knows exactly what Kara is referring to and her fists clench. “I am,” she says with a heavy exhale. “Not that I’ve ever attended. I’ve never been particularly fond of her offered form of entertainment.”

“I broke up a fight just a few days ago,” Kara tells her, shaking her head and glancing away. “Got my butt kicked actually. We’re trying to shut it down.”
“Are you okay?” Lena asks without thinking and Kara’s eyes snap back up.

“Yeah,” Kara answers with a soft smile. “My pride on the other hand-”

Lena chuckles softly. “And then what happened? Your friend is one of her fighters? He’s a...” Lena trails off, not following where Kara is going.

“He was kidnapped,” Kara says without answering Lena’s unspoken question. “We think so at least. It’s kind of a long story that I would absolutely tell you, but I’m on a bit of a time crunch.”

Lena thins her lips, worry for whatever Kara’s gotten herself involved in scratches at her rib cage. “So what can I do?”

“I thought maybe you might know where she moved her operation for tonight. I went to the last location and it’s completely bare, no trace of her.”

“That’s the thing,” Lena says with a roll of her eyes. “Her stupid pop up stays mobile.”

“Do you know where she’s holding the next one?”

“Of course I know.”

Kara looks at her expectantly as if Lena’s just going to tell her the location. She wants to help, but instinctual worry claws at her and she finds herself protective of the invulnerable girl in front of her. Kara was always a punch first, make a plan later kind of person and Lena knows if she just gives Kara the address Kara will do something reckless.

“You’ll never get in,” Lena tells her, “not without being on the list.”

“I don’t need to be on the list,” Kara says with an eye roll. “I’m Supergirl.”

“So you’re just going to fly in there, in the middle of all of it and hope for the best?”

“That’s sort of what I do,” Kara answers plainly.

A plan forms in Lena’s mind. If Kara’s going to run after Roulette halfcocked then the least Lena can do is be there to help with the fallout. She might not be bulletproof, but Lena has experience in dealing with people like Roulette, in navigating that world. Experience Kara certainly doesn’t have.

“I’m on the list,” Lena offers simply and Kara’s face goes dark.

“No.”

“No, what?”

“Can you just give me the address?”

“If it’s Veronica you’re after it might be wiser to go there as Kara Danvers, try to infiltrate her ring from the inside.”

“I’m not trying to infiltrate her criminal organization,” Kara says with exasperation. “I’m trying to save my friend.”

“And you need my help. Help I can give you.”

“Lena, I just came here to see if you knew where the fight club was going to be. I don’t want to get
“You’ve already gotten me involved,” Lena says with a pointed look.

“Not in the way you’re suggesting.”

Lena purses her lips. “This is my city too, you know,” she says slowly. “I care about what happens in it.”

“I know you do.”

“Roulette is notoriously slippery and she is a woman of many connections,” Lena tells her. “Sometimes you have to fight fire with fire. She might have friends in high places, but I’m a Luthor.”

“Lena,” Kara says with clear warning, but Lena can see that Kara’s starting to resign herself to it. She just needs one more push.

“You can’t just approach every single situation with a punch first, hope it works out mentality. Roulette is clever. You might get your friend out, but…”

They stare at each other for a long moment. Lena fights a laugh when Kara’s mouth twists into an angry sort of pout.

“Fine,” Kara concedes and Lena swallows the triumphant smile that threatens to take hold of her face. “Let’s go.”

Lena stands, but she chuckles a little, eyeing Kara up and down. There’s nothing wrong with her outfit - in fact the roll of Kara’s sleeves up her muscular forearms is admittedly distracting - but it won’t work for where they’re going. “You can’t go like that.”

“Like what?” Kara says, looking down at herself.

“Go change,” Lena orders, closing her laptop and shuffling some papers on her desk. “Something fancy.”

Kara cringes just slightly. “Like going to a nice restaurant fancy?”

Lena bites her lip. “Like you’re going to meet my mother fancy,” she says wryly and Kara’s eyes go wide.

“Right,” she says. “Okay, yeah I can do that.”

Lena scribbles an address on the paper and walks around her desk. She holds it up in front of Kara but moves it back when the other girl looks like she’s going to grab for it. “Meet me here,” Lena says, “but promise you won’t go in without me.”

Kara rolls her eyes. “I promise.”

Lena remains unconvinced. “Swear on Dinkel’s,” she commands, referring to a bakery Kara practically lived at in college.

Kara glares a little, crossing her arms in defiance for a quick moment. “I swear on Dinkel’s,” she grumbles.

With a smile, Lena hands her the paper and leans back against her desk to watch her leave.
When she shows up to their meeting location, Kara is standing there in a tight black dress and heels, her hair pulled up on her head to expose a long slender neck and Lena’s hand shakes with the urge to reach out and grab her.

Kara turns and spots her, runs her eyes up and down the length of Lena’s body in a familiar way that makes Lena’s gut clench.

“All set?” Lena asks when she’s finally in front of Kara. It’s only then that she notices two other figures over Kara’s shoulder, talking lowly. Alex, she recognizes easily. The other shorter woman is unfamiliar.

“Maggie Sawyer,” Kara fills in for her with a quirk of her lips. “NCPD science division. Alex has been bringing her in on a few cases.”

“Does she know about?” Lena makes a small gesture with her hand, scooping it between them like a plane taking off and Kara follows the motion with a small smile.

“No,” she says in a low whisper. “She thinks I’m here as a reporter and you’re just Alex’s liaison.”

Lena’s not too sure that’s true judging the way Maggie keeps glancing over and she almost says as much about Kara’s terrible ability to keep a secret, but then Kara’s talking again. “Alex seems to like her,” she says. “It’s nice to see Alex have a friend. She spends way too much of her time at work or worried about me.”

Lena watches the two women talk to each other, standing just a little too close to be considered professional and she quirks an eyebrow, shooting Kara an amused grin. “Friend?”

Adorable confusion crosses Kara’s face at Lena’s tone and Lena just shakes her head. Kara was always kind of oblivious to certain things. “Let’s go in. It’s about to start,” Lena says, gesturing forward. She and Kara walk towards Alex and Maggie.

“Hi, Lena,” Alex greets her, looking entirely displeased to see her there.

“Alex,” Lena replies with a soft incline of her head.

“This is Detective Sawyer with the NCPD,” Alex introduces and Lena shakes the other woman’s hand.

“Pleasure,” Maggie says, eyeing Lena with that critical gaze all police officers seems to have.

“Maggie and I will take point out here while you two-” Alex points at her and Kara with a continued look of displeasure. “Go inside and get a read on the situation.”

“Right,” Kara says with a nod, hands on her hips. Lena watches the posture with amusement. It’s so like Supergirl it’s a wonder the rest of the world hasn’t figured it out yet.

“The second you see J’onn you call us in,” Alex says with clear command, eyes hot on Kara’s face. Alex’s eyes cut quickly to Maggie for a second. “Then you get out of there and we’ll send in Supergirl.”

Kara has a look of innocence on her face. “I will.”

“Keep your eyes on Sinclair as well,” Maggie adds.
Lena and Maggie eye each other for a short second - Lena doesn’t know what to do with the little smirk on the detective’s face, but she doesn’t have time to think about it because Kara is leading them towards the entrance to the warehouse.

--

The fight club is exactly as Lena expected it to be. Roulette was always so damn dramatic.

The guest list is incredibly impressive and Lena hopes the mask she’s wearing hides her face enough and that no one looks closely enough to recognize her. She hadn’t thought of the fallout that could befall her were she to be spotted at this event. Discretion, however, is the kind of thing required for attending an event like this so she thinks she might be safe enough.

On instinct, she threads her arm through Kara’s as they walk inside and they walk like that for a good ten feet before Lena realizes what she’s done.

She goes to pull away, but Kara tightens her arm at her side and keeps them connected. “It’s fine,” Kara murmurs softly to her as they head for a high top on the far side of the room, close to a massive metal cage.

A waiter passes them on the way and Lena plucks a glass of champagne off his tray. She takes an immediate gulp of the bubbly liquid before setting it on the table and avoiding Kara’s curious stare.

Kara spots Veronica before Lena does and Lena only knows that because of the dark shadow that passes over Kara’s face, visible despite the mask she’s wearing.

Lena looks over her shoulder to see Veronica, tight red dress and tattoos on display. She resists the urge to roll her eyes and turns back to Kara with a small smile. “Do you want to talk to her? See if we can get her to tell us where your friend is?”

“Want to?” Kara parrots, frowning and indicating how little she would like to interact with Veronica Sinclair.

The choice is made for them when Lena hears the arrogant sounding, “Lena Luthor,” from over her shoulder. Apparently the mask isn’t as effective as she had hoped. Lena turns and scoots closer to Kara on instinct, their arms brushing suddenly. For half a second, Lena feels Kara’s hand brush against her lower back and drop away as quickly as it came.

Kara is still glowering, but Lena puts on a polite, though tight, smile and turns towards Veronica. “Roulette,” she greets.

“I was beginning to think my invitations had gotten lost in the mail.”

Lena doesn’t reply, just takes a practiced sip of her champagne and watches as Roulette’s gaze traces the short distance between her and Kara.

“I see some things,” Veronica observes as she eyes Kara, “Haven’t changed.”

“Hello,” Kara says in greeting and it’s unclear if Veronica actually recognizes Kara or is referring to something else entirely.

“You’ve always had such awful taste in women, Lena,” Veronica says with a sardonic smile directed Kara’s way.

It makes Lena want to punch the smirk off the other woman’s face, but when she sees the way
Kara’s fists clench where they’re resting on the high top, Lena channels her anger into something less violent. Kara’s never really been capable of keeping a lid on her temper around Veronica and now would be about the worst time for Kara to lose her cool.

“And you in fashion,” Lena says coldly, eyes running up Veronica’s red dress.

“What made you decide to finally grace us all with your presence?” Veronica asks with a smirk, chin lifted in that haughty way she always had.

“Curiosity,” Lena says, a bland look on her face. “I hear you have quite the event planned tonight.”

It’s fishing, to see if Veronica will disclose anything about Kara’s friend, but Veronica, as always, evades giving any direct answers. “I always have quite the event planned. You should know that.”

“I must admit, these fight clubs seem a bit beneath you,” Lena says. “Are you not afraid of the fallout in the event you’re caught? Running an underground fight club never seems to go over that well in the press.”

Veronica laughs and Lena can feel the heat rolling off of Kara in angry waves. She presses in a little so their arms are skin on skin, the touch of it seeming to soothe Kara just a little. “Fallout? They’re aliens fighting aliens. People care about dogfights. No one cares if a couple aliens get knocked around.”

Lena has to bite the inside of her cheek to stop the flood of angry words that wants to come out. She manages a smile and a lift of her chin, mimicking the arrogant pose Roulette has taken. “I suppose you were never one to shy away from a risk.”

Veronica’s lips purse and she hums through it, observing the two of them critically once more. “Well, it was good to see you, Lena. As always. I do hope you enjoy yourselves tonight,” Roulette offers, with a final disdainful look towards Kara. “Let me know if you grow tired of the mousy girls you favor between your legs. You have my number.”

Lena refuses to rise to the bait, just keeps a steady, narrowed gaze on Roulette as she turns and walks away, but Kara bristles noticeably, an angry huff of air leaving her mouth.

“I hate her,” Kara says with a frown once they’re alone again.

“Ignore her for now,” Lena dismisses. “Focus on finding your friend.”

Kara’s fist is still clenched so tightly on their table that her knuckles have gone white and without thinking about it, Lena reaches over to run a soothing palm over her skin. It relaxes the hand almost immediately and Kara’s shoulders sag a little.

Then, as soon as their eyes connect and Lena registers what she’s doing, she pulls her hand away quickly and reaches for her champagne flute.

Kara looks like she’s about to say something when suddenly the cage in front of them lights up and Roulette’s booming voice fills the warehouse.

It all goes to hell after that.

The main act must include Kara’s friend because her back goes rigid immediately and Lena hears her gasp before murmuring something with a hand at her ear - talking to Alex she presumes.

“You okay?” Lena asks, an eye on the spectacle in front of them. The two - martians, Lena realizes
“I’ve got to go,” Kara tells her in a quiet whisper, moving close enough so they can hear each other without tipping anyone off. Kara’s hand slides to the small of her back so naturally that Lena doesn’t notice it for a few seconds. Blonde hair falls forward as Kara leans in to talk directly into her ear and suddenly Lena’s whole body feels hot.

They’re in the middle of a semi-dangerous situation, surrounded by National City’s elite and all Lena can think about is tangling her fingers in soft hair and pressing her lips against Kara’s.

Kara doesn’t seem as distracted as Lena is and she imagines that’s because Kara is here on a mission more than anything - her friend in danger not twenty feet away. “Are you going to be okay?” Kara is asking, still pressed in close. Her other arm, the one not on Lena’s back, is resting on the table in front of Lena. She’s practically enveloped in Kara.

Lena nods, inhales through her nose and regrets it immediately. The sudden invasion of scent does nothing to stamp down the desire to press up against Kara and she coughs a little before looking back up at her ex-girlfriend. “Yes,” she manages to get out. “Of course, do what you need to do.”

Kara looks skeptical, as if she knows the direction Lena’s thoughts have taken, but she steps away. “Be careful,” she orders. “Stay here and keep an eye on Veronica, but don’t do anything.”

“Well,” Lena says, but the word comes out a little shaky and she clears her throat. “I’m serious, Lena,” Kara says, frowning. “Don’t be reckless. Stay here.”

“I will.”

Kara thins her lips, leans in for a second like she’s going to say or do something else - fly Lena out of here probably, she thinks - but then nods and steps away.

Kara’s out of sight in seconds and Lena returns her attention to the fight happening in the cage. A new alien has joined them - a huge brutish thing - and now both martians are being flung around the large space.

The fight doesn’t last long before Lena hears, “Everyone, freeze!” from behind her and turns to see Alex and Maggie entering the space with a SWAT team. Seconds later, Supergirl touches down across the warehouse and enters the fray.

Lena watches, heart in her throat, as Kara gets flung like a rag doll into a nearby shipping container, the sound of her slicing through the side of it crunching uncomfortably in Lena’s ears.

But then Kara is getting up, running back towards the other alien, and with a series of well executed maneuvers has him on the ground.

Which is about when Lena notices Veronica attempting to slip away. Keep an eye on her, Kara had said. So Lena follows, tearing the mask off her face and leaving it at the table.

“Roulette!” Lena calls out when they turn a corner into an emptier part of the warehouse. “Veronica.”

At this, the other woman turns, gives Lena a haughty look. “You’ll have to excuse my manners, Lena. I’m in a bit of a hurry.”
“You’re not getting away with it,” Lena tells her, stepping forward. It’s then that Lena notices a group of aliens emerging from around a back corner, stepping towards them. Lena thinks maybe this is what Kara meant when she said don’t do anything reckless. But she just needs to stall Roulette a little, wait for the cavalry to catch up.

“Get away with what?” Veronica asks with a laugh. “Don’t tell me Lena Luthor of all people is here to bust up my little show? I should have known.”

“What you’re doing is wrong,” Lena tries. “Not to mention illegal, and you’re not going to get away with it.”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” Veronica says darkly, stepping forward. “You know how this works. And you know exactly how I’ll get away with it.”

Lena does in fact know how Roulette has managed to stay afloat all these years. She’s no stranger to the kind of power that the right connections can have.

“You’re outnumbered here, Lena,” Veronica tells her and Lena eyes the group of aliens with a wary eye. They seem to take a collective step towards her, shielding Veronica. “Go now before you get hurt. I’d hate to have to kill you. We’re such old friends after all.”

She thinks to say something else, but a burst of noise comes from behind her and she turns to see Alex running towards them, gun raised.

“You’re under arrest, Veronica Sinclair,” Maggie says as she comes up behind Alex, gun in hand.

Alex comes up next to Lena and spares her a tight glare before subtly pulling her backwards and stepping in front of her. A few other agents in tactical gear surround them, faced in a standoff with Veronica and her small band of alien fighters. The aliens surrounding Veronica look braced for a fight.

Just as Alex looks ready to speak, Kara comes bursting into the room with a loud, “Stand down!”

Lena moves aside as Kara paces forward, arms spread out and a pleading expression on her face. She watches as Kara walks straight towards the group of aliens in front of her and addresses them in that careful, hopeful way she has.

It’s strange to experience this in person - Supergirl in her element. Kara somehow manages to be nothing like Lena remembers her and yet at the same time still the same wide-eyed earnest girl she fell in love with five years ago.

Kara talks everyone down with ease and Lena watches as one by one every alien once on Veronica’s side falls easily under Kara’s spell. Veronica turns to walk away, but Kara’s speech worked and her own people block the way, allowing Maggie to step forward and arrest her.

Kara steps up as it happens and Lena watches, arms crossed. “I’m sure you figured it out by now, but it’s not a good idea to bet against me.”

Lena wants to laugh at that, the brave, proud way Kara plants her hands on her hips as she says it. The look on Veronica’s face makes Lena smirk, catching the other woman’s eye for a pleasant second.

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*When Lena wakes up it feels like her head is being weighed down by invisible bricks and she*
struggles to pick it up off the pillow behind it. The groan she lets out causes something to shift at her right and she turns to see Kara there, watching her with wide eyes from a nearby chair.

“Hey,” Lena croaks out, her throat painfully dry. She thinks to reach out a hand towards her girlfriend, but she’s stopped by the barricade on the side of her bed. Looking around, she finally registers where she is and the memory of her car crash comes barreling back.

Kara’s standing at her bedside in a blink, leaning over with watery eyes. “Hey.”

“What happened?” Lena asks, trying to take mental stock of her injuries. She doesn’t feel too terrible. It’s just her head mostly that feels a little foggy and slow. There’s some soreness in her arm, hip and lower back but nothing feels too bad.

“You were in a car crash,” Kara tells her, voice breaking as she says it.

Lena lifts her hand up to brush across Kara’s cheekbone, seeing the tears that are threatening to fall. “You okay?”

Kara lets out a watery laugh. “Yeah, I’m just worried about you.”

“I’m fine,” Lena insists, she looks around the room again, tries to see if she can see where they put her chart. “I think.”

“Your brother called,” Kara murmurs.

“He did?”

“He says he’s going to try to make it down tomorrow, but work is busy. He was glad to hear you’re okay.”

Lena doesn’t ask if anyone informed her mother. She already knows the answer. “I’ll call him later.”

Kara nods, her smile tight. “I almost didn’t make it there in time,” Kara says so soft that it takes Lena a second to register it all.

“How did you get there?” Lena remembers driving, remembers being late for her lunch date with Kara, and remembers the second before impact when she realized the car had run the red light. Kara had to have been halfway across campus with no way of knowing Lena was in trouble.

“You heard it?” Kara replies with a small smile. Lena looks at her girlfriend with clear disbelief. Heartbeats aren’t distinctive or different. Apart from medical abnormalities or small differences in volume, human heartbeats sound the same.

But, Lena reminds herself, Kara is different and she’s looking down at her with such honesty. “I do?”

Kara nods. “It’s not - it’s not super different. Maybe I just know you or something, but I can pick out your heartbeat across all of campus sometimes. I can hear Alex’s too, and Eliza’s if I really try. It depends on how close they are really.”

It startles Lena to hear this. She knows Kara has superhuman hearing, but she hadn’t thought
about what that would imply on a personal level. “And you were listening to it - to mine - when I crashed?”

Kara seems to blush then, expression a little sheepish. “I’m not trying to invade your privacy or anything,” Kara says. “It’s just sometimes I tune in for a second to make sure you’re okay, or to see if you need anything. Sometimes hearing it calms me down if I’m feeling nervous.”

Warmth blooms up into Lena’s throat and she falls impossibly more in love with Kara. “And that’s how you knew about the crash?”

A dark look washes over Kara’s face and Lena watches the hands clutching the bed rail tighten. “That idiot,” Kara starts. “Blew through a red light and hit your car right in the side. Your car went clear across the intersection and he hit another car and flipped over.”

“What happened to him?”

Kara’s eyes spark dangerously. “I don’t care.”

There’s heat in Kara’s voice and her knuckles have gone pale white. Lena thinks she catches the sound of the metal creaking under Kara’s grip and her eyes go wide. “Kara,” she breathes softly. The anger rolling off of Kara feels palpable.

“Hey,” Lena says in a soft soothing voice. She picks her hand up and puts it over one of Kara’s, softly stroking over the skin there. “It’s fine, I’m fine, you’re fine. Everything is fine.”

Heavy emotions always put Kara completely out of sync with her own strength and Lena knows they’re about two seconds away from having to explain broken medical equipment to the nurse. She tugs at Kara’s fingers, whispering reassurance until they finally give way and Lena tugs them towards her lips, pressing a soft kiss there.

At this, Kara’s tears fall, but her shoulders sag with it and she lets go of the bed rail.

“I’m so glad you’re okay,” Kara whispers, moving forward to press her forehead against Lena’s. Lena closes her eyes and inhales the feeling of being this close to Kara, letting it calm them both in a way little else can. “I don’t want to lose you.”

“You won’t,” Lena tells her quietly before kissing the tears away.

--

Kara corners her as the room clears out, tugging her into relative privacy on the side of a shipping container.

“I thought I told you not to do anything reckless,” Kara hisses as soon as they’re alone.

Lena tugs a little against the grip Kara has on her arm until Kara releases her. “And I didn’t.”

“You went straight after Veronica the minute she fled.”

“You told me to keep an eye on her,” Lena points out, arching an eyebrow.

“Not that close an eye.”

“It’s Veronica,” Lena argues. “If she were going to kill me it would have already happened. Like that time I informed the headmistress of her unsanctioned gambling ring.”
“People are different after so many years apart,” Kara says and her tone is dark with accusation. “Or so you keep reminding me.”

Lena knows that Kara’s attitude is being affected by adrenaline and worry so she fights against the instinct to snap at her. “I’m fine,” she says, stepping a little closer to Kara, seeing the way she’s clenching her jaw and her whole body is tense.

Everything in her body is telling her to wrap Kara up in her arms, to run her palm down Kara’s spine in that way she knows always turns Kara’s body into liquid. Lena wants to know if it all still works, if she still knows the tricks of Kara’s body the way she once did. The urge to wipe away the furrow in Kara’s brow with her thumb is so strong she has to put her hands behind her back in order to resist it.

“I knew I shouldn’t have let you come,” Kara grumbles, pinching the bridge of her nose and sighing. The tone of it makes Lena bristle.

“Last I checked, you don’t control me,” Lena bites out and Kara’s face sags from the tight expression of before.

“That’s not what I’m trying to do.”

“It sure sounds like it is.”

“Lena,” Kara pleads and she takes a step closer, close enough that Lena has to lift her chin to keep eye contact. “I’m just worried about you.”

“You needn’t be.”

“I do when you’re running headfirst into danger like that.”

“I ran after a woman I’ve known for years to stall her. There was a SWAT team that included your sister right behind me and Supergirl. It was hardly as dangerous as you’re making it out to be. Roulette fights with her brain not her fists anyway, always has.”

“That’s not the point.”

“Kara, I’m an adult and I make my own choices.”

“Those choices affect me,” Kara says with an intensity Lena doesn’t know what to do with. There’s fire in Kara’s eyes and she’s close enough that all would Lena would have to do is lean up just a little -

Kara’s eyes dart down to Lena’s lips and the thought is like a tangible thing between them. Lena knows they’re about to cross a line - thinks maybe they already have - but she doesn’t know how to stop it. Her fingers tense with the desire to reach out and pull Kara in close.

It isn’t until Kara let’s out a strangled, “Lena,” that the spell gets broken and Lena takes a step backward, sucking in air as fast as she can.

“Can we - can we not do this?” Lena asks, voice breaking.

Kara’s eyes stare steadily into her own for a long moment. “Boundaries,” Kara whispers.

Lena nods, maybe a little too quickly, but there’s heat in her eyes. “Boundaries,” she repeats.
When they walk outside, Veronica is taunting Maggie even as she’s handcuffed and Lena makes out the words clearly enough that she decides to walk over, Kara hot on her heels.

“You’re wrong,” Lena says as soon as she hears Veronica say something about being released in a matter of minutes.

“All it will take is a phone call,” Veronica says with a cocky smirk. “You know how this goes. Right friends, right time.”

Veronica’s not that off base and Lena swallows against that knowledge even as she goes through the long list of her own connections, tries to decide which ways she could make Veronica’s life miserable. It’s highly likely Veronica will manage to dodge this arrest, as Lena is sure she has many times in the past.

Kara shifts behind her and Lena feels the motion as if she could see it. It draws Veronica’s glance for just a second.

“I wasn’t aware that you’ve changed sides,” Veronica continues and Lena’s jaw tightens.

“Wouldn’t your mother be proud.”

“I haven’t changed sides,” Lena argues, stomach turning at the mention of her mother. “You’ve just always misjudged me.”

At that, Veronica looks over Lena’s shoulder where she’s sure Kara is still standing - Supergirl is still standing.

“I suppose I have,” Veronica murmurs. “A Luthor and a Super,” she laughs, eyes darting between the both of them. “How the times have changed.”

Lena’s not sure how to tell her that in some ways, nothing’s changed at all.

Maggie tugs her away after that to pull her further down the sidewalk and Lena’s left alone with Kara again.

“Come on,” Kara says softly, a hand at her elbow. “I’ll take you home.”

Lena tugs away from the touch and swallows. Everything feels too raw right now and she’s so sensitive to Kara’s presence that she knows she’s seconds away from saying fuck it to any boundaries she’s been pretending they need. “I can get home on my own, thank you.”

“Lena, let me take you home,” Kara says, looking about as unsteady as Lena feels. She looks so ready to fall into Lena’s arms. Lena wants to let her, so badly.

“I’ll take her,” Alex’s voice interrupts as she walks up to them, eyes darting between them, narrowed.

“Alex,” Kara starts, but Alex puts up a firm hand to stop her.

“You need to go debrief back at the -” A quick glance to Lena. “Back at base. I’ll make sure Lena gets home.”

Kara looks like she wants to keep protesting and frankly Lena definitely does not want to be left alone with Alex Danvers. Especially not with the way she feels right now. But Alex has a determined look on her face and the two sisters just stare at each other for a long charged moment.
“Fine,” Kara concedes.

“Get out of here,” Alex tells her. “I’ll call you later.”

With one last heavy look at Lena, Kara nods and turns to jump back into the sky.

--

The air in Alex’s car is thick with tension and Lena watches National City race by outside the passenger side window with her arms crossed.

Alex is silent and Lena’s not going to be the one to change that. Frankly, a silent ride is more preferable than one in which Alex reminds her yet again of how she broke Kara’s heart four years ago.

They’re about five minutes into the ride when Alex finally says something, fingers drumming on her steering wheel. “I told Kara it was a bad idea to bring you in on this.”

“I’m sure you did,” Lena murmurs, keeping her eyes directed at the road.

“Not because of-” Alex pauses, looks over at her for a second. “You’d actually be quite an asset to our team.”

It shocks Lena into looking over at the other woman, her jaw dropping a little. “Is that a compliment I hear?”

Alex rolls her eyes, scoffs. “You did okay in there. You’re smart, you have decent instincts and you have this annoying fearlessness about you that’s actually useful in high pressure situations. You’re not afraid to make snap decisions.”

Lena smiles a little. “But?”

Alex sighs, sagging a little in her seat as if she’s already resigned to something. “You’ve got Kara all twisted up.”

It rubs painfully against Lena’s already stretched out emotions. “I don’t mean to,” she says quietly. “I told her we have to-”

“I’m not saying it’s your fault,” Alex interrupts and it’s the most honest and open she’s ever seen Kara’s sister. “Kara never really gave up on the idea that you guys would get back together.”

It’s like getting stabbed. Or so Lena imagines. The words jab into her chest painfully and she takes in a lungful of air. “I’m not trying to give her that impression,” Lena argues, pulling the words out of her mouth slowly and with a great deal of pain. “She wants to be friends and I - I’m-”

“Helpless to say no to her,” Alex finishes with a bitter laugh. “That was always your problem.”

Lena doesn’t know exactly what that means, but she looks out the window and swipes a finger at the corner of her eye, begging her body not to cry.

“Sometimes Kara just needs to be told no,” Alex continues and Lena’s jaw tightens.

“I don’t think we should be talking about this behind her back.”

“Neither of you are talking about it and that’s the problem,” Alex counters and Lena feels backed into a corner, defensive.
“We have talked about it and frankly, our relationship is none of your business.”

“So it’s a relationship?”


“Friendship,” Alex repeats, scoffing. “Right. Because you guys were so good at being friends the first time around.”

“I think that we can be friends,” Lena replies in a careful tone. “We just need some time. Everything is too new and raw right now.”

Alex laughs, the sound hollow. “Then you’re both fools.”

--

When Lena finally gets home she collapses in her bed with a bottle of wine and a box of tissues. The side of her bedroom is floor to ceiling windows and Lena spends the night watching the sky, eyes darting between the various buildings across National City and the stars that are barely visible above.

It’s close to midnight when she gets a text. Her phone vibrates on the glass surface of her end table and she snatches it quickly.

i’m sorry if things got weird tonight, it reads, and that i got mad. i just want to protect you. thank you for your help with everything.

Lena just blinks at the words, her eyes feeling dry and tired. She falls asleep with her phone in her hand.
When she wakes up the next day, there are about four unanswered texts on her phone. All from Kara, all apologetic in varying tones.

The *I’ll be better* eats away at Lena. As if it was Kara’s fault that they can’t be alone together without having emotionally charged staring contests. As if Kara’s the one that keeps setting the boundaries just to step right over them. As if *Kara* would ever need to be better, as if she’s not already perfect in Lena’s eyes.

It haunts her so badly that Lena finally responds.

*you did nothing wrong. i’m the one that’s sorry. i do want to be friends.*

Kara’s reply is so immediate that Lena wonders if she’d been waiting by the phone.

*lunch this week?*

Lena’s still not ready for that, but she so desperately wants to be.

*drinks next week?*

Kara sends back about twenty smiley face emojis and clapping hands and Lena just shakes her head, laughs a little and tries to fight the feeling that they’re just running in circles together.

--

The news reports on the new criminal gang terrorizing National City with highly powered alien weapons. Lena watches, chest tight, as Kara gets shot by one such weapon and crumples, hit again and flies into a building.

It scares her to remember that there are things out there that can hurt the Girl of Steel. Things out there that can kill her. She thinks of her brother, of his single minded mission to take down Superman and she knows there’s a warehouse full of his projects somewhere that could do just that.

She’s filtered most of them out of L Corp’s to-do lists, but she knows that’s not all of it. Lex was always paranoid. There’s some vault out there just waiting to be found.

When she watches Kara get knocked around for the second time, Lena can’t fight the hold the image takes on her throat. Kara is vulnerable to simple alien guns, anti-grav guns from the look of them. What could she do against Lex’s cavalcade of kryptonite weapons? It feels like she’s choking on worry at the very thought.

*Are you okay?* is all typed up and ready to send on her phone and Lena stares at it for a good twenty seconds before deleting it.

She sighs. They’re *friends* and she needs to start acting like it. Friends would check up on each other. That’s what Kara had said at the beginning of it all anyway.

She looks back down at her phone and types out a careful, *I saw the news. I hope you’re okay.*

Kara sends back a selfie, still in her supersuit and giving the camera a thumbs up. It eases Lena’s nerves a little, but it does nothing to quell the strong desire Lena feels sweep through her to find Kara, see her in person, and personally assure she’s uninjured.
The damage to the National City Children’s Hospital is all anyone can talk about, and Lena sees an opportunity to both do some good and garner positive press for L Corp. Apparently Supergirl getting thrown through a building isn’t as much of a concern for National City, but it consumes Lena.

Planning a fundraiser gala lets her focus on something other than the way Kara’s face looked right before Lena was sure she was going to kiss her, the night of Roulette’s fight club. It’s only when she’s reviewing the guest list for the party that she realizes what a target it would be for any criminal in National City looking for a score. Particularly ones with electromagnetic alien weapons.

They’d have to be stupid to go after L Corp or her, Lena thinks, but common thieves aren’t generally known for their high IQ.

A plan forms suddenly before Lena can stop it and she’s down in R&D without even thinking about it.

“Miss Luthor,” Lana greets her when she walks in, eying her warily. “You’re becoming quite the staple down here.”

“Project Hawking, are you familiar with it?” Lena asks without any pretense.

Lana looks a little taken aback, but recovers. “The field generator? Yes.”

“I’d like to take a look at what we have.”

They walk over to a storage unit in the corner of the lab and Lana scans them through, eyes on the tall shelving units until she finds what she’s looking for. Together they pull a large box from a top shelf and Lena opens it, observes what’s inside.


“What do you need it for?” Lana asks and Lena’s a little surprised. She’d have thought her sharp words in her office a week ago would have warded Lana off from asking such things.

“I want to see if I can get it working,” Lena says, walking it back out of the storage unit and towards an empty workstation not too far away.

“It’s not exactly a household consumer product,” Lana observes, helping Lena take all the different components out of the box.

“No, not exactly,” Lena laughs.

“You’re planning something,” Lana says with a smirk and it’s strange for someone to talk so casually to her, to be unafraid of who she is or the power she wields.

She looks up at Lana, thinks about how nice it might be to have an actual friend in National City. Not just an ex-girlfriend friend that she keeps almost kissing. “Just a surprise,” she tells the other woman.

“A black body radiation surprise?”

Lena shrugs a shoulder. “Do you want to stay and help?”
A look of surprise flashes over Lana’s help, but her smile goes wide. “Yeah, definitely.”

They sit there and work together, Lena with her head bowed over a mess of wires and coils while Lana hands her whatever tools she may need and keeps the coffee warm.

--

“I need to tell you something,” Kara says one night as they’re walking around campus. They’ve gotten ice cream at a place Kara loves. Lena scoops the last of hers into her mouth before chucking the small bowl into a nearby trashcan, turning to look at Kara.

“Oh,” she says in a slow drawl, dusting her hands together and swiping at her lip. Kara’s still clutching at a cone and there’s a bit of ice cream clinging to the corner of her mouth. Lena laughs softly and swipes a thumb over it, charmed at the sheepish expression Kara gives her, a blush visible even under the dim light of sunset.

They’ve been friends for months now, but Lena can sense something building between them. Most days she tries to ignore it. Her mother’s voice rings too loudly in her head - a college fling is one thing, Lena, but you have responsibilities. There’s no place for a relationship in a young Luthor’s life.

But with Kara smiling at her so softly, a red sky framing her face and a comfortable autumn chill in the air, Kara doesn’t feel anything like a college fling. She feels real. Significant. Heavy. Solid.

“What is it?” Lena asks when Kara doesn’t say anything else. They pause near a bench and Lena sits down, expecting Kara to sit with her. Instead, Kara paces in front of her, moving rapidly.

Lena’s never seen Kara look so nervous. She wants to reach out and grab ahold of Kara’s hand and soothe her.

“Kara, it can’t possibly that bad. Did you cheat on a test or something? Commit a crime?”

Kara shakes her head rapidly and Lena starts to get a little worried. It’s hard to think of her bright and sunny friend doing anything that would upset Lena, but from the way Kara can’t stop fidgeting, Lena’s suddenly not so sure.

“So, do you know Superman?” Kara asks suddenly, her hands gripping her glasses.

“Yes, of course,” Lena answers with a laugh. “I’m from Metropolis.”

“Right.” Kara twists her hands together and Lena watches this motion curiously.

“Are you dating Superman or something? I thought he and Lois Lane had a thing,”

“Wha - ew, no.”

Lena crosses her arms over her chest, shrugs. “Well if you don’t tell me what it is I’m just going to keep guessing-”

“He’s my cousin,” Kara says abruptly and Lena’s brain stutters to a halt.

“She’s what?”

“He’s my cousin,” Kara repeats and she stops pacing, standing in front of Lena with her hands out to the side, honesty in those pretty blue eyes.
“But he’s-”

“Yeah,” Kara breathes and she looks around them quickly. Campus is mostly empty, devoid of students who have fled home for Fall Break. There’s no one within earshot.

“So you’re-” The numbers start adding up quickly in Lena’s head and a thousand little inexplicable moments suddenly make perfect sense. The clarity of it all makes her eyes go wide.

“Yeah,” Kara says. The word is soft, but sure and Kara sits down next to Lena on the bench, studying her with clear vulnerability.

“You’re an alien?!” Lena asks in a hushed whisper, she’s only barely able to stop herself from shrieking. It’s not reproach or anger, but she’s surprised.

Though, it’s not that she’s entirely shocked. There’s always been something off about some aspects of Kara’s life, but there’s a difference between knowing and knowing something.

“Are you mad?”

Lena blinks. Tries to understand what’s going on, but answers the question easily - there is no other answer for her. “No, of course I’m not mad.” Relief floods Kara’s face.

“I thought you should know,” Kara says. “I’m really not supposed to tell people, but you’re not-” Lena watches Kara fiddle with her glasses and blow out a heavy breath. “You’re different.”

Lena’s not ready to confront all that different might mean to Kara.

“Thank you for telling me,” she says quietly before reaching for Kara’s hand to hold it in a sure grip.

There’s a voice in the back of her head, her mother again, and it’s full of all kinds of anti-alien venom. Superman has always been a testy subject in the Luthor household and she can even hear her brother’s whispers about the alien threat.

But when she looks at Kara, Lena can’t understand any of that. Not with the way Kara always grins like Lena’s made her day just by existing, or the feeling Lena gets when Kara laughs, that full bodied genuine laugh that never fails to get Lena to smile. The only threat Lena can sense is the one to her heart.

“You’re my best friend,” Kara whispers like it’s just as much a confession as before.

It frightens Lena a little, to feel so much for one person, but Lena doesn’t fight it. Just wraps Kara up in a tight hug and laughs a little. A wave of protectiveness washes over her at the tremble she can notice in Kara’s strong frame. “Me too,” she says with her nose buried in the fabric at Kara’s shoulder.

The scientist in her suddenly perks up and she sits back, disengaging from the hug. “So does that mean you can fly?”

Kara shrugs a little sheepishly. “I think so.”

“What do you mean you think so?”

“I haven’t tried to in years.”

A thousand questions start to line up in Lena’s brain, but she tries to stay on track. “Why not?”

So does that mean you can fly?”

Kara shrugs a little sheepishly. “I think so.”

“What do you mean you think so?”

“I haven’t tried to in years.”

A thousand questions start to line up in Lena’s brain, but she tries to stay on track. “Why not?”
“Using my powers could be dangerous,” Kara says like she’s reciting something from memory. “For me and for others.”

“But you have all the same abilities as…?”

“As far as I know,” Kara says. “Like I said, I haven’t really tested it all out.”

It’s natural scientific curiosity that eats at her. It’s impossible to ignore. In a quiet hushed whisper she asks, “Do you want to?”

Kara’s eyes go wide at the question. Like she hadn’t considered the possibility of ever using her powers again.

Lena runs through a catalog of open spaces they could get to around campus, calculates how far they’d have to drive in order to get anywhere private.

“You don’t think I’m dangerous?”

It’s asked so honestly and with such vulnerability that Lena swallows a laugh immediately. “No,” she says softly. “What I think is dangerous is not knowing what you’re capable of.”

Silence stretches for a long moment, Kara staring into Lena’s eyes before a cautious grin lights up her face. “Okay. Let’s do it.”

--

The decision to invite Kara to the gala doesn’t come easy. At first, she tries to convince herself that it’s an insurance policy. It’s not because she just generally wants Kara around, wants to put them back on even footing after the intensity of their post-alien-fight-club stare down.

She thinks to just text Kara, or call her, but Lena’s the one that keeps messing everything up between them. If she wants anything to get better or easier, she’s going to have to start facing her fears, so to speak. She’ll see Kara face to face and invite her to the gala. Like a normal friend would.

They haven’t spoken or seen each other in person since the fight club and Lena doesn’t trust herself to be anywhere alone with Kara. CatCo is almost neutral territory, or at the very least, they’ll be surrounded by people. That alone should reign in Lena’s emotions enough to get through a conversation.

Or so she thinks.

Except the minute Kara spots her, a flash of complete happiness brightens across Kara’s face, her whole body visibly straightening as she stands up from the desk she had been previously bent over. It spikes into Lena’s heart almost painfully.

“Lena!” Kara greets, turning to face her. Lena spares a glance for the gentleman to Kara’s left, but doesn’t acknowledge him.

“Hi,” Lena greets, crossing her arms and hoping her nerves aren’t showing. The constant movement of the rest of the office floor around them helps. Strong and steady CEO is a role Lena is very practiced at and she falls back into it without too much trouble. It’s admittedly harder with Kara around, but she still manages.

“What are you doing at CatCo?”
“I’m here to see you actually,” Lena replies and hates the immediate way Kara reacts to that - her smile growing impossibly large in an instant.

“You are?”

She takes a deep breath and affects a practiced smile, trying not to let Kara’s eyes get to her. It’s hard when she can practically feel the way Kara’s gaze is tracing her face. “L Corp is hosting a party this weekend.

“You’re throwing a party?” The smile on Kara’s face drops immediately to a frown.

“It’s a gala fundraiser for the children’s hospital after that horrific attack on their new building,” Lena explains, knowing what the look on Kara’s face means.

“Lena, that’s-”

“I was hoping you’d come,” Lena says before Kara can list off reasons why Lena shouldn’t be holding a party with a gang out there terrorizing National City.

It seems to work. Kara’s frown stutters up into another smile.

What she really means is that she hopes Supergirl can attend as an extra ward against any attack, but with the way Kara’s co-workers keep milling about in earshot, Lena knows she can’t exactly ask such a thing outright.

Before Kara can answer, the man sitting at the desk next to them stands, shaking a Red Vine in her direction. “Uh, gala? Is that like a party?”

Kara answers no immediately, clearly trying to shut him up, and Lena’s eyes dart between them, confused.

“It would mean a lot to me if you were there,” Lena says, focusing on Kara and ignoring the newcomer even as he continues to grin at both of them. Kara’s eyes go soft around the edges.

“Of course I’ll come,” Kara says with a small smile.

“I love parties,” the man interjects again and Lena tries to puzzle out if she knows him. He clearly seems comfortable enough with Kara to insert himself in her conversations. She wonders if this is the Winn that Kara told her she’d warm up to. “Can I come too?”

“No,” Kara answers hastily and Lena gets a sinking feeling when she looks at them, like Kara’s trying to hide something. It’s not Winn, she thinks, but it’s someone. She appraises the stranger again and something tightens in her stomach. He’s a lot like the kind of guy she always thought Kara’d fall for - the kind of guy she assumed, in her darkest hours, that Kara would date after their breakup. Cute, preppy, nice smile. They look good together in a bland sort of way.

It hadn’t occurred to her to consider the possibility that Kara was dating someone. She feels a little blindsided by the idea.

Unwilling to be a slave to her past, Lena laughs a little. A smile stretches over her face tightly. “No, of course your friend can come,” she says to Kara and her ex-girlfriend gives her a wide-eyed look, clearly uncomfortable.

Lena turns to the man, tries hard not to imagine sluging him in the jaw and reminds herself that sometimes it’s smarter to keep your enemies close at hand. “What’s your name?”
“Mike. Of the Interns,” he says sagely and Lena wonders if Kara finds that kind of humor amusing.

“Well, Mike of the Interns,” she says, perversely enjoying the pinched look on Kara’s face. “Find yourself a nice suit and we’ll see you there.”

He looks entirely pleased with the idea, the red candy in his hand wiggling in excitement but Kara just narrows her eyes at her.

Lena arches a brow at Kara, as if in challenge, and Kara sighs, stepping away from Mike and grabbing Lena’s arm, spinning them both in the opposite direction. “Can I speak with you? Please?”

Lena lets herself get led out of the main floor of CatCo and down a back hallway until Kara shuffles them both into an abandoned office.

It’s then that Lena realizes her error. She’s now alone. With Kara. Again.

“Kara,” Lena starts, needing to rid herself of these circumstances, but Kara starts talking before Lena can make a move to leave.

“His name isn’t Mike,” Kara says abruptly, hands on her hips.

Lena laughs a little. It wasn’t what she expected Kara to lead with. “What do you mean?”

“He’s from Daxam. His name is Mon-El.”

Lena startles a little at the mention of a familiar planet - she remembers Kara talking about it years ago. Not so favorably. “Daxam? Isn’t that-”

“Yeah,” Kara says with clear exasperation. Lena remembers Kara teaching her some colorful Kryptonian slurs that revolved around the planet and its people. “His pod, a Kryptonian pod ironically, landed here a while ago and he just woke up.”

“I don’t understand.”

“It’s actually a really long story,” Kara says, rubbing at her neck.

“Why are you telling me?”

“I’m trying to get him to assimilate into society,” Kara explains. “That’s why he introduced himself as Mike. Mon-El isn’t exactly a run of the mill human name. So then I got him this job at CatCo, but it’s not exactly going smoothly.”

“No?”

“He’s such a pain,” Kara confesses with a little chuckle. “And he keeps doing completely ridiculous things. I’m trying to be patient with him, but it’s so hard.”

The memory of Kara when they first met invades Lena’s brain and makes her smile a little. “Maybe you’re forgetting what you used to be like.”

“What do you mean what I used to be like?”

“You had to look up what a date was on urban dictionary,” Lena teases.

A charming blush flushes into Kara’s cheeks and Lena’s chest feels tight. Memory swirls between
them like something tangible. “Earth mating customs were foreign to me.”

“I remember,” Lena replies with an arch of her brow and it does nothing to help Kara’s blush which deepens as her ex-girlfriend bites at her lip.

They stare at each other for a bit, alone in the dusty, abandoned office and this is exactly why Lena wanted to avoid such a thing. It was easier out there with curious, watchful eyes. Here, there’s no one to stop her from crossing the floor and pushing Kara against the wall behind her.

No one but herself.

Of course then Kara opens her mouth and completely dampens Lena’s desire. “You can’t go ahead with this fundraiser. You need to cancel.”

“This sounds familiar,” Lena deadpans, crossing her arms across her chest.

“There’s a trio of criminals out there with highly advanced alien technology and this party will definitely be a target.”

“Then it’s a good thing you’ll be there,” Lena says, trying to appeal to reason. Kara looks unconvinced so Lena continues. “And Mon-El,” she adds. “Being from Daxam, he must be affected by the yellow sun as well. My party can have two protectors. You can bring him as your date.”

Kara’s eyes are narrowed, jaw tight as she considers Lena’s words.

“I’m not dating him,” Kara blurts out suddenly and with a certain amount of heat. Lena feels a lump in her throat.

“Okay,” she draws out.

“It seems like you think I am. But I’m not.”

Lena laughs and looks away, hating that exposed feeling she always gets when Kara just understands the many layers of Lena’s emotions. “I didn’t,” she lies, remembering the way she had immediately thought exactly that and cataloged Mon-El as a romantic rival. A ridiculous, instinctual reaction that she now wishes she could have stopped.

“Just in case then,” Kara says, looking at Lena critically. “I’m not.”

“That’s really none of my business, Kara,” Lena answers, gaze narrowing as she looks back at her ex.

Kara cocks her head to the side. “Isn’t it?”

“It’s not,” she emphasizes with some heat, angry at Kara for toeing at the line. At herself for dragging them back to the middle. Her invitation to Mon-El had been completely about assuming he and Kara were dating, or at least almost-dating, and it puts a sick feeling in her stomach. If they’re going to be friends she has to relearn how to see Kara and not think of her as a girlfriend anymore.

“Friends care about each other’s love lives,” Kara points out and it’s such a weak line of reasoning that Lena scoffs. Hates the sound of the word love as it comes out Kara’s mouth in this context.

“We’re not those kinds of friends yet,” she replies. They probably never will be, she thinks to add, but doesn’t. Lena can’t imagine a future in which she’d be comfortable hearing about Kara’s
romantic prospects. Romantic prospects that no longer include her.

“I just think that you should know—”

“You know what?” Lena interrupts with her palm outstretched towards Kara to stop her. “We’re not going to do this.”

“Do what?”

“This,” Lena says waving her hand around. “I want to be friends, Kara. But we keep doing this and it’s not helping either of us.”

“I still don’t know what this is,” Kara retorts, brows coming together.

“It’s been four years,” Lena starts. “You’ve dated people I’m sure. I’ve dated people.” Lena tries to ignore the perceptible flinch Kara gives at that. “We’ll probably each date more people. In the future.” She can’t look at Kara as she says it, but carries on. “We don’t need to rehash all that old history. We just need to move on. If you’re not dating him, great. If you are. Good for you. For the both of you. I don’t care.”

Lena’s pretty sure that her messy tumble of words indicates pretty loudly that she does in fact care, but she refuses to keep having these stilted conversations with Kara. “So can we just not have these kinds of chats anymore?”

“We’re pretty awful at being friends, aren’t we?” Kara asks, head bowed and with a resigned tone that Lena wants to kiss away.

“We don’t have to be,” Lena replies.

Kara’s head shoots up. “Friends?”

“Awful at it,” Lena corrects.

She readjusts the purse on her arm and takes a deep inhale. The smile on her face feels overly exaggerated, but she can’t keep looking at the way Kara’s now sagged against the far wall, looking at Lena with a kind of desperation.

“I’ll send you the details for the gala,” Lena murmurs before turning and exiting the office.

—

“Do you date? Do dating? Enjoy dates?”

The questions come out of nowhere, so suddenly, that Lena feels like her brain gets whiplash. “Do I what?” she asks. She had just been doing homework, before Kara had started conjugating the word date.

“A date,” Kara says.

They’re in the library and Kara’s peering at her from across a wooden table, her pen tapping rapidly on the surface as she looks around her laptop. It’s marking up the table it’s moving so fast and so hard, but Lena doesn’t think to stop Kara.

“Do I date?”

“Are you - “ Kara spares a glance for her laptop before returning her gaze to Lena with a smile,
“Are you dating someone?”

Lena sets her own pen down and furrows her brow at her friend. “You know I’m not.”

Kara looks about as confused as Lena feels. “So you’re not mat - dating - with Shawn?”

“Shawn Cady? No,” Lena answers with a laugh. Even the idea of it is absurd, but Kara doesn’t look like she’s joking.

“Jenna?”

It takes a few seconds of thought, but Lena’s eyebrows raise when she realizes who Kara is referring to. “Jenna Matthews? No,” Lena laughs again. “Jenna’s straight.”

“Straight,” Kara says, blinking. She leans forward suddenly, voice dropping down. “Do humans come in like crooked shapes?”

Lena laughs so loudly that the woman at the desk on the other side of the library looks up at her with a glare and she chokes on the sound, shaking her head at Kara and dropping her voice back down to something more appropriate.

“That’s not what I meant,” she says, bemused. “Jenna’s straight as in...she dates men. Exclusively as far as I’m aware.” Kara looks so confused that Lena closes her laptop and stares at her friend. “Do you...not know about all of that? How did this not come up in high school?”

“So what is the opposite of straight?” Kara asks, and types something into her computer. Lena laughs again, but keeps the noise quiet, mindful of drawing attention from the few students scattered about.

“There’s no -” Lena doesn’t know how to explain how there’s no such thing as opposite without confusing Kara. “Sexuality is more like a spectrum.”

Kara still looks adorably confused. “Sexuality,” she repeats like she’s just tasting the word for the first time. “So are you...straight?”

Lena blinks, takes a breath. “Kara, why are you asking me all this?”

“Mating is so weird here,” Kara all but grumbles, looking away. “On Krypton we just...there wasn’t really dating. You got matched with a mate and that’s kind of it. For life.”

The mention of Kara’s homeworld makes Lena ache. Kara’s just been able to talk about it without getting a watery look on her face or an unsteady cadence to her voice. Lena wonders what that must be like, how it must feel, to be the last of your kind.

“That sounds...like it could go badly,” Lena says, being careful not to insult Kara’s whole culture and world. “I mean, it sounds like an arranged marriage.”

“And arranged marriages are bad here,” Kara says, but it sounds more like a question, like she’s waiting for Lena to confirm that’s what she means.

“Not necessarily. I suppose,” Lena says. “Just, well, what if you don’t like your selected mate? What if they’re a psychopath, or ugly? Dating at least gives you some choice in the matter.”

Kara looks at her then, contemplative. “Mates are chosen because of something deeper. A connection that can’t be broken by distance or death or anything. You’re meant to be.” It sounds
recited, but not rehearsed. “It can’t go bad. At least not permanently.”

For a moment, Lena wonders what kind of person Kara would have been mated with. “Did you have a mate then?” she asks carefully, not wanting to upset Kara but curious all the same. “On Krypton?”

Kara chuckles, shakes her head. “I wasn’t old enough.”

There’s something like relief that floods Lena’s system, but she pushes it aside. She’s still completely lost as to what the purpose of this conversation is. “So are you interested in dating someone here on Earth? At school?” The question shoots a pang of discomfort into her gut, but Kara is her friend and clearly very lost when it comes to this particular Earth custom.

Kara just kind of stares at her, lips thinning. “Just trying to learn,” Kara says quietly, but there’s tension in the set of Kara’s jaw.

“Okay,” Lena says, and she reaches across the table to set her hand on Kara’s arm. Kara blinks, and her face melts from the serious expression it had to a soft smile. “To answer your question, no, I’m not dating anyone right now.”

“Do you want to be?” Kara asks it with wide vulnerable eyes, her hand turning upward to grab ahold of Lena’s by the fingers. “I think I might want to be. Dating, I mean. Dating with you.”

“Kara,” Lena breathes out, the words sit so heavy in the air that Lena chokes on it for a second. “What are you saying?”

“According to,” Kara squints at her screen again, “Urban Dictionary dot com, a date is two people sharing an activity together with the possibility of romance.”

“You looked up date on Urban Dictionary?” Lena wants to laugh, but the reality of the conversation has finally caught up to her and she’s having trouble remembering how to breathe.

Kara shrugs. “Well, I tried to ask Alex, but she wasn’t all that helpful.”

For a brief moment, Lena wonders if maybe she’s still asleep. Or maybe she’s been drugged or something. “Are you asking me on a date?” It feels important to clarify, if only for Lena’s brain to start working reasonably again.

“I would like to explore the possibility of romance with you,” Kara says quietly and Lena’s heartbeat picks up pace so quickly that she’s sure she’s about to have a stroke.

“Usually, when you ask someone out, it’s to a meal,” Lena manages to say, all the words coming out in a comprehensible order. She’s proud of herself because her brain is screaming about a million different things and it’s a wonder she’s still capable of speech at all.

“Would you like to?” Kara asks, shutting her laptop and giving Lena her full attention.

“Would I like to?”

“Dinner,” Kara says simply. “With me.”

Lena clears her throat and fights the lightheaded feeling taking over her skull. “For a date?”

“For a date,” Kara repeats with a smile.

“To explore the possibility of romance.”
“Yes.”

They’re silent for a moment, eyes locked together and Lena feels everything shifting so abruptly that she might fall over. It doesn’t stop her answer though. She’s pretty sure nothing could stop the soft, but sure, yes she lets out.

The happy look that takes hold on Kara’s face is something Lena doesn’t think she’ll ever forget, nor the feeling when Kara sped around the table to wrap Lena up in an excited hug.

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The party is in full swing when Kara shows up, walking towards her with a bright smile and a light blue dress. Lena’s heart beats in time with Kara’s steps and a smile spreads over her face to match the one on Kara’s.

“You came,” Lena says when Kara arrives at her side. After their conversation at CatCo, part of Lena thought maybe Kara wouldn’t come.

“Of course,” Kara says, a little furrow in her brow. “You invited me.”

“And -” Lena glances around for listening ears. “Supergirl?”

Kara laughs a little. “I’m sure she’s,” she makes a twirling gesture with her finger, “checking the perimeter.”

“I’d love it if she could make an appearance,” Lena hints and Kara gives her a look.

“Then I’m sure she will.”

Lena smiles at her, relaxing just a little. “I still hate these things,” she confesses quietly.

“I know,” Kara says with a laugh and it soothes something tight inside Lena. “At least your mother isn’t here,” she adds wryly and Lena lets out an amused exhale.

“Very true.”

“You know,” Kara starts, tone slow like she’s not sure she wants to say what she has to say. “You could have cancelled it. Probably should have.”

“No. I couldn’t cancel it,” Lena replies with a soft laugh. “You’ve never understood that part.”

“Maybe I understand it better than you think,” Kara says and there they are again, talking to each other with waves of emotional undercurrents that Lena has no idea how to navigate.

She does the only thing she can think of. “I had Irazu cater the dessert table,” she says and Kara’s eyes go predictably wide as she glances over to the table in question.

“Really?”

“Yeah,” Lena says with a soft laugh and a nod. “You should go try it.”

Kara looks about ready to do exactly that, her eyes stuck on the assortment of desserts.

“I’ll wait here for Supergirl,” Lena adds, drawing Kara’s gaze back to her.

With a nod of her head and a quick smile, Kara walks away and out of sight.
Seconds later, a different Kara is touching down in front of Lena. Hair down around her shoulders, red cape billowing around her legs, and hands on her hips as she lands.

“Supergirl,” Lena greets warmly, aware of all the watching eyes. This interaction with Kara feels somehow more comfortable than the one before. It’s easier to talk to Kara like this, with the obvious barrier of their respective adult roles between them - superhero and CEO, not Kara and Lena. “I’m glad you could make it.”

“I still think this might be a bad idea,” Kara says, walking towards her. Lena resists the urge to roll her eyes, smiles politely instead. “Well, why don’t we see how the evening pans out?”

Kara looks ready to keep arguing which Lena thinks is entirely unfair. Supergirl and Kara may be two different people to National City, but they’re only one to Lena. And Kara can’t exhaust an argument as Kara Danvers just to try and pick it back up as Supergirl.

Lena’s eyes have narrowed in warning and Kara must notice because she stops before she’s too close to Lena. “I’ll check the perimeter for any activity and I’ll be back at the first sign of danger.”

It’s more for Lena’s watching guests than Lena and the majority of the people in attendance seem completely mesmerized by the sudden appearance of their local hero.

“Sounds good,” Lena says and just like that, Kara is off, back up into the sky and out of view.

Seconds later, Kara is walking back towards her, blue dress back on as she peels the wrapper off a cupcake. “Thanks,” Lena says quietly once Kara is close and Kara just smiles, stuffs a big piece of her treat in her mouth and offers some to Lena.

Lena declines with a wave of her hand and chuckles a little when Kara shrugs and happily proceeds eating. It’s about then that Lena spots Mike - no, Mon-El, she reminds herself - walking towards them with a casual grin on his face.

She watches his approach warily and Kara must notice because she follows Lena’s gaze and straightens abruptly, shoving the rest of the cupcake in her mouth.

“Mon- Mike!” Kara greets around a mouthful of food and Lena rolls her eyes at that. How Kara has kept a secret identity this long is beyond Lena.

Mon-El eyes her warily. “What’s wrong with your mouth?”

Hastily swallowing, Kara just shakes her head and chuckles a little nervously. “Not-nothing. What are you doing here?”

Mon-El smiles, looks at Lena. “I was invited.” He pauses a little, his smile wavering just a bit. “Right?”

“Of course you were,” Lena replies, tone dripping with false warmth. They’re not dating, Kara had said, but she can’t help the paranoia in her head that tells her something is there. Something maybe Kara doesn’t even notice yet. It curdles in her stomach uncomfortably. “I should go make my rounds.”

Kara looks like she’s about to protest, but Lena turns away from them both before she can hear it, striding quickly across her party towards the bar.
They go on four dates and Kara doesn’t kiss her. Doesn’t even make a move to do so.

Lena wonders if maybe Kara didn’t really understand the definition of a date or romantic possibility. Maybe Lena had read the situation wrong, or Kara was even more confused about Earth customs than she realized.

Maybe there’s no kissing on Kryton, she thinks with a slight amount of horror.

On their fifth date, Kara walks her to her dorm and hugs her goodbye and the question comes bursting out of Lena, unwilling to be held back any longer. “Is there a reason you haven’t tried to kiss me?”

Kara trips, seemingly over her own feet, but recovers and stays standing. “Wh-wh-what?”

Lena thinks about taking it back, but she’s curious. Not to mention she’s getting way too invested. If Kara misinterpreted romance and this isn’t leading anywhere then Lena needs to jump ship before it gets more awkward. She could salvage their friendship, she thinks. Probably. Maybe.

“You haven’t tried to kiss me,” Lena says stepping forward into Kara’s space. “We’ve been on five dates. On Earth, we usually end dates with a kiss. If you want.” It occurs to again her that maybe Kryptonians don’t kiss or something, but the way Kara’s eyes dart down to Lena’s lips indicates she’s following the conversation just fine.

An attractive flush beats into Kara’s cheeks and Lena watches the flitting of Kara’s blue eyes. It takes a moment for Kara to answer. “I’m super into consent,” Kara tells her, soft as a whisper.

Lena’s brow furrows. “What?”

“I was letting you control that part of it,” Kara admits. “I didn’t want to pressure you. I did a lot of reading. On the internet.”

Lena’s brow rises. “The internet told you not to kiss me?”

Kara’s eyes flutter down to look at Lena’s mouth and then back up to her eyes. “Sort of?”

“Don’t believe everything you read online,” Lena jokes, but her heart feels like it’s in her throat because intention starts to fill the air between them. Lena can feel the moment coming like it’s something solid wrapping around them.

“Ohay,” is all Kara says before Lena is pushing forward, her fingers gripping into the fabric of Kara’s shirt to pull their lips together.

It’s quick for a first kiss, just a solid pressure between their mouths, but Lena feels like her chest cracks open at the sensation.

She pulls away, looks into Kara’s eyes to make sure her friend is still okay. Kara just blinks at her, her pupils dilated and cheeks red. “Okay,” Kara repeats, licking out against her lips. “The internet is stupid.”

Lena’s laugh gets swallowed by the sudden reapplication of Kara’s mouth.

It’s easy to see Kara from across the party even from where Lena’s standing near the bar.
An executive from Fidelity Investments is talking to her about his stock portfolio, but Lena isn’t fully tuning in. She takes a sip of champagne and eyes the way Kara and Mon-El are still talking to each other.

Jealousy is such an ugly emotion. And it’s one she has absolutely zero right to feel. She’s the one that broke it off with Kara, she’s the one firmly demanding they give each other space. It’s been four years since they last meant anything to each other and if Kara wants to spend her time with a cute boy from a planet not unlike her homeworld, then who is Lena to stand in the way?

None of that helps, though, when she sees Mon-El grab Kara’s hand and drag them into a waltz across the makeshift dance floor. Lena’s fingers tighten around her champagne flute so abruptly that she almost feels it give way under the pressure.

“Miss Luthor?” The gentleman in front of her is saying and Lena’s startled back into her present conversation.

“Sorry-” she starts, but is saved by the loud sound of a sudden explosion that rocks the entire party. She catches Kara’s eye immediately, the two of them staring at each other in silent communication before Kara’s jogging away and Lena moves to greet the trio of criminals striding into her party like they have a right to it.

“Oh, you picked the wrong party to crash,” she informs the leader with a smirk.

“I don’t think so, princess,” he retorts before reaching forward and tearing off her necklace forcefully. She sneers at him as she feels it happen and thinks to grab for it, or punch him or something, but Kara’s sudden presence stops her.

“Did you really think I wouldn’t be here?” Kara is asking, flying above all their heads and glaring. Lena can see the slight tinge of a glow in Kara’s eyes like she’s just barely restraining herself from blasting the three guys.

“Actually, I was counting on it,” he says and Lena watches with wide eyes as the alien weapon in his hand starts to charge. It’s different than the one she had seen him wield on the news before. A curl of worry wraps around her heart and she scrambles for a way to disarm him before he aims the weapon at Kara.

That’s the entire point of this, she remembers suddenly. There’s a black body field generator under the small stage at the far end of the party and she needs to get there to activate it.

Two of the armed men shoot at Kara and Lena watches as Kara crumples to the ground, smashing the concrete underneath her. It makes her chest burn, but she focuses on the task at hand and scrambles towards the stage, falling to her knees almost painfully and slipping underneath the white skirt.

The cylindrical device is there from when she planted it hours before, but when she goes to activate it, nothing happens. Hours in the lab poring over this thing and the moment she needs it, it’s nothing more than a paperweight.

She hits it on the side, frustrated and clicks it off and on a few times to no avail.

“Dammit,” she hisses before wrenching off the top and peering at the insides, trying to figure out what’s going wrong. She clicks on a small flashlight she had hidden in a toolbox under the stage and darts her gaze through all the wiring, poking and prodding to see what happens.
The sound of screams and crashes echo from outside, but Lena tries to put it out of mind. The image of Kara grimacing as she hit the ground threatens to derail her and she has to shake her head just to get it to clear.

Suddenly, another body invades her space, tumbling under the white skirt around the stage and turning to look at her with surprise.

“Do you mind?” She asks, sharply, angered at a new distraction. The device under hands suddenly pops with a sudden spark of life, some of the wiring starting to smoke. She clenches her teeth, frustrated it’s not working like she wants it to, even as the newcomer scrambles closer to her.

“Whoa, wait, wha - Is that a black body field generator?”

“It will be,” Lena grumbles, fiddling with the wiring and trying to focus. “If I can get it working.”

“This whole party. You - you - you set a trap for these guys!”

“Yeah, a trap that will fail unless I can get this operational.” Her mind diverts again to Kara and she hopes she’s holding strong against the alien weaponry. There’s the familiar %zoom sounds of Kara zipping through the air, but there are screams, crashes, weapon fire too. Her fingers are almost shaking, and she’s praying to god that the enormous crashing sound she hears isn’t Kara getting thrown around by these idiots, or that the people aren’t screaming because Supergirl is down and not getting up.

“Uh, okay,” the stranger is saying, leaning over to observe her device. She thinks about shoving him away, but can’t waste the time. “So if the black body is at equilibrium with the alien weapons then it will absorb the electromagnetic radiation and shut them down. This is genius.”

Lena doesn’t have much time right now for praise. Nor a useless description of a device she built. She knows how it damn well works.

“I know,” she says, eying the innards of the generator and trying to see what she’s missing. It feels like it’s something obvious, something she’s just not noticing and she starts to talk herself through it, “But the frequency and the wavelength - they’re a match so -” It occurs to her suddenly as she stares at the device and she looks over at the newcomer to see matching realization on his face.

“The induction coils,” they both say at the same time.

The stranger at least seems to know what he’s doing and she lets him reach forward as she holds the light out. It only takes a few seconds of fiddling before she hears the generator hum to life. The two of them smile at each other in triumph and he nods at her.

“Punch it,” he says and she does so, feeling the moment it works and hearing an answering explosion outside the platform.

They scramble out from under the stage and Lena straightens her dress, taking a deep breath. The sight ahead of her is pleasing - the three criminals from before now crouch weaponless and afraid near where Kara is standing.

That is until she sees Kara’s face, a look of concern that morphs to relief and then on to confusion, as her eyes look between the stranger and Lena.

“Oh no,” he starts to say, gesturing between the two of them and looking at Kara nervously. They must know each other, Lena thinks, as the stranger starts to stammer out an explanation. “We weren’t - we weren’t….under there. We…”
Lena watches him fumble for words with confusion. Kara is looking straight at her now and Lena can’t help the quick once over she gives her ex, subtly checking for any signs of injury. When she looks back to Kara’s face, a hint of unhappiness is starting to bloom there, looking behind Lena to under the stage and back to Lena and the man next to her. The thousand yard stare on her face when she looks to the stage is a burst of memory for Lena, an obvious giveaway to Kara using her x-ray vision.

“We stopped it!” The stranger finally says, giving Kara a double thumbs up. It makes her ex-girlfriend laugh. Lena takes the distraction to press out the last of the wrinkles in her dress and turn away.

Kara looks like she’s going to walk over to her, but Lena would really like another drink to calm her rattled nerves, the adrenaline from before leaving her so swiftly that she feels like she could lie down and sleep for a day.

It’s perhaps bad form to leave her own party early, especially in the wake of its destruction, but Lena doesn’t want to be there any longer than she needs to be. She grabs a bottle of champagne that survived the attack and makes her way back to her own office building as quickly as she can.

She knows Kara will find her later - can tell from the heated way Kara looked at her as if she was putting everything together - and Lena’d like to be about halfway to drunk before that happens. She can’t imagine Kara will be pleased to know she was merely a pawn in Lena’s scheme.

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“If you hate it so much, don’t go,” Kara says one evening when Lena’s putting the last of her jewelry on and straightening out her black cocktail dress.

“I can’t not go,” Lena replies, exasperated. They’ve been going around in circles about this for the last half hour, Kara insisting that Lena be her own person, and Lena insisting that she has responsibilities. It isn’t a new argument, but tonight, after a brisk phone call from her mother about what she’ll be overseeing once she graduates in four months, getting out of that “hellhole university” - after that, Lena’s patience is wearing thin.

“I don’t see why not.” Kara shrugs from her seat at Lena’s desk.

“I know you don’t,” Lena sighs. “That’s the problem.”

“Every time you go, you complain the entire time while getting ready and afterwards you’re exhausted and-”

“Kara,” Lena interjects more sharply than she intended. She doesn’t need to hear Kara tell her things she already knows.

“I understand that you have responsibilities,” Kara says, and Lena rolls her eyes. “I do, don’t scoff like I don’t understand your life.”

“Kara,” Lena says, trying to not bite her lip out of irritation. “I don’t think you do understand. One day, I’m going to help run a company, and that means doing things that I don’t like.”

“It doesn’t have to,” Kara says, and she reaches out across the distance between them. Lena doesn’t take her hand. “I just want you to be happy.”

“I am happy,” Lena says, though it comes out like there’s a gun held to her head. “I’m not going to fight with you about this.”
“We’re not fighting,” Kara says, her hands raising defensively.

“We will be,” Lena warns.

Kara’s lips thin, shoulders sagging. “I’m not trying to make you mad. You’ve just been so stressed about graduating and going to Metropolis and you won’t talk to me about it and I’m worried. I’m just not a big fan of things that upset you.”

“You’re the only thing upsetting me right now,” Lena snaps. It’s a lie, and overly harsh. She regrets it immediately, but she’s tired. Tired of having this argument every single time Lena has to do something like this. Tired of trying to find a balance between duty to her family and a selfish desire to do exactly what Kara is suggesting, to tell Lillian to let her be and to just live a life with this girl, who sees right through her.

Kara looks taken aback by her words, curling into herself like she no longer knows what to do. On a heavy exhale, Lena paces forward across the distance between them and cups Kara’s cheek. “I’m sorry, that didn’t come out the way I meant it.”

“I don’t want to upset you,” Kara says in a small voice that makes Lena wince.

“You didn’t,” Lena denies. “I’m just-” she waves around with her free hand, hoping Kara understands.

“I don’t like the way these things make you feel,” Kara whispers, looking up at Lena with soft blue eyes. Lena hears what Kara isn’t saying. These things really mean your mother and Lena’s not too fond of the feeling either. But she has responsibilities to her family that she can’t just shrug aside, no matter how they make her feel.

“I’ll be fine,” Lena says in an attempt to reassure.

“You should always be fine,” Kara says, insists really, her hands reaching up to grip Lena’s on either side of her face. “I can’t use my powers, but I can protect you from being sad.”

Lena blinks, and lets Kara pull her hands down, raising one up to her mouth and kissing it. Kara’s hands drift over the watch Kara had given her almost a year ago. She looks so genuine, so beautiful, that Lena wants to collapse into her arms, to tell Kara how scared she is, how she’s terrified and certain that she will have to leave this room behind, leave Kara behind. How angry she is that her family’s legacy will leave this wonderful girl in the dust, how that legacy would crush her if Lena brought Kara with her into the future.

But Kara is looking at her with such love that Lena couldn’t bear to let her feel anything different. So instead, Lena protects Kara and smiles.

“I love you,” she says, and the thrilled smile that always fills up Kara’s face when she says those words fills Lena up with such joy that the rush of sadness that comes after is nearly debilitating.

“I love you, too,” Kara says, and she reaches up to press one soft kiss to Lena’s lips. “I’ll still be up when you get back. We can order some Red Dragon and watch The Wizard of Oz.”

As she gets in the car, it’s hard to ignore the painful, insistent feeling that there are only so many more times that she’ll get to come home to Kara Danvers before it’s all over.

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“You planned that,” is the first thing Kara says to her when she lands on her office balcony later
that night.

Lena stands up from where she had been leaning against the rail and shoots her ex-girlfriend a bland look. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“This whole gala,” Kara says heatedly, following Lena when she turns to walk back into her office. If she’s going to get into a fight with Kara it’s probably best to move them into relative privacy. She doesn’t relish the thought of reading about a Luthor-Super catfight in the morning papers.

“What about it?”

“You threw a fundraiser so you could lure those guys there and destroy their weapons with your black body whatever it was.”

“Black body field generator,” Lena supplies.

“You set a trap.”

Lena turns as soon as they’re both inside the office and shrugs, affecting an innocent expression. “So?”

“So you didn’t tell me!”

“What does that matter?” Lena asks, crossing her arms. “You were there to protect the party in the off chance they showed up. They showed up. You protected the party. I disarmed them with my device. The plan went flawlessly, regardless of whether or not you were in the know.”

“You took a big risk and you kept me out of it,” Kara says, stepping forward, finger pointed at Lena in clear accusation.

“And what? You think you hold the monopoly on risk taking?”

“I’m bulletproof,” Kara says, pointing at her chest and stalking in Lena’s direction. They’re mere feet apart. “It’s hardly a risk when I do it.

“You’re not invulnerable, Kara,” Lena retorts. “Things can still hurt you, kill you even.”

“Not anything on this Earth.”

“Kara, They had alien weaponry,” Lena says incredulously. “The kind that very clearly can damage you. You got blown into a building!”

“I had it under control. I don’t need you throwing yourself headfirst into dangerous situations. This is just like that thing with Roulette.”

“That thing with Roulette,” Lena parrots, defensive. “That thing where I had to tell you for the hundredth time that I make my own choices and you don’t get to tell me what to do.”

“And I told you that those choices affect me,” Kara replies angrily.

“That’s not my problem,” Lena says, matching Kara’s ire. “I saw an opportunity to do some good and I took it.”

“You put yourself in a position in which you could have been seriously hurt,” Kara corrects.

“I refuse to live in fear,” Lena says. “You more than anyone should understand that.”
“A little fear might do you some good. You’re not some sort of vigilante, Lena.”

“So what? You’re Supergirl now and you’re the only person that’s allowed to take risks in the name of justice? I’m a Luthor, right? What do I know about the greater good?”

A dark look covers Kara’s face so swiftly that Lena nearly gasps. “I do not think that and you know it.”

Lena does know it, in some deeper place. Kara had never thought of her as anything other than Lena, a independent being from her family, worthy of being judged on her own merits. “What then?” Lena asks. “I’m not allowed to do something when I’m able to?”

“Are you forgetting that your brother has been hiring people to kill you? That you’re one of the most high profile people in this city and you have a target on your back?”

Lena doesn’t need to be reminded of something so obvious and painful. She feels her features shutter in response and Kara’s expression goes suddenly soft when she sees it. “I haven’t forgotten, no,” Lena says lowly.

“Lena,” Kara says slowly, almost as in warning. “I’m just pointing out that you need to be more careful.”

“Maybe you’re the one that needs to be more careful.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I see it on the news all the time, Kara. Ever since you became Supergirl. You just race off into dangerous situations without so much as a second thought. I’m supposed to just sit around and accept that?”

“Yes!” Kara says, looking at Lena like she’s crazy. In that moment, Lena thinks she actually might be, but there’s emotion bubbling up inside her and threatening to burst out. “That’s my job, Lena.”

“Well if I have to accept it, then so do you.”

“Accept what?”

“That I care about this city and protecting it and if I see an opportunity to do some good then I-”

“No,” Kara interrupts.

“No what?”

“You need to quit it with this reckless insane death wish behavior or I swear to Rao, I’ll-”

“You’ll what?” Lena challenges, chest heaving with the effort of bringing air into her lungs.

Kara doesn’t answer, just keeps her hands on her hips, glaring at Lena with the same kind of frustration Lena feels deep in her gut. “You make me so mad,” Kara confesses, the words pulling out of her sharply.

“Why?” Lena asks, hands shrugging upward. “Why do you feel like you have any right to-”

“Because I just got you back and I refuse to lose you again,” Kara practically shouts, cutting off Lena’s words.
And just like that there’s no sound in the office apart from Lena’s breathing, heavy and pained as they stare at each other. The tension between them is so tight that Lena’s sure it’s going to break at any second.

And it does.

With little warning Lena’s senses get invaded with Kara, their bodies pressing flush against each other and lips crashing hastily together. She doesn’t even have time to process anything - the attack on her senses so overwhelming that all she can think is Kara, Kara, Kara, Kara.

The kiss snaps something inside her and she’s helpless against her response, her hands are pushed against Kara’s chest, fingers finding purchase on the crest emblazoned there and she scratches at it, desperate to hold onto something. Kara’s arms are wound around Lena’s waist and she thinks maybe Kara has picked her up off the floor, just slightly, but Lena’s brain is in a fog.

Hands start pulling Lena’s blouse out of her skirt and suddenly Kara’s fingers are tracing the skin of her lower back. The feeling pushes her hips harder into Kara’s and she lets out a noise against Kara’s mouth.

It’s not until her back hits her office couch that she realizes Kara’s backed them up against it and floated them down.

The painfully familiar feeling of Kara kissing her surges through Lena’s whole body.

It’s like every interaction they’ve had the past few weeks has just been leading to this and Lena feels every piece of her soul react like it can finally relax, like it’s where it’s meant to be.

“Lena,” Kara breathes out, still kissing her. It suddenly tastes like tears between their lips and Lena’s not sure which one of them has started to cry, but she can’t stop kissing, can’t stop pulling Kara closer, always closer.

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They’re in the regional airport not thirty minutes from campus and Lena cannot stop crying.

Kara’s staring at her with a pained, helpless expression and Lena doesn’t know how to make any of it stop. Her head wars violently with her heart and all she can do is try to get air into her lungs.

“Lena,” Kara says softly, her hands cupping Lena’s cheeks and swiping at fallen tears with her thumbs. “Lena, don’t cry.”

“I’m sorry,” Lena chokes out, trying to get a grip on her damn tear ducts. “I’m sorry. We’re just going different places and we have different responsibilities and long distance just isn’t something I-”

“You don’t have to keep explaining it to me,” Kara says, but her voice sounds strained and hoarse. “You said all this in the car.”

And Lena had. The drive from campus to the airport had been filled with Lena’s careful, logical, rational explanation as to why they had to break up the minute Lena got on the plane back to Metropolis. Kara had argued, of course, but Lena stayed relentless, stubborn in her belief that this was the right thing to do. For both of them.

She had graduated. It was time for her to move on. Leave college behind.
As her mother had already told her on more than one occasion, Lena was going places Kara just couldn’t follow. Lena’s not sure she’d want Kara to anyway.

College is one thing, separate and safe from all the ugliness that taints Lena’s family life. A family life that’s about to mesh with her professional one in a bond that she’ll never be able to break.

Kara is sunshine and happiness and everything good in the universe. And Lena doesn’t deserve to ruin any of that with all of her baggage.

“I don’t want to resent each other five years from now, for any of this to get ugly,” Lena says even as Kara tries to shush her. “We should break it off now before it’s worse in the future.”

“Lena, you said all this,” Kara tells her again.

“I’m sorry,” Lena says, feeling ridiculous and useless and so so so broken.

“Don’t apologize,” Kara says, shaking her head, but she’s crying in time with Lena. “Just please stop crying.”

“I didn’t want to hurt you,” Lena confesses and she hadn’t. If she been thinking clearly instead of allowing herself to fall in love, Lena would have never put them in this position. She should have known from the beginning that it would always end up like this, they’d always end up here. She wishes she could have stopped it.

“Lena, I love you,” is all Kara says in a wet tumble of words and it rips another sob out of Lena’s throat. Kara’s careful understanding manner is somehow making all of this worse. She wishes they were screaming at each other, that Kara’s eyes were angry instead of sad, that she’d feel some sort of righteous fury that would make all of this okay, better.

But there’s none of that. There’s just Kara looking at her with such empathy and love that Lena feels it all over her skin like a blanket.

She surges forward to kiss Kara then, their lips meeting abruptly. Lena can taste both of their tears and Kara’s hands slide around Lena’s waist, picking her up to press them against each other. Blonde hair tangles over Lena’s fingers and she tries so hard not to think that this is the last time she’ll ever get to feel this.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” she says again when they break apart and Lena steps back to put some distance between them. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, it’s okay,” Kara just keeps repeating and they’re left staring at each other.

Suddenly, Kara’s pulling Lena into her chest again, her palm spreading out over Lena’s spine and her lips next to Lena’s ear.

“What are you doing?” Lena asks, but she buries her face into Kara’s shoulder and doesn’t resist the embrace.

“Memorizing your heartbeat,” Kara answers and Lena didn’t think her heart could break any worse, but it does. Shatters on the floor between them.

“I have to go,” Lena says, pushing away from Kara and away from the emotional black hole she’s tumbling into. If they continue on like this Lena will never be able to walk away. She’ll run straight into Kara’s arms and let the cards fall where they may, consequences be damned. Distantly, she can hear her mother laughing at her, the noise ringing in the back of her mind.
Kara’s nodding rapidly like she’s trying to convince herself it’s okay and Lena swipes again at her wet cheeks, the vision of Kara blurring as she reaches to pick up her carry-on bag and ticket.

“Take care of yourself,” Lena says, watching as Kara crosses her arms over her chest, curls in on herself.

“I’ll see you,” Kara replies with such confidence that Lena’s chest feels impossibly tight, like it’s trying to squeeze everything there is out of her heart.

An I love you sits on the tip of her tongue, threatening to come bursting out, but it feels too cruel. Like she doesn’t deserve to say it to Kara anymore. Instead, she forces a smile on her face and turns away from Kara, walks towards security and bites the inside of her cheek to try and stop her tears.

She spends the entire flight to Metropolis struggling against the continued wash of tears in her eyes as she deletes every memory she has of Kara from her phone. It’s better this way, she tries to tell herself. Out of sight out of mind.

By the time she lands she’s figured out how to compose herself, all the tears exhausted. She slides into a sleek black car sent to pick her up and repositions the mantle of the youngest Luthor child back onto her shoulders. It fits a little differently than it had before college, but it’s still familiar. It’s almost too easy to remember how to play this part, to slide back into this life. She wonders if maybe that’s because Kara’s not there anymore to remind her of how differently her life could be, how much lighter it could feel.

If she takes the first opportunity to spend three months in Tokyo opening up a new tech lab, it’s only because the distance between her heartbeat and Kara’s ears makes it easier to play the roles she’s meant to.

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Kara’s got a hand against Lena’s hip, fingers dipping beneath the waistband of her skirt and Lena’s brain is scrambling around trying to figure out how the hell someone gets a supersuit off a superhero. She’s just managed to find a zipper in the middle of Kara’s back, beneath the cape, is tracing her finger up the line of it, prompting a shiver from Kara -

Then suddenly everything stops.

One second, Lena’s got one hand tangled in Kara’s hair, the other just finding the pull of the suit, her lip biting against Kara’s and the next she’s alone and Kara on the other side of the room staring at her with wide eyes.

“What?” Lena asks throatily, sitting up and fixing her hair. Her heart is thudding so hard against her chest that she can feel it across her entire body and Kara looks like she’s breathing hard - a rare look on a being that doesn’t live off the same oxygen intake as humans.

“Someone’s coming.” Kara hisses, still staring at Lena like she’s desperate to touch her again.

Lena shoots up so quickly she nearly falls forward and her eyes dart to the door as she readjusts her clothing - she tugs her skirt back down and tucks her shirt back into the waistband.

“Your lipstick,” Kara tells her and suddenly Kara’s back in front of her, handing her a tissue.

Seconds after she feels confident she’s fixed her makeup and rearranged her outfit enough that she doesn’t project that freshly made out look any longer, her mother waltzes into her office.
Lena’s stomach, once tight with sudden arousal, drops like a brick in water.

“Oh,” her mother says with a tight smile, glancing at where Kara is standing near the balcony. “I didn’t realize you had company.”

Kara’s looking at her mother with a look somewhere between shock and scorn, and Lena’s desperate to pull Lillian’s attention away from National City’s resident superhero and her ex-girlfriend. Kara had only met Lillian once, but the meeting hadn’t gone particularly well and Kara had never really been shy about expressing her distaste for Lena’s mother.

Lena is sure that Kara blames their breakup on Lillian in some part. This is your mother talking, Kara had said during their last car ride together.

“I was merely thanking Supergirl for her help tonight at my party,” Lena says, grateful her voice stays steady even as her fingers shake with the roller coaster of emotion her body has gone through in the last hour.

“Is that so?” Her mother says, turning to look at Supergirl again.

Lena strides forward, stepping between her mother and Kara and tries to get Kara to stop glaring at her mother like she’s going to heat vision her face off. “She was just leaving,” Lena adds pointedly, gesturing towards her office balcony.

Kara looks like she’s about to argue, but Lena just narrows her gaze in warning and hopes Kara will leave them be. The last thing Supergirl needs is unwanted attention from Lillian Luthor.

“Right,” Kara says with a glance at Lillian. “Of course.”

Kara steps backward onto the balcony and turns, shooting one last tortured look at Lena.

“I’ll call you later,” Lena whispers, subvocally, but she knows Kara will pick it up.

When she turns, her mother is eyeing the balcony with disdain and Lena’s heart is still beating so erratically that she’s afraid she might collapse at any moment.

“Mother,” Lena greets, moving back around her desk if only to put something physical between herself and her mother, something to ward against whatever her mother’s here to tell her.

“I’m sorry I missed your party,” her mother starts and Lena just looks back with an unaffected expression.

“What else is new, Mom?”

“So that’s a no on the pleasantries, then,” her mother says with a little cluck of her tongue. Lena can hear the echo of years of lessons on manners and the like resound around them. She keeps her chin lifted and forces herself to keep eye contact with a woman who never fails to make her feel like a disappointment.

“What are you here for? Certainly not for idle chit chat.”

A brow arches primly over Lillian’s eye. “I didn’t realize you were friends with Supergirl.”

A thread of unease winds its way around Lena’s spine. “I’m not,” she denies, keeping gaze with Lillian’s despite feeling she’s being observed critically, like her mother knows there’s something there to figure out.
“Does the Girl of Steel normally make personal office calls? To Luthors?”

“I’m not a real Luthor,” Lena counters. “Or so you always remind me.”

An sardonic smile crosses Lillian’s face. “Don’t be petty, dear.”

“What can I do for you, Mom?” Lena feels desperate to be done with this conversation. It’s just one more emotional attack today that threatens to completely upend her. She wants to go home, sink into her bed and avoid all her problems.

“Can’t a mother just want to visit her daughter and apologize for missing her gala?”

“Sure she can,” Lena says, “If we had anything resembling a normal mother-daughter relationship.”

“This is still a family company,” Lillian replies testily. “A Luthor company.”

Lena glances towards the new L Corp logo displayed on a wall to her side and gives her mother a smug smile. “Is it?”

Lillian has that pinched look she always gets when they have to talk for more than five minutes and Lena doesn’t have the time for a full on Lena-Lillian stand off.

“Maybe I should come back at a time when you’ve remembered how to be respectful.”

Lena holds back a sigh, but takes the exit that’s being offered. “Maybe you should.”

Her mother scowls so deeply Lena’s positive she’s in for another lecture, but then Lillian just turns on her heel and strides out of the office.

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When she gets home, she doesn’t call Kara. Can’t find the strength to even consider it.

Instead, she falls directly on her couch and struggles not to think about a different couch in her office, the way it felt when Kara pressed her down against the cushions.

She does everything she can not to think about that one moment when everything felt right.

It’s too hard, the memories far too fresh, and Lena presses her hands against her eyes in aggravation at herself.

There’s a bottle of 2005 Pas de Nom Pinot Noir sitting in her wine rack and she pours herself a glass before taking a way-too-large gulp considering how much the bottle costs. After pouring a second glass she strides back to her couch, sits on it and clicks the TV on, flipping through to the news.

The incident at the gala is being covered, naturally, and Lena watches her own picture get put up on the screen. Her nose curls up a bit. They always use the worst pictures of her - this one from a corporate event three years ago.

The image flips then to grainy cellphone footage of Supergirl flying over the party, her guests running haphazardly in every direction. She takes a heavy sip of her wine.

Then just like that, Kara is on the screen, hands at her hips and bright smile, and Lena fights hard not to think of the way that smile felt against her skin only an hour ago.
“I had some help,” Supergirl is saying in response the interviewer’s question. “If it wasn’t for Miss Luthor’s ingenuity and bravery we wouldn’t have been able to apprehend these individuals so successfully.”

“So it’s true then,” the woman interviewing Kara says. “A Luthor and a Super teamed up to save National City?”

When Kara looks right at the camera, it feels like she’s looking straight at Lena when she says softly, “Very true.”

Lena turns the television off at that, her hand shaking where it clutches at her wine glass. Her skin burns with the memory of Kara’s lips, Kara’s fingers dipping low, and it takes everything Lena has not to give into the feeling and drown in it.

She settles for finishing her glass of wine and pouring another, taking it into the bedroom and praying she’ll fall asleep quickly and without dreaming.

It doesn’t work. When she falls asleep, it’s the same old dream, the one she had almost every night for months after they broke up. Kara is waiting for her when she gets in the door. She smiles. She kisses Lena. She says, “Welcome home.”
Chapter 4

Lena expects to hear from Kara right away - some kind of we need to talk text or something. Instead, the first she hears from Kara is a series of incomprehensible texts.

Several of them are in what Lena soon realizes is jumbled Kryptonian and Lena’s suddenly grateful she’d kept the coding in her phone that allowed it to read the alien language - without it, Lena’s sure the messages would just be indecipherable images. But even so, some of the words are hard for Lena to understand. She can’t decide if it’s because her Kryptonian is rusty or because the messages are riddled with typos that are throwing her off.

The texts are so confusing that if Lena didn’t know better she’d say Kara is drunk. But that’s...impossible. At least as far as Lena is aware. Kara’s body metabolizes liquor in a completely different way than humans and they’d never run into anything that could get Kara remotely tipsy. The only reason Kara ever drank in college was out of habit, an action bred out of a desire to fit in, to seem like any other normal human college girl.

A few of the texts seem to be random facts about giraffes - they sleep standing up lena - and some are just typo-ed affection. The yr so nice makes her eyebrows raise. The monel knows how to drink drinks makes her a little worried. It’s followed by another series of emojis. Lena’s been getting better at deciphering what Kara’s trying to say when she sends the little images, but this one is far beyond her comprehension.

are you okay? Lena sends. It seems like a reasonable, friendly thing to ask.

Kara doesn’t respond right away, but the text comes in later: alex is flying me dnt worry

Lena has no idea what that means, but she doesn’t inquire further.

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The attack on the research lab in the Arctic isn’t front page news, but Lena has “suspicious alien related or otherwise” activity flagged on her computer and she sees the blurb in an e-mail dump midday Monday.

Thorul Arctic Research Station. An animal attack from the way it’s being reported, but Lena reads between the lines. Most of the researchers stationed there died, apart from the head of the unit. Sole survivor. It’s suspicious enough to get pulled by the program she built to comb through news headlines and she idly wonders if it’s something Kara is involved in.

Even after Lena had first found out about Supergirl, she hadn’t really connected everything together. Kara and the thing Supergirl was reported on doing, the people she saved, enemies she conquered. She knew it was Kara, of course, but there was something detached about it. Like it was Kara, but it wasn’t. Having seen Kara in person, having seen her in her supersuit looking at Lena like she always has, it’s more real, more personal. She had always been worried, but a distant one, a “I hope everything’s okay out there” kind of worry.

The worry that etches itself into her ribcage now is worse, more intense. A worry she hadn’t thought to have for Kara before. She’s only been reunited with Kara for a short time, but every time she reads a headline or hears about an attack, she sees Kara flying towards it fearlessly, thinks of what could happen. And there are so many attacks - so many news alerts of fires, robberies, aliens fighting Kara in the streets.
It’s perhaps an odd time to think of her older brother, but she does. The almost crazed look in his eye when she last saw him.

The day he was apprehended, the Daily Planet ran a massive front page, full color photo of him snarling, opposite Superman. They were surrounded by pure chaos, destruction, the remnants of their last stand off. Lena remembers so vividly the tear in Superman’s suit, just above the crest. The way Superman’s usually oh-so-immaculate hair had been looser, more wild. His eyes, glowing with a kind of rage that almost rivaled the look in Lex’s.

That’s the thing people forget, Lena thinks. Lex almost succeeded. He almost won. Superman was just one mistake away from being killed. The world was one slip up away from being dominated by Lex Luthor. It comforts her, only slightly, that Lex is in maximum security (and then some) prison.

It does nothing for the dreams in which Supergirl replaces Superman in the pictures.

Lex may have been almost single-mindedly obsessed with the Man of Steel, but Lena knows it was only a matter of time before Supergirl would start to figure into his plans. Had he succeeded, Kara would have surely been the next target in Lex’s crosshairs. She can almost hear what her brother would say had he given any thought to National City’s Super. His voice resounds in her brain with that manicai lilt it had started to take in the end. What’s better than killing one Kryptonian, Lee? Killing two.

All it would take was one mistake, one missed detail. Kara flies headfirst towards a problem without thinking and the next anyone knows she’s on the ground, broken and battered, power drained. Lex could have done it, and now - everyone knows what Lex did to Superman in the streets of Metropolis. Kara could be flying in to something so simple, and there could be someone there with a sliver of Kryptonite, and Kara would be done for.

It only gets worse on days where she doesn’t see Kara, doesn’t hear from her. Even on the days where’s she’s received small little emoji-laden texts, there’s something more reassuring about being able to see her in person, see for herself in some sort of tangible way that Kara is okay. Without it, the worry keeps her awake at night, and its intensity ratchets higher the longer she’s in National City.

On the worst of those nights she tends to sneak back into L Corp, almost invisible in her jeans, sweatshirt, and baseball cap, and tries to get some work done. The R&D lab is usually empty and she sits down there at a workstation, poring over ideas and projects, desperate to channel her energy into doing something good for the world, something to erase her brother’s legacy, to minimize the threat he still seems to pose to Lena’s world, the threat that keeps her up at night. It settles the unease just a little to have something to do with her hands and something to distract her ever-working mind.

Sometimes Lana Lang is still there and she’ll smile at Lena warmly, put on a fresh pot of coffee the minute she sees her.

The day the news of the attack at Thorul breaks, she gets woken up that night from a dream of Kara getting attacked by some horrific ice monster, and comes in to find Lana still there, tinkering with random projects and blueprints.

“You don’t have to stay,” Lena tells her, but accepts the offered mug. It’s well past business close and most of the engineers that are usually scattered about the department have headed home to families and lives. She’d rather not be the reason her head of R&D gets no sleep.
“I was working late anyway,” Lana says with a shrug, sliding onto a stool next to Lena and sipping at her coffee.

“You shouldn’t work so late,” Lena chastises on reflex.

Lana laughs, leans an elbow on the table next to them and smirks at Lena. “That feels slightly hypocritical,” she stage whispers.

Lena rolls her eyes and boots up her laptop. “I’m the boss, Lana. I’m allowed to be hypocritical.”

“Of course, ma’am,” Lana says and it’s dripping with such feigned obedience that Lena lets out a little chuckle. “Yes, Miss Luthor.”

Gone is the almost strained way they had acted around each other before. It’s been replaced by a sort of casual friendship borne from the many nights Lena’s spent in lab acting as nothing more than a simple engineer working after hours. She doesn’t feel like CEO Lena Luthor down here. Not like she does in her office or behind her desk. She just feels like Lena, and Lana responds to that without pause.

It’s easy in a way Lena’s not used to. Lana teases her lightly, but still with some distance, and Lena allows it, sips at her coffee and lets Lana make suggestions about whatever project Lena brings up.

There’s something comforting in feeling like she has an unspoken ally on those nights, but Lena can’t fight the feeling that Lex was once an ally too.

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A text comes in the next day when Lena’s just gotten home, around six, her pencil skirt and blouse traded for soft joggers and a t-shirt. It’s from Kara, and it’s comprehensible this time, and not in Kryptonian either.

\textit{are you at home? can i come over?}

Kara lands on her balcony a few minutes later and Lena can’t deny there’s a sense of relief to see Kara standing there - whole and alive and smiling at her with a crooked grin.

“Hi,” Lena greets when she opens the balcony door.

“Hey.” Kara steps inside, red cape flowing behind her and hands on her hips.

It’s been almost three days and they haven’t talked about the incident in Lena’s office. The memory of it sits in the pit of Lena’s stomach, easily avoided in the work-filled days before, but much harder to ignore now when Kara is right here, in her apartment. It’s all she can think about as Kara perches against the arm of her couch, looking at Lena with an open expression.

“How are you?” Lena asks for lack of anything better to say, anything not related to her office couch.

“Tired,” Kara answers honestly, and Lena sees it then. Kara doesn’t just look tired. She looks \textit{exhausted}. In fact, she looks abnormally exhausted. It beats away any thought Lena had about confronting their emotional moment days prior and replaces it with worry.

“Are you okay?” Lena strides forward across the distance between them to step in front of Kara, tipping Kara’s chin up with a finger and searching blue eyes.
“Yeah,” Kara says, making no move to resist Lena’s touch. If anything, she sag towards it, leaning forward a little and smiling at Lena. “There’s this...I don’t know what it is really, but something happened and now this guy has some kind of like, thing inside him and when he touches me he can...feed off of my powers.”

“The research lab in Norway,” Lena says. “The strange attack there. It’s related?”

“How did you know that?”

Releasing Kara’s face, Lena steps away a few feet away and smirks. “I have my ways.”

“You’re scary, you know that?” Kara says, but it’s clearly teasing, just a slight upturn to Kara’s lips. It makes Lena smile.

“I’m a Luthor.”

“You’re Lena,” Kara corrects with a crooked smile and it tightens Lena’s chest so suddenly that she struggles to swallow against the feeling.

Clearing her throat, she paces away, sits on a chair on the other side of the room. “So what happened? Your powers got drained, but you’re okay, right?”

“Nothing some good old yellow sunshine can’t fix,” Kara says. “Though it’s strange. He’s not just draining me. He’s like drawing my power into himself, evolving. Mutating really.”

“Like a parasite.”

“Yeah. An alien parasite. Something ancient we think.”

“So in theory, he could take enough power that you’d-” She mentally chokes on the thought, her words cutting off abruptly. This is a perfect example of the things that keep her up at night: an energy alien parasite perfectly content to munch on her ex-girlfriend’s wealth of powers.

“In theory,” Kara replies, looking unaffected by such an option.

A thought occurs to her suddenly, interspersed with the images of Kara having her powers sucked out of her. “If he’s actually a parasite, or at the very least behaving as one…”

Kara’s face grows more serious, her expression expectant. “Yeah?”

“You could always try giving him more power or energy than he can handle. Overload his system.”

Kara hums thoughtfully, looking away from Lena for a moment. “Interesting.”

“Something to think about, at least,” Lena says. “Just be careful, please.”

“Always,” Kara answers happily, with a matching smile.

Kara is just about never careful, but the grin on Kara’s face makes Lena laugh. It’s a better reaction than what she wants to do - convince Kara to run away with her until they’re so far from all the ugliness in the world that nothing can touch them. It’s a too-familiar, painful wish, to shelter Kara and to avoid the world around them.

Silence stretches between them and Lena lets her eyes trail over Kara’s imposing form. It’s such a strange juxtaposition. There Kara is. Draped in the trappings of her superhero role. And yet, the
relaxed posture and the unsure twist to Kara’s lips makes Supergirl look nothing like National City’s Protector and everything like the Kara Danvers Lena remembers from college. She tries not to classify that Kara as her Kara, but that’s the only way she can think to describe it.

Kara’s voice breaks her from her musing.

“So, Alex is…” Kara looks like she’s struggling to find the words, her brow furrowed and mouth twisted. “Alex is gay. Apparently.”

Lena blinks at the sudden and unexpected subject change. “And?”

Kara’s gaze shoots up at that, bores into Lena’s. “And? And Alex is gay.”

“Oh,” Lena says, realizing suddenly what Kara isn’t saying. “And this is a surprise.”

“What do you - what - of course this is a surprise!” Kara sputters.

Lena laughs a little. “Okay, right, yeah. Completely. I am incredibly shocked to hear such a thing.”

Kara stares at her, jaw dropped a little before she rolls her eyes. “How is this so obvious to you and was such a surprise to me? You haven’t even seen Alex in four years.”

Lena shrugs. “I wouldn’t say it’s obvious. It’s just not shocking. It’s there if you’re looking for it.”

“But Alex has only ever dated men!”

Lena shakes her head at Kara’s incredulity, still laughing. “Yes. Clearly you don’t remember the disaster of a boyfriend she brought home to Thanksgiving that one year.”

“Disaster?” Kara asks like she doesn’t remember the ridiculously uninterested expression Alex carried throughout all of dinner nor the way Alex all but shoved her then-boyfriend to the ground on reflex when he slid his arm around her during the evening’s board game. The memory seems to come to Kara then, but she merely counters with, “Well Kevin was kind of the worst.”

Laughing, Lena smiles. “Sure, but then remember when your neighbor Ashlyn came over to bring us pie?”

Kara’s eyes go wide in recollection. “That mocha cream pie,” she breathes out with a certain amount of reverence.

Lena barely resists putting her hand over her face. That would be the only thing Kara remembered about the encounter. “I was referring to how excited Alex got to see her.”

“It was mocha cream pie, Lena,” Kara says with a seriousness Lena knows she’s not faking.

“It was gay, Kara,” Lena corrects, biting at her lip to hold back the laugh that wants to keep coming out. Kara looks entirely put out at the idea of not realizing this fact about her sister.

“How did I miss that?” Kara asks with a resigned sigh.

It charms Lena a little to see Kara in her supersuit, shoulders sagging and exasperation all over her face, looking like how she used to when something about Earth absolutely confounded her. “It was never something you needed to know,” Lena answers. “So you never thought about it.”

“And what? You needed to know it?” Kara asks, with suspicion in her tone.
“Not necessarily,” Lena answers with bemusement. “I just had an inkling. I definitely know when I’m meeting another gay woman.”

“She’s my sister,” Kara argues. “I should have known.”

“Maybe Alex wasn’t ready to know herself. Much less have anyone else be aware,” Lena offers with a shrug.

Kara sighs, twists her lips together, looking adorably confused. “Maybe.”

“It’s that cop she was with, right?” Lena asks, remembering seeing them at Roulette’s fight club. “Detective Sawyer?”

Kara’s eyes narrow. “Do you have psychic powers you never told me about?”

“No,” Lena denies with a soft chuckle. “I just see details you miss sometimes. Call it human intuition.”

Lips pursed, Kara shakes her head. “Yeah. Maggie. Alex is…” Kara smiles. “Super into her actually. It’s kind of cute. I’ve never seen Alex crush on someone so hard before.”

“Good for Alex,” Lena says, feeling a fondness for Kara’s protective older sister.

“I hope it works out for her,” Kara replies and Lena tries not to hear the wistful edge in the words, like Kara’s not really talking about Alex and Maggie.

“You’ve had quite the week,” Lena observes, hoping to change directions.

“No kidding,” Kara laughs. “And to top it all off, Mon-El has been working for street gangs to shake people down for money.Using his dumb leaping and punching powers, obviously.”

Something sours in Lena’s mouth at the mention of Mon-El, but she ignores it. “That’s not good.”

“I don’t know why I thought I could trust a Daxamite of all people,” Kara spits, a disdainful curl to her lips.

Lena shrugs, not too invested in defending Mon-El, but not loving the stubborn look on Kara’s face either. “People change,” she offers, but Kara just shrugs. “You never know.”

“I guess.”

It reminds Lena suddenly of the incomprehensible texting adventure they went on just a few days ago and she can’t stop herself from asking suddenly, “Were you drunk the other night?”

Kara kind of startles back, eyes widening. “What?”

“The other day,” Lena repeats, arching a brow and crossing her arms. A little smirk takes hold of her mouth before she can stop it. “When you sent me some...interesting text messages.”

A hint of a blush dusts Kara’s cheeks, the tips of her ears going a little red even as she cringes just slightly. “I’m sorry about that.”

“Don’t be sorry,” Lena says with a laugh. “It was just strange. I was worried. What happened?”

“So it turns out I can get drunk,” Kara says with a shrug. “There’s a bar we found that serves some off world liquor. Super toxic to humans, but for me it’s just like...really strong alcohol.”
The scientist in Lena is intrigued. “Really?”

“Yeah,” Kara sighs and rolls her eyes a little. “Mon-El basically bribed me into doing it.”

At the second mention of the Daxamite, Lena can’t stop the expression that shadows her face, but thankfully Kara doesn’t notice, too invested in staring across the room towards the expansive balcony windows.

“How was it? Being drunk for the first time?”

Kara chuckles, turns to Lena and shakes her head. “Weird,” she answers. “I broke Alex’s car door off accidentally. Drunk me isn’t so good with remembering the super strength.”

Lena winces. “I’m sure she wasn’t too pleased about that.”

“Not so much. Didn’t help that when I got home I watched a Too Cute marathon on Animal Planet and texted her about puppies all night while she was basically doing my job investigating the attack in Norway.”

“Good thing we didn’t discover any sort of alien booze in college then,” Lena muses wryly, thinking of the kind of destruction a drunk Kara Danvers could have gotten into. “Could have been dicey. You probably would have blown up my dorm room somehow.”

“True,” Kara agrees, smiling. “Or made you watch shows about puppies all night.”

“You already did that,” Lena laughs. “Without any alcohol.”

Kara pulls a face and laughs as well. “You liked it,” she teases and Lena’s heart flutters.

It occurs to Lena then that they’re talking about basically everything except what they should be talking about - the office incident as she’s come to refer to it as in her head. Just thinking about it again makes Lena tighten her arms over her chest and clear her throat. Kara must realize something similar because she sits up suddenly, mimicking Lena’s pose and looking over at her with an ominous expression.

“Listen,” Kara starts with and Lena tenses, feels what’s coming and isn’t nearly emotionally prepared enough for it. “I know we need to talk about...the thing that happened.”

“No we don’t,” Lena thinks. Talking about their heated office makeout session isn’t something Lena thinks she can entirely handle right now. It doesn’t matter so much that Kara’s right. They do need to talk. Kissing in the middle of strained emotional outbursts doesn’t exactly solve any of their problems. In fact, all it likely does is confuse the issue entirely - but she still doesn’t want to, is enjoying this rapport. “Okay.”

“I’m not trying to avoid you.”

Lena’s brows come together. “I didn’t think you had been.” If anything, Lena was happy that she didn’t have to talk to Kara right away. Not with how vivid the memory of their kissing sat in her brain for the entire night and well into the next day. There’s no way she could have gotten through a conversation maturely with that in the forefront of her mind.

“There’s just, like, a lot happening, right now,” Kara says and the exhaustion is evident again in the way Kara looks down at the floor and tightens her jaw. “I mean, all these weird Cadmus videos, this parasite, Alex…”
It seems like Kara has some sort of Big Speech prepared and Lena’s not sure she’s ready for it. They kissed. It was a mistake. That’s the whole of it and Lena’d just like to get back to the road to being friends again, without having to navigate the emotional minefield that is talking about it.

“Kara,” Lena offers softly, before Kara can say anything else. “Why don’t we just forget it?”

Kara’s head snaps up so rapidly Lena jumps a little. “I don’t want to forget it.”

“I think it’s best we do,” Lena says, carefully, even though she knows she won’t forget it herself. “What happened was—”

“Don’t say it was a mistake,” Kara says, dropping the words between them so quietly that Lena feels herself pull forward to catch them all.

“It’s not helping either of us become friends again.”

“Lena,” Kara says, drawing her name out incredulously, staring at her like she can see straight through her and Lena feels her heart rate start to pick up a little, hates the idea that Kara can probably hear it.

“Look, even if we were to—” Lena shakes her head, struggling to find a way to explain herself, settles for gesturing between them. “We can’t just crash back into each other like the last four years didn’t happen. We’re different people, Kara.”

“You keep saying that,” Kara replies with clear exasperation and a hint of disbelief.

“Because it’s true,” Lena insists. Kara might look exactly the same, smell the same, feel the same, but it has been four years and that’s just simple fact. Lena knows she’s not the same as the college version of herself and they haven’t spent nearly enough time together for Kara to know if Lena’s still someone she’d want to be with. “And you’re right. Our lives are crazy right now. I mean, my brother keeps trying to kill me from his maximum security prison. You’re saving the world from parasites. There’s a secret anti-alien organization gaining momentum. We don’t have the time to try to hash things like what happened out. So let’s just forget about it.”

“I can protect you from Lex,” Kara says, and she looks suddenly staunch, looks a world away from the tired girl who had just been slouching against Lena’s couch cushions. It brings a rush of heat through Lena’s chest, makes her feel like she can’t breathe.

“I know you can, Kara,” Lena says, then sighs, rubbing at her forehead. “But you have to agree. Both of our lives are a mess. Neither of us have any business trying to do this right now.”

Kara huffs a little with impatience, looks like she might argue the case for a little bit, then looks at Lena carefully. Whatever she finds there seems to settle her.

“Fine. Let’s forget it,” she says, but each word sounds like it’s being ripped out of Kara’s mouth.

“So, why don’t we get back to focusing on being friends again?”

“Friends,” Kara repeats with a disbelieving, amused tone wrapped around the word. It sounds just like Alex in the car ride home after Roulette’s club, when she called them both fools.

“Kara,” Lena sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose and sagging back into her chair.

“Sorry,” Kara says softly, and Lena looks at the tired lines around Kara’s eyes, wants to lead them both back to her bed and run her fingers through Kara’s hair until the visible evidence of her
exhaustion fades. Her hands war with her head, wanting to reach out to Kara, knowing the girl would come if she did so.

“Don’t be,” Lena tells her. “Go home. Get some rest.”

Kara stands, looking resigned, and paces over to Lena’s balcony. Lena stands to follow. “Okay. You’re right.”

“And you really should stop flying onto my balcony,” Lena jokes. “People will start to talk.”

Kara doesn’t laugh and the lack of response sits heavy in Lena’s chest. But then, Kara is turning suddenly, looking at Lena with a pleading expression. “Drinks Friday? With my friends?” Kara pleads in a hasty scramble of words, calling back to Lena already having agreed.

The look on Kara’s face unhinges something in Lena’s heart and she feels helpless to deny Kara anything else tonight. “Okay.”

“Yeah?” A look that could only be described as hopeful flashes onto Kara’s face.

“Sure,” Lena says with a smile.

“I’ll text you,” Kara murmurs and she moves so close that Lena’s sure she’s going to kiss her. Except Kara just snatches Lena’s hand and squeezes it warmly.

Lena tries not to think about how the gesture is somehow so much more intimate than the feeling of Kara’s lips against her own, and squeezes back.

“Fly safe,” she says, just after Kara jumps up and away into the air.

--

“It’s going to be weird,” Kara says one night, when they’re walking back to Lena’s dorm hand in hand.

“What is?”

“Being away from you for the whole summer.”

The reminder of Lena’s upcoming summer plans - a prestigious internship at the family company - and the fact that it will separate them for the next three months pains Lena a little, but she smiles through it and tries to be reassuring. “I’ll try to come visit. And, I hear there’s this new thing called cell phones and the internet.”

“Don’t tease me,” Kara pouts, bumping her shoulder against Lena’s slightly. It still amazes Lena how Kara manages to be gentle with all the superhuman strength flowing through her body.

“I’m sorry,” Lena says, tightening her fingers where they’re intertwined with Kara’s and gripping at Kara’s forearm with her free hand. “I’m going to miss you too. It will definitely be weird.”

They get to Lena’s building and Kara pulls Lena to a stop, fidgeting with the corner of her glasses as she does. Lena’s eyes follow the motion and she rubs the skin of Kara’s forearm, the muscle there tense.

“You okay?” Lena asks softly, wondering what’s got Kara so suddenly nervous. It could just be the reminder that they’re about to spend three months away from each other, but she wouldn’t think that’d make Kara nervous. Just sad.
“I have something for you,” Kara says, instead of answering Lena’s question. “Like a present.”

Lena’s eyebrow arches and she laughs a little. “You got me a gift?”

“Yes,” Kara replies, nodding rapidly. Lena brings up the hand she’s holding and presses a warm kiss there in an attempt to soothe. It doesn’t seem like it works, but Kara still smiles.

“Why are you nervous about my gift?” Lena asks with a teasing lilt to her voice.

“I’m not,” Kara denies, but her eyes are looking everywhere except at Lena and she can’t stop readjusting her glasses and Lena knows better.

“Is it like,” Lena waggles her eyebrows a bit. “A sexy gift? Because then we should probably go inside.”

An attractive blush beats across Kara’s cheeks and she rolls her eyes. “Lena,” Kara complains with a little whine.

“So just making sure.” Lena leans up a little, pressing closer to Kara and kissing her cheek, smiling at the sheepish demeanor Kara’s suddenly adopted. “Where is it?”

“Where’s what?”

“My present.”

Kara’s hand shoots into her pants pocket and Lena tracks the motion, wondering what kind of gift Kara could have gotten her that would fit in a pocket.

“Okay. So, like, we’re going to be far away from each other in a few days.”

“Not that far,” Lena laughs. Lena will be in Metropolis, for the start of the summer, at least, and Midvale isn’t that far away at all. It’s further than their dorm rooms on campus, but it’s not across an ocean kind of far.

“Far enough that I won’t be able to hear your heartbeat,” Kara says softly and Lena’s laughter cuts off immediately.

“Kara,” she says softly, squeezing her girlfriend’s fingers and trying not to remember the first time Kara mentioned being able to hear the sound of Lena’s heart. Sometimes at night she can still smell gas and fire and hear the hoarse sound of Kara’s voice screaming her name.

“And so I wanted to give you something that would remind you of me - of us - and still had like a practical use.”

Puzzled, Lena looks again to where Kara’s hand is still stuffed into her pocket. “What is it?”

It takes a few seconds, but Kara slowly pulls her hand out of the pocket and dangles a small velvet jewelry bag between them, looking at Lena carefully.

With delicate fingers, Lena takes the bag, releasing Kara’s hand so that she can open it and peer inside.

It’s a watch. “It’s gorgeous,” she murmurs, smiling at Kara, who just watches her, face neutral.

At first glance it doesn’t look to be anything but a watch. Gold band. Pretty pearl face. But upon closer look, Lena catches sight of an inscription on the inside of the face. The familiar shapes that
make up the alphabet of Kara’s native language.

Some of the words she recognizes immediately. The ones like always and love make her heart flutter. There’s a word at the end that she can’t quite translate. Her brain scrambles through her lexicon of Kryptonian in an attempt to understand it.

“I’ve never seen this word,” Lena says, picking her head up to look at Kara.

If Kara looked nervous before, now she looks downright terrified. “We don’t really have a word for girlfriend in Kryptonian,” Kara answers on a shaky breath. “So I improvised.”

Lena thinks to interrogate her girlfriend further, but Kara’s fingers are snatching the watch back and pressing a button on the side Lena had assumed was purely for setting the time.

“If you use this here,” Kara explains and they both watch as the face pops open suddenly to reveal a second red button inside. Lena looks at it with wide eyes. “One hit on this and it’ll let me know you need me.”

It occurs to Lena suddenly what Kara means and she feels a sudden burn prick in the back of her eyelids. “Kara,” she says, putting her palm over Kara’s and smiling. “I’m just going to Metropolis. For what’s essentially a desk job. I’ll be fine.”

“And you were just going to lunch when a car ran a red light and almost killed you,” Kara points out, turning her hand over to squeeze Lena’s fingers.

“It wasn’t that bad.”

“Lena,” Kara sighs, shaking her head. “That’s not the point.”

“What is the point then?”

Kara’s lips thin for a moment. “It will make me feel better. Knowing you can get to me if you need me.”

“I always need you.” The responding smile pulls so brightly across Kara’s face that Lena feels her own mouth stretching in reaction. “Even when you worry too much.”

A blush blooms across Kara’s face and Lena kisses against it. “You’re teasing me again.”

“Thank you,” Lena says softly, pushing forward to kiss Kara again, this time on the lips. “I love it,” she murmurs against Kara’s kisses, melting into the way Kara immediately wraps an arm around her waist and picks her up a little.

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Lena hears the crashing and screaming first. It sounds distant from her top floor office at L Corp, but the sound still breaks through the open balcony door behind her and she startles, dropping her pen onto her desk.

She can’t see anything from her balcony, but she can guess the general direction of the chaos. It doesn’t take long to use her computer and tap into police camera feed - there are enough of them along the downtown blocks that she should be able to see something. On her phone, she pulls up a local police scanner Twitter feed to see if anyone is talking about what’s happening.

Eventually she gets to the right video feed in time to see a huge brutish looking thing stalking down
16th Street. It must be the alien parasite that Kara had faced earlier and she watches as it engages first with a young man - Mon-El, she realizes when his face flashes clearly enough for her to recognize him - and then later with a newcomer in silver armor.

Kara is nowhere to be seen. Lena tries to fight the instant spike of worry that cuts into her as she observes Kara’s absence. Kara’s fine, she reminds herself. If Supergirl were seriously hurt Lena would know. National City would know.

It’s not seconds later that she sees Kara come speeding into the scene, knocking the alien off his feet and slamming him into the pavement.

When Kara takes the monstrous thing down, slamming what looks like plutonium into his body, Lena feels a wave of triumph rush through her and she barely contains a little fist pump at the sight.

She texts Kara later, just a short good job tonight.

Much later, when Lena’s home and getting in bed, Kara responds. couldn’t have done it without you.

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The texting continues as if their office incident had never happened and nothing is different between them. Just two old friends reconnecting.

On Wednesday Kara sends her about sixteen different recommendations for sushi. you still like sushi, right? Lena does, in fact, still like sushi, even though it reminds her a little of the three months she spent in Tokyo right after after their breakup. Of course, she replies and considers adding, we should have some together, but stops herself.

Late afternoon on Thursday, Kara sends her about five consecutive pictures of a random dog - each of them just slightly blurry, shaky even, like Kara tried to take the picture while flying. There’s no text apart from a dog! and Lena laughs. Cute, she sends back and Kara just sends twelve red and blue hearts back.

A random animal fact comes on Thursday: did you know turtles can breathe through their butts? Lena stares at it for a good minute before responding with why do you know that? She can easily imagine the proud smirk on Kara’s face when she gets a I know things Lena in reply.

In the middle of a development meeting, Kara sends her another selfie. This one of Kara holding a stack of what looks like seven pizza slices in her hands while she makes a maniacal open-mouthed face towards it. Lena has to stifle her laugh with a cough, but she must not be entirely successful because the entire table turns to her and goes silent. It’s a good thing that Luthor intimidation has always been something she’s excellent at; it’s not hard to drop her face into a heavy glare, eyes glancing at every occupant of the room until they all look away. Everyone except, of course, Lana Lang, who just shoots Lena a tiny smirk before carrying the meeting on, pitching a new nanotechnology she read about in a recent science journal.

Under the safety of the table, Lena looks down at the picture of Kara one more time, sends back a pizza around the world must fear you, before closing her phone and focusing on her work.

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“You’re getting faster,” Lena says with disbelief as she enters the data into an encrypted spreadsheet on her laptop.
“Really?” Kara leans over her shoulder and looks at the data as Lena types it in.

“Really,” Lena murmurs back, leaning forward to double check her numbers.

“Awesome,” Kara breathes out, kissing Lena on the cheek quickly before tumbling away from her to lay down against the grass of the open field.

They’re about an hour outside of campus and civilization has been left behind them. All that surrounds them are a line of trees to one side and then open fields as far as the eye can see. Lena knows there’s a lake about a mile west and a farmhouse two miles east, but they’re as safe as they can be from prying eyes. Which was why she had picked the place months ago for Kara to test out her ever-growing abilities.

“Good job,” Lena praises and Kara smiles happily at her, crossing her feet and putting her hands behind her head.

“Thanks.”

“You’re actually almost on par with Superman’s numbers.”

Kara sits up a little, leans on her elbow to look at Lena. “How do you have Superman’s stuff?”

Focusing on encrypting the files on her computer with Kara’s data, Lena doesn’t even spare Kara a glance. “I’m from Metropolis,” she answers absently.

“That’s not really an answer,” Kara replies and it sounds so serious that Lena pulls her head up and looks at where her girlfriend is staring at her, concern in her features.

“Sorry,” Lena says with a short shake of her head. She closes her laptop and sets it aside in the grass before leaning back against the tree behind her. “I just meant that I grew up with Superman around in some capacity.”

“Do you know him personally too?” Kara asks with clear confusion. “How would that have not come up?”

“No,” Lena says with a laugh, kicking her foot a little against where Kara’s elbow is planted in the ground. “Lex is just a little obsessed with him.” It sounds weird when she says it like that, but it’s the truth. As Superman grew in popularity, Lex became fascinated. It quickly became a hobby of his to study Superman and his abilities in the interest of harnessing such power for humans to protect themselves. He may not be around forever, Lee, Lex had said to her once.

“He is?”

“Yeah,” Lena says with a shrug. “He’s gathered some data in the last few years. It’s not exact of course, but it’s a pretty good base level.”

“Why would he do that?” There’s a thread of suspicion in Kara’s tone that Lena bristles at. As if Lex has some ulterior motive for studying an alien. She reigns in her natural reaction to snap. It makes sense, she reminds herself, for Kara to be naturally concerned about any scrutiny towards herself or her cousin. There’s a reason, after all, that Lena drove them to this field hours away from school.

“Because we can’t rely on Superman to save us forever,” Lena answers, hearing her brother’s voice in her head. “He thinks there’s a way to recreate some of Superman’s abilities for humans, that way we can learn to protect ourselves.”
It takes a few seconds, and Kara’s expression shifts between confusion and worry before settling on something more casual. “So I’m really almost as fast as him?”

“Yeah,” Lena says with a soft laugh. “You are.”

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Mid-Friday afternoon Kara texts with a location and a reminder that happy hour starts at four - pretty sure you can leave work early if you’re the boss the text says.

It goes against just about everything Lena believes in about work ethic, but she can’t stop thinking of the defeated way Kara looked in her apartment, of the quiet pleading in her voice when she asked Lena to come. So around 3:30 that afternoon she packs up her desk and tells her assistant she’s taking the afternoon off. It’s Friday anyway and her assistant looks pathetically excited at the prospect of an early night.

The location they’re set to meet is just the middle of a sidewalk in downtown and Lena looks around, confused. There isn’t really a bar in sight. She texts Kara to let her know she’s here and moments later Kara is jogging around the corner and waving her over.

“What kind of bar are you taking me to?” Lena asks with a laugh when Kara leads her down a side alley, grabbing her by the hand and pulling her.

“The super secret alien bar I told you about.” Kara sounds appropriately excited about it, but waves of hesitation pass through Lena. She’s sure that a Luthor is the last person an alien wants to see while enjoying their afternoon drink.

“Kara,” Lena says with a careful tone of apprehension. “I don’t really think I should be walking into an alien bar.”

“Why?”

Lena doesn’t know how to respond to that. The answer should be obvious. “I’m kind of a known entity,” she settles on and realization seems to dawn on Kara’s face.

“Lena, it’ll be fine,” she says, tugging Lena forward a bit. It’s not a strong tug, but Lena stumbles anyway, following after Kara towards a metal door at the end of the alley. “This place is a dive bar before it’s an alien bar. Trust me. Everyone’s so involved in their own stuff they won’t even notice you. Plus, I’m here. I’ll keep you safe if anyone tries to do anything.”

Lena doubts Kara’s sunny disposition, but knows Kara would without a doubt protect her, and walks with her into the small establishment. She immediately feels out of place in her immaculately pressed blouse and trousers and tugs her purse up higher on her shoulder to fight the feeling. Kara releases her hand as soon as they get inside and it only makes the feeling worse.

But as it turns out Kara is mostly right. They walk through the bar towards a table in the far corner and Lena only pulls a few glances their way. Not exactly the riot she expected.

At the table, Alex is setting down a tray of beers and shots, handing them out to two other men. The first is immediately familiar to her and it only takes her a moment before she places it. James Olsen.

The other man turns as they approach and his eyes go wide as soon as he spots Lena. It’s the stranger from her gala. This one must be Winn, Lena thinks and fights a smile at the way his eyes dart between them.
“Hey guys,” Kara greets before gesturing towards Lena. “This is Len-”

“Lena Luthor,” James says quietly, with a smile caught somewhere between polite and wary. He extends his hand and Lena takes it, refusing to react to the tight way he grips at her, just on the gentle side of painful. Lena remembers him when he still worked for the Daily Planet. Remembers the articles and pictures that were run about her brother at the height of his madness and during his trial.

Nonetheless, she smiles back at him. “James Olsen,” she says enjoying the way his smile falters just a little at Lena’s complete refusal to be intimidated. “Your reputation precedes you. I didn’t know you knew Kara.”

“We work together at CatCo,” Kara explains, but there’s something overly hasty about the way she says it and Lena turns to her with a little furrow to her brow. “Actually, James is the new Cat Grant.”

Lena inclines her head back towards James. “Congratulations.”

“Winn,” the other man at the table interjects suddenly, extending his own hand which Lena takes. “Winn Schott. We kind of already know each other.”

“Nice to officially meet you, Winn,” Lena says as Winn vigorously shakes her hand.

“You know each other?” Kara asks, glaring a little at Winn until he lets go of Lena’s hand.

“Remember? From the gala? We totally saved everybody,” Winn says with pride and Lena smiles indulgently.

“Winn went into hiding under the stage where I had planted the black body field generator,” Lena adds and Kara purses her lips as she looks at both of them, settling on Lena with a heavy stare. Kara’s disapproval practically radiates out of her and Lena gives her a little eye roll.

“Science bros!” Winn exclaims, extending his fist towards Lena. She has no idea why he’s looking at her expectantly, but doesn’t have a chance to respond because Kara reaches out and swats at his fist.

Alex clears her throat suddenly and Kara jumps a little, looking at her sister. “Oh, right. And Alex, my sister,” Kara offers, pointing to her sister as if they’ve never met.

Lena nods at Alex, who nods back.

They take a seat and Alex passes her a beer with an inquiring glance. Lena hasn’t had beer since college. Her lips thin at the idea of drinking it now. “I think I’ll go for something stronger, actually,” Lena says hoping it doesn’t sound rude. Or snobby.

Alex gives her an almost impressed look, hidden by a smirk and Kara stands suddenly. “I’ll get it,” she offers before scrambling towards the bar.

Lena’s left at the table with Kara’s sister and her two friends looking at her critically with varying expressions. She wishes she had a drink in front of her if only to have something to do with her hands.

Not a single one of them says anything, but Lena can feel Winn, next to her, open and close his mouth like he’s trying to figure out something to break the ice.
“Nice weather today,” Lena comments casually, but all she gets are noncommittal hums as an answer. She sees Alex nearly snort into her beer.

Kara comes back with a cocktail and sets it in front of Lena, setting her own stout glass of clear liquid on the table next to it. Lena eyes the drink Kara’s got for her and something settles low in her gut. It’s a Manhattan, that much she can tell just by the color and the lemon twist.

When she takes a sip, it’s just how she likes it - cherry whiskey, dry vermouth, twist of lemon for that little something extra. Kara remembers her drink order and the knowledge of it tightens an invisible band around her chest.

“Good?” Kara asks her, eying her with a clear request for approval.

“Perfect,” Lena admits before taking another long sip and looking away from the pure expression of happiness Kara exudes at her answer. When she looks around the table she wonders if anyone noticed that Kara ordered her a drink without asking what she wanted, but they all seem involved in their own beers.

“So, Lena,” James says politely, looking up and propping his elbows on the table. “How are you enjoying National City?”

“It’s not that much different from Metropolis,” she answers and he laughs a little.

“I miss Metropolis sometimes, though,” James says and he seems somewhat more comfortable than his initial reaction to her. She can’t tell if it’s genuine or just for Kara’s sake. She assumes the latter based upon the way he keeps glancing towards Kara as he speaks.

Lena digs inside herself to try and remember how socializing works when you’re actually trying to be friends with someone. “I especially miss Uncle Franky’s,” she says and James’s expression shifts to something pleasantly surprised, his grin widening just a bit.

“No way. You were not an Uncle Franky’s girl,” he says and Lena shrugs.

“A guilty pleasure, I must admit.”

James laughs, but Kara leans forward in confusion. “What’s Uncle Franky’s?”

“It’s an old hot dog joint,” James explains, still smiling. “Clark and I used to get it for lunch at least once a week.” He laughs again, shaking his head. “I’m sorry, I’m trying to imagine Lena Luthor of all people in that dive and it just-” He makes a vague gesture and Lena smiles.

“Oh, I think I’ve been there,” Winn adds. “I remember they wouldn’t put ketchup on my hot dog.”

“How have I never heard about this?” Kara asks, glancing between them with a clear look of betrayal. Alex takes a sip of her beer and looks away, clearly distracted by something across the bar. Lena glances over and sees what keeps capturing Alex’s attention - one NCPD detective racking up a set of pool balls. When Alex catches her eye for a brief second, Lena smirks a little but Alex doesn’t even react other than taking a deep breath and looking down at her lap.

“Why would you have heard about it?” James asks, laughing at Kara.

“As my friends, you should be informing me of any interesting restaurant you know of. For research.”

“Well, now you know,” Lena tells her, just barely resisting placing a placating hand on Kara’s
forearm where it’s braced on the table.

Kara whips her gaze to Lena. “Is it better than Nighthawks?”

Lena laughs at the mention of their favorite hot dog spot in college. “Is anything better than Nighthawks?”

“I’m pretty sure I still get free hot dogs there,” Kara says proudly and Lena remembers, with some level of disgust, the eating challenge Kara had to go through to win the lifetime of free hot dogs.

She pulls a face and laughs a little. “Don’t remind me. I don’t think I got the smell of chilli out of my nose for days after that.” This time she does reach out and touch Kara’s shoulder, shoving at it lightly in a friendly manner. Kara charmingly goes with the motion, lets herself get pushed to the side just slightly.

The table has gone suspiciously quiet after that and Lena suddenly realizes what she’s said. Her eyes go a little wide and not long after so do Kara’s. She turns back towards her drink and takes a gulp of it. Anything to stop her stupid mouth from saying more ridiculous things. It’s like she’s completely forgotten who she is every time she’s around Kara for more than five seconds.

It’s James that speaks first, eyes darting between them before settling on Lena with clear suspicion. “I thought - Didn’t you just move here? From Metropolis?”

“Yeah, I thought you guys just met,” Winn adds.

Kara and Lena glance at each other. During their agreement not to intentionally bring their relationship history into the light, Lena had said she wouldn’t deny it if asked and she finds herself aching at the idea of it now. Denying Kara’s place in her life has never been something Lena’s grown used to even after all these years. Here, with Kara inches from her, Lena’s positive she wouldn’t get away with it convincingly.

Frankly, Lena didn’t really think it would come up so soon. A ridiculous notion, really. She can’t spend five minutes in a room with Kara without dragging their history up into the present.

“We, uh,” Kara stammers a little, looks at Lena again like she’s waiting for permission.

Lena sighs. “We went to college together.” It’s the truth even if it’s so much more complicated than that. It should be enough to appease the group.

Out of the corner of her eye she sees Alex make a face of pure annoyance and put her beer back on the table. “I’m getting another round of drinks. Who needs one?”

Without waiting for an answer, Alex turns from the table and heads to the bar, leaving Lena and Kara alone with James and Winn.

“You went to college together?” Winn asks, looking between them, confused.

James cocks his head to the side. “And you two-”

“We were friends,” Kara fills in for him with a tight smile. “In college.”

“It was a long time ago,” Lena adds before taking a long sip of her drink.

“You never mentioned that you knew a-”

“It never came up,” Kara cuts him off, looking angry, but Lena knew what would come next. She
understands the wariness in James’s eyes. It’s a well known fact that James and Clark Kent are close friends. It’s a lesser known fact that Clark and Lex used to be too.

The table goes silent again and Lena feels tense.

Then Winn speaks, turning to Lena with friendly eyes she’s not sure she deserves. “I heard a rumor that L Corp was working on replacing silicon chips with something based on the behavior of molecules,” he says and it’s such a random divergence from their earlier conversation that it takes a second for Lena to reply.

“If that were true,” Lena says carefully, but she smiles a little. “It’d be a highly classified project.”

“Sure,” Winn says with a cocky shrug. “But is anything really classified?”

The conversations turns into something Lena feels much more capable of navigating. Winn asks her a litany of questions about L Corp’s advancements in technology and she answers those that she can. She catches Alex listening avidly a few times after she returns with new drinks, but as soon as she catches the other girl’s eye, her gaze flits away with a practiced air of indifference.

There’s a TV on the other side of the bar and Lena can sense Kara’s eyes darting over to it occasionally with a look of distaste. Lena turns to see what has Kara so upset, but the TV is merely playing the news, the anchor reporting on National City’s new vigilante - the man in silver armor.


“Guardian?” James interjects from across the table. “I thought you said he helped you.”

“He did,” Kara says with a shrug, the words coming out with a tinge of displeasure.

Lena senses the but coming before James even asks.

“I don’t know,” Kara continues, shaking her head. “I just don’t think the city should be putting its trust in him so quickly.”

James defends the vigilante with a kind of suspicious vigor and Lena catches Alex’s eye for a moment, the other woman’s eyebrow twitching just a bit as she sips her beer and listens to James.

“What do you have against the guy?” James asks and Kara laughs.

“Well for starters, why wear a mask? Why cover your face up if you’re on the up and up? I don’t wear a mask.”

“You wear glasses,” Lena says, bumping her shoulder with a teasing smile. “Maybe he doesn’t have the luxury of your brilliant disguise.”

Kara shoots her a look and Lena almost expects Kara to stick her tongue out petulantly.

The table has gone suspiciously quiet and Lena turns to see Winn looking at them with wide eyes. Next to him, James’s gaze is narrowed, darting between them. It occurs to her what she just said. Or rather what it implied.

Before she can say anything else, Winn is leaning over the table towards Kara and hissing, “She knows?”

It takes a second, but Kara rolls her eyes, waves him away with casual ease. “Of course she
knows.”

“What do you mean of course?” Winn asks, glancing at Alex who is doing everything she can to seem disinterested. Her eyes roam everywhere in the bar except the table and she sips at her beer.

“She’s Lena,” Kara answers like that means anything to Winn of all people, but it tugs at something inside of Lena that she tries to ignore. Her throat feels uncomfortably thick and James is staring at her like he knows exactly what Kara meant.

Winn moves straight past it, looks to Alex again and repeats the question, “She knows?!”

Alex just looks at him, takes another sip of her beer. “Yes. She knows,” Alex deadpans in a clear *don’t fucking ask me about it* tone. “Move on.”

“Aren’t secret identities supposed to be secret?” Winn continues, which Lena thinks is ridiculous considering everyone at the table is aware of Kara’s alter-ego. “This is why Guardian wears a mask,” he adds, looking at Kara pointedly.

Alex sets her beer down on the table, loudly enough that Winn jumps. “Whoever Guardian is, he’s got a sidekick. That’s for sure.”

It’s clear from the way Alex glares at Winn that the conversation is officially over and he seems to accept the unspoken directive, leaning back in his stool and pursing his lips at Alex. “Sidekick,” he scoffs. “Likely a partner if anything.” James laughs at that, evidently willing to move on as well.

Kara leans forward at the table. “You know, my cousin worked with a vigilante once,” she says, joining her sister in moving the attention away from speculation as to why Lena would be in on the Supergirl Secret. “Tons of gadgets. Lots of demons.”

“The Bat,” Lena adds, realizing whom Kara is talking about. It had been all over the papers for weeks. “The man in Gotham, right?”

“Yeah,” Kara says with a roll of her eyes. “Vigilantes are nuts.”

“Or maybe you are afraid of the competition,” James says with a teasing smile and Lena scoffs before she can stop herself. He looks at her, brow raised in question.

“I highly doubt the Guardian poses much of a threat to Supergirl in any competition,” she tells him with the kind of confidence she usually reserves for board meetings and corporate acquisitions.

Kara practically preens at the praise, grinning and sitting up straighter in her seat. It’s an adorable reaction and Lena can’t help but respond to it, smiling in kind even as James eyes them warily from across the table.

Before anyone can say anything else, a loud, “Danvers!” interrupts them and they all turn to see Maggie Sawyer standing a few paces away.

“Hey,” Maggie says with a smile and Lena watches as Alex struggles not to choke on her beer. “It’s been a hot minute. How are you?”

“Yeah, good, yeah. Yeah,” Alex fumbles and Lena fights a grin, Alex’s discomfort distracting her from the emotions of seconds before. Kara scoots closer to Lena almost immediately as if on instinct, shooting her a raised eyebrow look that Lena manages to interpret as *pay attention.*

“Everybody this is Maggie. Maggie, this is everyone,” Alex introduces, naming them all around
“Oh, the sister,” Maggie says, with a polite grin when Alex introduces Kara. “I’ve heard so much about you from Alex.”

“And I’ve heard all about you,” Kara says, with one of her too-wide smiles that Lena can read so easily.

It must not have gone well, Lena realizes as she watches Kara’s fist clench under the table even as she takes an indifferent sip of her beer. Maggie must notice the frost in Kara’s tone, because she startles just a little, eyes darting to Lena and back to Kara before she turns to Alex and asks to speak with her.

When the two women walk away from the table, Lena brushes her hand against Kara’s arm. A quick, barely there motion, but Kara’s fist unclenches and her shoulders drop into a more relaxed posture. She glances at Lena with a small smile, and it takes everything in Lena to not grab ahold of Kara’s hand underneath the table.

“That looks intense,” Winn comments as he studies Alex and Maggie on the other side of the bar.

“Leave them be,” Kara admonishes.

James, however, is still studying Lena in what she’s sure he thinks is a subtle manner, but she can feel his gaze every time it passes over her face. She has no idea what he’s looking for, no idea what his expression means as his eyes dart between her and Kara.

“So, college, huh?” He says eventually, cutting through the bickering still continuing between Kara and Winn.

Kara’s eyes whip to his and Winn sits back in his seat, looking at Lena again. Lena smiles, undeterred by the critical glint to James Olsen’s eyes. “It was a long time ago,” she says and he seems to be pleased by that answer, nodding just a little with a small smile.

“Wow, I seriously cannot imagine you in college. Like, I know you went, but still,” Winn adds looking at Kara. Kara laughs, pushes her glasses up and twirls a little on her stool. Lena notices, finally, how close she and Kara have drifted, because her legs brush Lena’s.

“Well, like Lena said. It was a long time ago.”

“Only a couple of years, right?” James counters, leaning his elbows on the table and playing with his beer bottle. “Did you guys keep in touch?”

“Four years, actually,” Kara corrects, a hint of melancholy in the way her smile wavers. “Lena graduated early.”

Alex returns to the table before Kara can answer James’s question. _No, they didn’t keep in touch_ is putting it lightly, and everyone’s attention turns to Alex.

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“I think that went well,” Kara says as they walk out of the bar later that night. It feels familiar, like it’s four years ago and they’re leaving a date at the one nice restaurant on campus. Lena could sling her arm through Kara’s and it’d be like nothing had changed.

Lena laughs a little. “Your friends are nice.”
“Yeah,” Kara says with a little answering laugh. “They can be your friends too.”

“I don’t know about that,” Lena says trying to keep mirth in her voice even as her gut tightens uncomfortably. The idea of Kara’s friends being her friends feels far too much like college, too much like a time when their lives were so intertwined that it was natural for their friends to all be mutual friends.

Everything feels so wildly fragile since that night in her office and just the little sense of familiarity threatens to topple her.

Kara must notice because her chest puffs up a little bit and her chin goes with it before she puts on a smile that Lena knows is forced. “Just saying,” Kara says, shrugging a little. “They like you.”

“They don’t know me,” Lena counters, trying not to scoff at such a preposterous idea as present-day Kara’s friends liking her. Kara turns to her as if to protest, so she keeps talking. “I’m glad you asked me out.”

It occurs to her from the look on Kara’s face how that sounds and Lena scrambles to correct it. “I didn’t mean it like that. I just meant-”

Kara laughs dismissively, kicking at something with her foot. “I know you didn’t,” she says softly, but picks her head up to look at Lena with her bright blue eyes. “I’m glad you came.”

“Thanks, Kara,” Lena says softly, and they pause on the street, just around the corner from the alley that leads to the bar.

“For what?”

“For wanting to be my friend again,” Lena replies because it’s true. It’s not like before, but it still feels right to have Kara in her life in some capacity. Like something has been returned to her that she’d forgotten about, or tried desperately to avoid thinking about. “And for being so much better at making it happen than I’ve been.”

Kara’s brow furrows. “That’s a dumb thing to thank me for.”

“Nonetheless,” Lena says quietly.

“You’re not the one that kissed me,” Kara says, just as quiet and Lena’s heart thuds so solidly against her chest she’s sure even a human being could hear it. “I haven’t been that good with this friend stuff.”

Lena thinks to add that she was the one with her hand on the zipper to Kara’s suit, she was the one arching against Kara’s touch and pulling her closer, but she doesn’t. Just the memory of it has her skin heating up. She’s afraid to find out what will happen if they keep talking about it. This is why she had suggested they just forget about it.

“That was a momentary lapse,” Lena counters refusing to focus on the way Kara is looking at her like she’s just as lost in memory as Lena is. “You’re still making an effort when I would rather just run, hide, and avoid the situation.”

“That’s not like you.” Before Lena can even respond, Kara’s adding, “And don’t say you’re different now.”

On a deep inhale, Lena puts on a practiced smile, the kind she reserves for particularly stubborn corporate executives. “I merely meant that I’m glad we’re still trying to be friends. Even when it’s
not easy. I’m happy you’re still willing to try.”

Confusion crinkles around Kara’s eyes. “I’ll always want—”

“Kara,” Lena interrupts with a dry laugh. “Just say you’re welcome and let’s move on.”

Kara smiles, rolls her eyes at herself sheepishly. “Yeah, okay. Sorry. You’re welcome.”

“Good job,” Lena says, whispering it in a teasing manner. It makes Kara laugh and Lena feels something loosen inside her.

“What are you doing for Thanksgiving?” Kara asks so randomly that it takes a second for Lena to understand.

“Pardon?”

“Thanksgiving,” Kara repeats. “Do you have plans?”

Lena blinks. In all honesty, Thanksgiving hadn’t really been on her radar. “I’ll probably just get some work done. Take advantage of everyone being out of the office.”

Kara looks completely horrified at the idea and Lena should really have sensed where Kara was going with her initial question, but she’s sure the emotions of the last few hours have fried her normally high brain speed. “Lena, you can’t spend Thanksgiving working!”

It sounds so much like conversations they used to have in college that Lena feels a wave of affection settle over her. “Kara, it doesn’t bother me. You know that.”

“Like always, I don’t know how to help you with that,” Lena replies with a laugh.

“We’re doing Thanksgiving at my apartment. Alex, Winn and James. You should come.”

“Kara,” Lena starts, but Kara preempts her hesitation with a wide smile.

“It’s just dinner, Lena,” Kara says, as casually as someone can invite their very serious ex-girlfriend to Thanksgiving dinner with their friends and family. “We’re going to eat a lot of food and then play a board game and hang out. Super low pressure. If you can handle the bar, you can handle Thanksgiving. We’ll play Monopoly! You love Monopoly!”

Lena is very certain that happy hour drinks and a family Thanksgiving are two completely different things, but she can’t deny the part of her that misses the feeling of being a part of something during holidays. The last time the Luthors all sat at a table and had a meal together as a family was long before she had even met Kara. Her first holiday with the Danvers had involved Alex flipping the Monopoly board and all its pieces in Lena’s direction, angry at Lena’s beginner’s luck as she had called it.

“Just dinner and Monopoly,” Lena says, looking at Kara’s face. The other woman grins that huge grin that had always set Lena’s heart on fire.

“Just a great dinner with a lot of cookies and then you beating us all at Monopoly,” Kara reassures,
reaching out to nudge at Lena’s arm. “I promise I won’t let Alex flip any tables this time.”

“That doesn’t seem like something you could prevent,” Lena says with a wry smile.

Kara shoots her an incredulous look. “Please, I’m Supergirl,” she says in a conspiratorial whisper, ending it with a crooked smile that beats against Lena’s chest.

Lena laughs, shakes her head at her ex-girlfriend. “Okay,” she says on a deep exhale. God, to think people believe she’s capable of Lex’s supervillainy when she can’t stand up to Kara Danvers’s smile.

“Great!”

“Do you need me to bring anything?”

“Just your pretty face,” Kara jokes with a bright grin and she knows Kara doesn’t mean it to be flirty - Kara had never really mastered the very human art of flirtation - but it comes across that way nonetheless. Lena struggles to control a blush.

It’s not that she’s never been hit on or flirted with by people other than Kara, but for whatever reason when it’s Kara saying things like that, Lena feels like she’s eighteen all over again with a crush on her best friend.

“I’ll be there,” Lena manages to get out and Kara nods, clearly unaware of Lena’s inner reactions.

“So,” Kara says, moving her hands to hold them in front of her. “You want a ride home?”

It takes a second for the question to register in Lena’s brain and she almost jumps back from Kara when it does. The last thing she needs to do right now after two Manhattans and an onslaught of emotion is touch Kara, to feel her right there. It’s all so much worse now that they’ve kissed, very nearly did a whole lot more than kissing.

“Thank you, but my driver is right there,” Lena says, pointing towards a black car parked at the corner.

Kara looks over her shoulder at it and shrugs, looking halfway to sad. “Right. Yeah, of course.”

“Have a good night, Kara,” Lena says, smiling.

“You too, Lena,” Kara says and the second it looks like Kara might move in for a hug, Lena bolts to the side and strides quickly for her vehicle.

She doesn’t turn back, doesn’t want to see the look on Kara’s face, just gets into the back seat of her car and takes deep, steadying breaths.

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Lena’s never been much for parties or going out to bars, but Kara drags her along often enough that she starts to build up a resistance to her distaste. It’s time spent with Kara anyway, and Lena’d suffer through a lot for just that reason. Kara’s friends from astronomy club are nice enough, so Lena doesn’t mind it as much when Kara tells her they’re going to a local campus bar named Legend’s with them on Friday night.

Kara flashes her fake ID at the door and the bouncer looks appropriately skeptical - Kara’s fake is terrible, and she’s pretty sure it’s the same one Alex used in college. Lena stands behind Kara,
visible over her shoulder and glares at the bouncer, urging him to recognize who she is and see the threat in her gaze.

After a few seconds of looking at Kara’s ID, the bouncer does finally notice Lena and locks stares with her for a second before handing Kara her ID back and ushering them both inside.

Kara’s friends are all congregated at one end of the bar, huddled around a high top and arguing about what kind of shots they want to take next.

“Kara!” Max greets loudly when they approach. “Lena!”

With an enthusiasm Lena can never seem to match, Kara says hello to the entire group, Lena following behind and repeating the sentiment.

They order drinks and the night goes by fine. It’s not unlike any other time at the bar. Lena leans into Kara’s side and lets her control the flow of conversation while she sips at her drink. Inevitably Max or Aaron will challenge Kara to some sort of challenge - drinking, eating, some feat of strength that Kara will have to fake an inability to do.

They’ll laugh and tell stories and grow louder the more they order shots.

Lena will get comfortably buzzed and Kara will smile at her indulgently when her hand slips under Kara’s shirt at the small of her back, tracing heated skin there. It’s one of her favorite places on Kara’s body, and when she’s got enough alcohol in her system, it’s all Lena can do to not put her hand there.

Everything goes just exactly as it usually does until suddenly Kara’s entire body goes rigid and her head whips around.

Having no idea what’s made her girlfriend so tense all of a sudden, Lena follows her gaze to see a group of boys at a booth across the bar, laughing and passing around a pitcher of beer. She shoots her girlfriend a puzzled look, but Kara’s just glaring in their direction.

“Kara,” Lena whispers, aware of how the rest of the group have suddenly noticed the change in Kara’s demeanor.

“Assholes,” Kara grumbles loud enough to be caught by Max, who is sitting at their right. He turns to look at the group of guys. It’s rare for Kara to curse - it usually only happens in times of intense or severe emotion - and Lena feels a chill down her spine.

“Do you know them or something, Danvers?” He asks and Kara doesn’t even turn to acknowledge Max.

“They’re talking about you,” is all Kara says, shifting just slightly to indicate she’s referring to Lena.

Max looks puzzled and Lena realizes Kara’s error immediately.

“You heard them talking about me earlier?” Lena asks, more to clarify for Max than anything and to try to get Kara to realize they have an audience.

It doesn’t entirely work, though Max at least looks a little less confused and Aaron has turned back to his conversation with Josie for the moment. Kara, however, is still glaring across the bar and Lena thinks she almost catches the beginnings of a telltale glow in the rim of her eyes.
“Why don’t we go outside? I could use some fresh air after that last whiskey,” she says urgently, sliding off her stool and gripping Kara’s forearm, tugging against it. It feels like trying to pull a marble statue across the room, but it at least gets Kara’s attention. Her girlfriend looks down at where Lena’s hand is on her arm with puzzlement.

“Come outside,” Lena grits out warningly. “With me.”

Kara looks ready to argue, but Lena puts as much plea into her expression as possible. The anger doesn’t fade from Kara’s face, but she nods and lets Lena lead them outside the bar and around the corner to a place of relative privacy.

“I’m going to go over there,” Kara says as soon as they’re alone, pacing in front of Lena. “Let them know how I feel about what they said.”

“You are not,” Lena tells her, crossing her arms and trying to understand where all of Kara’s ire is coming from.

“They can’t talk about you like that. I won’t let them,” Kara argues, and her eyes spike with color.

“Kara, you need to calm down,” Lena says, sensing the almost palpable feeling of Kara’s powers warring inside her.

“I’m calm.”

“You are anything but calm right now.”

“You didn’t hear what they were saying,” Kara retorts, pointing a finger at Lena as if she’s the one to blame.

“I don’t care what they were saying,” Lena replies, and she means it. She’s used to being talked about. There’s not much that hasn’t been said about her, even as a nineteen year-old. Everyone has an opinion and she learned how to tune all that out years ago. “I’m a Luthor, Kara. People talk about me. That’s just a fact of life.”

“Well it shouldn’t be, Lena.”

“And yet it is.”

Kara kicks a nearby dumpster and the sound of it is so loud she’s sure the bar’s bouncer is going to come flying around the corner. The metal container screeches across the pavement underneath it, careening away from them a few feet with a brand new foot-sized dent in the side.

“Kara!” Lena exclaims, rushing towards where her girlfriend is still seething, grabbing ahold of Kara by the arm. Kara sags suddenly against the brick wall of the building, blowing out a breath so violently that it’s almost as if the discarded trash near the dumpster blows away from them.

“I’m sorry,” Kara says, shaking her head and putting a hand to her temple, ripping her glasses off her face and bending over as if in pain. There’s a wince forming on Kara’s face that Lena recognizes and she grabs Kara’s other hand, cups the back of Kara’s neck soothingly.


“It’s too much. I can’t - I can’t,” Kara says, looking tearful, and Lena knows what she means. Lena releases Kara’s hand so that she can hold Kara’s face in both of her own, trying to get Kara
to keep eye contact. Distantly, she hears Kara’s glasses fall to the pavement with a soft clink.

“Listen,” Lena repeats, but Kara just shakes her head.

“I can’t,” she murmurs. “Lena, I just want to - it’s too much.”

Emotions often get the better of Kara and her restraint on her powers goes right out the window. It’s a sudden sensory overload where suddenly Kara can hear everything and the noise of the entire world comes crashing into her ears.

“I know,” Lena soothes, and she grabs Kara’s hand again to bring it up to her chest, flattens Kara’s palm on her sternum. “Listen,” she says again. “Can you feel it? Can you hear it?”

Lena breathes deeply, steadies her heartbeat and keeps her eyes locked into Kara’s blue ones. Fingers spreading, Kara finally nods a little and lets out a meek, “I feel it.”

“Okay, good,” Lena says encouragingly, watching Kara’s eyes flutter closed as she focuses. Their foreheads connect and Lena takes an audible breath, steady and slow. “Just feel that. Let yourself feel it. Listen to it.”

It takes a good minute of just standing there together before Kara relaxes, Lena tapping on the back of Kara’s hand in time with her own heartbeat and repeating the soft command over and over again. Listen to my heart. Feel the beat. Focus on me.

“You’re okay,” Lena whispers, her thumb stroking against Kara’s cheekbone soothingly. When Kara opens her eyes again, Lena’s happy to see that the angry glow has faded and the muscles of Kara’s arms are no longer coiled in tension.

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Ever since Lena had given Kara her number, the texts had been coming in on a consistent basis. So consistent in fact, that Lena could almost tell time by them. One in the morning, usually something benign - hello, good morning, hope you have a great day, etc. Then one around lunch, usually a picture of whatever Kara is eating or a recommendation for a new restaurant. The quirkier texts start around mid-afternoon and range all the way from random facts about elephants to questions about philosophy.

In a way, Lena’s grateful for Kara’s constant persistence. It’s an easy way to get to know each other again. Low pressure. It feels a little like when they first met - Kara would barrage Lena with a litany of questions in an attempt to learn more about her. They know all the big stuff about each other already, but Lena finds that she’s discovering new things about Kara.

The texting becomes such a staple of her day to day that the minute it stops, Lena notices. As far as Lena is aware, Kara drops off the face of the Earth for two entire days.

At first, she tries to think nothing of it. Kara’s under no obligation to be texting her every single day and maybe Kara just got tired of Lena’s less imaginative responses to texts like did you know walruses bark? Except as soon as Kara seems to disappear, so does Supergirl. From the news, from the skyline of National City, from everywhere. There’s not a single mention of the Girl of Steel for two days even when the warehouse on 8th Street goes up in flames.

When speculation starts to grow that National City’s new vigilante - the Guardian - might be actually be more serial killer than superhero, the worry in Lena’s gut grows tenfold. There’s no way Kara’s absent while this goes on unless something is seriously wrong.
She thinks to text Alex and ask. It would require a certain amount of detective skills (or hacking skills) to acquire the older Danvers’s number, but the situation seems to warrant such a thing. Just as she’s about to do just that, a heavier-than-normal thud resounds through Lena’s apartment from the direction of her balcony and she turns to see Supergirl standing there, hunching a little with a desperate look to her face.

“So what,” Lena breathes as she moves out to the balcony, just barely restraining herself from yelling Kara’s name. “Are you okay? Where have you been?”

Kara’s lips twitch a little at that, but it’s not from amusement. Something twists inside Lena’s gut and her skin tingles in silent foreshadowing. Whatever Kara’s here for, it’s not good.

“I need to talk to you,” Kara says simply, walking inside the apartment. There’s a heavy look to her step that unsettles Lena.

She runs a hand through her loose hair and follows her inside. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Yeah,” Kara sighs, but it sounds off. Lena responds to it instinctively, paces over to where Kara is and puts her hands on her cheeks, pulling Kara’s face until they make eye contact.

“What happened?” Lena asks, eyes darting over Kara critically, looking for some physical sign of injury. But it’s only the shuttered, haunted look around Kara’s eyes that’s worrying her. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

Kara leans into the contact for a brief moment, her eyes fluttering before she pulls away, backs up and sits down on the arm of Lena’s couch, fingers twisting together as she studies them. “I’m fine, for real. I just need to talk to you.”

The sudden absence of Kara’s skin under hands shudders something cold down Lena’s spine and she swallows against the feeling, throat thick. “Okay, sure,” she replies, trying to get the shaky feeling to subside. Her hands ache to touch Kara again, to seek out a tangible reassurance that Kara is okay. “About what?”

When Kara turns to look at her, a pained expression is all over her face that likes of which Lena’s not sure she’s ever seen before. “Your mother,” Kara answers and Lena takes a step back reflexively at the dark tone in Kara’s voice.

“Kara,” Lena says carefully, unsure of where this could possibly be going. Why Supergirl would rush over here looking unsettled and asking questions after her mother. “What does my mother have to do with anything?”

From the looks of Kara’s expression, she wants to be doing anything but answering that question, and Lena crosses her arms defensively. Kara’s eyes track the motion and she sags, perching against the arm of the couch. It’s a position Lena seems to always find Kara in when they’re about to have emotionally exhausting conversations. “Why don’t we have a drink?” Kara suggests. “And I’ll tell you about it.”

“You don’t drink,” Lena answers, trying not to snap. “Answer my question.”

Kara looks at her dead on, jaw tight. “Let’s have a drink,” she repeats. “And I will.”

“Stop being obtuse,” Lena snaps, unable to stop herself this time. Worry and irritation mixing and bubbling up into her throat. “You know how much I hate that.”

“I’m not trying to be,” Kara says softly, cutting through Lena’s anger. “I’m just,” she sighs heavily,
“It’s not a simple answer.”

They stay locked in a silent staring contest for a few moments and Lena catalogs the tired look in Kara’s eyes, the concern etched into her strong jawline, and the resigned curl of her spine. It’s the quiet, “Please,” that Kara lets out after a bit that finally defeats Lena and she throws her hands up before walking further into the apartment towards the kitchen. “Fine,” she sighs. “I’ll make hot chocolate.”

Kara actually laughs a little at that, the sound of it at such a contrast with the tense feeling that’s stretched between them. Lena lets herself smile, for just one moment.
Chapter 5

Lena puts milk in a pan and pulls out a jar of chocolate powder from a cabinet. Kara takes a seat at the kitchen island, rearranging her cape around her legs and watching as Lena finds a mug and starts adding chocolate powder and sugar to it. It eases a little of her nerves when Kara gives her a look as she only puts a single scoop of sugar in her mug. Lena rolls her eyes, adds some more and fights a smile.

They don’t speak, Lena just works methodically to bring the milk to a simmer and pulls out a glass of wine for herself. Anything to calm the subtle shake that hasn’t left her hands.

The feeling of Kara’s eyes tracking her doesn’t help.

“Well?” Lena asks, once she finally sets a mug of hot chocolate in front of Kara. She leans against her kitchen counter and watches as Kara takes a sip of her drink.

There’s no answer, just the silence of her kitchen while Kara looks down into her hot chocolate and lightly taps her fingers against the mug. The irritation from earlier is worming its way back into her body and she rolls her eyes when Kara continues to do everything except start talking. “Why don’t you just spit it out, Kara?”

“I’m trying,” Kara grumbles, leaning back on the stool and releasing her drink. Her head falls back a little as she eyes the ceiling and Lena’s gut churns. She can only imagine what Kara’s so afraid to tell her.

“Try harder,” Lena replies, setting her wine glass down and leaning on the kitchen island with both hands.

Kara crosses her arms and takes on a determined look. “It’s your mother,” Kara says, puffing her chest out a little. It draws unneeded attention to the crest across Kara’s suit and Lena glances away for a moment.

“We’ve been over that,” Lena replies, shaking her head. “Can you please get to the point? My imagination is coming up with worse upon worse scenario here.”

Kara blows out a breath, looks away for a second before locking gazes with Lena, tension evident around her eyes. “Your mother is the leader of Cadmus.”

It takes a few seconds for the words to make sense to Lena, but when they do, she laughs. Loudly and without pause for a good moment. Kara stares at her with confusion furrowed between her eyebrows. “Lena,” she says.

“Cadmus,” Lena manages to say between laughs. She straightens away from the island and crosses her arms. “The anti-alien paramilitary organization that keeps broadcasting creepy, terrorist videos to everyone?”

“Yes.”

“My mother,” Lena continues, voice filled with mirth. “Behind Cadmus.”

“Lena,” Kara draws out, face serious and Lena can’t help but laugh again. The idea of it so absurd. Lillian might not be winning any mother of the year awards anytime soon, but to think she’d do something like this...it’s a considerable struggle not to think immediately of Lex, how people had
looked at her since he went insane.

“You’re mistaken,” she tells Kara, with a shake of her head. “My mother is a lot of things, but to think she’s capable of-”

“Lena, she kidnapped me,” Kara interrupts forcefully and Lena’s laughter cuts off immediately, the sound dying in her throat.

“She what?” Lena asks.

“That’s where I’ve been,” Kara answers, uncrossing her arms and looking at Lena with a look of such twisted sadness that Lena feels it seep into her, chilling down her spine. “She kidnapped me. And Mon-El.”

Anger rushes through her so swiftly she has to take a quick inhale of air just to speak. “Why?”

“I’m not sure yet,” Kara says with a shrug. “She made me solar flare to blow out my powers. Then she took a sample of my blood. Had her henchman throw me around the building for good measure.”

It’s such a chilling thought that Lena has to shake it out of her head, can’t process it yet. Her fists clench so hard she’s sure her nails are going to draw blood against the skin of her palms and her chest starts to ache. She forces her fingers to spread back out, takes a deep steadying breath.

“Are you sure?” she asks, and Kara sighs, looking everywhere but at Lena.

“I’ve met your mother before, Lena,” Kara says. “I know who she is and what she looks like. I’m sure. She threatened to kill Mon-El if I didn’t cooperate with her.”

“My mother is no killer,” Lena argues, but the words feel thin, hard to hold on to. If she thinks about it hard enough she can easily picture Lillian steady enough to do such a thing. People can be capable of a lot of things if they’re pushed hard enough. Lex had taught her that much.

“She shot Mon-El in the leg,” Kara counters, “and was about to shoot him in the heart if I didn’t do what she wanted.”

“It’s just not possible,” Lena breathes, unwilling to think her mother is capable of that level of villainy. Rampant xenophobia sounds appropriately her speed - but being the head of Cadmus? Threatening to kill people?

“It is,” Kara insists and Lena feels overwhelmed with an onslaught of feelings from all different directions.

“You’re lying,” Lena argues, snapping a little. The words are ripped out of her forcefully even as she cringes at herself. Kara has never lied to her and even standing here after a four year absence, Lena doesn’t actually believe Kara to be capable of it now. But she can’t reconcile that with the deep belief that her mother couldn’t be capable of doing what Kara’s accusing her of.

Kara looks taken aback by the suggestion that she’s lying, a look of hurt shadowing her face. “I’m not lying, Lena. I swear. I wouldn’t lie about something like this.”

“I don’t understand, Kara,” Lena says and she starts to pace a little, shaking her head.

“Lena, I know it’s hard, but-”
“No, you don’t know,” Lena interrupts, stopping to glare at her ex-girlfriend.

“Don’t do that,” Kara argues with sudden heat, standing up from her stool. “Don’t act like I don’t know you.”

They stare at each other for a long moment and Lena thinks that somewhere the universe is laughing at her. For a brief moment, Lena understands her brother. Here she is, a Luthor, standing in front of a Super and she can almost see the line being drawn between them. There’s a choice in front of her and she can sense it.

Kara’s jaw is tight, her eyes vivid with a sense of desperation pulling Lena in, and the crest on her chest feels like it’s the only thing in color in the entire room. Lena can’t stop looking at it, all of a sudden.

“Can you change?” Lena asks, deflating from the anger of before just enough that her shoulders drop.

Kara looks down at her suit and frowns. “Why?”

Lena swallows. “Because I’m not having this conversation with Supergirl.”

There’s a look of hurt on Kara’s face, masked only but the conciliatory smile she shoots Lena. “It’s still me,” she says in a small voice that slices against Lena’s frayed nerves.

“I know, but you wear that symbol on your chest and you-,” Lena doesn’t know how to explain how she feels without hurting Kara further. “Just, please. There’s some sweatpants and shirts in my bedroom,” she says, “you’ll be more comfortable anyway.”

Kara hesitates for a few seconds, but concedes, nodding. “Okay, sure,” she says before walking towards the bedroom, the movements looking unnecessarily slow and stilted.

Lena takes a heavy sip of her wine, tries not to think too hard about Kara in her bedroom nor confront the idea that her mother is spearheading an anti-alien initiative intent on killing her ex-girlfriend.

When Kara comes back the supersuit has been traded for a pair of faded grey sweatpants and a white t-shirt and Lena’s throat goes a little dry. All she had wanted was to no longer have to stare at the Crest of El. She hadn’t considered that the alternative meant Kara would be in her clothes. It’s a throwback to weekends when neither of them had anything to do and Kara would laze around in Lena’s small dorm room in shorts and t-shirts, and Lena would find her so beautiful.

“Better?” Kara asks, hands out at her sides as she glances down at herself.

After another deep sip of her drink, Lena manages to nod. “Thanks.”

Kara retakes her seat and pulls her mug towards her. It must have gone cold because Kara makes a disgusted face after the first sip. Kara gives her what can only be described as a helpless look and it takes a good few seconds for Lena to piece together what it means. She sighs a little.

“It was just the suit,” she tells Kara, gesturing towards the mug. “It’s fine.”

With just a moment’s more hesitation, Kara seems to accept what Lena’s saying and looks as though she’s going to send a quick jolt of heat vision into her drink, but her eyes just spark with color and nothing else. Lena watches as Kara shakes her head like she can rattle her heat vision back to working order, and tries again, fails, tries again, fails. It takes five tries for the laser beam
of heat to come out of her eyes and into the hot chocolate and Lena watches it all with a dropped jaw, worry clawing at her throat.

The tonnage of what Kara went through becomes much clearer. “Kara,” Lena says softly, moving around the counter until she can put her palm against Kara’s forearm. The skin there isn’t as warm as Lena remembers it to be and it’s almost as if Lena can sense that the muscles are weaker. “Are you okay?”

Kara laughs, but the sound falls short of funny and Lena scans Kara’s body critically. “After a solar flare it kind of takes some of my powers a little bit to get back to full working order.”

“But they will?” It must be terrifying, Lena thinks, for Kara to feel so uncharacteristically weak, so human.

“They will,” Kara reassures her, with a squeeze to the fingers Lena still has wrapped around Kara’s forearm. “Don’t worry.”

Despite an almost inescapable urge to confirm for herself that Kara is okay, that there isn’t any lasting damage as a result of solar flaring, Lena nods, detaches from Kara and walks back to her wine glass.

For a minute they just sit there in silence, Kara sipping again at her drink and Lena trying to untangle the knots in her stomach, letting her brain take over and piece together everything Kara’s been saying.

“My mother is the head of Cadmus,” she says quietly and Kara winces.

“Yes,” Kara replies with a nod.

“And you know that because she kidnapped you, and threatened to kill your friend if you didn’t…”

“Blow out my powers so she could take a vial of my blood.”

There have been times in her life when she’s hated her mother, but none of them have rivaled this moment. She’s never known Kara without her powers, can’t conceive of what it’s like to bleed for Kara. Lena can’t even imagine it. This is different than Lex’s betrayal, but she feels just as blindsided by it. “What did she want your blood for?” Lena asks around the lump in her throat.

“I’m not sure,” Kara says, looking like all she wants to do is grab Lena and comfort her. Lena thinks she might actually let her, boundaries be damned. “I thought you might be able to tell me.”

Lena goes rigid at that and feels unstoppably defensive. “Because you what? Think I’m in on my mother’s secret evil plans?”

“What?!” Kara says with such incredulity that Lena feels a twinge of guilt at having even thought such a thing. Kara’s out of her seat again, halfway around the island, her hands extended towards Lena. “No, of course not.”

Running a hand down her face, Lena tries to take deep steady breaths and remind herself how to think like a rational human being that doesn’t let emotion control her every thought process. “I’m sorry, I’m having trouble thinking clearly right now.”

“I know,” Kara replies. “I’m sorry too.”

“It’s not your fault,” Lena says, closing her eyes for a brief moment.
“I thought you might be able to tell me what your mother could be up to because you’re the smartest person that I know. And you know your mother.”

“Clearly I don’t,” Lena rebuts with a mirthless laugh.

“I know this is a lot,” Kara says softly, carefully even, like Lena’s liable to break at any moment. “But I thought you deserved to know. I could use your help. And I don’t want there to be secrets between us.”

Lena thinks this might be the point where she should say thank you, but she’s not sure it would come out sounding sincere. All she really wants to do is go back to a time where her biggest concern was how to be in a room alone with Kara and not want to kiss her. She doesn’t want to think about her mother following in Lex’s footsteps, or how the threat to Kara’s life is somehow much more real now, more personal.

“Okay,” is all Lena can say.

Seconds later, before Lena can do anything about it, Kara’s crossed the distance between them and wrapped Lena up in her arms. Lena’s head goes immediately into Kara’s shoulder, her hands trapped between their bodies. On instinct, Lena’s fingers tangle into the soft fabric of Kara’s shirt and she can’t help the way her entire body sags into the contact, loosens entirely from the tense moments of before. It feels like she could cry if she let herself, but she doesn’t, just closes her eyes and inhales against the sudden scent of Kara, mixed up in the fresh laundry smell of her clothing.

“It’ll be okay,” Kara murmurs and Lena feels the words against the her hair, comforting her against her will. “Your mother’s not going to hurt you or me or anyone.”

I won’t let her, Lena thinks, but doesn’t verbally respond, just buries herself deeper into the feeling of Kara surrounding her. It feels like the world shuts out for a peaceful minute.

They both stand there, Kara all but cradling her, for a long quiet moment until Lena knows she needs to step away before she becomes both physically and emotionally incapable of doing so. With a soft clearing of her throat she moves just enough that Kara notices and releases her hold, allowing Lena to back away from her.

Kara’s eyes are rimmed with red like she’s one second away from crying and Lena knows if that starts neither of them will stop. It helps to ebb the tide of tears threatening in the back of her eyes. “So what now?” Lena asks with a shrug, turning from Kara and going back to where her wine glass is.

“Now, we just have a good Thanksgiving, eat way too much pumpkin pie and turkey and potatoes and-”

“How are you thinking about food right now?” Lena jokes, if only to distract herself from the sad, tense feeling threading between them.

“I’m always thinking about food,” Kara replies with a shrug, not a hint of tease in her voice.

It makes Lena smile despite the churning in her guts and Kara reacts to the expression with a grin of her own. “We can worry about this after all that, okay?” Kara says entreatingly. “Let’s just focus on friends and food and board games and not think about this for a few hours tomorrow.”

“I don’t think I’ll be able to concentrate on anything else.”

“Yes, you can,” Kara tells her with an encouraging nod and smile. “There’s nothing we can do
about it right now anyway.”

“There’s always something we can do,” Lena argues, already planning out where to start in her head.

“Lena,” Kara says, with a little laugh. “I think we both need to mentally reboot. It’ll help us think more clearly.”

“Okay,” Lena concedes on a shaky breath. “You’re right.”

With an arched eyebrow, Kara shoots Lena a teasing grin. “Can I get that on record?”

Lena rolls her eyes, knows Kara is just teasing her in an attempt to distract her from everything that’s going on and she hates that it works so easily. “Very funny,” Lena deadpans, shoving Kara just slightly on the arm. It’s like shoving at a brick wall, but Kara sways backwards in reaction anyway.

Kara shrugs, unrepentant. “Are you going to be okay?” The question soft, concerned even as Kara’s face stays smiling. Kara’s hand extends between them, brushing past Lena’s elbow.

“Yes,” Lena laughs, running shaky fingers through her hair. “Once I stop thinking about my mother out there somewhere devising ways to kill you.”

“I’m pretty hard to kill,” Kara jokes, but Lena doesn’t laugh this time.

“Don’t joke about this,” Lena says, and she’s upset to feel her eyes spike with heat, knows Kara is frowning and looking at her with intensity.

“I’m sorry,” Kara whispers, and when her hand arrives back at Lena’s elbow, it stays there. It’s warm and it feels like it sinks Lena to the floor, centering her and helping her get the image of her mother hurting Kara out of her head.

“It’s okay,” Lena says, reaching against better judgment to grab Kara’s hand and squeezing it. “Just not exactly something I want to hear jokes about.”

Kara looks at her for a moment. “Do you want me to stay tonight?”

Something goes tight inside her the minute the question registers, and she drops Kara’s hand. “What?”

“Tonight,” Kara repeats. “Would you feel better if I stayed?”

The thought of Kara there overnight sends a multitude of feeling through Lena and she can feel heat starting to bloom in her cheeks. “No,” she says almost too hastily judging by the expression on Kara’s face. “No, I’m fine. Thank you though.”

“Are you sure? I can sleep on the couch, too, obviously.”

“Positive,” Lena replies, forcing calm into her expression. It seems to work because Kara only looks at her a moment longer before nodding.

“Okay, well, you know how to reach—” Kara’s words cut off abruptly and Lena watches as a wave of deep thought shadows over Kara’s face.

“You okay?” Lena asks, when Kara doesn’t say anything else.
Kara’s gaze locks into Lena’s, a hint of worry crinkling around blue eyes. It takes a few seconds before Kara suddenly asks, “Do you still have the watch I gave you?”

The question startles Lena, her chest feeling suddenly hollow. She hadn’t thought about that particular gift in what feels like forever. “I - I don’t know,” she stammers out. A lie. And a big one. She knows exactly where that watch is despite not having looked at it for years.

“You don’t know?”

“I’m sure it’s somewhere,” Lena corrects, hating the immediate look of hurt that’s stretched over Kara’s face. “I just haven’t worn it in years. It didn’t feel appropriate.”

“Yeah, sure,” Kara says nodding, but she looks unmistakably like she’s close to tears. Lena wants to reach out and calm Kara, tell her that of course she never got rid of the watch. “Well you should find it, if you can.”

“Why?”

“It would make me feel better,” Kara says quietly, mimicking the words she said the night she gave Lena the gift. “To know that you could get to me if you needed me. Especially now.”

“I’ll see if I still have it,” Lena says with a slight clearing of her throat, and Kara seems to accept that with a sad nod.

“I’ll leave you to it,” Kara replies, looking no better than when she first landed on Lena’s balcony. Lena hates it. The urge to grab Kara, tell her to stay, lead them both back into the bedroom and fall into the bed is so strong she has to put her hands behind her back just to stop it from happening.

Kara’s just at Lena’s balcony door when she turns suddenly, looking down at herself. It’s as if Kara just remembered that she’s wearing Lena’s clothing and not her supersuit, because she’s turning to Lena with a lost expression like she doesn’t know what to do. Doesn’t know if she should change back into her suit.

“Just keep those,” Lena tells her. “You can give them back to me later.”

It seems to appease Kara and she smiles a little. “Thanks,” is all she says before shooting Lena one last comforting grin and jumping up up and away into the night sky.

Lena presses a hand against her sternum, tries to steady her breathing and sits down on her couch. What a mess.

--

There’s a box hidden so deep in Lena’s storage unit that it takes a half hour of maneuvering to even so much as get a glimpse of it. She hasn’t looked at its contents in close to three years and she’s not entirely sure she’s ready to dig it up, but here she is, tugging it out from around a corner.

Inside the box is almost the entirety of her relationship with Kara. Just opening it gives Lena the waft of a smell that transports her back to that time in her life. It feels like a century ago.

There are about sixty things in the box that Lena isn’t emotionally prepared to think about and she pushes them all around to find the thing she’s looking for. It’s towards the bottom under a tattered copy of *Dune* and on top of a folded up red t-shirt that Lena absolutely cannot look at. She snatches the small jewelry bag sitting there and pulls it out, shutting the box as quickly as possible.
Inside the bag is a pretty gold watch and Lena remembers the moment Kara gave it to her like it was yesterday.

For if you ever need me, Kara had said. Lena had told Kara that she’d always need her and it had never felt far from the truth. There had been many times in the past four years Lena had thought about pressing the button - lonely nights staring at a Tokyo skyline, exhausted afternoons after a particularly tough day at work, the day Lex had been arrested. There were times too when she’d watch Superman fly through the buildings of Metropolis, fight some enemy - her brother sometimes she’d realize later - that Lena would think so hard about the watch. It’d be a good excuse, she’d think. Something real, an actual threat.

On bad nights Lena would sometimes wonder if Kara would even come anymore. What if she pressed the button and nothing happened? Could she really blame the girl? The thought of it made it easier to keep the watch hidden away, out of sight.

But the past few weeks around Kara tells her how foolish that notion was. Even now Kara looks at her with a kind of significance that conveys just how fast she would have shown up had the button been pressed. She imagines it for a long moment. Her apartment in Metropolis. Kara on the balcony. It hurts as much as it soothes.

She almost doesn’t want to look, but her fingers are turning the watch over anyway, her thumb stroking over the inscription on the backside of the face.

The Kryptonian lettering isn’t faded even in the slightest and she stares down at the words with an ache in her chest. The always is especially painful. The word on the bottom is still unknown to her. Something like girlfriend Kara had said, and Lena wonders, not for the first time, what Kryptonian words Kara twisted around to come up with an equivalent.

She can’t bring herself to wear the watch just yet, but she takes it with her out of the storage unit and puts it in her purse. Close at hand will have to do for now.

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Lena’s not in a great mood. Her final engineering project won’t work the way she wants it to, her mother has left three voicemails on her phone and they’ve all managed to make Lena feel inadequate as a daughter, and she hasn’t seen Kara in nearly a week.

Exhaustion has started to stress the muscles in her back and her eyes feel dry and tired. The feeling is dark enough to make her want to drop out of school, grab Kara and escape their lives, move somewhere remote and peaceful. Find a place without the ever present pressure from her family nor the hectic schedule of graduating earlier with multiple degrees.

Then, as if her prayers have been answered, a familiar thud of feet land on the carpet by her window and Lena’s whole body relaxes on instinct. “That’s not an entrance,” Lena says dryly and smiles when Kara laughs.

“It was open,” she protests, walking up to Lena and pressing, strong capable fingers against the sore muscles of her neck.

Lena hums, but doesn’t turn to look at her girlfriend, just lets her head fall forward against the pleasurable feeling of Kara’s hands.

“Hey stranger,” Kara says softly, kissing the top of Lena’s head.

“Hey,” Lena greets, standing and turning to give Kara a proper hello. “I missed you,” she
murmurs before pressing their lips together firmly, drinking in the taste of her girlfriend after such a long absence.

“Me too,” Kara says, smiling against Lena’s mouth and sliding her arms around Lena’s waist. Lena yelps when Kara picks her up off her feet and keeps kissing her, laughing a little.

“I thought you were working late,” Lena says when they disengage. They stay close together, Kara’s hands keeping them firmly pressed up against each other. Kara is as warm as ever, and it’s calming Lena by the second, distracting her from her phone and her work.

“Bryan let me go early,” she says with a crinkle between her brows like she’s embarrassed by something. “I may have been complaining a lot about how I haven’t seen you in centuries.”

“Dramatic,” Lena jokes in a deadpan, smoothing out the wrinkled skin on Kara’s forehead with her hand.

“That’s what it felt like to me,” Kara pouts and Lena laughs.

“Me too,” she admits, kissing her again. “I’m glad you’re here.”

“And guess what,” Kara says with an exaggerated wiggle of her eyebrows.

“What?”

“I brought Dirk’s,” Kara tells her with a crooked grin.

Lena tries not to moan at the mention of her favorite sandwich shop on campus, but her empty stomach makes itself known at that exact second and her mouth starts to water. Kara laughs at her wide-eyed expression.

“You’re my favorite,” Lena says softly, smiling fondly at Kara, who scrunches her nose up delightedly and fixes her glasses.

Kara says something in reply that sounds suspiciously like it’s in Kryptonian, but Lena can’t translate it.

“What does that mean?” Lena asks, twisting her fingers in the loose ends of Kara’s ponytail.

“There isn’t an easy way to translate it,” Kara says quietly, but looking at Lena with such love that she has a pretty good idea of what it might mean. “I guess it kind of means I love you.”

Lena can’t help the way her body presses forward at the words, still new enough that her heart flutters rapidly at hearing it. “Is that so?” she murmurs, tugging lightly on Kara’s hair.

“Really it just means that you’re my favorite too.”

“Yeah?”

Kara kisses her swiftly. “Definitely.”

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It doesn’t actually occur to her until she’s leaving her apartment the next morning that it’s the first time she’s going to see Kara’s place. The realization derails her so much that it’s blissfully the only thing she focuses on the entire ride over.
There’s noise coming out of Kara’s apartment that can be heard even down the hall and it stops Lena in her tracks. She can make out Alex’s laugh and what sounds like Winn’s voice booming through the door. And then Kara’s laugh, not unlike her sister’s, but louder, more exuberant. For whatever reason, the sound of it pins Lena to the floor and she can’t seem to bring herself to walk the few feet to the door and knock.

It ends up not mattering, however, because the door is suddenly swinging open and Kara’s poking her head out with a wide grin that only grows larger when she spots Lena.

Lena tries to smile back, thinks she manages. But Kara steps out into the hallway and shuts the door behind her. “What are we doing out here?” Kara whispers, looking mischievous and so sweet.

“How did you know I was out here?” Lena asks, hands gripping at the brown paper bag she’s holding.

Kara taps an ear, still smiling, but looking a little quizzical at Lena’s tense posture. “You okay?”

“Yeah, sorry, I just—” she stumbles over her words a little, can’t decide what to say. She settles on a vague, “Holidays.”

Only then does Kara’s smile falter just a tad. “Come on,” she says, sliding an arm around Lena’s waist, taking a half-step towards the door. The familiar weight of Kara’s arm comforts her, and it also terrifies her. “You’ll be fine. Alex has saved you some wine. She’s really nervous because she’s been trying to come out all day.”

“What happened with Maggie, by the way?” Lena asks, looking upward a little at Kara’s eyes. It helps to focus on something that isn’t the sudden racing of her heart nor the feeling of Kara’s body in suddenly close proximity. Kara frowns, shrugs a little, her hand drifting absently to the middle of Lena’s back as they just stand there outside Kara’s door.

“Maggie wants to be friends, I guess. It’s…” Kara pauses, mouth twisting a little in a way Lena recognizes as confused anger. “It seems really stupid. Alex likes her so much you know? And I encouraged her to say something because,” Kara laughs a little, shrugs at Lena. “Why keep that feeling inside, right?”

“Right,” Lena says softly but feeling herself tense up, heart thudding solidly.

“Apparently Maggie doesn’t like Alex the same way?” Kara looks adorably confused by the notion. “Who wouldn’t like Alex?”

Lena laughs. “No idea,” she says with a soft smile.

“So they’re friends, I think. But it’s ridiculous if you ask me. I’ve seen them together a bunch and like Alex still makes this face if you say Maggie’s name so…”

Lena has almost nothing to say about that, because well. The parallels are obvious enough to her in the language Kara’s using. But Kara keeps talking, and Lena tries to ignore how Kara’s hand is sliding along the fabric of her coat.

“I mean, Alex cried a lot,” Kara says with this wide eyed expression. Lena thinks she understands, just imagining Alex Danvers crying is making her eyes go a little wide as well. “I almost asked Winn to look up where Maggie lives just so Supergirl could go pay a visit.” Kara flexes the arm not wrapped around Lena’s waist and it makes her chuckle.

“You can’t just go threatening people that make your sister cry,” Lena jokes, but her body is
heating up having been pressed against Kara this long and it’s becoming harder and harder to control her reaction to it the longer they stand there talking.

“Yes I can,” Kara replies, but she’s smirking and Lena feels breathless at the almost cocky expression on Kara’s face.

“But anyway, all that doesn’t matter now, because it’s Thanksgiving, and you’re here, and you look beautiful, and - your heart is beating really fast, what’s wrong?”

Kara’s hand has made its way to one hip, and she turns fully to look at Lena carefully. She very carefully backs out of Kara’s hold, and when Kara realizes what she’s done, she has enough sense to look half-apologetic.

“Sorry,” she says, and then she seems to forget her apology, because she grabs Lena by the hand and reaches for the door. “Come on, everyone’s waiting for you!”

The sight inside Kara’s apartment does little to calm her nerves. Alex is the first to greet her. Her expression relatively neutral all things considered, but she actually pulls Lena into a brief hug after taking the bag from her hands.

“Happy Thanksgiving,” Alex murmurs, releasing her quickly.

“Happy Thanksgiving,” Lena repeats and they nod at each other in some kind of silent understanding. It feels like something’s changed between them, but Lena isn’t sure what it is. Maybe it’s just Alex Danvers in the holiday spirit. Alex pulls the bottle of whiskey out of the bag Lena brought and sends Lena an impressed look before turning to set it in the kitchen. Lena had picked it out with the exclusive goal of trying to make Alex be somewhat less cold, so she thinks she’s done a good job.

Winn comes up next, grinning easily and greeting Lena as if they’re old friends. James is less friendly, but not rude. Shakes her hand and tells her he’s happy she’s here. Mon-El is lounging on the couch with a beer and he waves at Lena, tilting his head in a silent hello. It’s only when she hears a familiar voice that Lena’s nerves ratchet back up to high alert.

Kara’s adoptive mother comes towards her with a delighted smile and Lena cuts a bewildered look in Kara’s direction. She hadn’t known Eliza would be here. Kara has an expression of such feigned innocence that Lena realizes she wasn’t supposed to know. She thinks to put on her serious CEO glare, knowing it would cow Kara a little, but Eliza’s in her space before she can pull it out.

“Lena!” Eliza is exclaiming with a level of enthusiasm Lena’s not prepared for. “It is so good to see you, dear.” Before Lena can say anything in response, Eliza embraces her warmly, pulling Lena into a hug for a long moment.

“Thank you for having me,” Lena says politely when they disengage and Eliza gives her an indulgent smile.

“Oh please, you’re family. I was so happy when Kara told me you’d be joining us. It’s been too long. I guess I hadn’t realized you were in National City at all!”

Lena’s mouth goes a little dry and she looks at Kara again, briefly. She’s not sure how to react, doesn’t know how to process the genuine happiness Eliza is exuding at her presence nor the idea that she’s still considered a member of the Danvers family in some capacity. Of all the reactions she’d expected, this was not one of them. “It’s been a long time,” Lena manages to say, forcing herself to remember how to act normally. She’s stared down Fortune 500 executives with less
nerves. “Good to see you as well.”

“Let me get you a drink,” Eliza says, turning to where Kara is watching them with a look of such longing that Lena has to blink against the heat spiking in the back of her eyes. “Kara, get Lena a drink.”

“I’ll get it,” Alex says, an amused expression on her face when she looks at Lena. Better than displeasure, Lena thinks. On her way to the wine that looks half drunk already, Alex bumps into Kara solidly, and Kara startles from her staring, nearly knocking over her trash can.

“I did not,” Kara says, adjusting her glasses and then pushing them up her forehead. “I did not see that there.”

It makes Lena laugh, and Kara is laughing sheepishly too, and then they’re just staring at each other, smiling.

Eliza clears her throat, and Kara startles again, bumping backwards and towards her sister, who she begins vigorously whispering at while Alex laughs. Lena is left blushing, trying not to acknowledge that she just stared at her ex-girlfriend in front of her adoptive mom. But Eliza just smiles gently, clearly and obviously happy, because she runs a final warm palm down Lena’s arm, squeezing companionably before letting her go and turning back to the massive spread of food on Kara’s kitchen counter.

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“I met someone,” Lena tells her brother over the phone, the words just above a whisper and her hand shaking where it’s playing with a pen on her desk. Her dorm room is quiet and uncharacteristically devoid of her alien girlfriend. She’s not sure what possessed her to call her older brother and divulge details about her love life, but here she is, waiting for Lex to respond.

There’s silence for a bit before Lex chuckles. “Mom won’t like that,” he says, but it comes out mostly teasing. “She has plans for you after all.”

Lena rolls her eyes even though her brother can’t see it. “Stop. I get that enough from her.”

Lex laughs again and it makes Lena smile. “I’m happy for you, Lee. What’s she like?”

“How do you know it’s a she?”

“Oh, please,” Lex says and Lena feels her cheeks warm. “Remember who you’re talking to.”

On a deep breath, Lena looks at the cork-board over her desk and spots a picture of her and Kara from Halloween. “She’s…” Words appropriate to describe Kara to her brother fail her. “She’s special.”

“Must be if she’s caught your eye,” Lex says and Lena feels a wave of affection for her older brother. It’s the first time she’s told anyone about Kara, anyone important at least and it feels good, like there’s something more real now about her relationship even though they’ve been together for months.

“I want you to meet her,” Lena replies, eyes on the way Kara’s grinning at Lena in the picture, the casual way Lena’s sitting on her lap holding a blue plastic cup and leaning into Kara’s forehead. Kara’s hand is just short of inappropriately high on Lena’s thigh and Lena’s got a free hand clutching long locks of Kara’s hair. Lena didn’t even realize her face could make that kind of happy expression until Kara showed her the photo.
“Well I have to meet her if you’re serious about her,” Lex says with an obvious smile in his tone. “Who else is going to make sure she’s good to my baby sister?”

“She’s good to me,” Lena counters genuinely, thinking of how Kara waited outside Lena’s 8AM lab just the other day for the sole purpose of giving Lena coffee.

It makes Lex laugh again. “I’m glad, Lee. Really.”

Lena smiles, relaxes back into her desk chair. “Thanks,” she sighs.

“Now, tell me about that bot you’re building for Robot Wars this year so I can tell you what you’re doing wrong and fix it for you.”

This time Lena laughs even as she shakes her head. “Says the guy who couldn’t beat my minibot three battles running.”

“I let you win,” Lex argues, but he’s laughing too and Lena sinks into the contented feeling that surrounds her.

--

It’s only when Alex has finally handed her a glass of wine and steered her towards the living room where the boys have congregated that Lena has a chance to actually look around Kara’s apartment.

She immediately wishes she hadn’t.

Where Lena’s apartment is relatively spartan, clean and mostly devoid of personal effects like pictures, Kara’s is full of life, full of personality. It’s intimate in a way Lena isn’t used to. She hasn’t been around it since college.

And the worst of it? Lena can see herself in far too much of it. Their relationship is everywhere in a subtle way that she’s sure no one but she can notice.

There aren’t pictures of the two of them - Lena idly wonders if Kara actually has any still - but there’s a picture of their bench from college sitting on a side table. To most people it’d look like a generic picture of a pretty setting. But Lena recognizes the tree immediately and nearly chokes when she realizes it’s a picture of the bench they used to sit on, on long nights when Kara had nightmares and Lena would take Kara out to look at the stars, or when they picked up ice cream and would watch squirrels dart across the courtyard.

On the couch, Lena spots a throw blanket that she hasn’t seen in four years. The last she remembers it sat at the end of her small dorm room bed and Lena can almost picture a younger version of herself and Kara snuggled underneath it. Her fingers itch to grab at it and pull it to her face, see if it still smells the same, feels the same.

It takes about every ounce of strength in her body to sit on an armchair and keep her face from reacting. She forces herself not to look at anything else in too much detail. Out of the corner of her eye she’s already caught the sight of a stack of books she knows Kara’s never read. She can’t imagine Kara has much use for owning The Telemore Effect nor The Cosmic Serpent. The memory of Kara scanning Lena’s bookshelf with an absent look of boredom and distaste comes to mind as she recognizes each title sitting there.

Which is about when Kara catches her eye from where she’s standing in the kitchen next to Eliza, the two of them preparing a turkey for the oven. The look on Kara’s face makes Lena think maybe Kara knows exactly what Lena is thinking and for a second Lena thinks Kara might come over to
her. Just the thought of it squeezes her throat a little and she shakes her head subtly at Kara, silently telling her to stay put. Kara tilts her head to the side, looking like she might just ignore Lena’s warning.

Thankfully, she’s saved by Winn who plops down on the couch opposite her, next to Mon-El, who has his eyes trained on the television - a football game plays quietly from the screen.

“So Lena, no Luthor Family Thanksgiving this year?”

The question startles her and brow furrowed, she shoots Winn a bewildered look. He’s grinning, however, in a way she thinks is meant to be teasing. “No,” Lena says slowly, twisting her wine glass around in her hand. “Finding out my mother might actually be a genocidal maniac like my brother kind of puts a damper on the mood.”

It comes out before Lena can stop it and she feels her eyes go wide. It’s probably way too honest and not funny at all for this group. She’s not even sure Kara’s told the rest of them about Lillian, but she must have, because Winn laughs loudly. James just shakes his head and drinks his beer, leaning back in his chair. Mon-El mostly looks confused.

“Yeah,” Winn says, “I know all about homicidal family members, trust me.” Lena arches an eyebrow in question and he adds, “My old man is the, ah, Toyman.”

“Oh,” Lena says with a note of surprise, remembering those old stories. “I’m sorry.”

Winn shrugs. “Hey, it happened. I’m getting over it. Kara’s helped a lot with that, actually.”

A rush of pride spills through her, as it always had when people said good things about Kara - not that people said bad things about her often.

Kara appears with a tray of appetizers and she sets them down on the coffee table between them all with a wide smile. “Anyone need another drink?”

A chorus of no and I’m good resounds in reply, but Kara doesn’t turn to move right away, she sends a look to Lena, one that clearly conveys you okay? and Lena puts on as good a smile as she can manage just to reassure her. It seems to work and Kara turns back, bouncing away towards the kitchen.

“Is Kara mated to someone?” Lena hears from the couch and she chokes a little on the wine she had been sipping on. Mon-El has directed the question to James and Winn, who are looking about as befuddled by it as Lena feels.

“Say what?” James asks, looking like he wants to laugh.

“Well on Daxam, we have arranged marriages at birth and when you reach a certain age, you’re mated,” he explains. “I think on Krypton they did something similar.”

Lena’s stomach turns over a little when she realizes why Mon-El would be asking such a thing about Kara, his eyes tracking her movements in the kitchen. It reminds her of Kara’s similar line of questioning years ago, but she can’t feel any affection for the recollection in this moment. Not when it’s Mon-El doing the asking.

“On Earth, we call it getting hitched,” Winn says and Lena just takes a gulp of her wine, wondering how rude it would be if she just got up and walked away from this personal hell. Of course, she’d just be wandering into the kitchen with the Danvers family, and that’s another can of worms. “And you pretty much choose your husband or wife. Or, I guess, your mate.”
The answer clearly pleases Mon-El and if she wasn’t positive it would break her hand, she would punch him in the face. It’s silly and possessive over something she gave up a long time ago, but the urge is still hovering inside of her.

Alex walks up to the conversation, toting a glass of what seems to be just whiskey, just as Mon-El asks, “Has Kara chosen?”

“Chosen what?” Alex asks, handing James another beer before sitting down on the arm of his chair.

“A mate,” Mon-El answers and Alex pulls such a disgusted face so quickly that something unravels inside Lena, makes her want to laugh.

Except, Alex answers, “Yes,” with such finality that Lena’s gut just clenches again, chest uncomfortably tight.

Mon-El looks only slightly defeated by the response, but James and Winn just look at Alex with confusion.

“Hey!” Kara calls out from the kitchen and the whole of them startle a bit at the sound. When Lena turns Kara is looking at them with confusion, wiping her hands on a towel while Eliza fiddles with the oven. “Can someone set the table?”

Mon-El gets up immediately with a wide grin that Kara returns. “I’d love to,” he says and walks over to where a stack of plates is waiting for him. Kara starts singing something in Kryptonian that Lena thinks she might have heard before, bouncing over to the kitchen and grabbing utensils.

James looks up at Alex with an amused smile playing at his lips. “Not liking our resident Daxamite going sweet on your baby sister?”

Alex just blinks at him, takes a casual sip of her drink. “I don’t care,” she replies with a shrug.

Winn laughs and tips his beer in Alex’s direction. “You told him Kara is mated,” he says with a disbelieving smile. “Or has chosen a mate or whatever. Seems like you care.”

“I know what I said,” Alex says plainly and Lena glances to where Kara is giving instructions to Mon-El. She wonders if Kara can hear them, but considering Kara hasn’t so much looked in their direction, she thinks perhaps not.

“Why would you tell him Kara’s chosen a mate if you weren’t just trying to throw him off her scent?” Winn asks with a chuckle.

“I told him that,” Alex replies with that deadpan way she has. “Because it’s the truth.”

Both Winn and James look taken aback by that answer, their jaws dropping open and closed in silent disbelief and Lena feels like she needs to calm the sudden racing of her heart. She’s sure Kara is going to pick up on it at any minute and come over to see what’s wrong.

Alex stands up before anyone can say anything else, but she shoots a smirk at Lena before she does. It does exactly nothing to help her calm down.

“What did she mean by that?” Winn asks, clearly puzzled, but James is looking at her with the same scrutiny he had at the bar last week. “I mean, it’s not one of us, right? I think she was pretty clear about us.”
James pushes his lips together, turning his gaze from Lena to Winn. “No, I don’t think she meant one of us. She’s never even mentioned Kryptonian mating.”

Winn shrugs, leans further into the couch and takes a petulant sip of his beer. “Well you got further than me, so who knows.”

It’s confirmation of something Lena had already suspected, but it still takes a little breath out of her. She and James lock eyes in a moment of silent understanding. It’s odd to realize that every single person in this apartment aside from Alex and Eliza has had or does have a romantic interest in Kara. It’s something Lena’s never experienced before, at least not without the security of being Kara’s girlfriend.

“Whatever even happened between you two? I feel like we were all caught up with the other Supes being in town, I never got to ask,” Winn says casually, glancing every so often at the football game. The timeline has started to coalesce in her mind, and now she’s catching up to the staring and suspicion that James has been treating her with since they met.

“We decided we’re better off as friends,” James answers, still looking at Lena. She looks away, tries to focus on the football game herself, tries to calm down a little. This time, she’s saved by Mon-El returning, though it doesn’t entirely feel like a save necessarily and he plops down next to Winn, plucking the beer out of his hand and taking a long sip.

“I still don’t understand the rules of this game,” he comments, watching as the team on TV celebrates a touchdown.

James and Winn both start to explain the game, but Lena tunes them out, focuses on stopping the sudden racing of her heart. The next thing she’s really aware of is a body sitting on the arm of her chair and Kara looking down at her with obvious concern. Lena jumps a little, swallows against the thick feeling in her throat and smiles up at her ex-girlfriend. Absently, she hears Winn trying to explain what a two point conversion is to Mon-El.

“You okay?” Kara asks softly. It’s hard not to imagine a world in which Lena would answer that question with a soft smile and a quick kiss. There’s something possessive deep inside her that wants to wrap her hand Kara’s neck and put their lips together in front of all the boys in the room. It’s a guilty feeling and one Lena does her best not to have, but the desire is so strong her fingers ache from restraining herself. The worst part is knowing that Kara would be happy to participate. Kara’s looking at her with searching blue eyes and worry and Lena realizes she hasn’t actually answered her question.

“Yeah,” she says with a quick nod and a small smile. Kara looks unconvinced and Lena’s positive it’s because she can hear the rapid thumping of her heart. She puts a hand on Kara’s knee without thinking about it and adds, “I promise.”

Kara’s hand arrives atop hers, her index finger diving beneath some of Lena’s own fingers, and it does nothing to quell the want Lena feels pooling in her stomach. They stare at each other for a longer-than-appropriate moment and Lena’s sure that her face is telegraphing her every thought and emotion, but the spell gets broken by the loud sound of Winn groaning in pain.

When they look up, Kara’s friend is hunched over his hand, Mon-El watching him warily and James trying not to laugh (and failing).

“We’ll work on that,” Winn wheezes out, clearly in pain.
“What did you do?” Kara asks with concern. Her hand is still weaving with Lena’s, playing with her fingers with a clear absent-mindedness. Kara had always been like this, had always touched Lena with such open and unthinking care.

“High-five?” Mon-El says with a tone of question, holding his hand in the air cautiously.

Lena laughs.

“Kara, that’s heavy,” Lena hisses in warning as she watches her girlfriend pick up her robot from the back of the car, her keys dangling from her hand. Kara is wearing Lena’s engineering department sweatshirt, giving no care at all to appearing like she isn’t an alien.

“No it’s not,” Kara replies dismissively. The robot is small for its power and purpose, but it still weighs 115 pounds.

“Yes, it is,” Lena insists, trying to get Kara to understand what she’s saying. With a glance over her shoulder to make sure no one is watching, she drops her voice to a whisper. “You need to at least act like it is.”

Kara seems to understand then, looking behind them as well towards the stream of people walking into the arena. “Right, yeah. Super heavy,” she says suddenly making an exaggerated face as she pretends to struggle with the weight.

“Kara,” she laughs, rolling her eyes. “Darling, I love you, but you’re hopeless.”

Kara just shrugs, but her eyes light up the way they always do when Lena says things like I love you. “I still think you should call this guy raogrhy,” she comments, setting the robot on the nearby cart Lena had procured.

“And how would I explain where I got that name?” Lena asks, making sure the robot survived the ride over from campus. It’s a sleek little thing, but it’s been her pride and joy for the past few weeks.

Kara shrugs, picks up Lena’s tool bag from the back seat and slings it over her shoulder, forgetting to look hurt when it smacks into her back, though Lena winces for her. “You made it up?”

“Mockingbird is fine,” she says, brushing past Kara to reach into the back seat and grab the controller she had spent two whole days wiring together.

“You named it after a bird,” Kara complains. “Not exactly the scariest of beings on earth.”

“You’ve clearly never seen the movie The Birds,” Lena says dryly, locking the car and following Kara as her girlfriend begins pushes the cart towards the building. A couple of kids stare at the shiny outer surface of the robot, making excited noises.

“I’m just saying that if I was betting on a fight between like... DestructoBot and Mockingbird, I know which one I’d choose,” Kara says, reaching behind her and wiggling her fingers for Lena to grab her hand. She does, lets Kara pull her a little closer.

“Names aren’t everything.” Lena argues, rolling her eyes and lacing their fingers together.

They’re just at the door when she hears a voice call out her name from behind her. They both turn
to see her older brother striding towards them with confident steps, a charming smile on his face and a Midway City Robotics Club sweatshirt and hat. Lena brightens when she sees him, letting go of Kara’s hand to rush back and hug him.

“What are you doing here? I thought you were in London!” Lena says, laughing when he picks her up a little off the ground and swings her back and forth.

“I wasn’t going to miss the finals,” Lex replies, setting her back down and shooting a glance over her shoulder to where Lena knows Kara is standing. “That her?” Lex stage whispers.

“Yes,” Lena says pointedly with a look of warning for her brother. “Be nice.”

He mocks offense at that. “I’m always nice,” he says stepping around her to introduce himself to Kara.

“You must be the girl,” he says, extending his hand.

Kara takes it in her own and Lena sends up a silent prayer that Kara remembered the exact amount of pressure needed for a handshake to feel human. “I am a girl,” Kara answers, with some confusion written across her features, and Lena sends her eyes up to the sky for a moment.

“Kara,” Lena provides for Lex, stepping up next to them. “Kara, this is my brother, Lex.”

“Oh!” Kara says with a sudden smile. “Lena talks about you all the time.”

“All terrible things I hope,” Lex says with patented Luthor charm. Lena shoves his shoulder, but he keeps grinning.

“Nice to meet you,” Kara says happily and Lena moves to stand next to her, twining their fingers back together and facing Lex.

Lex watches it happen, grins knowingly at Lena and shoots her wink. “We can do the real meeting of the minds later,” he says, reaching out to touch them both on a shoulder. “Let’s get this robot inside and watch my sister destroy those peasants from Hub City.”

After Mockingbird sends the opponent’s robot so high into the air that it sends out sparks when it lands, she gets smashed into the plexiglass boards surrounding the arena. Her brother’s hug is exuberant and it thrills her to know he’s proud of something she’s built. When Kara joins the hug, gently steering them off the rattling boards, she smiles at Lena so brightly that Lena thinks she’s never been happier, sandwiched between the two most important people in her life.

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Dinner starts off fine for the most part. Until James gets up to give a toast and Alex all but berates him, sipping heavily from what Lena knows is her fourth glass of wine. It’s an odd exchange. James is only halfway through telling everyone how grateful he is for how understanding a friend Kara can be when Alex shuts him up with a no she’s not.

Kara and Lena send matching looks of confusion towards Alex, who merely glares up at James and keeps drinking. Mon-El interrupts them both and stands, clearly about to make a speech of his own. Lena’s sure she doesn’t want to hear whatever he has to say, but Kara’s bumping her shoulder from where she’s sitting next to her and it helps a little.

“Out of everybody that could have found me in that pod,” he says, smiling at Kara charmingly. “I’m the luckiest guy in the world that it was you.”
Kara laughs a little, bowing her head sheepishly as she often does when being given a compliment and Lena hates how flirty it suddenly feels. The crush he’s developed on Kara is painfully obvious, but who is Lena to blame him? She wonders if this was how she used to act when she and Kara were merely friends and Lena spent most of her time trying to ignore the growing attraction she felt for the other girl.

Before she can process anything else, Alex is standing, only slightly unsteady on her feet and looking uncharacteristically nervous. Lena watches with some concern as Alex fumbles her way through what she’s thankful for and by the time Lena’s realized oh wow Alex is about to come out they’re suddenly interrupted by a massive anomaly bursting out of thin air above their dinner table.

They all jump to their feet, backward and away from the table, chairs falling over and screeching against the floor. Kara grabs Lena’s arm immediately and tugs her until Kara’s body is between Lena and whatever thing is hovering in the air above the table.

But then, just like that, it’s gone with a pop and a rush of air.

“Does that normally happen? On Thanksgiving?” Mon-El asks. It’s such a funny question that Lena snorts, and Winn, across from her and Kara, also laughs.

Kara’s gaping at the space previously occupied by the blue cloud-like thing, but she doesn’t look worried. In fact, if Lena had to categorize Kara’s expression she looks excited. “Do you know what that was?” Lena asks softly and Kara quickly hides her growing smile when she looks over at Lena.

With a shrug, Kara hums noncommittally. “Not sure,” she answers, but there’s a look in her eye that Lena thinks means I’ll tell you later.

“What the hell?” James exclaims and Lena catches sight of Alex reaching around to her back as if to grab for a weapon.

“I think we’re fine,” Kara says, arms spread wide to calm everyone down. It takes a moment, but everyone does seem to settle, slowly moving back towards the chairs and retaking their seats.

“Well that was interesting,” Eliza says with a laugh. “Never a dull moment in National City.”

The table laughs and a noticeable ease falls back over them.

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Later, when they’re appropriately stuffed and after Lena plays so intentionally poorly at Monopoly that Alex wins, Kara walks Lena out of the apartment and towards a waiting town car.

“Thank you for having me,” Lena says with a smile. Despite the emotional rollercoaster she seems to be constantly riding on whenever she’s around Kara, the day had been pleasant. Normal even. There’s a contented feeling growing in her stomach that not even the looming threat of her mother can trample on.


“It was fun,” she says and Kara practically glows in response.

“Better than dinner at your desk?”

“Infinitely,” Lena agrees with a warm smile.
They idle around each other for a moment, halted on the sidewalk outside Kara’s building. Lena gives a look to her driver who’s leaning up against the black car and he nods in response, opening the car door and sliding inside to start the engine.

“Lena,” Kara says with a hint of nervousness. “I have to ask.”

Lena’s brow furrows, but she keeps smiling. “Sure, what is it?”

“Did you find it?”

“Did I find what?”

Kara fidgets, adjusts her glasses. “The watch.”

Without thinking of it, Lena pulls her purse higher onto her shoulder, all too aware of its contents. Her smile fades a little. “I did, actually,” she asks, clearing her throat slightly.

A wave of relief seems to wash over Kara and she smiles a little crookedly. “Good.”

It reminds Lena of why Kara had asked her about the watch in the first place and she fidgets a little with the strap of her purse. “I think I have an idea as to what to do about my mother.”

Kara frowns, hands at her hips. “You don’t need to do anything.”

“She took your blood, Kara,” Lena argues. “And you don’t know why.”

“She’s dangerous,” Kara warns lowly. “Don’t do anything stupid.”

“I just want to talk to her. See if she’ll tell me anything.”

“She’s not going to tell you anything, Lena. Do not seek her out. If she gets wind that we know-”

“Kara it’s my mom. She’s not going to attack me. Certainly not in the middle of L Corp Tower.”

“We don’t know what she’ll do,” Kara snaps, anger evident in her expression. Lena bristles a little, conflicted between the warm feeling of Kara wanting protect her and her natural aversion towards being told what to do. “Promise me you won’t go trying to find her.”

Lena rolls her eyes and scoffs. “Kara,” she says, drawing the name out in warning.

But Kara just repeats herself. “Promise,” she demands.

“I’m not promising that,” Lena says with a shake of her head and Kara’s lips go thin with displeasure.

“I’m not trying to tell you what to do,” Kara starts slowly and Lena laughs again.

“That is exactly what you are trying to do,” Lena grits out heatedly, fist clenching.

“I’m trying to protect you,” Kara exclaims in an angry hiss.

“It’s hardly necessary in this instance,” Lena tells her with exasperation. “All I’m suggesting is having a conversation with my mother in broad daylight in my office.”

Kara’s entire posture is rife with tension and Lena feels an instinctive need to soothe it. This time, she doesn’t fight it. Instead, she steps into Kara’s personal space and puts a hand on the other girl’s
bicep, smiling a little when Kara relaxes into the contact. “I have the watch,” Lena says softly, searching worried blue eyes. “If I need you, you’ll know.”

“Promise you’ll use it,” Kara says, putting her hand on Lena’s hip. The warmth of it shoots across Lena’s skin and memories of all the times Kara’s had her hand there before, tracing across bare skin or pulling her closer in bed bursts into her consciousness. Her throat grows thick quickly and she just nods, stepping away from Kara to break their contact. They’re still close, but no longer touching and Lena feels like she can breathe again.

“I promise.”

“You haven’t before,” Kara replies quietly, looking almost distraught.

“I haven’t had a reason to use it before,” Lena answers, struggling to ignore the look of pain in Kara’s features. It’s not a whole truth, but Lena doesn’t know what else to say.

“I would have come even if you didn’t have a reason,” Kara whispers, turning the conversation in another emotional tailspin. Lena wants to tell her about all the times she almost did press that button. But the specter of her mother’s recent ascent to terrorism reminds her of why she’s been so insistent on being friends with Kara - there’s too much going on in their lives, too much of a mess between them. No matter how much Lena wants to reach up and fold herself into Kara’s arms. The moment feels too dark, out of sync with the happy feelings of earlier and Lena is desperate to cut through it all. With little regard for consequences, ignoring for just one moment the reminders flitting through her head, she steps back into Kara’s circle and leans up to press a warm kiss to Kara’s cheek. “Happy Thanksgiving,” she murmurs before moving away quickly, unwilling to see Kara’s reaction.

“Happy Thanksgiving,” is all she hears from behind her when she slides into the backseat of her car. As they drive way she can’t help but catch the way Kara’s still standing on the sidewalk with a dumbstruck kind of expression, her hand at her cheek.

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The next day, before she goes to work, she slides a watch on her wrist that she hasn’t worn in years. The knowledge of the inscription pressing against her skin burns through her and she’s hyper aware of it the entire day.

Thoughts of Kara run through her mind on repeat.

It’s not long before she’s thinking about her mother, about all Kara had told her and Lena feels lost in a swirl of betrayal. Maybe they never had the best mother-daughter relationship, but to think her mother has gone this far into the deep end...it’s as equally hard to believe as it is easy. Why wouldn’t her mother follow in her beloved son’s footsteps?

If she can just talk to her mother, maybe she can stop this insanity before it goes too far, before people get hurt and yet another Luthor makes front page news for trying to rule the world. Before there’s another Super bruised and battered on the cover of every newspaper and magazine in the world.

A voice in the back of her head reminds her that she tried to talk Lex off the ledge too to no avail. Some people are just bad.

Despite that knowledge, that deep seated belief that you can’t save everyone from their own evil, Lena has her assistant contact her mother that afternoon with a request to meet at her earliest
convenience.

A frost seems to cover the room as soon as Lillian waltzes into it, setting her bag down on one of Lena’s office chairs and going straight for the liquor cart on the side wall. Lena watches as her mother inspects the bottle of wine there, turning her nose up in distaste. It’s oddly comforting. For a moment she can pretend this is all her mother is - a woman that’s always made her feel like a disappointment. Not some mad super villain hell bent on wiping out the alien population of National City and then the world.

“So,” Lillian starts, smirking at Lena from across her desk. “To what do I owe the pleasure for being summoned to L Corp?” She says L Corp like it’s a dirty word and Lena tries not to react. “Planning on apologizing for our last meeting?”

Lena returns her mother’s smirk, remembers all the lessons she’s had about not being intimidated by anyone. “I have nothing to apologize for,” Lena says simply.

Her mother’s lips thin in distaste and Lena’s uninterested in running circles around each other for the next few minutes. She stands and moves around her desk to face her mother.

“Let me ask you something, Mom,” she starts, crossing her arms over her chest and watching her mother’s face for a reaction. “What the hell are you up to?”

It’s a vague question, but her mother does indeed react to it, her face screwing up into what Lena’s sure is meant to be shock and innocence, but merely comes across as irritation. “We’ve hardly spoken since Lex’s trial,” her mother says and Lena feels a stab of pain at the memory of that specific meeting. “I thought maybe you called to make amends. It’s a holiday, after all.”

Lena tries not to laugh. “There have been some rumors,” she says, thinking of how to formulate this without incriminating Kara. “A reporter has been sniffing around and they know something about you. What is it?”

“Lena,” her mother drawls in that condescending way she has.

“You’re up to something. They seem to have information on you and whatever it is. Something incriminating I’m guessing.”

Lillian scoffs. “I won’t stand here and be attacked like this by my own daughter.”

“I’m not your real daughter,” Lena says, digging her nails into her bicep. Absently, she’s aware of the weight of the watch on her wrist, takes comfort from it. “Or so you never let me forget.”

“You may be adopted, Lena, but I do love you. In my own way.”

It burns over Lena unpleasantly. Her mother has never really been able to get out an I love you and have it sound genuine or true. “But not as much as you love Lex.”

Her mother shrugs, completely unaffected by the accusation. “Every parent has favorites. Anyone that says differently is kidding themselves. It doesn’t mean I don’t love you.”

Lena’s eyes narrow, seeing now the truth of what Kara had said. It’s there in the barely perceptible crinkle around Lillian’s eyes, the clenching of her fingers and the almost angry set to her jaw. “What have you done, Mother?”
“I have no idea what you mean.”

“You’re lying,” Lena accuses with a smile.

“You have no way of knowing that.”

“Yes I do,” Lena says coldly, feeling a new kind of distance between her mother that hadn’t been there before. The lines drawn between them solidify as the seconds tick by. “You told me you love me,” she says with a wry smile. “Which we both know isn’t true. And you only say it when you need something from me. So what is it, Mother? What are you gunning for? What could you possibly need from your youngest adopted daughter?”

Her mother’s eyes go hard at that, withdrawn and her chin lifts haughtily. “Don’t concern yourself with things you’ll never understand.”

“So there is something?” Lillian’s eyes flicker around the room as Lena asks it and Lena thinks to follow the motion, wonders if there’s something in her office that would give her mother away, something she’s looking for.

Silence fills the room and her mother just smirks at her with a short shake of her head. “I hope you had a happy Thanksgiving, Lena,” her mother says, managing to make it sound as insincere as possible before turning on her heel and waltzing back out of the office.

Fiddling with the watch on her wrist, Lena watches her exit and blows out a low breath.

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The attack on the alien bar breaks on the news that afternoon and Lena watches it in her office in horror. Her thoughts go immediately to Kara and by that afternoon when a death count scrawl appears at the bottom of her TV screen, Lena’s calling her before she can even think about it.

“I’m okay,” Kara opens with as soon as the line connects and Lena sags in relief.

“I’m glad,” she murmurs, pressing a hand over her eyes and taking a deep breath. “Do you know what it was? Who?”

There’s silence over the line that puts a pit in the well of Lena’s stomach. “Kara?” she says when the other girl continues not to respond.

“Are you at work?”

“Yes,” Lena responds, spinning her chair around until she’s facing the expanse of windows leading out to her balcony. Her eyes roam the skyline. “Why?”

“I’m coming to get you,” is all Kara says before the line cuts out. It’s only a matter of seconds before a red and blue blur shows up at the far end of the city, zooming straight for L Corp.

When Kara lands on her balcony, Lena’s already at the door, opening it to usher the girl inside. Kara walks in, hands on her hips and looks at Lena with a nervous flickering of her eyes.

“Are you actually okay?” Lena asks, reaching out to circle her fingers around Kara’s wrist.

Kara’s gaze shoots down to the touch and her whole body goes suddenly rigid. As soon as Lena notices she moves to release Kara, but her hand is grabbed, pulled up into Kara’s eyeline. “You’re wearing it,” Kara breathes almost reverently and Lena realizes what she’s talking about then, both
of them staring at the gold watch on her wrist.

“Yeah,” is all Lena can think to say. Everything feels overly significant then. Kara’s eyes look wide and watery and Lena’s wrist burns under the scrutiny of her gaze.

“I’m glad,” Kara says, and then as if realizing she’s about to cry over a piece of jewelry, she lets go of Lena’s hand and steps back, laughing a little. It sounds off, but Lena allows it, smiling in response.

“So what’s wrong? What couldn’t you tell me on the phone?”

“Oh, yeah, sorry,” Kara says, shaking her head for a moment. “Let’s go.”

Kara moves as if to scoop Lena into her arms and Lena takes a step backward immediately, her hand out. “Wait, what?”

“Let’s go,” Kara repeats, waving her hand to beckon Lena closer and Lena just shoots her an incredulous look.

“Why don’t we start with where we’re going?”

Kara looks appropriately sheepish after that. “Right, totally. The DEO.”

“The DEO?”

“Department of Extra-Normal Operations.”

Lena blinks, tries to fill in all the blanks. “Which is...?”

“I work there,” Kara explains before shrugging a shoulder. “Well I guess Supergirl works there.”

“Okay,” Lena draws out, trying to convey her confusion.

“And it’s time to bring you in.”

“Bring me in?” Lena asks because it sounds suspiciously like she’s under investigation. Kara must catch her tone.

“Not like that,” she says bringing her hands up to reassure. “The attack on the alien bar was some sort of chemical weapon that killed every single alien in there.” Lena’s stomach turns over with thoughts of her mother. “Mon-El was there.”

“Is he...”

Kara looks away. “No, but he’s not doing very well.”

“What does this have to do with me?”

“You’re a genius, Lena. And you have a background in biology and chemistry and...”

“And anti-alien warfare,” Lena adds dryly.

“No,” Kara denies, but Lena imagines that has to be part of it. Has accepted it in some way.

“So you want to bring me into the DEO because...”

“Because I think you could help us,” Kara says, hands out to her sides in an open pose. “And
because I’d feel better if everyone I cared about was in one place right now.”

Resigned to the determined look in Kara’s eye, Lena sighs. “Can I at least pack my stuff up?”

It reminds her of many a conversation in college when Kara would come to collect her from whatever mountain of work she’d been hiding in, and Kara must be thinking of the same thing because she smiles crookedly when she answers, “Of course.”

A few minutes later Lena’s packed up her computer, shut down her operating terminal and informed her assistant that she’s taking the afternoon off. Kara’s leaned up against her balcony door, ankles crossed while she plays on her phone and it’s such an odd image to see. The red and blue of her suit is the most vibrant looking thing in the office. Kara’s got her brow scrunched up while she looks down at her phone, swiping her thumb idly.

“Everything okay?” Lena says when she steps forward, bag held in front of her.

Kara jumps a little, covering her phone. “Yeah. You ready?”

Lena nods even as her chest flutters a little at the idea of being close to Kara again. “We could drive,” she offers, if only to avoid the weak feeling she gets just thinking about Kara lifting her up off the ground.

“It’s a secret government operation, Lena,” Kara jokes. “You can’t just drive up.”

“Right,” Lena laughs, fingers tightening on the straps of her bag.

“I’ll be fast,” Kara murmurs, before stepping forward, arms held out.

Lena takes a deep breath and smiles, reminds herself that this is just Kara and she’s been held like this a million times. It’s not that big of a deal.

Except she gets that same swoop in her stomach the minute Kara slides her arm under her knees and scoops her off the ground. With one hand she holds tightly to her bag, the other winding around Kara’s neck.

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It amazes Lena on a consistent basis that a girl capable of crushing cement blocks in her fist like it’s nothing is somehow one of the most gentle people she’s ever met. It’s one of Kara’s more impressive qualities really, but right now it’s working against Lena instead of for her.

They’ve been dating for months and it’s been going great and Lena is especially a fan of all the kissing that it’s added to their relationship, but every time she thinks anything is going anywhere Kara is pulling away suddenly and making up excuses for being anywhere else apart from around Lena.

It’s not unlike the careful way Kara avoided kissing her the first time and Lena knows she’s the one that has to confront the issue if anything is going to change. Maybe Kara’s not interested in anything more than kissing, maybe she’s wildly insecure about what to do, maybe sex just isn’t a thing on Krypton. Whatever it is, Lena doesn’t care, but she does want to know.

They’re in Lena’s dorm room, on her full size bed, with a movie playing like white noise in the background. Lena’s straddled over Kara’s hips, and they’re kissing heatedly. The moment feels rife with intention and Lena can’t stop pressing down against Kara’s lap, hoping this is the one time Kara doesn’t stop them.
Strong arms wrap around Lena’s waist, keeping them close together, and Lena smiles into Kara’s kisses, biting softly at her lower lip and tangling her fingers in long sandy blonde hair. Kara makes a content noise, her palms sliding under Lena’s shirt and against the overheated skin of her back.

Everything is going fine. Lena’s lost in the sensation of Kara pulling her in closer and the need to feel bare skin against bare skin threatens to consume her. She pulls back suddenly and without pause pulls her shirt over her head, tossing it to the side. Just as she moves back in to continue kissing her girlfriend, Kara is wrenching away, her eyes squeezing shut and hands stilling on Lena’s back before moving off to rest against the bed beside her.

The heat of the moment before seems to come to a standstill and Lena feels derailed by the reaction. Kara looks like she might throw Lena off her lap at any moment and Lena’s desperate to root out of the source of this behavior, confront it once and for all. She reaches out to pull at Kara’s chin in an attempt to stay close together.

“Hey, hey,” Lena whispers, holding Kara’s face in her hands, their foreheads pressed together. “What’s wrong?”

Kara’s breathing way too quickly for someone that doesn’t actually need a steady intake of oxygen and her fists are clenched like stone against the mattress. “I just need a second.”

“Kara,” Lena says softly, soothing Kara with soft strokes of her thumbs. “Talk to me, sweetheart.”

“I’m fine,” Kara replies, but her eyes are closed tight and there’s tension everywhere.

“You’re not fine,” Lena counters, pulling back to look at Kara. She moves her hands to card fingers through Kara’s hair in an attempt to get her to calm down. “Talk to me,” she repeats.

Taking in a heavy breath, Kara opens her eyes, responding to the gentle strokes of Lena’s fingers. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. Just explain.”

Kara looks lost as she looks up into Lena’s eyes, but her fists unclench and she puts warm hands on Lena’s hips. “Did you know I dislocated Alex’s shoulder once when we were younger?”

It’s seemingly a random anecdote and it takes Lena a moment to respond. “No, I didn’t.”

Kara hums, nods a little, her thumbs stroking at the skin of Lena’s hip just above her waistband. “We were just messing around and I guess I just like-” she swallows visibly and looks away for a moment. “I forgot about the fact that I have crazy strength and I wrenched her arm out of her socket. It’s a wonder I didn’t break it.”

“That sounds scary,” Lena comments, her hands moving to rest against Kara’s chest. The heart under her palms is thudding heavily in way Lena’s not sure she’s ever felt.

“It was,” Kara agrees.

It takes her a moment to connect the dots. “You’re afraid of hurting me,” Lena whispers sadly, sagging in Kara’s lap.

Kara nods, eyes watery. “Sometimes when we’re kissing I feel like I get so lost in it and - and I - I just -”

“I get it,” Lena soothes, cupping Kara’s cheeks again and swiping her thumb over Kara’s bottom
“I get it.”

“It’s not that I don’t want to...you know,” Kara says with wide eyes, and Lena laughs.

“I didn’t think so,” she replies, eyebrow arching at the feeling of Kara’s hands sliding around towards her backside.

“I don’t know what to do.”

Lena shakes her head, feeling a little lost herself. “We’ll just - we’ll go slow,” Lena says and Kara looks all ready to protest. “Trust yourself. If it gets too much we can take a break.”

“Lena,” Kara sighs, looking so defeated that Lena’s heart aches.

“Kara, it’s okay,” she says. “Let’s just try. And if it doesn’t work, it doesn’t work, okay?”

Kara bites at her lip, a sad crinkling around her eyes. “If it doesn’t work-”

“It’s okay, Kara,” Lena tells her in the most gentle voice she can manage. “This isn’t a dealbreaker for me.”

“I want it to work,” Kara says in a quiet voice that Lena melts towards. “I want you.”

“You have me,” Lena reassures her, smiling. “With or without this.”

“I want this,” Kara replies firmly.

“Then let’s try,” she whispers, pecking Kara on the lips softly. She keeps her kisses quick, just soft pressure to try and relax Kara, bring them back to the heat of earlier. “I know you would never hurt me on purpose, Kara,” she says between kisses. “Let yourself try.”

“Okay,” Kara says with a nod.

Smiling, Lena kisses her more solidly this time, pressing her chest in close and tangling her hands in Kara’s hair like they were before.

Something must have switched in Kara’s brain, because the next thing Lena is aware of she’s being flipped over, her back hitting the mattress with a soft whoosh of air and Kara pushing in between her thighs comfortably, a hand under Lena’s knee pushing her legs open wider. Just like that, all the arousal that had cooled during the conversation comes bursting back into Lena like wildfire and she barely keeps a moan inside her throat when Kara kisses down the side of her neck, Kara’s hips pushing insistently downward.

The sudden shift in power makes her head swim and she becomes acutely aware of just how strong Kara is.

“Your heartbeat is going crazy,” Kara murmurs, lips against Lena’s jaw.

“That’s a good thing,” she answers, gasping a little when Kara’s fingers trace the curves of her hips, hook into the waistband of her jeans.

“It’s really distracting,” Kara says, but she doesn’t sound like she’s complaining.

“I can’t help it,” Lena retorts breathlessly, her hips seeking friction against Kara’s stomach. Her hips move in an insistent rhythm and Kara practically falls forward into her body, her forehead pressing into Lena’s shoulder with a barely audible groan.
“You okay?” Lena asks after a few moments of stillness, Kara’s hand at her hip keeping Lena still.

“Yeah,” Kara sighs, puffs of air against Lena’s bare skin. “You’re just really…”

“We can stop,” Lena says, despite her entire body screaming at her not to. The words come out hoarse and thick and Kara shakes her head, laughing slightly.

“No, I’m good. I’m good,” Kara replies, and it’s comforting to know that Kara wants this just as much as Lena does.

Lena presses a kiss against Kara’s temple, soothes her hands over Kara’s back to get her to relax and after a few moments Kara does, kissing at Lena’s collarbone and seemingly back to the task at hand.

Eventually Kara’s lips finally make their way back to Lena’s and she gets lost again in the heat of it, Kara’s palm sliding over the skin at her side, brushing up against the fabric of her bra.

Lena’s fingers play under the hem of Kara’s shirt, slide just a little under the waistband of Kara’s jeans. When they suddenly grow bolder, dip a little lower, a loud cracking sound echoes into the room so abruptly that Lena jumps underneath Kara’s tense body.

Breathless, but no longer kissing her girlfriend, Lena blinks up at Kara’s tight expression trying to locate the source of the sound. She follows the line of Kara’s arm up behind her head where she notices it’s curled over a post in Lena’s headboard. Or what was a post in Lena’s headboard, and is now completely severed from its former position, crumpled dust in Kara’s hand.

“Kara,” she says in a panted breath. Kara’s just staring at her hand, wide eyed and unmoving. “Kara,” Lena repeats and Kara shifts then, slides off of Lena so quickly that a rush of chill waves over Lena’s skin.

Kara’s still holding a handful of what is basically just sawdust in her hand, curled into a fist. Lena reacts to the distraught look on Kara’s face, curling her fingers around Kara’s hand soothingly. “Hey, it’s okay.”

“It’s not okay,” Kara says, shaking her head and looking about seconds away from bolting from the room. Lena’s desperate for that not to happen and she puts her other palm against Kara’s cheek.

“Yes, it is,” she replies with as much conviction as she can muster while shirtless and desperately turned on.

“Lena.” Her name sounds hoarse, like it’s being ripped out of Kara’s throat. “That could have been-”

“Hey,” Lena interrupts, stroking her thumb under Kara’s welling eye. “It wasn’t.”

“It could-”

“I don’t believe in dwelling on would have, could haves,” Lena tells her in a firm voice.

“Well I do,” Kara snaps and the set of her jaw conveys anger. At herself, Lena presumes.

“Kara,” Lena says in as gentle a way as she can, scooting closer and smiling. “We’re not going to get it perfectly the first time.”
“Stop acting like this is something trivial like - like - like not knowing what to do or something,” Kara sputters, ripping the fist holding the broken post out from under Lena’s grasp and opening it above the floor near the bed. They both watch as the crumpled remains of wood fall to the floor silently.

“I’m not trying to,” Lena says and she moves until she’s straddling Kara’s lap again, both hands on her cheeks like before. She’s a little surprised when Kara doesn’t stop her, just puts hands on Lena’s hips to keep her steady. “When I said this wasn’t a dealbreaker for me I meant it. But if you want to do this, then I’m willing to try, risks included.”

“Those risks aren’t worth it to me,” Kara replies, looking up at Lena with sad blue eyes.

Lena thins her lips, thinks of a different tactic. “When it happened,” she starts, then stops. “Walk me through what happened.”

“You - your - I mean I was -” Kara fumbles with her words, a blush starting to become visible in her cheeks and Lena feels charmed by it. “We were kissing.”

“Yes,” Lena laughs, despite the tense atmosphere around them.

“You - your - I mean I was -” Kara fumbles with her words, a blush starting to become visible in her cheeks and Lena feels charmed by it. “We were kissing.”

“Yes,” Lena laughs, despite the tense atmosphere around them.

“And I was really into it,” Kara admits, looking away. Lena moves her hands until they’re in Kara’s hair, scratching lightly at her scalp. Kara’s eyes flutter a little at the feeling and Lena smiles softly. “And your hands were - and my hands,” Kara shakes her head. “I don’t know. I got overwhelmed and I moved my hand up to the headboard so I didn’t hurt you or anything and next thing I knew-”

“Kara,” Lena sighs, kissing her quickly. “You’re not going to hurt me. The fact that you moved your hand to avoid exactly that-”

“Look. No one gets anything right the first time around.”

“Those risks aren’t worth it to me,” Kara replies, looking up at Lena with sad blue eyes.

“Look. No one gets anything right the first time around.”

“You get everything right the first time around,” Kara counters grumpily and Lena laughs.

“That’s not true.” Kara hums, unconvinced and a little pouty and Lena kisses her again quickly.

“I love you,” she says quietly and it puts a still calm in Kara’s face that wasn’t there before. Lena doesn’t say the words often, despite feeling them near constantly, and every time she does a sort of wonder lights up in Kara’s face. “And I trust you.”

“I love you, too,” Kara says. She blinks up at Lena, her hands drifting up the skin on Lena’s back and back down. “I do want to do this. Obviously. Can we just - try again later?”

Lena smiles, presses a kiss to Kara’s lips. It lasts maybe a little too long, and Kara’s hands are strong against her lower back, pulling her close again. One hand takes an adventurous trip underneath the back strap of Lena’s bra, and Lena’s gasp manages to break the kiss off. Kara’s eyes are wide again, but a charming one that seems like a normal terrified.
“Please put your shirt back on,” Kara practically whispers. Lena laughs, falling forward a little and tucking her head into Kara’s shoulder.

“You act like you’ve never seen a girl in her bra before,” Lena says, reaching down to the floor to grab her shirt and letting Kara’s hands keep her on the bed as she does. “You have x-ray vision, Kara, are you telling me you’ve never once seen through my shirt?”

“I - no,” Kara splutters, looking mortified and adorable. “No, I am extremely respectful.”

Lena slips off of Kara’s lap, pulling on the shirt and then settling against her pillows. Kara follows after her, and it’s maybe unintentional on the other girl’s part, but Kara crawling across the bed toward her looks predatory and it sends Lena’s heart off again.

But then, of course, Kara collapses on top of Lena, her head tucking right into her sternum, her arms wrapping around Lena’s body. Kara directs her attention towards the television, where the movie is still playing, but not before placing a kiss right over Lena’s heart.

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The rumors about a secret branch of the government tasked with extraterrestrial activity were something Lena had been aware of for some time, but it’s an odd thing to be confronted with the truth of it. Kara sets them down just inside on a small platform and the first thing Lena notices is Alex’s pinched look of irritation.

The older Danvers sister is standing in front of them, arms crossed and dressed in what Lena can only assume is a DEO uniform.

“This is supposed to be a secret government base,” Alex says to Kara with clear censure. Kara rolls her eyes. “It’s Lena.”

“That can’t be your catch-all reasoning for everything,” Alex retorts and Lena feels her cheeks warm with the implication. It flutters in her chest for a comfortable minute.

“She’s here to help,” Kara says, grabbing for Lena’s hand and moving down the steps towards where Alex is standing. Lena follows after, noting the seal of the DEO on the ground, looking around as agents bustle past Supergirl and her sister.

“You were supposed to be under quarantine,” Alex continues, falling into step with Kara and Lena as they start off to somewhere.

“I had things to do,” Kara counters, and Lena whips her eyes between them.

“You were under quarantine?!” Lena asks, pulling Kara to a halt.

Kara waves her off with an eye roll and a casual hand gesture. “It’s fine.”

Alex is nodding behind Kara’s back, arms crossed and glaring at her sister. Lena sighs.

“Kara,” she chastises, thinking of how long they spent just idling around in her office while Lena got ready. Had she known Kara was in some kind of danger, or that Alex was waiting, she would have moved a little faster, or yelled at Kara.

“You can yell at me later,” Kara says, tugging at Lena’s hand and pulling her further into the base. The base is loaded with all kinds of technology that Lena has never seen before and she should
probably be paying attention to the conversation happening beside her, but her eyes can’t stop roaming over everything, cataloging it in the back of her mind.

She’s so preoccupied with looking around that she doesn’t even notice she’s being led to what looks like a medical bay until she’s stepping inside and Eliza Danvers is there to greet her with a wide, somewhat surprised smile.

“Lena,” Eliza greets, not unlike how she had at Thanksgiving. She strides forward to hug her and Lena recovers enough to return the embrace, smiling.

“Good to see you again, Eliza,” Lena says and she’s hyper aware of Kara just over her shoulder watching the exchange.

“I wish it was under better circumstances,” Eliza says and when she steps away, Lena notices the body on one of the beds, a man she doesn’t recognize standing over it with his hands on his hips, authoritative.

“This is J’onn J’onzz,” Kara introduces. “He’s director of the DEO.”

Lena shakes his hand warmly, smiles. “Nice to meet you, Director.”

“You as well, Miss Luthor,” he says, looking at her with an overly critical gaze. It feels piercing and for a brief moment Lena feels uncharacteristically vulnerable.

“J’onn is a martian,” Kara whispers with an excited little smile and Lena startles, realizes this must be the friend they rescued from Roulette’s fight club.

Alex steps up to them and gestures towards the monitor Eliza’s been looking at.

“We’ve been analyzing the chemical agent they released at the bar,” Alex tells her, stepping up beside her mother and typing in a few commands on a nearby computer. Lena’s eyes scan the machinery around Mon-El’s bedside, tries to put together what each piece does. “Kara’s under the impression that you might be able to help.”

“She can help,” Kara grits out defensively and Lena places a calming hand on her forearm.

“I’d be happy to take a look,” she says, smiling at Alex and Eliza and walking over to where they’re hovering around a monitor. “Where do we start?”

Eliza gestures to the screen in front of them. “I’m trying to isolate a strand of the virus from Mon-El’s blood,” she says and Lena moves around to squint at the screen. It takes a second, but she sees it about the same time she feels Eliza’s hand suddenly grab at her forearm.

“I recognize that protein code,” Lena says softly and Eliza is looking at her with matching realization.

“What is it?” Alex asks, looking over their shoulder. Kara hovers around them in a nervous sort of pose, one arm crossed over her stomach and the other reaching up to twirl a strand of hair around.

“It’s from Krypton,” Lena says with a certain amount of confusion. How could that be possible?

Alex voices the question immediately. “The virus is from Krypton? How did Cadmus even get their hands on it?”

“My blood,” Kara adds suddenly, with rapidly growing fear on her face. “That’s why they needed
“To get in.”

“To get into what?” Alex asks, looking at her sister with trepidation.

“The Fortress of Solitude,” Kara says, already turning to walk away from the group.

Alex calls after her, but Kara’s taken to a run and seconds later she’s blasting out of the base and into the sky.

“The Fortress of Solitude?” Lena asks softly, looking at Eliza for an answer, but the other woman looks just as confused as Lena feels.

When Kara returns, it’s with angry steps towards where they’re all congregated near Mon-El’s bedside, but Lena detects something else simmering just beneath the surface of Kara’s skin. She looks shaky and unsettled and Lena wants to reach out and hold her.

“Medusa is a weaponized virus made on Krypton for the express purpose of attacking non-Kryptonian physiology,” Kara explains without any pretense. Her hands rest in clenched fists on her hips and her eyes stray to Mon-El as she talks. “They took the formula from the fortress and now Cadmus can make as much of the virus as they want.”

The knowledge that her own mother has a virus capable of exterminating all alien life on Earth burns through Lena. But there’s something else Kara’s upset about. Lena can tell in the way her jaw stays tight and her eyes can’t stay on one thing for more than a few seconds.

“That explains why Mon-El survived,” Alex comments. “Kryptonians and Daxamites share similar DNA.”

“So he’ll live?” Kara asks, looking up and directly at Eliza for the first time since she’s returned.

“He’s fighting,” Eliza responds, looking at Kara with a gentle expression. “But he needs a cure.”

Kara takes a deep breath and holds out a small object towards them. “Here’s everything I could find about the virus from the fortress.”

Eliza takes it with a soft smile and Alex reaches out to reassure her sister. “We’ll start working on it right away,” she tells her before linking arms with her mother and walking back towards the labs.

J’onn looks at Kara for a moment longer. “You alright?”

Kara sends him a smile, but it doesn’t quite reach her eyes. “Yeah, I’ll be fine.”

It’s clear he doesn’t buy it, but he nods and walks away, leaving Lena and Kara alone in the room with Mon-El, unconscious on the bed.

It’s quiet except for the beeping of machinery and the idle sounds of DEO agents shuffling around outside. Lena watches Kara for a moment before walking closer and settling a hand on a tense forearm. “What happened?”

It takes a few seconds for Kara to tear her gaze from Mon-El’s unmoving body and look at Lena, but when she does it’s with an expression that radiates pain and betrayal. “My father,” Kara says softly.

“What about him?”
“He created Medusa,” Kara confesses, looking like she can’t decide if she’s angry or sad. “He made the virus. The *weapon*.”

“How do you know that?”

“Remember when I told you I have an AI of my mom?” Kara asks and Lena nods. “The Fortress of Solitude has basically everything Kal and I have from Krypton. Entire archives of history and - I asked it about Project Medusa. My father, a *hologram* of my father, told me that he created the weapon as a joint project between the science and military guilds to fight against alien invasions.”

Lena can practically feel the way Kara is vibrating with a dark energy and Lena slides her hand down until it’s tugging at Kara’s clenched fist, begging it to unravel and tangle with Lena’s fingers. “Kara,” she says softly.

“I thought my parents were the good guys,” she says, sounding tired and broken. It’s a pain Lena knows all too intimately.

“They were trying to protect your planet. They thought they were doing the right thing,” Lena argues, trying not to draw parallels to her own situation. Kara does it for her anyway.

“Just like your mom,” Kara retorts, shaking her head. “Like Lex.”

If it were anyone else speaking about her brother that way, Lena would feel an unstoppable need to shut down and clam up. But Kara looks lost and in pain and Lena just smiles in an attempt to soothe her. “We are not our family, Kara,” she says softly, not entirely sure if she believes that or not. “We are our own people.”

The sad look around Kara’s eyes doesn’t go away, but she does relax a little from the angry tension she walked in with. The hand Lena’s pulling at relents, letting their fingers twine together between them. There’s still red around her eyes, a slight hint of color like she recently used her heat vision and Lena wants to do whatever she can to make Kara smile again.

“What do you need?” Lena asks in a quiet voice, squeezing the hand she’s holding.

Kara returns the squeeze and looks at Lena with the slightest twitch of her lips. “Just stay here. With me.”

Lena nods, her chest tight with emotion. “Of course.”
Chapter 6

The DEO, it turns out, has a gorgeous view of National City from the small landing balcony on the far end of the base. It reminds her of her own office and she understands why Kara pulled her out here after long minutes of watching Mon-El do absolutely nothing in a medical bed.

Kara sags her head forward on crossed arms, leaned up against the balcony’s railing. “I hate feeling like there’s nothing I can do.”

“Alex and Eliza are two of the brightest minds in astrobiology and medicine. They’ll figure it out,” Lena soothes, stroking a palm down Kara’s back, underneath the cape, and watching as Kara leans into the touch.

They’re silent for a few moments, just the sounds of the city around them. Despite the looming danger of their circumstances, Lena feels at peace.

“It’s beautiful,” Lena murmurs.

“Yeah,” Kara breathes out, picking her head up and smiling a little. “Reminds me of Argo City, actually.”

The mention of Kara’s hometown makes Lena smile, her curiosity piqued. “Really?”

“It’s a lot like my bedroom when I was a kid. I could see the whole city from the window,” Kara says, eyes roaming National City. “All the lights and the pods zooming by.”

Lena hums encouragingly and tries to imagine what the city of Kara’s youth must have looked like. Kara had talked about it before, trying to create the image for Lena out of fragments of memories from her childhood and Lena feels a longing to see something she knows she’ll never be able to.

“I loved that city,” Kara confesses in that broken kind of voice she always has when she talks about Krypton. It’s darker now, something Lena didn’t know was possible, and Kara lets out an uncharacteristically bitter laugh. “What a joke.”

“Your memories aren’t a joke, Kara,” Lena says, turning to face her. Her hand presses into Kara’s back, trying to get Kara out of this slump.

“I went my whole life thinking my parents-” Kara shakes her head, looks out towards the city. “Now their legacy is nothing but death and destruction.” The crushed and betrayed tone in her voice is something Lena understands on a deep level.

Hating the defeated look of Kara’s entire body, Lena shifts closer, slides her arm through Kara’s until their fingers are tangled together. “Did you know you were the first person in my life that ever wanted to be my friend without any agenda?”

Apparently confused by the random divergence, Kara’s brow furrows when she looks at Lena. “I couldn’t have been.”

Lena hums, smiles fondly at the memory of running headfirst into Kara in the lobby of the science building. “My last name comes with some baggage,” Lena says softly, watching Kara’s face. A wave of understanding passes over it. “It’s especially true today. Most people wouldn’t touch a Luthor with a ten foot pool.”
“Those people are dumb,” Kara grumbles. “About you at least.”

Lena laughs a little. “I was used to people making all kinds of assumptions about me. Whether it was because they knew my brother, or they had heard of my parents, or maybe they’d noticed that my last name was on a few buildings around campus.”

“Lena,” Kara draws out, a little sadly.

“You never saw me as a Luthor,” Lena says quietly. “I remember being so surprised when I realized you didn’t even know I was one. You made me feel so...normal.”

“You’re more than your last name, Lena,” Kara says defensively, like she always had, and it wraps around Lena’s ribcage tightly.

“Yeah,” she sighs. “I know. But I like my last name. It’s the only one I’ve ever really had and I’d like to think I have some say in its legacy. Regardless of Lex or of my mother.”

“You do,” Kara answers quickly, squeezing Lena’s fingers.

“And so do you,” she says emphatically. “You’re the legacy that matters. The House of El lives on in you. Not in anything else. You’ve done so many good things, Kara Zor-El. Saved so many people here on Earth. Are you telling me all that can’t outweigh the sins of your parents? This one thing they’ve done?”

Kara’s lips thin, her jaw cutting a tight line as she looks at Lena thoughtfully. It’s only then that she realizes just how close they’ve gotten, Kara’s hip is touching Lena’s and their sides are pressed together. If Lena leaned forward just a few inches their foreheads would touch. The air around them heats up just a tad before Kara breaks the tension with a soft, small voice.

“I missed you,” she says and Lena eyes well up a little. It’s a wonder something hasn’t broken in her body with how often she’s had to restrain from crying the past few weeks. “Missed having you around,” Kara adds with a wry smile. “Even just as a friend.”

“I missed you too,” Lena confesses, soft but sure and she leans heavily into Kara’s side, ignores the warning bells that go off as she places her head against Kara’s bicep. “I’m glad we’re friends again.”

“You make me feel normal, too,” Kara says. It isn’t a new sentiment, but the fact that Lena can still help Kara feel at home nearly breaks her heart, like it always had. “Thank you for helping me with this.”

“Of course,” Lena whispers. Kara’s fingers are playing with hers now, tracing the bones of her hand.

“You know you were wrong about something,” Kara says suddenly, and she sounds like she’s smiling. Lena’s brows pull down as she picks up her head to look at Kara. She’s hardly ever wrong.

“About what?”

“I had an agenda,” Kara says, but there’s a curve to the edge of her lips. “When I wanted to be your friend.”

“Did you?” Lena asks with a matching smile, enjoying the teasing glint to Kara’s eyes.
“Yeah,” Kara replies, lifting her chin a little. “You were so pretty. How could I not want to be around you all the time?”

“Kara,” Lena all but groans, rolling her eyes.

“I was just trying to get some coffee and all of a sudden, someone was running straight into me. And then I had to catch you, because you like bounced right off me and humans are so fragile,” Kara says, and she pokes at Lena’s side. “And you looked so mad.”

“I thought I had run into a wall,” Lena says, and she tries not to lose herself in the memory, of how she had turned her eyes up and stared at a beautiful girl. Definitely not a wall.

“You had that stupid baseball hat on and that thick navy sweatshirt with the little horse guy on it,” Kara says and Lena shakes her head, remembering the disheveled way she had dressed hastily for class.

“Stop,” Lena commands in a whisper, fighting a smile as well as a blush.

Kara relents with a sigh and straightens, turning with a more serious expression. Their hands unclasp and Lena steps back to put some space between them. “You should probably go find Alex,” she says even though she looks about as pleased with the idea of separating as Lena feels about it. Being near Kara had always intoxicated her. This is no different. “Your brain is put to better use than sitting out here trying to cheer me up.”

“I’m where I want to be,” Lena replies softly and Kara deflates noticeably with a soft smile.

“But not where you need to be,” Kara says wryly. “I’m okay.”

Lena looks at her skeptically, but Kara laughs it off. “I really am. Go find Alex. Figure out what the hell is going on with this virus so I can punch something.”

“We’ve both had a really long past couple of days,” Lena says pointedly. “It’s okay to need a few minutes to decompress.”

Kara blows out a heavy breath. It ruffles the edges of Lena’s dress. “Yeah, but we have a responsibility. One I’m letting you neglect.”

Everything in her wants to say out here with Kara, try to smooth out the last wrinkles of despair that still linger around her eyes, but another part of her wants to be in the lab, doing something with her hands and her mind that can figure out the key to stopping her mother’s plan.

“Lena,” Kara says, interrupting her internal debate. “Please go put that big brain of yours to use.”

“I’m here if you need me,” she tells Kara softly.

“I know,” Kara replies, with the prettiest of smiles. If it were four years ago Lena wouldn’t be able to stop herself from kissing it. Even now she’s having trouble resisting the urge. They’ve crossed some barrier that’s allowed them to touch more freely now and it’s only making it worse. The smart thing would be to revert back to the boundaries Lena so strictly advocated for weeks ago, but she’s not sure she could even if she tried.

They touched as friends like this anyway, soft and sure and often absentmindedly. She can handle it now. Even if every time she feels Kara’s hands on her all she wants to do is press full bodied against her ex-girlfriend and drown the world out.
“I’ll see you later,” Lena says against the thick wet feeling in her throat.

Kara reaches out, squeezes Lena’s bicep lightly in a way that does nothing to help the warm feeling pooling in her stomach. “You will.”

Before she does something that will further blur the fading lines drawn between them, Lena turns and leaves Kara on the small platform as she walks back into the base in search of Alex and Eliza.

J’onn is standing just inside when Lena starts down the stairs and he watches her with an unreadable expression. She smiles at him and he returns it, though it doesn’t quite reach his eyes. He glances outside to where Kara is still standing, and Lena looks back as well - Kara is leaning again against the railing, looking out on the skyline and rubbing at her wrist absentmindedly. She feels a burst of affection rush through her, wants to go back out there and hold Kara. But she turns back, and J’onn is looking at her again, nodding to himself as if he’s decided something.

She thinks to ask him, to say something, but he’s already walking past her, up the stairs towards Kara before she gets a chance.

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Tokyo is a city that never seems to truly sleep and it fits Lena like a glove. She works all day and all night. The new lab is coming along swimmingly and her almost maniacal devotion to working through the night fits right in with the normal Japanese work ethic. It’s not hard to convince a few techs to burn the midnight oil with her or find a restaurant still serving food when she takes a break at 4am.

The work is the only thing preventing her from calling Kara and breaking down. Every time she stops, takes a moment for herself she can’t stop the avalanche of emotion that floods through her - wishful thinking that Kara was there with her, still a part of her everyday. If she closes her eyes it’s easy to imagine Kara sitting on the edge of her bed talking absently about her day, or pressing up against Lena before bed, laughter traded between kisses. The images haunt her so badly that sleep seems an unreachable goal. So she gets back out of bed most nights and stares at blueprints and readouts and sets her phone in the hotel room safe so she won’t give in. It would be so easy to just call Kara. Tell her she misses her. She knows Kara would be there in a heartbeat, zooming across oceans to find Lena.

When she does sleep, it’s exhaustion-induced, after days of being awake. Those are the worst days, because she’ll wake up and the sun will be shining on her bed, and she’ll forget for a moment. Forget that Kara’s not here. For a brief heart stopping second it’s easy to believe that if she reached out across sheets, her hand would hit a warm body and Kara would roll over sleepily, tug Lena into an embrace and coax her back to sleep. The feeling of cold that fills her out when she realizes that Kara’s not there is earth shattering, every time. So she works, and avoids sleep, and works some more. And it goes on and on.

After two weeks of nearly nonstop working she’s surprised to walk into the lobby of her hotel and see her brother waiting there, dressed immaculately in a pinstripe suit and scrolling through his phone in an oversized chair.

She paces over to him quickly, “Lex!”

His head picks up and he grins wide and easy when he spots her, standing and pocketing his phone. “Hey, little sister,” he says stepping forward and wrapping her up in a hug.

The familiarity of his embrace settles something thick in her throat and it feels so undeniably good
to see him. The cold, isolated feeling she’s had the last few weeks ebbs away in that moment and she grips at her brother’s shoulders longer than normal.

“You okay?” he asks when they break apart and she just nods, knows that if she tries to talk her shaky voice will give her away. He seems to notice, but he doesn’t push, just wraps an arm around her shoulders and steers her towards the elevators at the far end of the lobby. “I hear things with the lab are going well.”

“They are,” she says, grateful to be talking about something neutral like work. “Did you come all the way to Japan just to check up on me?”

He laughs. “No, of course not,” he tells her, squeezing her shoulders a little. “I was actually hoping you’d help me with something.”

“Really?” Lena asks, turning to look up at him. She presses the button to call the elevator and waits for him to elaborate.

“Let’s go get a drink and I’ll tell you all about it,” he says with a charming smile. “I’ve been craving a Suntory 30 ever since I touched down.”

“You have disgustingly expensive taste,” Lena teases as they step into the elevator.

“I have great taste,” he retorts, adjusting his tie with exaggerated movements and winking at her. While he waits for her to freshen up in the hotel room, he doesn’t talk - doesn’t mention the stack of coffee cups on the desk or the way she’s drawn all the windows closed so the sunlight won’t get in.

They end up at at some bar Lex insisted they go to - it’s way too far from Lena’s hotel in her opinion, but he raves about the view and goes on for twenty minutes about the whiskey selection, so she relents. It’s better than trying to sleep.

“So,” Lex says, taking a sip of the amber liquid in his glass. Lena cuts into her steak and arches an eyebrow at her brother. He’s been looking at her carefully since they’ve sat down, and she doesn’t love his tone.

“So.”

“Takano says you’ve been working almost non stop since you got here,” he says, observing her with a critical narrowing of his eyes. “Barely stopping to eat or sleep.”

Lena scoffs. “You’ve been speaking to my employees?”

“They’re my employees too,” Lex reminds her, setting his glass down and reaching over to pluck a potato off her plate.

“I’m just trying to get this lab open. It’s a lot of work.”

“Sure,” Lex agrees with a shrug. “But I don’t think that’s it.”

She laughs, sets her silverware down and takes a sip of her wine. “I don’t know what you mean.”

His face grows serious and Lena looks away for a moment, out at the city lights and dark water below them. “Tell me you’re not throwing yourself into work to avoid…” he trails off, looking just a pinch uncomfortable. “Personal problems.”
“Personal problems,” she repeats with an incredulous tone. “Lex, please.”

A part of her wants to scream, all of a sudden, that Kara could never be a simple personal problem. That Kara not being with her was a life problem, a broken thing that could never be tinkered at or solved. She sips her wine instead.

“That’s not what this is.”

“You needn’t be,” she says, clearing her throat and picking her silverware back up. She cuts another piece of her steak, eyes trained on her plate. “It’s only been a few weeks. I’ll be fine.”

Lee,” he sighs. “You love her. You’re torturing yourself by doing this.”

Lex,” she says. “I don’t want to talk about this. I thought you came for my help on a new project, not to check up on me. Or give me-” she waves her fork around, stumbling over her words just a little, "relationship advice."

He stares at her for a long moment, jaw tight, before reading the warning in her eyes and relenting. Pulling his phone out of his inside jacket pocket, he brings up a blueprint on the screen and passes it to her.

“What is it?” She asks, abandoning her food to flip through the images.

“A suit,” he responds. “A Superman suit.”

It startles her, reminds her of Kara, and she looks back up at him, confused. “You’re making a suit for Superman?”

“No,” he laughs. “It’s for me. Or I suppose for anyone that needs it.”

It occurs to her then what she’s looking at and her eyes race over the table of equations Lex has laid out, the plans for all of its different components. “You finally figured it out?”

He nods, smiling gleefully, proud even as he leans back in his chair and takes a heavy sip of his drink. “We can harness his power. It’s going to revolutionize this world. If we get this suit to work, we won’t have to rely on one single Superman for the rest of our lives to come and save us. We could save ourselves.”

It reminds her of Kara immediately and she struggles to quash the images of her ex-girlfriend, the sound of her voice in her head. Kara’s hands, wrapped around her, carrying her away from her car crash. Kara’s voice confessing a desperate need to help people, to use her powers for good, to do
the things her cousin gets to do. Fear claws at her chest like it always does when she imagines Kara flying headfirst towards a disaster, an enemy, a fight. She clears her throat against the feeling.

“What do you need me for?”

“Well,” he says with a playful smile. “I’m having a little trouble with the cooling system and the bio readings are all over the place if the suit is in use for too long. I also can’t seem to get it to stay in flight for long enough to be viable. I thought the second smartest person I know could maybe see something I can’t.”

She thinks of the encrypted spreadsheet she has saved on an encrypted hard drive, stored in her safe. Kara’s powers, all laid out and measured. She could do this. Help save the world. Help Kara from having to save the world.

“The second smartest person?” She teases with an arch of her brow.

“After me, of course,” he says with a wide grin and a shrug.

Later that night, she falls asleep and dreams of the suit. Imagines a world without Superman, a world without Kara ever feeling the need to walk in his shoes. It’s the best sleep she’s had in weeks.

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Eliza and Alex are hugging tightly when Lena shows back up at the lab and if she hadn’t just opened the door noisily enough to startle both women, Lena would have backed out and left them alone.

“I’m so sorry for interrupting,” Lena says, eying them apologetically.

Eliza waves her off. “Not at all,” she says and Lena tries not to look at the way Alex wipes at the corner of her eye. “I should go check on Mon-El’s vitals. I’ll be back in a minute.”

And with that, Eliza walks past Lena and out the door. Alex sits back down on a stool and Lena approaches her cautiously, noticing the shaky way she takes a breath.

“You okay?” Lena asks, unsure if Alex will even respond.

Alex smiles though, wide and rare and Lena finds herself responding to it herself. “Yeah, actually. I’m great.”

“Good,” Lena says, eying Alex a little warily as she walks over. It doesn’t seem like Alex is going to offer anything further, not that Lena would expect her to. She glances at the monitor in front of Alex. “What are you working on? Can I help?”

“I’m breaking down the virus at a molecular level,” Alex tells her, reaching out her hands and starting to type at her computer. “See if we can find anything out from that.”

Lena watches over her shoulder and hums affirmatively.

Alex turns a little to glance at Lena. “So…” she starts. “What do you think of the DEO?”

“Impressive,” Lena admits with a small shrug of her shoulder. “But some of your equipment is a little dated.”
“This equipment is state of the art,” Alex argues and Lena tries not to smirk. It’s true that there is a significant amount of tech she’d love to get a closer look at, but she doesn’t need to give Alex the satisfaction of knowing that.

“I work with state of the art everyday at L Corp,” Lena says with an air of indifference. “Just because you have access to alien technology...”

Alex thins her lips, crosses her arms. “If L Corp would consider government contracts, you could have access to that alien technology.”

It’s an intriguing thought, but Lena laughs. “You can’t afford me,” she says plainly.

“And if I sent Kara to negotiate the contract?”

Arching an eyebrow, Lena shoots Alex a half smile. “Do you play chess, Alex?”

A bemused smile spreads over Alex’s lips. “Not if I can help it.”

“You’d be a formidable opponent,” she tells her kindly.

Alex is still smiling, but there’s something serious in the set of her eyes. “Not against you, I’d imagine.”

Before Lena can respond, Winn walks into the lap holding a tablet and is halfway through a sentence about synthesizing the virus when the words choke to a halt in his mouth when he sees Lena.

“Lena!”

“Hello, Winn,” Lena says with a smile, watching his mouth flounder around as he looks between her and Alex.

“I had no idea you were here,” he says, walking forward and setting his tablet on the desk. He looks surprised, but happy that she’s here.

“It’s Lena,” Alex tells him dryly, leaning back in her chair. It’s meant to be an imitation of Kara, that much is clear, and Lena blushes.

“Of course,” Winn says with a knowing look, and Lena wonders if it’s merely because he knows she and Kara are friends or if he’s figured something else out.

“Did you find anything out about the virus?” Alex asks him and he shakes his head with a shrug.

“So far, all the crystal Kara brought back has is a lot of information about how to synthesize and disseminate the virus, but I don’t think they ever considered a cure,” Winn says with a helpless shrug.

Eliza comes back into the room, Kara trailing behind her. “How’s Mon-El?” Alex asks.

“Not getting any better,” Eliza says and Kara purses her lips. “He needs a cure.”

“The entire alien population of National City is going to need a cure if Cadmus successfully weaponizes it,” Winn adds wryly.

“Maybe we need to start thinking like Cadmus,” Alex offers. “They have the formula. What’s missing? What do they still need?”
Lena tries not to notice the way everyone but Kara seems to glance right at her.

“A dispersion agent,” Eliza answers. “But the virus is Kryptonian. There wouldn’t be one available on this planet.”

A molecular breakdown of the virus is still up on Alex’s screen and as Lena stares at it, the answer pops straight into her brain. “Isotope 454,” she whispers to herself, remembering long nights spent cataloging Lex’s old projects.

No one seems to hear her and they keep talking to each other, bouncing off ideas, but Kara’s eyes are trained on her and it’s clear that her superhearing picked up what Lena was saying.

“Lena,” Kara says, and the sound of it cuts the rest of the group off mid sentence. “What is it?”


“How do you know that?” Winn asks, brow furrowed.

“When I took over from my brother,” she says, trying not to stumble over the last word. “I went through a lot of his old projects. Primarily to weed out some of the more world domination oriented ones.” Kara shoots her an encouraging smile. “He created a lot of different biological weapons - synthetic plagues really.” No one noticeably reacts, but Lena can sense the unease that settles over them. “Isotope 454. It’s nearly identical to the Kryptonian version. My brother spent a lot of resources on trying to create Kryptonian elements on earth.”

“Isotope 454.” Alex repeats. “What is it? Where could Cadmus find it?”

“It’s incredibly rare,” Lena adds. “Because it’s produced exclusively by my company.”

The room is silent for a long moment before Eliza speaks, looking at Lena with quiet sympathy. “It’s all Cadmus needs to weaponize the virus. With the isotope they’d be able to spread the virus all over the city.”

“I just spoke with my mother,” she says without thinking of it. “I’m surprised she didn’t just ask me for it. Or at least hint at it. She had full access to the building, but I checked the security logs.”

“You what?” Kara replies with a deep disapproving glare that Lena pulls back from, just realizing what she’d confessed to.

“I checked the security logs,” Lena repeats, looking at Kara and trying not to notice the small, barely there thread of distrust that swirls its way among the group. “She didn’t go anywhere apart from my office.”

“That’s not what I mean,” Kara grits out, frowning.

“I set a meeting with my mother because she has no idea I know about Cadmus and I thought—”

“After you promised not to,” Kara interrupts, hands on her hips.

“I never promised that,” Lena replies, chin lifting in defiance. “I wanted to see if she’d give anything away. I told you I was going to.”

Kara keeps glaring at her, but Alex’s voice pulls Lena’s gaze away. “Well did she?”

“No,” Lena says. “I mean, she acted a little suspicious, but other than that it was a normal frosty meeting with my mother.”
“Maybe she knew you wouldn’t give it to her if she asked,” Eliza says and Lena feels something warm inside her at the subtle way Eliza presumes which side of it all Lena would fall on.

“She needs it though,” Lena says, shaking her head. “She’ll try to acquire it somehow.”

“Probably send her henchmen for it,” Winn comments. “You guys store it at L Corp?”

“There’s a stockpile there,” Lena replies. “It has a very unique radioactive signature. You could track it. Make sure it hasn’t been moved.”

Winn straightens at that, picks his tablet up off the desk and puts his finger up in the air as he walks out. “On it.”

“Winn’s right,” Alex says, standing and grabbing her phone. “If Lillian needs that isotope it’s highly likely she’d send someone for it. Tonight.”

“Then we should secure it before she can,” Lena says thinking of the employees that might still be working over the holidays, the night security shift.

Before anyone can say anything else, Lena walks away from the group, intent on collecting her bag with her keycards and computer and heading straight to her office. If she can get there in time she can do something with the isotope before Cadmus or her mother gets to it. Distantly, she hears Kara yell after her, but she keeps walking until a strong hand is pulling her to a halt just outside the door to the medical lab.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Kara asks, looking furious.

“Getting my bag,” Lena answers, trying to pull her arm out of Kara’s grip. When Kara notices, she releases her immediately, but steps between Lena and the door.

“And then what?”

Realizing that there is no way she’s going to get Kara to let her return to L Corp without a fight, Lena changes strategies. “And then you’re going to fly me back to my office and-”

“No,” Kara says vehemently. “You stay here and I will go to your office to get the isotope.”

“We’re on a clock here, Kara. We don’t have time to argue about this,” Lena retorts, hands on her hips in a mimic of Kara’s own angry posture.

“I’m not letting you go back to L Corp Tower where I am sure Lillian will send her goons to collect the isotope. I brought you here to keep you safe.”

“You don’t know what you’re looking for,” Lena insists. “I will be perfectly safe if you come with and the longer we stand here arguing about it the less time we are going to have to stop my mother.”

“She’s right,” Lena hears from behind her, and she turns to see Alex standing there.

“Stay out of it, Alex,” Kara warns.

“Kara, we do not have time to debate this. Lena is the best person to get the isotope for us and you’re the best to protect her while she does it. Stop arguing and get moving,” Alex says with a certain amount of authority that even Lena finds herself responding to. “I already sent Maggie and whatever units she has available that direction.”
Kara looks all set to fight her sister and lock Lena in a closet somewhere, so Lena moves forward, shielding Alex from Kara’s eyeline. She puts her best pleading expression on and smooths a hand down Kara’s arm. “We’ll be fine,” she says softly and after a brief moment of staring, Kara relents, stepping aside to allow Lena back into the lab.

“In and out,” Kara says, when Lena steps back next to her, bag slung over a shoulder.

“In and out,” Lena agrees with a raise of her eyebrow. This time she doesn’t hesitate before stepping up into Kara’s personal space and slinging an arm around her shoulders.

Kara looks a little taken aback by the action, but recovers quickly and slides an arm around Lena’s waist, bending to put another under her knees.

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The first time Lena meets Alex Danvers is one of the most terrifying and nerve wracking experiences of her life. And considering she grew up in a household run by Lillian Luthor, that’s saying something.

It doesn’t help that Kara talks about her older sister like she hung the moon and the stars and Lena’s pretty sure that Alex’s approval of her is a make or break it kind of thing.

The fact that she was raised to keep calm in intimidating situations is the only thing that saves her when Alex gives her an immediate once over with a critical stare that can only be described as frosty. Kara is watching them with a wide easy grin like she’s completely unaware of what is happening and if Lena wasn’t so afraid to break eye contact with Alex first, she’d cut a glare in her girlfriend’s direction.

“Nice to meet you, Alex,” Lena says with a smile. “Kara has told me a considerable amount about you. I hear you’re in medical school?”

“Yes,” Alex responds simply.

They’re at a local bar, one of Kara’s favorites because it serves its full kitchen menu until 3am, and Alex has said about three words to her since they sat down.

“I’ll get us drinks,” Kara says, bouncing away from the table and Lena almost yells at her for suddenly leaving her alone with her sister.

Except Alex is leaning forward now that it’s just the two of them and a smile plays a little at her lips. “So. Kara thinks you’re pretty great,” Alex says, watching Lena with a hard stare.

“I think she’s pretty great too,” Lena responds, glancing away only to see Kara leaning over the bar trying to get the bartender’s attention.

“I think she’s pretty great too,” Lena responds, glancing away only to see Kara leaning over the bar trying to get the bartender’s attention.

“Yeah, because she is,” Alex deadpans like it’s unspeakable for someone to think otherwise. “I love my sister.”

Lena just barely bites back against the I love her too that wants to come out. “I know.”

“And I trust her judgement,” Alex says, the tense lines around her eyes softening for a moment. “But Kara likes to assume the best about people.”

Feeling suddenly defensive, Lena bristles a little, but before she can say anything Alex continues. “I don’t know you,” she says with a little shrug. “I just want Kara to be happy.”
“I do too,” Lena replies and Alex seems to transform into a normal human being, smiling genuinely.

“Then we’re good,” Alex says just as Kara returns with three beers clutched in her hands. She hands one to her sister before sliding in next to Lena and pressing a quick kiss to her cheek as she sets the drinks down in front of them.

“What are you guys talking about?” Kara asks, glancing between the two of them.

Alex points at Lena with her beer, smiles like they’re good friends. “Lena here thinks she can beat me at pool.”

“Alex is really good,” Kara stage whispers to Lena with something like worry in her eyes.

Lena laughs a little. “I’m always game for a challenge.”

Later, when she and Kara say goodbye to Alex and walk back to campus, Kara swings their hands happily between them. “I think Alex likes you,” she says.

Lena’s not so sure that’s true, but all in all it seemed to work out. “She’s very protective of you,” Lena observes.

“Sometimes Alex forgets that I’m invulnerable,” Kara laughs with a shrug.

It’s not really what Lena meant, and it’s not what Alex is protective over, but she lets it go. “I like her,” she admits. Once Alex dropped the cold overprotective big sister routine, they got along just fine. Alex is smart and funny and good enough at pool to give Lena a run for her money.

Kara grins wide, happiness practically bursting out of her. “I’m glad.”

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L Corp is quieter than Lena expected despite the late hour. The desperation of earlier had her convinced Lillian would have already sent a cadre of loyal Cadmus followers to raid the place. Kara sets them down in her office and Lena slides immediately into her desk chair, pulling out her laptop and logging into the L Corp mainframe.

“What are you doing?” Kara asks, eyes searching the room on high alert and one hand arriving at Lena’s shoulder, warm, heavy, and somewhat reassuring.

“This company is massive,” Lena tells her, bringing up project inventory logs. “It’s not like I can just walk to the hall closet and find the isotope. I’m figuring out which storage unit it’s in.”

It occurs to her that even at this late hour Lana Lang might still be awake and in the lab despite the holiday weekend. Just as she’s about to see if Lana’s logged into the system, Kara gasps loudly, her entire body straightening in a telltale sign she’s picked something up with her superhearing.

“What is it?” Lena asks, fingers hovered over her keyboard.

“Stay here,” is all Kara says in answer, zooming out the balcony door and out of sight. What was wrong with explaining things before flying off to punch them?

Instinct pulls her in the direction Kara fled to, but she turns back to her computer and works quickly to find out where the isotope is, locating it a few moments later and mentally cataloging the location.
The security alarms go off not seconds later, and without a moment’s more hesitation, Lena flees her office, heading for her private elevator and hitting the button for the lobby.

The minute she rounds the corner from the elevator banks, she spots Kara engaged in a battle with a man that looks suspiciously like J’onn J’onzz except with a metal plate obscuring half his face. With wide eyes she watches Kara get thrown like a rag doll into the large cement L Corp sign and it topples over with the force of it.

Lena feels frozen at the sight of Kara on the ground looking hurt and broken, like she’s been ripped straight from Lena’s nightmares.

She’s so stuck on it that she doesn’t even notice the sight of the man Kara’d been fighting walking over to pick up a heavy piece of the cement L and throw it in her direction. The last thing she sees is Kara picking her head up to look at her and the next second she’s in Kara’s arms, flown around the corner into relative safety.

“I told you to stay in your office,” Kara growls, setting Lena back down and looking over her shoulder. Her hands are holding at Lena’s waist, and she looks frustrated, but Lena doesn’t care.

“Are you hurt?” Lena asks, running her hands down Kara’s arms. The wall suddenly reverberates loudly and Kara pulls Lena’s head down protectively, covering her with most of her body and her cape. It must be the rest of the L Corp sign being thrown in their direction, Lena thinks.

“Get somewhere safe,” Kara orders her, when they straighten back up. “Now.”

Kara steps away, pokes her head around the corner before looking back at Lena, who hasn’t moved. “Lena,” Kara says with force. “Move.”

“I have to get across the lobby,” Lena hisses, gesturing towards the other set of elevators that lead to the basement levels on the other side of the lobby. They both cower a little when they continue to hear crashing and growling. Kara looks at the elevators in question with a helpless expression like she can’t decide what to do.

“Stay here,” Kara seems to settle on, echoing her earlier command. And with that she’s gone, speeding back around the corner and Lena hears what sounds like two bodies colliding forcefully.

The sound of the fight rattles in Lena’s brain painfully and she tries not to imagine Kara fighting, not to imagine the pained expression she had on her face just seconds ago. Back pressed against the wall just around the corner from the lobby, Lena hears sirens pull up to the building and the loud yelling of what must be a SWAT team storming through the front door.

When the bullets go off, Lena can’t help but jump. She listens as they bounce around the walls of the building. Something shatters and it echoes across the space and she spares a thought for the amount of money it is going to cost to clean up after this. L Corp doesn’t really need any unnecessary expenditures right now.

But then all sound cuts off so suddenly that Lena’s curiosity pulls her forward until she’s poking her head out around the corner and gasping at what she sees.

It isn’t so much the fact that the J’onn doppelganger has Kara pinned to the floor, an angry maniacal expression on his face. It’s the blueish anomaly floating in the air above the front doors that has her wide-eyed. The same anomaly that appeared over Kara’s dinner table on Thanksgiving.

Kara must have picked up on her gasp because she turns her head to Lena and while the man attacking her is distracted by the floating thing above their heads, Kara takes advantage and gets
out of his hold, kicking him down in an efficient motion. Just as he’s down on the ground the blue anomaly pops out of existence as quickly as it appeared, Kara turning to look before it disappears. Lena can’t place the look of disappointment on her face when it goes away.

Which is about when the man shoots what looks a lot like Kara’s heat vision towards the cadre of police officers on the other side of the lobby and hits one in the shoulder.

“Maggie!” Kara yells and Lena’s heart squeezes in realization. Kara abandons her fight and scrambles over immediately. With a window of opportunity, the man leaps to his feet and takes off just as Lena comes out of hiding. She’s halfway across the lobby towards Kara when she realizes he’s disappeared.

Maggie Sawyer is on the ground clutching at her shoulder where a wound is flashing blue and red and Kara’s face is a mixture of fear and concern as she comes to her knees next to her. Absently Lena wonders if Maggie is aware of Kara’s identity. Kara’s hands hover over Maggie’s body like she doesn’t know what to do and Lena watches from over her shoulder.

“Just get the bastard,” Maggie grits out in obvious pain, sparing a glance to where Lena is standing.

“He’s gone,” one of the SWAT team members calls out and Kara stands, spits out a word that Lena recognizes as a Kryptonian slur and blows out a heavy breath.

“We need a medical team over here,” Kara says to a passing officer and she turns back to Maggie to help her to her feet.

The wound is still glowing a little, but it’s fading, and suddenly, Alex Danvers is bursting into the L Corp lobby with her gun raised. “Alex!” Kara exclaims, propping Maggie up with an arm around her waist. Alex’s eyes go wide when she sees the scene and Lena understands that feeling so intimately she nearly laughs.

“What happened?” Alex asks, stalking over, but only lowering her gun halfway. The question is directed at Kara, but her eyes stay trained on Maggie.

“Henshaw was here. He got away,” Kara replies, moving Maggie until she can sit in an abandoned chair at the security desk. Lena follows, throws a tight smile to Alex when she glances over.

“The isotope?” Alex asks, this time finally looking at Lena.

Kara turns to her as well and her expression startles a little as if she just remembered Lena was there. “Did you find it?”

“I did,” Lena responds watching as Alex crouches over Maggie’s sitting form to observe the wound in her shoulder. “Or at least I know where it currently is.”

“I’ll take Maggie to the DEO,” Alex says, her hand on Maggie’s unwounded shoulder. Lena watches the soft way the detective observes Alex through the pain still evident around her eyes.

“You guys go secure the isotope.”

“Right,” Kara says with a nod, hands on her hips and looking grateful to have some kind of instruction. Turning on her heel she shoots Lena a tense expression and ushers her away by the elbow in the direction of the elevators Lena had indicated earlier.

“You okay?” Lena asks softly when they’re alone in an elevator car, the soft whoosh of it the only sound.
Kara’s body is tight, rigid even and there’s a look of exhaustion permanently etched into her features even when she looks at Lena. “I told you to stay in your office,” Kara says, but the words don’t come out angry. The tone is sad, almost scared.

“We’re here to get the isotope,” Lena says reasonably, keeping her tone light and even. What she wants to say, to reiterate for the millionth time, is that Kara is no position to be telling her what to do. But she doesn’t want to argue, not with the worried crinkle around Kara’s eyes. “I was making sure that part got done.”

“Lena,” Kara sighs, backing up against the wall of the elevator and throwing her head back a little, eyes on the ceiling. Lena knows Kara hates small spaces, knows the look on Kara’s face of anxiety and fear, and she can’t help but let her own annoyance drift away.

“Relax,” Lena murmurs, reaching out to run her hand down Kara’s forearm, her fingers tracing the smooth fabric of her suit. Kara takes a deep breath, and squeezes Lena’s hand when it arrives in her own, just briefly.

The elevator doors open and Lena strides out of the car, taking long steps towards the labs at the far end of the corridor.

To her surprise, Lana Lang is in fact still in the labs, taking a screwdriver to some device at a workstation as if there wasn’t just a massive showdown in the lobby not five minutes ago. The sound must not have reached this far down, but the alarms should have evacuated the building.

“Lana!” Lena greets, shock coloring her tone. Lana’s head picks up immediately and she smiles wide at Lena, setting her device down and only hesitating when she glances over Lena’s shoulder where Kara must be standing.

“Supergirl,” Lana says with a strange kind of reverence. Lena knows for a fact that Lana has met Superman on more than one occasion, but from the look on Lana’s face it’s as if it’s the first time the other woman has ever encountered a Kryptonian in the flesh.

Kara just sort of glances between the two of them, hands at her hips. “Hello.”

It makes Lena want to laugh, a quick moment of normalcy amongst all that’s happened in the last few hours, but she bites her lip instead. “Lana Lang, Supergirl. Supergirl, Lana Lang.”

“Nice to meet you,” Kara says, but she doesn’t move forward to shake Lana’s hand, just continues to look at the both of them with a wary expression.

Lana must pick up on it because she stands suddenly and focuses on Lena. “Something I can do for you, Miss Luthor?”

It’s formal, as if Supergirl’s presence requires some kind of professionalism and Lena’s struck that for most people it probably would. Supergirl is some kind of icon, an otherworldly figure, a symbol more than anything. She forgets that sometimes. Forgets that Supergirl isn’t just Kara the way she is to Lena.

Before Lena can answer, Kara steps forward, close enough to Lena that they touch, and sends Lana a polite smile. “We’re just here to get something,” she says vaguely and Lena turns a furrowed brow her direction. Kara puts a palm at the small of Lena’s back, just a little pressure that says move on and Lena sighs, understands Kara’s meaning.

“She’s right,” Lena says, knowing how thin the reasoning sounds. “We’ll be out of here in just a moment.”
Lana shrugs a little and continues to look confused, but nods. “Okay.”

Already feeling Kara pushing them away from Lana, Lena smiles at the other girl. “Go home, Lana. It’s late.”

“Yes, Miss Luthor,” Lana says with a little laugh as her shoulders relax.

They leave Lana there and pace to a back door leading out to a long hallway full of storage units. Lena leads them down the corridor until she can find the right one.

“I didn’t know Lana Lang still worked here,” Kara says quietly, while Lena’s swiping into the correct room that holds the isotope. When she pushes the door open, the storage unit’s lights flicker on.

She sends a curious glance over her shoulder. “You know Lana?”

Kara’s arms are crossed as she follows behind Lena, her gaze raking over the shelves upon shelves of cataloged projects. “Not really.”

“Then why would you know if she worked here or not?”

“I don’t know,” Kara says softly, squinting to read the name on a nearby box.

Lena stops, turns to look at Kara full on. “You’re being particularly evasive.”

“No I’m not,” Kara denies so hastily that Lena almost laughs.

“Kara,” she chastises.

Kara deflates a little. “My cousin knows her,” she admits and while Lena had been aware that Lana had run into Superman a few times in Metropolis, the way Kara says it implies something more intimate than the casual rescue now and then. “Or, he used to.”

“I didn’t know that.”

Shrugging, Kara looks away, traces her fingers over a shelf. “It’s not really something people know I guess.”

Kara had always been protective over Superman, and it makes sense that she might be confused to see a maybe former love interest of his, but she’s still acting strange.

“Is there something I should know -” Lena steps closer, lowers her voice. “Lana is my employee and -” she stumbles a bit, “a friend of mine. If there’s something I should be aware of.”

“No,” Kara says, cutting her off firmly. “No. I was just surprised to see her. She doesn’t even know me and I don’t know her.”

“Okay,” Lena says unconvinced.

“I’m happy she’s your friend,” Kara says with a strange emphasis on the last word. Kara’s reaction makes even more sense then, but she doesn’t have time to think about it.

With a roll of her eyes, Lena turns back around, paces down the row of boxes to find the one she’s looking for and she pulls it off the shelf with a heavy tug. “This is it,” she says, double checking the tag on the shelf.
“Great,” Kara says, plucking it from her hands immediately. “Let’s go.”

--

They get back to the D.E.O. with little trouble and Lena feels a certain amount of ease as soon as she hands over the isotope to J’onn.

“Good work,” he says to them and she feels Kara puff up a little at the praise.

Eliza smiles from behind J’onn where she’s standing next to Alex and she gestures towards the briefcase Lena’s just given him. “Hopefully this can bring us closer to finding a cure for Mon-El,” she says, taking the isotope when J’onn hands it over.

“How is he?” Kara asks with concern.

Eliza doesn’t answer, just thins her lips and looks at Kara with a gentle expression. “We’ll work hard,” she says, and then looks at Lena. “I could use another pair of eyes.”

Lena blinks, a little surprised even though she’s been helping this whole time. Part of her assumed her role at the D.E.O. up until now had been more to keep her under surveillance than anything. A very small part, but the inkling had been there nonetheless.

“Of course,” Lena says, stepping forward towards Eliza. As they turn to go she hesitates just a moment, looks at Kara over her shoulder who is watching them with worried eyes. Kara looks tired and Lena knows she’s the cause of some of it.

But her ex-girlfriend merely smiles when she notices Lena’s glance. “I’m going to go check on Mon-El,” she says and stalks off in the opposite direction. Alex watches her go for a minute, before shooting an identical smile at Eliza and Lena.

“I’m going to make sure she’s okay,” is all she says before following after Kara.

J’onn looks at Lena for a moment, his expression the same as it has always been and Lena feels something prick at the back of her neck, but he just smiles at the both of them and it manages to look genuine. “Let me know if you need anything, ladies,” he says before walking over to where Winn is twirling in his chair, typing away at something on the computer in front of him.

“Come on,” Eliza says to Lena, gesturing with her head towards the labs. “Let’s go cure this thing.”

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_The first thing Lena ever notices about the Danvers family home is that it feels like home._

_It’s so different than how she grew up and though she has deep affection for the house she was raised in, it’s never quite felt so full of life as Kara’s home does._

_“So this is my room,” Kara is saying, spinning around in the small bedroom and Lena looks around, observes how different it is than her bedroom in the west wing of Luthor Manor. Not better nor worse, just different._

_“I like it,” Lena says, running her finger over the desk against the wall and looking at the plethora of pictures of Kara and Alex as kids. She laughs at one in which Kara is shoving a pie in Alex’s face, a murderous look on Alex’s face and an expression of pure joy on Kara’s._
Kara paces over to see what Lena’s looking at and smiles. “Alex wanted to kill me,” Kara laughs.

“She looks like it.”

“Well, Alex always kind of looks like that,” Kara jokes, wrapping her arms around Lena from behind and setting her chin on Lena’s shoulder. “I’m glad you came.”

Tangling her fingers with the ones sliding over her stomach, Lena sinks against Kara. “I didn’t have much of a choice,” she teases, thinking of the horrified expression Kara had affected when she learned Lena didn’t have plans to go home over Thanksgiving break.

“You had a choice,” Kara tells her, straightening to turn Lena around in her arms.

“I’m teasing, Kara,” she says, tugging on a strand of loose hair. Kara doesn’t have her glasses on and her hair is down around her shoulders. It’s a look Lena doesn’t get to see very often. Kara is comfortable here, in her childhood home and surrounded by her family. Lena likes it, wants to live in the feeling of it forever.

“Right, I knew that.”

Lena laughs, presses forward to kiss Kara and lets it go on a little longer than she should considering they’re only a floor away from Kara’s adoptive mother and her older sister. Kara’s hands are lower on her back now, warm and strong, and Lena’s happy.

As if sensing what’s occurring, Eliza’s voice calls out from down below. “Girls! Come help set the table.”

Kara jumps out of the kiss with wide eyes and an attractive blush that makes Lena smile. Just as Lena’s ready to tease her for it, Alex’s voice interrupts her and they both jump this time, turning to see Kara’s sister leaned up against the door to Kara’s room. “You guys going to spend all your time up here making out or are you going to help?”

“Alex,” Kara hisses, her blush deepening and Lena feels her own cheeks warm. Alex laughs, shaking her head at her sister and Kara grips Lena’s hand, tugging them both towards the door.

When they get there, Kara makes a point of shoving past Alex, bumping her on the shoulder and Alex feigns considerable pain, gripping at her arm and mock crying out.

Kara rolls her eyes, but she laughs, and Lena laughs, and Alex laughs, and in that moment everything feels so normal. It’s the first time Lena’s ever been to the house, but she doesn’t feel like a stranger in it, like she’s an outsider watching a family interact. It makes her miss her brother for a brief, fleeting moment, but then Alex is shoving at Kara, laughing and then yelping when Kara tackles her into the air, hovering up above the stairs with Alex dangling from her hands. It’s such an open display of Kara’s powers that Lena can’t help but smile at it, even as Alex is yelling curse words at Kara.

“Put me down, Kara! I swear to God, I will tell Lena about that time in gym class—” Alex gets out, and Kara immediately has Alex on the ground, grinning nervously up at Lena and gesturing for her to come down the stairs.

“Kara, please don’t tell me you were flying your sister around the house again against her will,” Eliza says, and Lena can see her peak her head out from the kitchen, counting all their heads and smiling gently at Lena. Kara looks sheepish then, and Lena can’t help the feeling she gets to soothe Kara, reaching out to squeeze her hand.

“She was, mom,” Alex says, looking victorious and then grabbing Lena by the shoulder, pulling
her toward the dining room. “Please yell at her while Lena and I, your two competent and nice
guests, set the table.”

“I’m competent!” Kara says, glaring at Alex while Eliza comes closer to her. Lena can’t hear what
she’s saying to Kara, but the smile that breaks across her face is certainly not a response to a
lecture. It’s complete, unburdened happiness, and Kara’s eyes glance over to hers long enough
that her smile grows wider, listening to Eliza speak.

“I’ll still tell you about the gym incident, don’t worry,” Alex says, and Lena laughs, taking the
dinner plates Alex hands to her, setting the dinner table for four.

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They work in relative silence. Eliza shares with Lena the work she’s done so far on trying to
reverse engineer the virus and Lena works on inputting the data she has from Isotope 454.

It’s comfortable, soothing even, for Lena to have something to focus on with the warm presence of
Eliza working at her side in tandem.

That is until she sense Eliza looking at her, clearly gearing up to say something. After a few
seconds of feeling the stare, but no words forthcoming, Lena arches an eyebrow at her in question.

“How are you doing, sweetheart?” Eliza asks in a kind voice, setting her tablet down on the desk
and looking at Lena with an expression Lena’s seen on Kara’s face many a time.

“I’m fine, Eliza,” she says, shifting her eyes back down to the microscope back in front of her.

“It has to be hard,” Eliza continues and Lena has to take a deep breath to avoid her usual defensive
reaction to this line of questioning. “Everything with your mother. Kara told me some of it.”

“It’s not,” Lena denies with a casual shrug, but Eliza continues to stare, the feel of it hot on the side
of Lena’s face. She sighs, knowing Eliza is almost as unrelenting as Kara in these situations. “It
helps to focus on something like this,” she says, gesturing around the lab.

“If you ever need someone to talk to,” Eliza offers and it settles warmth in the hollow of her chest.

“Thank you,” she says, meaning it.

Eliza nods in understanding, smiling softly. “And how are things with Kara?”

“Things with Kara?” Lena asks, just barely managing to keep her voice even. It feels a lot like the
first time she ever met Eliza after she and Kara started dating.

“Are you two…” Eliza trails off, but there’s a hopeful look in her eye that makes Lena’s heart rate
increase. She takes a deep breath against it - the last thing she needs is Kara walking in right now,
asking why her heartbeat is going crazy.

“No,” she says with a sound somewhere between a laugh and a scoff. “We’re friends.”

“That’s nice,” Eliza replies, but she looks utterly unconvinced and Lena wonders why it is no one
seems to believe she and Kara are capable of being friends. They were friends for months before
they ever dated.

“It is,” Lena agrees, turning back to her desk in hopes the conversation is over.

But Eliza clearly isn’t done and she takes a step closer to Lena, leans her hip up against the table.
“You’re good for Kara,” she adds and Lena shoots her an incredulous look. Eliza smiles when she sees it, stares at her kindly.

“I’m not sure about that,” Lena says, each word slow and careful. She eyes the door to the lab and considers making a completely indiscreet exit, but Eliza is talking before she can even move.

“You were always too hard on yourself, honey.” The only reaction she can think to reasonably have is to laugh, but Eliza is staring at her with kind, sympathetic eyes and Lena feels heat spike in her own. “Kara needs family in her life. A family you are a part of.”

“She has Alex,” Lena answers because she can’t think of anything else to say. The knowledge of how close Kara and Alex are had comforted her in the dark moments of guilt Lena had often felt, the feeling like she had abandoned Kara as so many other people in her life had.

“Alex gives Kara strength,” Eliza says with a fond smile. “You give her calm.”

This time she does laugh because she’s fairly certain nothing in the past few days between the two of them has been calm. “Kara and I are complicated,” she says, feeling adrift in this conversation, and it isn’t as though she needs to hash this out with her ex-girlfriend’s mom. “We can’t just - it’s been four years and I -”

Eliza cuts her off mid sentence with a soft smile and a casual, “I’m not saying you two should get back together.” She studies Lena for a moment like she’s an equation capable of solving, but her smile never falters. “I’m merely expressing my joy that you’ve found each other again. Even as friends.”

It sounds a lot like Kara telling her I missed you a few hours ago on the balcony and Lena swallows against a lump in her throat. “I’m happy to have her as a friend again,” she says quietly.

Eliza smiles affectionately and pats Lena on the arm. “Do me a favor and go check on Mon-El’s vitals?” She says and Lena sees the reprieve that’s being offered. She smiles, nods and without another word, leaves the lab.

As she’s walking up to the medical bay checking off things on a chart glowing at her from the tablet on her hand, the sight inside the small room stops her in her tracks. She blinks and inhales sharply.

Mon-El, now conscious, is sitting up in bed and has pulled Kara’s face close, pressing their lips together for what feels like a long frozen moment. Lena can’t do anything but watch it happen wide-eyed until suddenly Kara’s shoving him away, stumbling backwards and crashing into about four different pieces of equipment that Lena’s sure are all expensive.

Everything Kara hits breaks in some measure, and Mon-El is watching it happen with a stunned, feverish expression. Lena doesn’t know if laughter is appropriate, but it’s catching in her throat because Kara’s still flailing about trying to get away from the man on the bed. It’s at least a better reaction than the burn she feels low in her gut at watching Kara kiss someone else.

She must actually laugh at some point because Kara turns towards her suddenly, her eyes growing impossibly wider just as Mon-El flops backward on his bed seemingly falling immediately back asleep. “Lena!” Kara exclaims loudly and Lena regains her ability to move again, striding into the small medbay with a bemused expression.

“Hi,” she draws out with a hint of tease.

“That - that was - I didn’t - you know he - you see,” Kara sputters, gesturing at Mon-El in a series
of nervous movements. She hits a monitor, cracks the screen and nearly trips on the broken arm of a surgical laser.

“Kara,” Lena laughs, walking over to a small, thankfully still functional console next to Mon-El’s bed and double checking a few numbers. “It’s fine. Though I think the bill is going to be pretty high for all that equipment you just broke.”

“I didn’t want to kiss him,” Kara blurs, still sputtering a little. “He kissed me.”

Lena looks over her shoulder and shrugs one casually. Her conversation with Eliza burns in the back of her mind and Lena just wants to brush aside all the complicated cadre of emotions she keeps feeling around Kara. They’re friends and Lena has to start acting like it - she accesses the young freshman college student she once was and tries to remember how it was to be friends with Kara Danvers. The smile on her face stretches across like an old memory. “Kara, it’s fine,” she says, laughing a little. “I could tell you didn’t want to kiss him by the three computers you broke jumping away.”

“He just - I mean I was just sitting here checking on him and he woke up and was all -” Kara gestures vaguely, eyes wide and Lena laughs.

“He has a pretty heavy fever,” Lena tells her, checking something on the monitor. “Not that he’d need that to want to kiss you.”

Kara blushes, and Lena doesn’t know what possessed her to say something so overtly flirty - maybe tapping into her freshman self was a mistake, but Kara’s reaction makes her feel warm all over her skin. “I just want to make sure you’re aware. Of the - of the circumstances.”

“Well,” Lena says, because she can’t control the part of her that’s pleased to discover Mon-El’s crush is extremely one-sided. “You don’t have to explain it to me.”

“Still,” Kara says, twisting her hands nervously, fingers plucking at the cuff of her suit.

Knowing they’re wading into dangerous territory, Lena focuses on recording Mon-El’s vitals onto the chart in her hands. “Any word on whether or not my mother has discovered we’ve secured the isotope?”

“We don’t think so,” Kara replies, fiddling with a broken piece of monitor to her right. “Now it’s just a waiting game to see what her next move is.”

A crawling feel of fear wraps its way up Lena’s spine and she hates it. Playing defensively is one thing, being unable to read her opponent’s moves is another one entirely.

Kara must notice the uncomfortable expression she feels spreading over her face because she steps a little closer, bending slightly to catch Lena’s eye. “We’ll get her, Lena. I swear.”

“Yeah,” she says with a smile Kara clearly doesn’t believe. “I just wish there was more I could be doing.”

“Right now all we can do is focus on figuring this virus out and seeing if we can cure Mon-El,” Kara says, glancing again at the bed. There’s a sheepish expression on her face that Lena wants to laugh at. “We couldn’t do anything to her right now anyway. We don’t have any proof apart from my word that she’s leading Cadmus.”

It occurs to her that they may never have that kind of proof. Her mother is a lot of things, but stupid she is not, and she’s slippery, clever, discreet as all Luthors are taught to be. If they’re going to do
anything significant to her mother they have to catch her red handed. An idea starts to form.

“Lena,” Kara says, interrupting her formulating.

Clearing her throat, Lena goes back to swiping through chats on her tablet, ignoring Kara’s critical stare. “Yes?”

“Why do you have that face?”

“What face?”

“That I have a genius plan to sabotage Bobby Fuller's robotics project face,” Kara says, hands on her hips.

Lena laughs, startles to learn Kara can still read her so easily. It secretly pleases her, but it’s not something she needs right now. “That was a flawless plan and he deserved it.”

“Sure,” Kara agrees easily. Bobby Fuller was easily one of the skeeviest guys they went to college with and when he finally crossed a line with one of their friends it was all too simple for Lena to figure out a way to take him down. “But what are you trying to plan right now?”

Knowing that there’s no way Kara is going be agreeable to any plan that put Lena in harm's way, she shrugs off the question. “Trying to think of ways to reverse engineer the virus and find a cure,” she answers, with a tight smile for her ex-girlfriend.

She doesn’t allow Kara time to answer, just turns on her heel and walks away as her brain continues to piece together a strategy to effectively defeat her mother.

--

It’s surprisingly easy to sneak out of the DEO, all things considered. The only person that even looks at her twice is Eliza when she strolls back into the lab to grab her computer bag.

“Going somewhere, honey?”

Lena smiles engagingly, long practiced at fooling people. Even people that know her reasonably well. “Just moving my stuff,” she lies, glancing at the tablet Eliza is holding and diverting her attention. “Any luck with the virus?”

“It’d be a lot better if I had a living sample of it,” she muses, focusing back on the data in her hand.

“I’m sure,” Lena murmurs. “It’d be easier to engineer a cure that way.”

“Absolutely,” Eliza agrees and Lena reaches out to give her shoulder a friendly squeeze.

“I’ll leave you to your work,” she says with a soft smile.

“Are you okay, dear?” Eliza asks just as Lena’s at the door. A hand on the frame, she turns back and keeps a casual smile on her face.

“Of course,” she answers and Eliza has the same look Kara gets when she’s not buying any of Lena’s bullshit.

“If you need to talk to-”

Lena waves her off, growing a little impatient and nervous Kara is going to spot them at any
moment, foiling Lena’s window for escape. “I’m just worried about my mother,” she says and it’s not entirely untrue. “I’m really not ready to talk about it.”

“I understand,” Eliza replies with a caring smile. Lena returns it before waving goodbye and heading out of the lab.

It doesn’t take much for Lena to find her way out. There’s a guard stationed near one of the landing platforms and Lena risks asking him where the exit is - he responds so promptly and obediently that for a second Lena suspects Kara’s strong armed most of the base into respecting her. It’s definitely something Kara would do.

When she finally gets outside the base she’s surprised to find that she’s not far from her office in downtown National City. She had known, of course, that they were still within city limits, but it’s disconcerting to know that a secret government base existed less than a mile from where she worked every single day and she was none the wiser.

Back at L Corp, she’s happy to see that the previously destroyed sign in the front lobby has been removed, the area cleaned and she walks past it with an air of determination as she heads towards the elevator that will take her down to the R&D labs. She makes a mental note to give her night clean up crew a raise.

Predictably, Lana Lang is still in her office despite Lena's previous orders and she's standing with another engineer whom she's giving brisk orders to. It’s not often that Lena comes down here in the light of day and the man shoots her a bewildered look clearly conveying disbelief - like he wasn't sure Lena was real until this very moment.

“Miss Luthor,” Lana greets politely and Lena smiles, grips tightly at the strap to her bag.

“Hello, Lana,” she says, sending an arched eyebrow towards a man standing to their right, clearly waiting for instruction from Lana. He notices her expression and his eyes widen before he scurries away. When she looks back at Lana there’s an amused smile playing at her lips. “I’m beginning to think you live here.”

“Not far from the truth,” Lana jokes with a shrug. “I like my work.”

“I’m glad,” Lena says, understanding a devotion to work as few others do.

“No bodyguard anymore?” Lana asks with a teasing smile and it takes a second for Lena to catch her meaning.

A spike of guilt hits her, but she smiles despite it, chuckles a little. “I’m afraid Supergirl has more important things to be doing.”

“I can’t imagine what,” Lana replies, still smiling. “Anything I can help you with this time?”

It’s a gamble to trust anyone at this juncture and something Lena has made an almost lifelong habit of not doing, but Lana doesn’t need to know the whole of it to offer assistance.

“Yes, actually,” Lena answers with an easy smile before pulling Lana away from listening ears and telling her what she needs.

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It feels a little like there’s a ticking clock in the back of her head the longer she is away from the DEO. Kara will surely notice that Lena isn’t there at any point and her ex-girlfriend has never had
particular difficulty in locating her when she needs to. Isn’t exactly known for her patience either, and the last thing she needs for this plan to work is Supergirl flying through the window right when she’s trying to convince her mother that she’s on her side.

Thankfully it doesn’t take much to talk her mother into visiting her office again and Lena’s only a little surprised. It must help that Lena prefaces the request with a I believe I have something you want.

Her mother walks in on the offensive, just as Lena expects she would and it eases something inside her. She can see all the pieces on the board now, can predict the moves. Confidence builds as she turns and affects a smug look.


An exact replica of the isotope sits in a briefcase on her desk and she notices her mother glance at it briefly. “You’re in charge of Cadmus,” Lena finishes.

A smile spreads over Lillian’s face. “Am I in for another one of your little lectures now? Like you used to give to Lex?”

The mention of her brother spikes an ache in her chest, but she forces her heartbeat to stay calm and she walks towards the case on her desk. “No,” she says, trying to look at her mother with as kind eyes as possible. “We’re family, mother. Ask me for my help and I’ll give it to you.”

Lillian glances at the briefcase again, shoots Lena a disbelieving smile. “It’s that easy?”

It’s almost tragic how simple it is to get her mother to believe her. Then again, it’s always been simple to lie to people that don’t know her at all.

“It’s that easy,” Lena answers with a smile, opening the briefcase and showing it to her mother, the red glow of the isotope flashes across Lillian’s face.

“I didn’t think you believed in the cause,” her mother says, almost reverently. Lena imagines for a moment what it would be like for her mother to actually be proud of her, to love her. What it would be like to garner the kind of look on Lillian’s face through something genuine instead of a lie.

Arching an eyebrow and playing the part of the dutiful daughter, Lena smirks. “Then maybe it’s time you got to know your daughter a little better.”

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The fake isotope is as close to the real deal as Lena could make it, as deep as the radioactive signature she knows Winn is tracking. It’s as much as she’s willing to involve the DEO and by extension Kara, in the plans.

As soon as they move offsite towards a warehouse her mother has informed her houses the nearly completed weaponized versions of the virus, Lena knows the DEO will be alerted. There won’t be much time between that and Kara showing up.

They make their way quickly to the Port of National City and Lena tries to wheedle as much information out of her mother about Cadmus as possible. She doesn’t get very far - her mother is a master of avoidance and it’s clear she hasn’t completely bought into Lena’s sudden showing of loyalty.

Hands in the pockets of her jacket, Lena follows her mother to a massive weapon sitting in the
middle of the port like it belongs there and she pulls the tarp off it with a flourish. Lena can’t help but laugh at the absurdity of the moment. Especially when her mother pulls a chain off her neck from which the keys to the weapon dangle.

“Some mothers wear lockets with pictures of their children,” Lena says with some amusement. “You wear the keys to a bazooka.”

“It’s a rocket launcher,” Lillian corrects like she’s teaching Lena about the Sicilian Defense in chess. “And it’s yours,” she adds, turning to Lena with a careful smile. Lena had expected this. The test of loyalty. “Take it. Prove you’re with me. Unleash Medusa and end Earth’s alien menace once and for all.”

The words turn her stomach over, but she’s no novice at hiding emotional reactions. With one hand still in her pocket she reaches out with the other and takes the keys. The weight of the watch on her wrist feels heavy and she wonders how long she has until Kara touches down.

It turns out not long at all. Just as she’s sliding the launch key into its slot a telltale thud resounds behind her and both she and her mother turn. Kara is standing there with J’onn and they both take a few steps her direction. A look of complete and utter confusion is plastered across Kara’s face and Lena falters for a moment, doubting her decision to keep Kara in the dark.

“Lena!” Kara exclaims with wide, hurt eyes and a desperation. The look of it makes Lena feel guilty, but she forces herself to focus on the task at hand.

“Get out of here, Supergirl,” Lena warns darkly, ever aware of her mother’s watchful gaze. “It’s too late. We have the isotope and now Medusa will do its job.”

Kara shoots a bewildered expression towards her, a glance at J’onn. “Lena, what are you doing?!?”

It comes across far too familiar to not register with Lillian, and Lena knows she needs to do something about it. “I’m a Luthor,” she says even as her hand shakes where it’s still holding the key. “What do you think I’m doing?”

And with that she turns the key to release the weapon, watching Kara’s eyes go impossibly wide in reaction. Lena’s sure her heart is going to come bursting out of her chest it’s beating so quickly and loudly.

J’onn doesn’t have the same concern on his face that Kara does, but his mouth is set in a frown of disapproval before he turns to Kara. “I’ve got that,” he says, eying the rocket that’s just shot out of the launcher. “Watch her.”

Lena and Lillian both watch as he transforms into another form, different this time than what she remembers from the fight club, and shoots off into the sky after the rocket. It leaves Kara there staring at her like she’s a stranger, her eyes darting between Lillian and Lena like she’s trying to figure out what’s happened.

“You heard my daughter, Supergirl,” Lillian says stepping up in front of Lena to face off against Kara. “It’s too late.”

“I - I don’t understand,” Kara stutters, taking a step towards them. From behind her mother’s back Lena’s eyes grow wide and she tries to communicate with Kara, tell her something, but before she can, J’onn look-a-like, Henshaw, she remembers, comes stalking towards them. Her mother turns just enough to give him a sardonically pleased smile.

“Now, if you don’t mind,” Lillian is saying and Kara is just staring at her, a silent plea for an
explanation in her eyes that Lena finds herself pulled towards.

“It won’t work,” Kara yells out, coming closer to Lillian and Lena, her eyes starting to glow. She gets one step closer before she’s being launched backwards, into two shipping containers. Henshaw is grinning, saying things about how Kara is a monster. Kara’s body thumps awkwardly to the ground and one of the containers falls on her. Lena tries not to gasp, tries to school her expression for when her mother turns back to grin at her.

“To think that alien defended you to me,” Lillian says. “If only she had known.”

Her face is so motherly and kind, a smile that Lena would have once been so thrilled to receive. And now it feels like poison, seeping through her, as Kara rockets through the shipping container and grips ahold of Henshaw, pulling him up into the air. The punch she gives him is thunderous, sends his mask flying off, and he crashes into the ground so hard it leaves a small crater.

“Goodbye, Supergirl,” Lillian says. Kara is coming toward them then, her eyes glowing red. She looks undisciplined, angry and upset, and it wouldn’t be obvious to anyone else. But she can tell from the unsteady way Kara’s hands shake. Lena’s mother flips a switch, and the sky explodes above them. Kara’s head turns upward, watching the bomb plume outward, curiosity coming across her face. Lena wants to rush forward, to Kara, but if she does now, Lillian will know. J’onn lands, his face looking calm as the orange, inert virus falls from the sky and drifts over them like snow.

It doesn’t work. J’onn doesn’t fall to the ground gasping for air, and there are no screams echoing around National City. Pride floods through her, along with relief.

Kara’s face turns to Lena, and it’s silly, but Kara looks so beautiful surrounded by what could almost be small, falling stars.

“They should all be dead,” Lillian says, and Lena’s distracted from Kara’s gaze by her mother staring at her.

“You,” her mother says with clear accusation, but there’s this hint of surprise in it that Lena latches on to - it’s wrapped in something almost like pride, as if her mother didn’t expect Lena to be capable of such an underhanded plot. It disturbs her to feel warmed by such a thing, but she feels it nonetheless. “You switched out the isotope. You made the virus inert.”

A smile crosses her face as her jaw lifts and it’s a strong feeling to stand in front of her mother like this, to know that her plan succeeded. “I did,” she says just as red and blue sirens come flashing into her peripheral. “And I called the police.”

Lillian turns to see the cars arriving and Lena can sense Kara watching them from a distance, her hearing picking up on the conversation no doubt. “You’re making a mistake,” her mother says, but it doesn’t hold the same kind of condescension as it usually does.

A few police officers stalk towards them, hands on their guns. One steps up close to them, “Lillian Luthor, you’re under arrest for the-” Lena tunes it out, focuses on her mother’s stare, unwavering as she’s handcuffed and read her rights in front of Lena.

“We’re family, Lena,” her mother says with a half smirk that stutters in Lena’s chest just a little. It’s almost impressive the way Lillian exudes a commanding presence over the situation despite her hands being literally tied behind her back. “You’d do well to remember that.”

“We’re not really family, mother. Remember?”
“This isn’t over,” Lillian says even as she’s being pulled away. Her chin stays high in the air, a dare in the way she observes Lena, looks down at her. “The cause is bigger than both of us. Your brother understood that.”

“It’s over, mom,” Lena replies, stepping forward as Lillian gets pushed towards a waiting patrol car. “You’re going to jail for a long time. Last I heard, attempting to commit genocide doesn’t go over great in court.”

It unnerves her a little that Lillian’s smile barely falters. “Oh, Lena,” her mother says, shaking her head and tutting like she’s scolding her for not having proper manners or forgetting to do a chore. “Don’t think you’re so safe out there,” she continues and the threat is obvious in the hard cut of her eyes. “This little blip changes nothing. You’d do best to choose the right side before anything has to get too messy.”

Any response she might have gets preempted by the firm slamming of the car door and Lena’s left to watch her mother’s smiling face through the window as the police drive her away. An officer steps up to her immediately, hesitation in his stance as he eyes her warily.

“Miss Luthor? I need to take your statement,” he stutters out and she takes a deep breath, plasters on a practiced smile and turns to him.

“Of course.”

--

The first few weeks after Lena’s car accident, Kara won’t even touch her. Every move her girlfriend makes is as if Lena’s liable to fall apart if she so much bumps into something.

Lena allows it for awhile, understands Kara’s fears and the unease they’ve both felt since it happened, but Kara doesn’t seem to recover from it, can’t move past it. Lena’s woken up on more than a few nights when Kara’s stayed over to the telltale signs that her girlfriend is having a nightmare.

It’s not unusual, but she knows Kara’s not having the nightmares she usually has - the ones of her planet exploding, of her parents faces, of Alex dying along with them. This time, Lena knows she’s the star player in the dreams, can tell from the way Kara mumbles her name out in a pained broken whisper while still asleep.

She knows they both need to heal, but Kara’s treating her like she’s made of glass and it’s not helping either of them move on.

Like most moments in their relationship, Lena realizes she has to be the one to push through it, to confront the problem and solve it. So when Kara sits down on Lena’s futon with about two feet of space between them, Lena sighs heavily and stands. Before Kara can so much as realize what’s happening, Lena’s straddling Kara’s lap, both hands on Kara’s cheeks.

“Lena!” Kara exclaims, but her hands grip at Lena’s hips immediately, and Lena settles into the feeling.

“I’m not going to break,” Lena says softly, and Kara’s eyebrows pull down, her lips thin.

“I don’t know what you-”

“You’re walking on eggshells around me,” she says with a pointed look, daring Kara to argue.
Kara looks away, but doesn’t move her hands and Lena’s fingers play with the ends of Kara’s ponytail, hoping to relax her. “I don’t mean to be.”

“Kara, what happened was a freak accident,” Lena says, bending a little to force eye contact. “I’m okay.”

Kara chews on her bottom lip nervously. “Humans are so fragile,” she says in a whisper and Lena laughs a little.

“Well compared to you, sure.”

“That’s my point,” Kara says, so sadly that Lena feels her eyes heat up in response. “You almost died.” The words are barely whispered between them and Lena struggles to keep the memory of the car crash out of her mind and focus on the here and now.

“I’m okay,” Lena tells her for what feels like the hundredth time since the accident. “You were there, you got me out. I’m okay.”

“I’m literally invulnerable,” Kara replies with a half smile. “And I couldn’t even save my girlfriend - What if I hadn’t been able to hear your heartbeat? What’s going to happen when you’re -”

“Kara,” Lena admonishes, suddenly realizing what this is about. “There was nothing you could have done differently.”

“I just keep thinking about it in my head. Over and over and over again and I-”

“You have got to stop,” Lena says, cupping at Kara’s cheeks and smiling at her, trying to provoke a similar expression. It doesn’t quite work, and all Lena sees is despair swimming in those pretty blue eyes.

“I can’t,” Kara confesses on a shaky exhale, her hands running form Lena’s hips to the center of Lena’s back, pressing there.

Lena observes her for a long moment, her thumbs stroking at soft skin. “Did you know that when my dad died it was from a disease that maybe one in every six million people contract?”

Kara startles out of her sadness for a second, confusion shadowing her face that Lena’s sure is because she rarely talks about her father. The memories sometimes too painful to face, still too fresh even though it’s been years.

“One day he was fine and the next he was dying from something inside him that none of us saw coming,” she says, ignoring the ache in her chest when she remembers being pulled out of school and whisked away to the hospital. “My mother is a doctor. The best in her field, and she couldn’t do anything but watch him die. All the wealth and the genius in the world and we couldn’t save him.”

“Lena,” Kara says softly and her arms are wrapping around Lena’s waist in comfort, pulling them closer. It warms across Lena’s skin and gives her the strength to make her point.

“And he apologized,” Lena tells her with a watery laugh. “Apologized for dying. Like it was his fault.” She shakes her head and clears her throat. “Things happen. Things completely out of our control,” she says quietly. “And the only thing I can remember thinking after he died was that I wish I had let him win just once at chess.”
Kara laughs a little and Lena smiles. “I don’t know what’s going to happen in the future,” Lena says quietly, her thumb running over Kara’s bottom lip. She kisses her quickly because the need becomes too much and Kara’s hands run up under Lena’s shirt, the warmth of it comforting against the skin of her back. “But what I do know is that if something does happen, something bad, I don’t want to look back and think I wasted one second of my life with you.”

“I hate the idea that you could go somewhere I can’t follow,” Kara says softly and it cuts across Lena’s chest so painfully she has to swallow against the harsh feeling. She knows Kara means it in a more morbid manner than Lena hears it, but she can’t help but think of the not-so-distant future, of a life after college and responsibilities Lena has been unwilling to confront so far. She wants to live in the present, here with Kara, and without the looming possibility that their whole lives might change.

“You can’t live in fear,” Lena tells her, pressing a palm against Kara’s chest to feel the comforting thud of her heartbeat.

“Help me,” Kara says soft and pleading and Lena gets wrapped up in it.

She kisses Kara again, solid significant pressure. “Always.”

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It takes about twenty minutes for Lena to get her whole statement out to the cop that interviews her and she can feel Kara hovering in her peripheral the entire time.

The rest of the DEO agents that had finally made it there have spent the time sweeping the area, collecting the rocket launcher and what was left of the fake virus. They’ve since cleared out, but Kara remains after they’ve left.

When she’s finished and the cop walks away from her with a grateful smile, she turns to Kara, lifting her shoulders up and taking a deep breath in preparation. Kara doesn’t come closer, just stands where she is, arms crossed as she watches Lena with an inscrutable expression.

They stare at each other for a moment and Lena isn’t sure what to do. Kara seems as if she’s not going to say anything soon and it’s chilly enough that Lena isn’t going to stand out here for hours and have a staring contest. With a heavy sigh she pulls her gaze away and makes as if to leave. It’s only Kara calling after her that stops her.

“Yes?” Lena asks, feeling defensive even though Kara hasn’t said anything yet.

Kara steps closer, looks as if she’s going to reach out, but doesn’t. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Lena shrugs, doesn’t have an answer to that other than, “Would you have gone along with it if I had?”

“Yes,” Kara says with a kind of conviction that Lena knows is forced. She gives Kara a look until Kara relents just a tad. “Maybe.”

“Exactly.”

“That was dangerous,” Kara says and it’s then that Lena notices the shake to Kara’s hands where they’re resting against her biceps as if it’s the only thing holding her together.

“It was fine,” Lena tells her. “I’m fine. And now we have my mother in custody.”
“You shouldn’t-”

Lena puts her hand up to forestall whatever Kara’s about to say and exhales noisily out her nose. “Kara,” she pleads, taking a step closer. “I’m tired. Can we do this some other time? You’re free to tell me all about the risks of my behavior later, but for tonight can we-”

“Yeah,” Kara says, uncrossing her arms, but her jaw trembles just a bit like she’s going to lose it at any second. “Sure.”

Neither of them move and they just idle there together for a long moment.

“You were just gone,” Kara confesses in a small voice and Lena feels like her heart is in a vice grip at the sound of it.

“What?”

“You just left and I didn’t know where you were and-” Kara looks away, her face screwing up like she’s in pain and her foot tapping a little on the ground. “Your heartbeat was going all over the place and I just-”

Lena sees the terror there now, hadn’t considered this kind of reaction when she had first devised her plan. Kara would be angry, sure. Lena expected anger - the kind she had gotten after the incident with Roulette or after the gala. She hadn’t expected Kara to be looking at her with an expression Lena’s only really seen one other time - from a hospital bed.

“It wasn’t hard to figure out what you were doing - well Alex figured it out - and when I realized you were somewhere out there with your mother who for all we know wants to -” Kara’s words choke out suddenly and Lena feels her heartbeat start to pick up, the thud of it almost painful against her ribcage.

“Kara,” Lena says sadly, approaching her with the kind of caution she’d give a wounded animal. Kara looks liable to break at any moment and Lena hates that she’s the cause.

“I’m sorry,” Kara says with a shake of her head and a smile that doesn’t meet her eyes. “I’m not trying to - I’m sorry.”

Lena’s instincts are yelling at her, a natural response to Kara looking like she does, and she stops fighting it. She crosses the distance between them and wraps her arms around Kara’s shoulders, one hand resting at the back of Kara’s head to bring her into a warm hug. Kara goes practically boneless the second Lena touches her and collapses into the embrace, her fingers clutching at the back of Lena’s jacket and her face pushing into Lena’s shoulder.

“I’m the one that’s sorry,” Lena murmurs, hugging Kara as tight as she can, the words whispered into loose blonde hair. “I didn’t think.”

They stay there for a long moment and Lena spares a thought for being glad no one else is around. She’s sure the sight of Lena Luthor cradling Supergirl would draw attention from more than a few people.

After Kara seems to relax from the shakiness of earlier, she pulls back just a little, still holding onto Lena’s body tightly. Lena takes in a lungful of air as she does and Kara clears her throat, the sound thick and significant.

“Can I take you home?” Kara asks and Lena doesn’t have the heart to say no.
“Yeah,” she says with a watery smile. “Sure.”

Something eases in Kara’s posture and it validates Lena’s decision. With a step forward, Kara scoops Lena up in her arms and jumps up into the air.

They land on Lena’s balcony with a soft thud, but when Kara sets Lena on her feet neither of them move away from each other. Lena eyes the dark expanse of her apartment through the glass door of the balcony and takes a shaky breath. The thought of being alone right now spikes a tendril of fear through her that she’s not used to. She can’t get the smiling image of her mother out of her mind and Kara’s close presence feels like the only thing keeping her calm at the moment.

“I’ll call you tomorrow?” Kara is asking, her palm resting on the small of Lena’s back.

“Yes,” Lena croaks out with a nod, eyes still on the dark furniture of her living room.

Kara steps away then, though her fists clench like she’s trying to resist something. Likely the same thing Lena’s trying to restrain herself from doing. “Goodnight, Lena,” Kara says and her knees bend a little as if she’s ready to take off.

“Stay,” Lena says so softly she’s afraid even Kara won’t hear it. But she must, because her ex-girlfriend’s eyes go a little wide and she bounces in place a little.

“What?”

“Stay,” Lena repeats, but doesn’t raise her voice, afraid if she says it too loud something will break between them. “The night. With me.”

“Lena,” Kara starts, looking unsure. “What happened to boundaries?”

It’s odd to hear Kara being the one advocating for something Lena had been so adamant they needed. And she’s not wrong. An invitation to stay the night crosses over the lines Lena’s been so careful to draw, but there’s a need for it that Lena is too tired to fight against.

“Just tonight,” she clarifies with a shake of her head. “After everything with my mother and with-”

Kara reaches out and grabs Lena’s hand, warmth shooting up across Lena’s chilled skin. “I’d feel better if you were here,” Lena finishes with a soft smile. “And I think you’d feel better too.”

The truth of it flashes like relief over Kara’s face and she nods quietly, allowing Lena to tug them inside.

The inside of her apartment feels cold and impersonal and despite Kara’s warm presence at her back, none of it comforts her. She flips a light on and it’s too harsh, the way it bursts through the darkness. The shakiness only grows as she walks into her kitchen and spots a pile of unread mail on the counter and the invitation to the annual Luthor Family Fundraising Gala sits starkly on the top of it.

Thoughts of her mother threaten to consume her and suddenly her own apartment doesn’t feel as safe as it used to. It feels far too wrapped up in everything threatening about her life.

Kara must notice the wide-eyed way she’s staring at the invitation because she comes over and places a calming hand on the small of Lena’s back. “Lena,” she says, voice barely above a whisper.
Lena turns to her and takes a deep breath, tries to force a smile. Kara just shakes her head.

“Do you want to stay with me instead? At my place?” Kara asks soft and slow like if she says it too quickly Lena might bolt. It’s not far off from the way Lena feels, but her desire to say yes, to sink into Kara and let them both comfort each other is too much.

So she agrees with a nod and a shrug of one shoulder and Kara smiles. “Get some stuff and we’ll head over there. I’m going to check around your apartment.”

--

When they end up back at Kara’s apartment, Lena realizes the error in this plan. Kara’s place is significantly smaller than Lena’s and it’s so full of their relationship that she doesn’t know how they’re going to survive being around each other in such a tight space.

But Kara seems completely unconcerned with any of this and just trounces on in, setting Lena’s bag on the couch and speeding into the bedroom. When she comes back out, her suit is traded for soft sweatpants and an oversized long sleeved shirt. “Bathroom is back there,” Kara says. “You can change and I’ll make tea.”

Lena thinks to say something about her internal dilemma, but Kara is already in the kitchen pulling items out of her cabinets and Lena thinks maybe a few minutes alone is all that she needs. She grabs her bag and heads for the bathroom, locking herself in there and observing herself critically in the mirror.

She’s still in the same outfit she’s been wearing all day, her hair still immaculate in its bun. With a quick kick she rids herself of her heels and lets her toes clench against the subtle ache that’s settled there after the events of the evening. It takes her longer than usual, but she strips and trades her dress for a pair of soft pajama pants and a thick sweater. She spends time washing the makeup off her face and taking her hair down. It’d probably do some good to take a shower, but she has neither the time nor the energy to even attempt such a thing.

When she reemerges, Kara has two cups of tea steeping and Lena picks one up, grateful for its heat bleeding across her palms. Kara watches her as she takes a sip and Lena’s eyes flutter a little at the comforting taste and the feeling of her chest warming up.

“Tired?” Kara asks, leaning back against her kitchen counter.

Earlier, Lena had felt exhausted. So tired she could have collapsed on her floor and slept like the dead, but now she feels like her brain is running too quickly to really sleep and if she gets in bed she’ll just spend the night replaying images of her mother laughing at her from a cop car. “Not really,” she answers.

“Come on,” Kara says, gesturing with her head towards the couch. “I have the best remedy for a crazy night of crime fighting.”

Lena allows herself to laugh a little and follows Kara to the couch, sinking into the cushions with a grateful sigh and taking another sip of her tea while Kara walks to a small shelving unit next to the television. She watches Kara peruse a row of DVDs and Lena can just barely make out some of the titles. “I’m not watching Mamma Mia,” she says with a little smile, feeling lighter than the darkness of earlier.

Kara shoots her half of a pout from over her shoulder, but Lena watches her bypass the movie in question and pluck a different from the shelf. “Singin’ in the Rain,” she says, putting it up in the air
with flourish.

Lena shakes her head, but lets Kara put the movie on and settles down further into the couch. The familiar sound of one of Kara’s favorite movies fills the apartment and Lena stops fighting the contented feeling that threatens to wash over her. It had been a long day, after all, and she deserves just a small moment of comfort, a small moment of pretending everything in her life isn’t hanging together by threads. If she closes her eyes, she can almost see the four walls of her dorm room and the way Kara’s smile looked against the blue fabric of her couch as they marathoned movies and TV shows on lazy Saturday mornings.

Finished with her tea, she sets the mug down on the coffee table and trains her eyes on the television, hyper aware of Kara just inches away from her on the couch. Her fingers clench a little on her thigh with the desire to reach out and pull Kara towards her, tangle their bodies together as they have hundreds of times. Instead, she just takes a deep breath, inhales against the scent of Kara all around her and the comfortable feeling of doing something so menial, so normal. Everything in her relaxes.

The feeling of contentment is so strong that Lena doesn’t even remember falling asleep. It feels like her dreams and reality are all blurred together because the next thing she’s really aware of is Kara picking her up from the couch and walking her to bed.

It must be a dream. It feels far too good. Dream Kara sets her down on the bed and Lena sinks into soft bed sheets that smell like they came straight out of her past. Her head feels swampy and slow and she can feel her consciousness getting dragged down deeper into sleep, but she’s barely aware of Kara stepping away from her and her hand reaches out immediately to grip the hem of Kara’s shirt, pulling at her.

“Darling,” Lena murmurs, tugging dream Kara towards the bed, can’t handle the idea that she’d leave right now. Can’t handle being in bed, without Kara, alone after this terrible day. “Stay.”

It feels like it takes forever for Kara to move. But, eventually, her familiar presence is sliding in bed next to Lena, their legs tangling together easily like this is something they’ve been doing every night for the past four years. Lena sighs into the feeling and smiles when Kara wraps her arms around her, tugging their bodies together tightly. A good dream, for once.
Chapter 7

Lena wakes up slowly, awareness coming in inches. Sun is piercing into her eyes and she squints into it as she tries to blink awake.

The first thing she notices is that she’s not in her apartment and it takes a stuttering moment to remember that, of course she isn’t. She had made a foolhardy decision to stay at Kara’s last night. She winces at the memory of leaping so far across the boundaries of their friendship that they might as well just ignore them.

The second thing she notices is that she’s warm, comfortable even, and she goes stiff when she realizes why.

How Kara’s body wrapped tightly up around her own wasn’t the first thing she had noticed, Lena has no idea.

Kara mumbles something grumpily, likely reacting to the way Lena’s body had gone rigid. Lena forces herself to relax, turning over a little to confirm for herself that it is in fact her ex-girlfriend that’s latched to her back.

The sight of Kara still sound asleep, gripping at Lena and frowning in her sleep, flutters uncomfortably in Lena’s chest for a long, still moment. She manages to turn completely around without waking Kara, and can’t resist reaching across the short distance between them to smooth out the crinkle between Kara’s eyebrows. Kara’s face relaxes and she murmurs something incomprehensible, something in Kryptonian, before tightening her hold on Lena.

It makes her want to smile just a little - Kara was always a deep sleeper and it seems that nothing has changed. For a moment, Lena sinks into the feeling of Kara around her, lets herself pretend like she did the night before that nothing has changed between them. That Kara will wake up soon and she’ll smile at Lena without opening her eyes. They’ll exchange soft good mornings and linger far too long in the comfort of the bed.

The rational part of her brain is screaming at her to get out of the bed, to slowly extricate herself from Kara’s grip - a harder prospect than it sounds - and move away. But nothing in her body seems to agree, and all she can do is fall into the warmth around her for a few more minutes - hold onto it until the real world breaks its way in and shatters it all. She catalogs the feelings and stores them away, saves them for another day, when she can’t have this.

She must fall back asleep. The next thing she knows, a loud pounding sound is echoing into her foggy brain and she’s sitting up in an empty bed. For a fleeting second she wonders if the earlier moments were just a part of a dream.

But then Kara is coming out of the bathroom, piling her hair on her head in a messy bun, her sleep shirt riding up inappropriately high on her stomach as she does it, sweatpants hanging low on her hips and Lena hasn’t had nearly enough coffee to deal with any of this, and certainly not enough to deal with spotting Kara’s abs.

The pounding sounds out again, and Lena finally registers it as heavy knocking. Kara notices her sitting up on the bed as she passes, shoots her a shy smile before rolling her eyes as the knock comes again.

“I’m coming, Alex!” Kara yells and Lena’s spine stiffens. Her heart starts beating uncomfortably
fast and Kara’s steps falter as she’s walking towards the door. She turns to look at Lena over her shoulder. “What’s wrong?”

Lena shakes her head, shuffles out from under the covers and manages a smile. “Nothing.”

Kara looks skeptical, but Alex is still knocking and Kara huffs a little at the interruption, padding over to the front door and throwing it open.

Lena barely has time to smooth the wrinkles out of her shirt and run her fingers through her disheveled hair before Alex is barreling into the apartment with a tray of coffee and a box of baked goods.

“Hi,” Kara says to her sister, plucking the box out of her hands and opening it immediately. A donut is in her mouth before Alex can even respond.

Alex drops the tray of drinks off on Kara’s kitchen counter and Lena eyes the excited look in her eyes, wonders what has the older Danvers sister over at - she glances at a wall clock - six in the morning.

“What are you doing here?” Kara asks around a mouthful of food. It’s just then that Alex notices Lena lingering near the bedroom. Her eyes go wide immediately, and Lena realizes how the entire scene looks - both she and Kara still in sleep clothes, hair in disarray and she’s walking out of the bedroom.

“Oh no,” Alex says, straightening and pointing between Kara and her. “I have a thing, okay? I have a thing to be excited about and it is not going to be usurped by you two doing -”

“Alex,” Kara interrupts with a sharp snap, swallowing her donut hastily and glancing briefly at Lena. “We’re not - Lena just stayed the night because - we didn’t -” Kara fumbles around and Lena needs coffee if this how the morning is going to go because, sure, they didn’t sleep together the way Alex is implying, but what they did do feels so much more intimate, so much more real.

“I stayed the night because I wasn’t exactly feeling safe in my own home,” Lena finishes for her, clearing the sleep out of her throat and walking over to a coffee maker on Kara’s counter. She only counts two cups on Alex’s tray and she’s not going to sit here and suffer the delicious smell of it without having her own cup.

“You can have mine,” Kara says when she notices what Lena’s doing and Lena tries to wave her off, but Kara is slapping her hands away from the machine and pushing a styrofoam cup into her hands, steering her back to the kitchen island.

Alex watches it all with a pinched expression and sighs, shaking her head as she takes her own coffee off the tray and sips at it.

“So,” Kara says after a moment. “What are we excited about?”

The box of donuts is open on the counter and Lena watches as Kara eyes it with glee, picking up her second treat and taking a big, happy bite out of it.

Alex is looking at Lena with a wary expression, like she’s not sure she wants to say what she has to say with Lena there and Lena gets that, wonders if she should offer to leave or head to the bathroom under the excuse of getting ready for the day. But the look only lasts a few moments and fades into a happiness Lena’s sure she’s never seen on Alex’s face before.

“Maggie came over last night,” Alex says to Kara who sits up a little straighter, surprised. Lena
smiles, realizing exactly why Alex looks so pleased.

“She did?” Kara asks, blinking at her sister and slowly setting her donut down. “Why?”

Kara is clearly not picking up on Alex’s very clear body language because she’s frowning a little, looking like she’s readying for Alex to start crying again and Lena fights a smile at the protective stance Kara’s adopted.

Alex’s mouth opens like she’s going to answer Kara, but no sound comes out. Her jaw moves helplessly and her eyes flicker around the room like she can’t find the words and something in Lena understands that feeling like a warm memory. When Alex catches her eye, Lena smiles encouragingly, full and easy as she remembers trying to explain Kara to her brother all those years ago.

“I think we’re dating,” Alex confesses in a soft hushed whisper, managing to sound excited and completely confused at the same time. “She kissed me.”

“What?!” Kara says, jumping a little and her expression shuffling to one of wide eyed surprise. “Really?”

Alex nods so rapidly Lena’s a little afraid she’s going to give herself whiplash and then suddenly Kara’s squealing in happiness, bouncing towards her sister and wrapping her in a tight hug. Alex laughs, and Kara laughs, and Lena smiles as she watches the two sisters embrace each other.

“Oh my god, Alex. I’m so happy for you,” Kara is saying, swaying Alex back and forth. Alex just clutches at her sister’s shoulders and smiles.

“I’m happy for me too,” she says, but it comes out like she doesn’t quite believe any of it is happening. It pangs in Lena’s chest.

She takes a slow sip of the coffee in her hand, but can’t help the sour expression she makes at the first taste. Whatever Alex brought for Kara has to be the sugariest thing on the menu because it tastes like liquid candy. She coughs at the unexpected taste and it brings the attention of both Danvers women her way.

Licking her lips a little, she smiles, sets her coffee down. “Congratulations, Alex. Maggie is a lucky woman,” she says politely and Alex just grins at her, a testament to just how lost she is to the moment.

“The luckiest,” Kara agrees with an arm around Alex’s shoulder and a grin for Lena. It feels so normal in that moment. Like she and Kara belong in this apartment together and Alex would naturally come over to break the news to both of them.

They all sit there for a minute, comfortably, a blanket of happiness swirling around them.

“Well,” Alex says after a moment, looking at Kara pointedly and then at Lena. “I just came over to tell you, but I can see that you guys are -”

“No, Alex, stay,” Kara says at the same time Lena tells her, “It’s fine, Alex. Stay.”

They both look at each other and then back to Alex, whose face has regained its pinched look from earlier.

“We can catch up later,” Alex says.
“I want to hear all about it,” Kara tells her with a finger towards her sister and Alex grins again, wide and genuine. Lena feels an ache in her chest at the knowledge that Alex has figured it all out, gets the girl and the happiness and here Lena is with Kara. Where everything feels unattainable, like a fleeting dream.

“Later,” Alex replies walking back towards the door. “We can have a sister night.”

Kara claps her hands excitedly and follows Alex over. “Definitely,” she says. “Thanks for the coffee and donuts.”

With a nod to Lena, Alex hugs her sister goodbye and exits. Kara turns, a disbelieving but happy expression on her face and she walks back to the kitchen island to pick up her donut and resume eating.

“Good for Alex,” Lena murmurs, taking another sip of the sugary drink in front of her, this time less surprised at the sudden saccharine taste.

Kara hums around her food, shrugs and a little of the excitement of earlier fades from her face. “Do you think I should give Maggie the talk?” Kara asks after she swallows.

“What talk?”

Shrugging a shoulder, Kara takes another bite. “The hurt my sister and they’ll never find the body talk.”

Lena laughs. “I don’t think that’s necessary,” she says and Kara looks a little skeptical so she adds, “Alex owns a lot of guns.”

“True,” Kara says with a thoughtful nod.

The excitement of earlier is subdued now and Lena’s left to yet again confront the fact that she’s alone in Kara’s apartment after a night of sleeping together. There’s a memory lingering in the back of her mind of her voice begging Kara to stay in the bed, her fingers pulling Kara towards her and she’s hoping it’s the fading images of a dream and not something she actually did.

Kara is regarding her from across the kitchen island, watching as she takes careful sips of her coffee. It’s not exactly the way she likes her coffee, but it’s caffeine and she needs the boost to get her brain to start working properly. After a few more pulls of the drink, Kara laughs, popping the last of her donut in her mouth and dusting her hands off.

“I’ll make you real coffee,” Kara says, plucking the cup out of Lena’s hands and taking a long drink of it.

“I can make it,” Lena protests, half standing until Kara waves her off.

Kara goes about turning her coffee maker, pulling out a container of ground beans from her fridge and Lena gets lost in the domestic feel of it.

“Are you going into work today?” Kara asks, glancing over her shoulder at Lena. She startles a little as the memories of the previous day come flooding back.

She sighs, eyes her bag where it sits on Kara’s couch and thinks about how her phone is probably overflowing with notifications. The headlines must be full of her name this morning, or at the very least her mother’s, and she can’t decide if she even really wants to see what L Corp’s stock is going to do when trading opens, what it did overnight in Japan.
“I suppose I have to,” she says, for the first time truly dreading the idea of stepping foot in her office and having to play the part of stalwart CEO.

“You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to, Lena,” Kara says, turning to lean against the counter while the coffee maker starts to percolate. “You certainly deserve a day off after what you went through.”

Lena laughs softly, shakes her head. “There aren’t really such things as days off in my world.”

“There should be,” Kara says pointedly, crossing her arms and Lena rolls her eyes a little. Ignoring Kara’s expression, she gets up and walks over to her bag, pulling her phone out from its depth and feeling unsurprised to see the flood of notifications on her lock screen.

“Maybe I do need a vacation,” she confesses with a chuckle and she turns her phone off, willing to put off having to answer anyone for at least another hour. The world can have her after she’s at least two cups of coffee, taken a shower, and gracefully exited her ex-girlfriend’s apartment.

Kara’s expression is sympathetic as she slides Lena a mug of coffee and they both retake seats at the kitchen island.

“Do you want to talk about last night?” Kara asks after a few quiet seconds of just sitting there.

It causes Lena to choke a little on her coffee and she wonders which part Kara means - the part where they had just barely stopped her mother from committing genocide, or the part where Lena’s pretty sure she all but begged Kara to sleep with her.

“What about last night?” Lena asks, managing to keep her tone even and steady. She takes a sip of coffee just to have something to do, while Kara fiddles with her own cup.

“Everything with your mother,” Kara clarifies, and Lena relaxes a little. It’s somewhat easier territory to navigate, but only just slightly. “Did you want to talk about it?”

“Honestly?” Lena starts. “Not really.”

Kara reaches out across the counter and twists her fingers with Lena’s softly, the feel of it shooting straight up Lena’s arm. “Well when you do…”

“You’ll be the first to know,” Lena says, with a quick squeeze to Kara’s hand. It’s not untrue. Lena can’t imagine who else she would trust enough to talk about things with her mother. Who else would understand everything she’s going through.

The moment feels comfortable, not unlike how it was earlier when they were still wrapped up in each other under Kara’s comforter. Lena loathes to think that anything could break this feeling, that reality is calling out to her and she’ll have to leave all of this in a few short moments and face everything the day has set out in front of her. Just the thought of having to read what the press is saying about her makes her want to scramble back into bed and hide under the bedsheets there.

Before either of them can say anything, a loud whoosh sounds out behind Lena and she ducks away from it quickly. Nanoseconds later, Kara is pulling Lena off the stool to stand behind her and Lena’s eyes go wide to see the same blue anomaly from Thanksgiving and L Corp pop into existence in front of Kara’s couch. It wavers there for a moment longer than it had the first two times and Lena feels frozen as she watches two men come jumping out of it like it’s a portal.

It’s a portal, she realizes when it pops away, and she’s left standing behind Kara observing two
strangers in the middle of Kara’s apartment.

Everything is still for a long moment before Kara is squealing again, jumping forward with a loud, “Barry!” and rushing towards the taller man’s arms.

So. Not a stranger, Lena thinks and she’s left to watch Kara embrace - Barry apparently.

“I knew it was you,” Kara is saying, breaking apart and Barry smiles widely at her. “I knew it was you in that weird space portal thing.”

“Yeah,” Barry says, shrugging. “It took a couple tries to get here.” He gestures to the man standing next to him. “This is my friend, Cisco.”

Cisco reaches out to shake Kara’s hand. “I have to say,” he starts. “This is a nice universe you got here.”

Lena’s brain tries to put it all together, but she’s only barely had one cup of coffee and there are about twenty parts to what’s happening that aren’t adding up. Barry notices her then, his eyes going wide and jaw dropping as he looks between she and Kara in a similar way to how Alex had earlier.

“Oh,” he says, gesturing around a little. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know you had - I didn’t mean to interrupt you guys. The breaches are kind of hard to control where we -” He paces over to Lena and smiles engagingly. “Hi, I’m Barry Allen.”

Lena shakes his hand, still entirely confused as to what is happening, and Kara bounces over to them. “Oh, wow, sorry, yeah. This is Lena. Lena this is my friend Barry!” Kara looks excitable and happy and Lena reacts to it, relaxing a little despite not knowing anything about what’s going on. “Barry is from another universe,” Kara says to her, in a lower voice, and Lena blinks, tries to decide if she maybe hallucinated hearing that.

“You’re Lena,” Barry says with a knowing tone that surprises Lena. “Like -” he turns to Kara, drops his voice a little. “Lena Lena?”

Kara nods, and Barry’s smile goes even wider than before and Lena can’t keep up with it. It reminds her of Kara, in a way, like Barry is vibrating at an entirely different frequency than the rest of them. “Wow, I’m so happy for you guys. I mean, that’s awesome. I know all about - I have an Iris back home. Well, she’s not, I don’t have her, she’s a person - you know what, I’m going to stop talking now.”

The words come out in a quick and jumbled mess and Lena is fairly confident she might actually still be dreaming.

“I’m Cisco,” the other man interrupts, shoving at Barry just enough to move past him and shake Lena’s hand. “You can call me Vibe,” he adds in an exaggeratedly low tone. Barry makes an apologetic face behind him.

“Kara,” Lena draws out slowly, maintaining a polite smile for the two men in front of her.

Kara looks at her expectantly, but frowns when she notices the expression on her face. Good, Lena’s communicating her feelings correctly.

“Can you please explain what is going on?”

“Oh! So,” Kara gestures at Barry. “Barry is from another universe.”
“You said that,” Lena replies and she tries to force her brain to boot up to its normal processing speed.

“A parallel universe,” Barry adds with a shrug.

“Parallel universe,” Lena parrots. She realizes she must sound like an idiot right now, but she’s pretty sure that Kara has just implied the multiverse theory is real and she’s standing here in front of two people not of this Earth.

“What are you doing here anyway?” Kara asks, and Barry turns back to her, clearly not caring that Lena’s having mental whiplash trying to keep up with everything that’s happening.

“So you remember last year when I like helped you out and you promised to do the same for me?” Gone is the excitable Kara Danvers of before, replaced by a more Supergirl-looking woman, her spine straightening. Despite her disheveled clothes and messy hair she looks confident and ready for action. “What are we up against?”

“Aliens, actually,” Cisco answers, smiling a little. “Barry here thought we might get a ringer for our team. Even the odds.”

“Well, I’m happy to help, Barry,” Kara says, and Barry grins at her. “Of course.”

“Thanks, Kara,” he says and he glances at Lena for a moment. “We kind of have to get going as soon as you’re ready-”

“Oh yeah,” Kara says, waving around. “I just need to change.”

Barry is still eying Lena, but he keeps smiling. “Cisco and I will go get some food. I’m starved.”

“You guys have Big Belly Burger on this Earth?” Cisco asks, as Barry ushers him to Kara’s front door and out of the apartment.

Alone again, Lena finds herself incapable of forming a complete sentence, settles instead on shooting Kara a perplexed look and just blinking at her. Kara stares back at her, clearly trying to find a way to explain.

“So Barry’s from another universe,” Kara says slowly.

“We established that,” Lena replies.

“And now he needs me to go over to his Earth and help him out.”

“Okay,” Lena says, drawing the word out slowly. “I’m going to need you to start from the beginning.”

“Barry is from another universe,” her ex-girlfriend repeats.

“Kara,” Lena warns, and Kara straightens a little, tapping on the counter and thinking.

“Do you remember last year - there was this thing in the news about the Blur?” Lena digs through the archives of her brain, has a fuzzy recollection of such a thing. “Sure.”

“Well that’s Barry. He’s like, insanely fast. Superhuman fast.”
“Faster than you?”

“No,” Kara scoffs, snorts into a dismissive laugh. “Of course not. But close.”

“Is he an alien?”

“Uh, he’s a metahuman?” Kara says, and Lena no longer needs coffee. She needs a drink. “So, like, he got struck by lightning and now he’s the fastest man alive. At least on his Earth.”

“And he got to this Earth because-”

“He ran way too fast and accidentally showed up here,” Kara says with a soft shrug.

Lena’s brain finally feels like it gets up to speed and she attempts to unpack everything Kara is saying. It helps when she adds what she already knows about multiverse theory into the conversation. “Okay,” she says, rubbing her temple a little. “I think I understand. Sort of.” Not entirely, but if Kara keeps explaining it, Lena feels like she’ll just understand less.

“Now he needs my help and I have to, uh-” Kara pulls a face, crosses her arms.

“Go to another universe and help him,” Lena finishes for her.

“Yes.” Kara pauses, then brightens like she’s just had the most genius idea of all time. “Hey, why don’t you come with?”

Lena’s jaw drops. “To another Earth?!” The words come out with a little squeak she feels immediately embarrassed about, but the world feels like it’s moving way too fast and she can’t keep track of anything in a coherent manner.

“You said you needed a vacation,” Kara points out and Lenashoots her an incredulous look.

“When I said that, I was thinking more like a weekend in Coast City or Happy Harbor, not a different universe.”

“Come on,” Kara entreats, and she adopts this look on her face that Lena can’t categorize as anything other than seductive, even though she’s sure Kara doesn’t mean it that way. Lena’s body doesn’t really care about Kara’s intentions, however, and she feels her chest heat up a little at the sight. “Don’t tell me that the nerd inside you isn’t totally dying to see what another universe looks like.”

Kara’s not wrong, the scientist in her is completely interested. But she has responsibilities here on this Earth and she’s still reeling a little from the events of the previous night along with the way she woke up just moments before. It’s like she can still feel Kara pressed tightly against her and she swallows against the tingling that rushes over her skin.

A laundry list of things she needs to do today pours into her mind and she thinks of the chore it’s going to be handling her inbox at L Corp.

“Look,” Kara says, stepping a little closer to Lena and Lena straightens a little at the feel of Kara’s body radiating warmth towards her as it always had. “You can either stay here and deal with the hell that your work day is probably going to be or you can come with me to a universe in which neither of us have to worry about your mother or about…” Kara looks around, trying to find words, like she can’t figure out what it is Lena actually does in her day to day. “Stock prices?”

It makes Lena laugh and she considers what Kara is saying. Her work day is going to be hell and
“It sounds like it’s a job for a superhero,” she says as a last ditch effort at resistance. “I don’t want to get in the way of your saving another world.”

Kara’s brows pull down. “Lena,” she laughs. “You helped save the world literally last night.”

“I thought you didn’t like me taking risks,” Lena says, and Kara rolls her eyes.

“I don’t like when you take risks without me. If we take one together, it’s way more fun,” Kara clarifies. "And safe."

“Barry came to find an alien. I don’t think I exactly qualify,” Lena jokes and Kara shrugs.

“Barry came because he needs help fighting aliens and you’re like the smartest person ever and you probably know more about aliens than anyone he’s got on his team so…”

“That’s quite an assumption,” Lena replies, but she feels pride start to swell a little her chest.

“Come on. Let’s go save another universe. You and me.”

Lena purses her lips and crosses her arms, regarding Kara for a long moment. With a deflating sigh she shakes her head and laughs. “Fine,” she concedes. “I’ll go.”

Kara’s eyes go wide like she didn’t really expect Lena to agree and then she’s practically vibrating with excitement, jumping forward to hug Lena with exuberance. “It’s going to be awesome.”

“I’m going to regret this,” Lena grumbles, but she smiles at the sound of Kara’s laughter, clear and bright in her ear. She grabs a bag, shoves a few clothes in it, dashes off an email to Jess telling her to put out a press release asking for privacy, with clear instructions to not do anything else until she hears from Lena. And then Barry and Cisco are back, and Kara’s pulling her by the hand into another universe.

They take a trip during the spring of sophomore year, because Lena can’t stop stressing about her early graduation and Kara can’t stop stressing about Lena’s stress, and they both decide they need some time away from campus and Lillian’s badgering phone calls. If only just for one weekend.

So they buy plane tickets to go to Midway City for the weekend, even though Kara tries to convince her that she can fly them both. Lena texts Lex making sure the family yacht that’s docked there is available for the next few days.

“We need to do this more often,” Kara observes from behind Lena. She’s spread out on one of the foredeck’s small little lounge beds, watching Lena as she leans to look into the water. Kara’s clearly happy to be in the open air, free of the hours of airport, plane, and town car that had preceded their arrival at the yacht.

“Do what?” Lena asks, making sure they’re anchored correctly and glancing over her shoulder to look at Kara. Behind the dark of her sunglasses, Lena allows herself a moment to admire all the skin Kara has on display. It’s an unusual sight - Kara tends to favor pants and sweaters and long sleeved shirts - but the unseasonably warm weather of the day called for shorts and tank tops and Lena is not complaining.
“Be lazy,” Kara answers, craning her neck a little in Lena’s direction. She tips the edge of her own sunglasses down so she can look at Lena. “Come here,” she murmurs enticingly.

Satisfied that the anchor is hooked properly, Lena abandons her post and pads over to Kara, dropping down and curling up against her side with a soft sigh. “It’s nice.”

“No homework to worry about, no job to get to,” Kara lists off, tracing her fingers down Lena’s bare arm, her lips ghosting over Lena’s forehead.

The combination of Kara and warm sun makes Lena feel boneless as she sags against Kara’s body, her leg sliding over her girlfriend’s. “Enjoy it while it lasts,” Lena says wryly, closing her eyes against the subtle rock of the boat.

“We should get a boat,” Kara responds and Lena props up a little to look at Kara, her palm spreading out over unfairly toned abs.

“We’re on a boat.” Lena laughs. “One that I do, in fact, own.”

“Well, we should go on it more,” Kara clarifies and she puts her hand against the small of Lena’s back, pulling her closer. Lena’s hips press in solidly against Kara’s and heat blooms up in Lena’s gut that has nothing to do with the abundance of sunshine. Her hand slides up Kara’s body until it’s resting against her sternum where bare, tanned skin is on display thanks to this miracle tank top.

“If we did it all the time it wouldn’t be special.”

“After you graduate then,” Kara says, her fingers sliding up under Lena’s tank top to trace her spine. It’s a distracting feeling tempered only by the mention of graduation and the imminent separation that Lena knows will follow. It cools a little of the heat building between them.

“Can we not talk about graduation?” Lena asks softly, her fingers smoothing against the exposed skin over Kara’s collarbone.

“Sorry,” Kara replies, equally soft and genuine.

Lena shakes her head, pushes forward a little until she can kiss Kara properly, a solid pressure of their lips. Kara smiles into the kiss and Lena’s chest flutters with happiness. “I don’t want to think about the real world right now,” Lena murmurs between kisses and Kara’s hands fit to her hips, lifting her slightly until she’s stretched out fully on top of Kara. “I just want to be here with you. Just us. Nothing else.”

With a sudden movement, Kara flips them over, pressing Lena down into the cushions. “I can do that,” she says.

Kara kisses her then. The kind of kiss that sparks through Lena like wildfire and she wonders for the millionth time how someone that isn’t even human, that had to google what dating was, can be so good at something like this. She manages to push Kara’s sunglasses off her face and pulls her own off as well, tossing them to the other lounge bed on the bow. Kara’s weight is steadying and warm, and Lena’s hands are traveling through Kara’s hair, down her back.

Warm hands are pushing up Lena’s tank top and Kara’s lips are sliding insistently against her own and just like that Lena gets what she wanted - the entire world distills down to this moment and everything else gets shut out. All she is aware of is the careful way Kara dusts kisses down her jawline and whispers affection directly into her ear.
She’s so distracted by the fingers tracing her ribs that she doesn’t notice Kara’s switched from English to Kryptonian until she’s mumbling words Lena’s never heard before. Pulling away a little to force Kara to look at her, Lena affects a quizzical look, her hand reaching up to trace a thumb over the swell of Kara’s lower lip. “What did you just say?”

A blush beats over Kara’s cheeks and Lena realizes maybe there’s a reason Lena doesn’t know those particular phrases. “I said I love you,” Kara murmurs, voice thick and attractive. It beats heat into Lena’s gut.

“No, you didn’t,” she says with a smirk. “I know what that sounds like.”

Kara’s eyes dart away guiltily and Lena laughs as realization dawns. “Kara,” she says in a teasing tone, voice dripping with feigned shock. “Were you saying something dirty?”

“No,” Kara immediately denies, but the truth is in the deepening of her blush and Lena grins even as Kara moves off of her with a heavy roll of her eyes.

Lena follows the motion immediately and settles on top of her girlfriend, grinning down at the sheepish expression on her face. “I can’t believe you wouldn’t teach me all the dirty Kryptonian words. That’s easily the best part of learning a new language.”

“Stop teasing me,” Kara complains, with a certain amount of whine and a pout that Lena has to kiss.

“I’m sorry,” Lena says softly against Kara’s lips, but she’s smiling and Kara makes this little noise into their kisses that tightens something low in Lena’s gut.

“No, you’re not,” Kara retorts, but she brings her hands up to grip Lena’s hips and sits up a little to keep their lips together. Lena wraps her arms around Kara’s neck and enjoys the feeling of Kara cradling her in her lap.

“Kara,” Lena says, pressing a trail of kisses across Kara’s jaw until she’s nosing under her ear. Kara hums out a questioning sound and slides her palms up under Lena’s shirt at her back. “I love you.”

It’s whispered straight into Kara’s ear and the reaction is instantaneous. Kara’s body relaxes into Lena’s and her fingers clench a little against the skin over Lena’s spine.

“But I’m not having sex on the bow of this ship.”

Kara startles a little bit and pulls back to look at Lena. “I wasn’t trying to - I mean I want whatever you - I didn’t.”

Lena shushes her with a finger over her lips and a short chuckle. “We’re not alone on this lake,” Lena says and gestures without looking to where she knows another boat is anchored not far away. In the distance she can hear the gentle roar of an engine speeding past. “Do you think you can handle carrying me down to the cabin?”

Without responding verbally, Kara just stands up, lifting Lena with ease and all but floating them down to privacy.

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As it turns out, parallel universes don’t exactly have significantly noticeable differences. At least not right away.
Earth-1, as Kara had called it, isn’t much different than their own earth (Earth-38, she learns) and Lena finds herself just a tad disappointed by that.

Barry has assembled what looks to be an entire superhero team together in a big airplane hanger and Lena feels a little out of place. The feeling settles just slightly when Kara grabs her hand and keeps her close by her side.

“Barry, I thought you were bringing an alien,” a man calls out from across the hangar as they make their way towards him.

“Yeah, we did,” Barry says and he smiles at Kara, stepping aside for the group to observe her. Lena drops her hand on instinct and allows Kara to pace forward. “Everybody, this is my friend, Kara Danvers, or as she’s known on her earth, Supergirl.”

It’s odd to hear Kara’s secret identity so casually disclosed like that, but she supposes it’s not as important a secret on a completely different earth.

A man to their right speaks up. “What makes her so super?”

Lena smothers a smile at the quick response Kara has to that, jumping up to hover in the air. Her laser vision whirs to life and they all watch as she draws the Crest of El into the cement right behind them.

“I’m convinced,” Lena thinks she hears someone say punctuated by an excited, “Best team up ever!”

Kara touches back down beside Lena, eyes bright and Lena shakes her head. “Show off,” she whispers.

The man from before, the one asking Barry if he brought an alien, steps forward. “And you are…?”

It takes Lena a second to realize the question is directed at her, but Kara answers for her anyway. “Lena,” Kara provides, rocking forward a little on her toes. “She’s with me.”

The man looks like he’s waiting for some other sort of explanation, but Kara doesn’t give him one, just keeps smiling and looking around. Lena doesn’t offer one either, just crosses her arms and stands beside Kara.

Barry steps forward and claps his hands together. “Right, so let’s get some introductions out of the way,” he starts and proceeds to name each person in the hangar, Kara watching with intelligent eyes as she nods at every single one of them.

There are a lot of names to remember, and a lot of aliases that go along with them, but Lena keeps up and idly wonders what it would be like to live on an Earth with this many superheroes. On their Earth, it was only a couple Supers, a new Guardian, and a rotating cast of Bat-people in Gotham. And that was only because Gotham was so crazy, she was sure of it.

When they’re done, they congregate around a bank of monitors and Barry runs them through the threat they’re all gathered there to fight. The Dominators. Kara adds in her own two cents about what she knows of them from their universe. Lena only half listens to it as she idles by Kara’s side. She marvels a little at what it’s like to be confronted with a problem that really has nothing to do with her. That doesn’t actually pose a threat to her day-to-day.

It’s also only slightly unnerving to be in a warehouse full of strangers and realize that not a single
one of them knows who she is. At least not who she is apart from some woman Supergirl brought with her from another universe.

Eventually the group decides on running a training exercise against Kara, and Lena grins a little at the excited glint Kara gets in her eye at the prospect. When they all clear out to get ready, Lena’s not entirely sure where to stand or what to do. It occurs to her that she really just is a bystander in this whole thing. Every single other person seems to have some kind of role or contribution to the group, but Lena is just there observing, standing on the sidelines and watching.

Kara, who is far too excited about pretty much everything to do with this, merely gives Lena’s hand a warm squeeze before skipping away to talk to Barry and the grumpy man named Oliver Queen. Lena just kind of looks around the room and tries to find a place to stand that is relatively out of the way.

“Lena, right?” The woman named Felicity walks over to her with a cautious smile, pointing at her in question.

“That’s right,” Lena answers, straightening a little.

Felicity’s smile grows to something more warm and easy and Lena can’t help but respond to how friendly it seems. It’s freeing to realize that she’s meeting people that seem to have zero presumptions about her. “You can stand with us,” she says. “In the command center. It’s where the brains of this operation usually congregate.”

Lena follows her into what looks like a mobile tactical unit with S.T.A.R. Labs painted on the side. Lena’s never heard of such a company, but from the looks of the massive hangar they’re currently standing in and the amount of tech around them with the same logo, it’s as big a deal as L Corp in this universe.

They watch the training exercise from the safety of the van, occasionally stepping out to run some tests or take down data. Lena lingers around Felicity, Cisco and Caitlin and watches over their shoulders. It’s fascinating to discover what each member of the team can do - between highly powered weaponry and lethal combat skills they make a formidable squad. But they’re no match for Kara.

“Heat vision,” Cisco breathes at some point when Kara yet again lets the beams shoot out of her eyes. “Damn. That’s cool.”

Felicity hums agreement, types something into her laptop and Caitlin looks over. “I wonder how hot it actually is. It just cut through tungsten.”

“It can exceed 50,000,000 degrees Fahrenheit,” Lena answers without thinking and the group turns around to collectively stare at her with matching looks of surprise. She can’t decide if it’s because the number is almost incalculably large or if it’s because it’s the first time she’s spoken aloud to them in almost an hour.

“That is seriously hot,” Cisco says in a way Lena’s not entirely sure is about the numbers. Lena laughs a little, clears her throat at the feeling of being observed critically by all the three of them.

Felicity turns her chair entirely around, leans back in it and looks at Lena with narrowed eyes. “What is it exactly you do? On your Earth?”

“I run my family’s company,” she says simply.

“Sounds quaint,” Cisco adds, turning back to his computer and typing in a few commands.
She smiles at the idea of L Corp being considered anything of the sort. “It pays the bills.”

“What’s the company?” Felicity asks.

“L Corp,” she responds promptly. “Formally Luthor Corp. After my family. The Luthor family.”

There’s no visible response and Lena finds herself a little baffled at the experience. Not a single person in the room reacts to her last name and she hasn’t had this kind of feeling since meeting Kara for the first time.

Felicity just sort of blinks at her. “What does the company specialize in?”

Lena can’t help but laugh a little. “I wouldn’t say we do exactly. Though our technology division is probably our most lucrative. We also hold interests in industry, communications, financial, and some property ventures.”

“Okay maybe not so quaint,” Cisco says, twirling around like Felicity. Lena can make out the small smile Caitlin lets out at that.

“Well you’re in good company,” Felicity says wryly, but Cisco is watching her with interest now and he wags a pen in her direction.

“Technology. Talk more.”

Lena shrugs, feeling comfortable with this line of questioning. It feels nice to talk about L Corp to people that have absolutely no preconceived notions about its legacy. “Mostly bio-engineering, robotics, pharmaceuticals, software.”

“I knew it,” Cisco says sagely with a shake of his head. “You’re totally a nerd.”

Eyebrows raising, Lena smiles, crosses her arms. “I know a few people that would disagree. Myself included.”

Caitlin turns after that, sending Cisco a short glare before looking a Lena kindly. “So does Supergirl work for L Corp?”

It pulls a sharp laugh out of Lena. “No, not exactly.”

“But you guys work together?” Felicity asks and Lena wonders how she found herself in this position being interrogated by these three.

“We’re friends,” Lena answers and it seems like a massive oversimplification, but it’s all she has. Felicity gives her a skeptical look, like she knows just how generic that response is, but she lets it go.

“Is that how you know all her numbers?” Cisco says.

“Her numbers?”

He nods. “Yeah, like her powers. You’ve tested them?”

It’s habitual to shield people from knowing too much about Kara, knowing about the wealth of information she’s gathered regarding Kara’s powers, but the room seems to hold something trustworthy in it. “I have.”

Caitlin’s eyes light up a bit of that and so do Cisco’s. Felicity has an amused smile on her face she
can’t read, but doesn’t get a chance to before Cisco is nodding rapidly with a wide grin. “Awesome. You have got to tell me everything. Let’s start with just how strong she is because I’m thinking she could probably drop kick Grodd into cyberspace based on what I’ve seen, but maybe it’s even more than that.”

“Grodd?” Lena asks, perplexed.

Caitlin glares at Cisco again. “He’s this -” she waivers, gestures inarticulately.

“He’s a gorilla,” Cisco provides. “It’s a long story.”

“Doesn’t seem that long,” Felicity mumbles, but she spins back around in her chair and eyes the monitor that’s playing a live video feed of the hangar. Out of the corner of her eye Lena can spot Kara’s happy grin as a stream of bullets bounce off her chest.

“So how powerful is she really?” Cisco is leaning towards her eagerly and she can tell Caitlin is just as curious about the answer.

Lena shrugs, thinks of the encrypted spreadsheet she still has on a dusty harddrive in her storage unit and does some easy calculations in her head. “On a good day, with significant yellow sun exposure, she could likely support somewhere in the range of 200 quintillion tons.” If she inflates the numbers a little it’s only because she likes the awed reaction she gets as she says it, the way everyone glances at Kara who is now tossing around Ray Palmer like he’s made of paper.

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It happens mostly accidentally, but she’s working on a robotics project one day when she discovers how to make a self-repairing alloy.

It wasn’t her intention when she had set out to modifying her newest battlebot, but as she’s reviewing some of her research results and sipping on a lukewarm mug of coffee she realizes that the metal she’s been tinkering with in the simulation was...healing itself.

For a frozen few seconds she can’t do anything but blink at her computer screen.

She checks her results three times. Runs them through four different programs.

All the same.

Her first thought is that she could revolutionize architecture, industrial design. An alloy that when broken intuitively binds itself back together has limitless possibilities.

Her second thought is about Kara. And as if summoned by Lena’s wandering brain, her girlfriend saunters into the enclosed lab with a bright smile and a brown paper bag.

“Hey,” Lena greets, craning back a little to accept the kiss Kara drops on her lips.

“Hi,” Kara says before plopping into a chair next to Lena and leaning back to prop her legs on the table. She deposits the bag next to Lena’s laptop. “I ordered potstickers, but I think Great Wall shortchanged me again.”

“That’s probably because no one that works there thinks one person could reasonably want twelve orders of the same thing at once.”

Kara hums disapprovingly and glances at Lena’s computer. “What are you working on?”
Glancing back at her screen, Lena just sort of shakes her head, flounders around for what to say. “I’m not sure.”

Kara sits up then, her feet thudding back on the floor and she leans in close to Lena to properly see the program that’s still running Lena’s numbers through a series of algorithms. “Whoa,” Kara says after a few seconds of blinking at the screen. The expression on her face is a lot like how Lena felt just moments ago when she realized what was happening. “Is that - I mean is it repairing itself?”

“I think so.” Lena nods grateful that someone else is seeing it too. At least she’s not hallucinating.

“Rao,” Kara breathes out, looking at Lena with awe in her expression. “That’s amazing. It’d make it virtually unbreakable wouldn’t it?”

“In theory, yes,” Lena answers and she’s back to thinking of all the implications - she makes a mental note to call Lex later and send him the results.

“I knew I was dating a genius, but this is like -” Kara smiles at her as she makes a gesture with her hands, opening them up near her head and letting a small explosion sound come out of her mouth. It makes Lena laugh and roll her eyes.

“Stop,” she says, fighting a blush. Kara relents with a quick kiss to Lena’s cheek and a smile.

“I wonder what that would feel like,” Kara comments with a hint of wonder in her voice and Lena looks at her curiously.

“What do you mean?”

Kara shrugs, leans back away from Lena’s computer and reaches into the bag of food on the table to pull out a plastic box of potstickers and set it on her lap. “I’ve never held an Earth metal I couldn’t snap in half or at the very least bend.”

Lena had never thought about that. Never thought about how Kara doesn’t really understand anything on this earth that’s unbreakable. She reaches out to hold Kara’s hand and warms at the gentle way Kara twists their fingers together. “Well if I can get it out of the theory stage, I’ll make you something with it.”

“Really?” Kara perks up a little at the idea, and Lena is, as always, helpless against Kara’s smile.

“Definitely,” she responds with a quick, solid kiss to Kara’s lips.

The metal does, in fact, end up working. Her brother sends her a bottle of Macallan 1939 after she sends him the results and a sample. The note on the bottle reads: you’re going to make us obnoxious amounts of money. It makes her feel a kind of pride she can’t deny, fills her with purpose and for a few seconds she looks forward to the future - working with Lex at Luthor Corp to revolutionize the world.

Kara takes her out to dinner to celebrate, and when they’re back in Lena’s dorm room later, she hands Kara the bracelet she made out of the new metal.

“What’s this?” Kara asks, taking the small metal circlet from Lena’s hands. It’s a shimmery, anodized metal that picks up colors easily, and it nearly shines in Kara’s hands.

“A bracelet,” Lena answers simply. “Made from the first samples of the new alloy I discovered.”
Kara looks down at it with something like reverence and she’s holding it gently in her fingers like it’s liable to break. Which it’s not. That’s the whole point.

Lena laughs a little. “Go on,” she tells Kara. “Try to break it.”

There’s hesitation in Kara’s demeanor, but after a few seconds, she tries, pulling at the bracelet in an attempt to snap it in half. The metal bends a little, but doesn’t break, stays interlocked in a circle. It’s thin, but incredibly heavy - Lena had to use two hands just to present it to Kara.

“Wow,” Kara says, looking between Lena and the bracelet. “You really did it.”

“I did,” Lena replies, feeling proud of herself.

“I love it,” Kara whispers and her smile beats across Lena’s heart like a drum.

“I would have had it engraved,” she adds softly and she fiddles a little with the watch on her wrist. “Like you did with my watch, but you can’t really carve into a metal that’s built to repair itself.”

It’s said as a joke, but Kara’s gaze whips up so fast and serious that Lena’s smile swipes off her face in response.

“What would you have said?” Kara asks and her voice sounds hoarse and scratchy. “If you could have?”

With a casual shrug, Lena tries to ignore the significant look in Kara’s face. “Something like mine,” she answers, aware of the Kryptonian lettering that sits against her skin. “Something saying how much I love you. How I’ll love you forever.”

Kara’s chest is moving up and down perceptibly and it’s such an odd image that Lena starts to get a little worried. Especially when Kara doesn’t say anything else, just stares at Lena with an inscrutable expression.

“Kara,” Lena says, keeping her voice soft, but reaching out to stroke a palm down Kara’s arm. “Darling, are you okay?”

Without answering, Kara just pushes forward and presses the sweetest kiss to Lena’s lips.

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The training lasts a few hours and Lena can’t stop the swell of pride as she sits back and watches Kara handily beat back any attack thrown at her without breaking a sweat. As it goes on, though, Kara starts to look a little uncomfortable with it, and as happy as Lena is to see Kara beating everyone up, she still doesn’t love Kara being used as a training dummy.

“Are you sure you want me to keep going?” Is a question Kara asks more than once and it’s always met with the gritty grumble of Oliver Queen telling her not to stop.

There seems to be some other drama happening among the group and she’s heard the term time travel thrown around about seven times. There’s a lot to process.

She follows along with some of it, but she’s frankly so grateful to not be at the heart of some epic conflict that she’s happy to watch the rest of them argue amongst themselves and throw distrustful gazes at someone that isn’t her. It isn’t until a beeping sound interrupts them and Lena turns to see Felicity staring at her phone with clear worry.
“Guys! It’s Lyla. The president’s been abducted by the Dominators. She needs us now.”

Just like that everyone tenses and looks around and what had felt like just fun and games for most of the day seems to get palpably serious. Kara’s spine straightens and she locks eyes with Lena.

The group, still clearly unnerved by their own internal drama, splits in two. Oliver and Barry hang back and Lena can’t decide if Oliver is upset about it or if the surly attitude is just normal for him. Judging by the way Felicity seems to constantly be rolling her eyes at him behind his back she thinks it’s probably a consistent personality trait.

Most of the team shuffles out with purpose, but Kara walks over to her and grips lightly at her bicep, clearly conflicted at the idea of leaving Lena alone in the hangar. It occurs to her then that they really are isolated in this universe. They have only each other.

“You going to be okay?” Kara asks, her hand warm and solid on Lena’s arm.

“Of course,” Lena replies, reaching up to grip at Kara’s hands, their fingers slipping together. “Be careful.”

“Always,” Kara says with a bright grin that makes Lena laugh.

Without any time to realize what’s happening, Kara leans forward to press a quick brief kiss to her cheek, just a little too close to her mouth to be considered friendly and they both kind of stare at each other wide eyed when Kara pulls back.

“Okay, cool,” Kara croaks, stumbling back a little. “Yeah, okay I’ll see you later.”

Speeding away just a little faster than human, Kara is gone and Lena is left staring at the empty hangar space hangar.

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“So how long have you and Kara been dating?” The question comes out of nowhere and Lena nearly chokes on the rum runner she had been sipping on. She bends over, away from the wall she’d been leaning against and coughs for a good few seconds.

She turns wide, confused eyes to her left, where the voice had come from and squeaks out a, “Excuse me?”

It’s Max’s new girlfriend, who’s sitting on the far end of the couch and she’s eying Lena with her brow furrowed, clearly puzzled by Lena’s reaction. They’re at some party the astronomy club is hosting and Kara had just bounced away to make sure to Aaron and Josie were ordering the right kind of pizza, leaving Lena in the living room with…apparently a very curious new addition to their friends group.

“You and Kara,” the girl, Hayley, Lena thinks, is saying. “Have you guys been dating long? Did you meet here, at college?”

“We’re -” Lena tries to get her brain to start working again, idly wonders how many drinks she’s had. It can’t have been that many. Maybe two. Maybe three. “We’re not dating.”

This gets what can only be described as a shocked expression and Hayley sort of rears back a little, looking at Lena like she’s just told her that the world is indeed flat and the sky is actually purple. “You’re not?”
“No,” Lena answers, the word slow like she’s explaining something to a child. Max steps over then, handing his new girlfriend a drink and he grins at both of them.

“What are we talking about?” He asks and then catches Lena’s expression. “Why do you look like someone just told you the Earth orbits the moon?”

“I was just asking about her and Kara,” Hayley confesses and she scoots over so Max can join her on the couch. “I thought they were dating.” She winces a little, sends Lena an apologetic look. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to be awkward.”

Max bursts out into laughter, loud and nonstop for a good thirty seconds. Both she and Hayley shoot him perplexed looks, clearly not getting the joke, but before she can say anything, Kara is gliding back into the room and heading straight for Lena.

It becomes obvious to her quickly both why Hayley was convinced they’re dating and what exactly Max found so amusing because Kara plops down on an armchair to Lena’s right before reaching up to circle Lena’s wrist and tug until Lena is falling right into Kara’s lap.

She just sort of freezes, her heart starting to thud a little quicker than usual, but it’s not from sitting on Kara’s lap. That, she’s starting to realize, is a completely normal experience. Kara is a pretty tactile person and she’s always touching Lena in some capacity. But now she notices that Max is fighting a smile when he looks at them and Kara wraps her arm around Lena’s waist in a manner less than friendly and she leans her head against Lena’s shoulder as she plucks the plastic cup out of Lena’s hand and takes a long sip.

It takes a few seconds, but Kara must notice Max and Hayley staring at them and she’s likely picked up the sudden increase in Lena’s heartrate because she leans forward a little bit to catch Lena’s eye before glancing warily at their other friends. “What?”

With a slight cough, Lena recovers and doesn’t want Kara to feel self conscious about what she’s doing so she slings her arm around Kara’s shoulders like she always does and smiles at her. “Nothing,” she says, ignoring the pointed way Max takes a slow sip of his beer.

Kara looks completely unconvinced - Lena’s sure it’s because her heart is still fluttering - so Lena twists her fingers in the ends of Kara’s ponytail to try and reassure her. “Did you get the right pizza ordered?”

Brightening at the prospect of food, Kara bounces a little, setting her chin on Lena’s shoulder with a happy grin. “Yes, and I made sure they ordered you a salad.” She says the last word like it’s something dirty and Lena laughs.

She’s aware of Max and Hayley still watching them even as Aaron and Josie walk back into the living room, but she finds she doesn’t actually care. Kara’s body is warm as it wraps around hers and she’s smiling like Lena is the only person she cares about in the room and there are worst things to be accused of doing than dating Kara Danvers.

The crush she’s developed on Kara since they started being friends two months ago has become harder and harder to ignore - especially with the way Kara has no idea what the near constant physical contact between them does to Lena - but Lena’s pretty sure she wouldn’t trade their friendship for anything.

It’s odd. Lena had come to college with zero intention of developing any significant emotional attachments, but it seems she was wholly unprepared for this girl in her life. A girl that is still unaware of the implications of some Earth customs, unaware that holding hands and cheek kissing
and lap sitting could all be easily misinterpreted.

But Lena stops caring when Kara laughs at something Aaron is saying and the sound of it comes straight into Lena’s ear, puffs of air against her neck. She tangles her fingers in the ones spread out against her thigh and takes her drink back from Kara.

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The tech team heads to the actual S.T.A.R. Labs and watches the mission from what looks like some kind of command center. Cisco and Felicity take seats next to each other in front of a bank of computers and Lena takes stock of everything they’re looking at. Before long, everything goes to hell - as it seems like it does with this crew. The terrible feeling that rockets through Lena when she hears Kara screaming in pain isn’t settled by Barry and Oliver rushing out to go help them, and it certainly isn’t helped when the team, including Kara, starts attacking them.

Eventually, Barry gets Kara alone, leading her back to the warehouse where the team had started.

“What is he doing?” Felicity asks and Lena feels the exact same way, would like to know exactly what Barry thinks his plan is.

Cisco answers. “He’s making her angry.”

Lena thinks to tell them how bad an idea that is - she’s seen Kara Danvers angry, has been there while trying to calm her - but settles for keeping her eyes on the little map that tracks Barry and Kara’s movements.

“But he knows Supergirl is invincible,” Caitlin argues and Lena feels something turn over in her chest. Because Supergirl has weaknesses and this is alien technology that she knows Kara’s never been up against. Worry spikes hard in the back of her head at the idea of Kara getting hurt because of someone overestimating her invulnerability.

It occurs to her then what Barry is probably doing and she exhales noisily in realization. “He’s trying to get her to destroy the device. Fly right through it.”

She can’t fight the wave of irritation that flows through at that because she hates the idea of Kara being used, but it’s not seconds later that both figures on the map seemingly collide and then stop abruptly.

Everything in the room stills and they wait for what feels like a minute, but is likely only seconds before Barry’s voice is breaking through the silence telling everyone that everything is okay and they’re back.

Lena fiddles with her watch and takes a deep, steadying breath.

On a monitor to her left she can see the video images of the rest of the team, congregated just outside the labs, but no longer fighting each other. They stand around just staring at each other and as soon as it’s confirmed the fight is over, Felicity is fleeing the room and heading outside.

The group is all assembled there and Barry shows up in a flash, but Kara is nowhere to be seen.

Lena walks over to take a seat at the chair Felicity just vacated and looks at Cisco. “Do you have Supergirl on the communication systems?”

Cisco turns to her, gives her a look that could only mean *duh* and hands her a small earpiece. “Sorry, probably should have hooked you up earlier.”
“It wasn’t necessary,” Lena tells him, smiling in thanks as she slides the small device into her ear. Cisco reaches across and pulls up a program on the computer she’s sitting at and she recognizes the software with relative ease.

“Know how to work that?” He asks with a little smirk and she sends him a confident look of her own.

With a few keystrokes Lena connects to Kara’s earpiece and hears it click open in her left ear. “Kara?”

Kara’s voice returns, surprised. “Lena?”

“Are you okay?” Lena asks because no one else seems overly concerned about Supergirl and that’s a role she easily steps into.

“Yeah,” Kara says but the tone sounds anything but convincing. “I’m going to go scan the rest of the city. Make sure there aren’t any more of the devices that were controlling us.”

It doesn’t seem like the brightest idea, frankly. If Kara does come across such a device what’s to stop it from controlling her again? Of the entire team to be put under that kind of spell, Supergirl is the most dangerous of all of them.

She can feel watchful eyes on her, from Cisco and Caitlin, who are still loitering around the room. In the interest of privacy, Lena clears her throat and speaks a language she hasn’t spoken in four years. “Are you sure that’s a good idea?” Her Kryptonian is rusty and feels awkward at first, but she thinks she got the words out right.

It takes Kara a second to respond, likely because Lena’s accent was never quite perfect, but she comes back through the line, answering in kind. “I’ll be careful.”

"See that you are," she says, and then goes for levity. “It’d be pretty bad form to abandon a girl in an alternate universe.”

Kara laughs and Lena smiles. “I’ll be home for dinner,” Kara jokes and it feels so normal.

Lena tries to remember the Kryptonian phrase Kara used to say to her all the time, the one that was supposed to be something like take care or until we meet again. It takes a second of scrambling through her memory to find it, but she does, and she says it softly across the comms.

There’s another pause, long enough that for a second she thinks maybe Kara already disconnected, but then her voice comes through again, quiet. She repeats it back, and it floods Lena with the warmth it always has.

With that, Lena clicks out of the line and closes down the communications program, sliding the little device out of her ear and standing.

Cisco is looking at her with his jaw dropped and confusion in his eyes. It nearly makes Lena laugh as she hands back the earpiece.

“You guys have some secret language or something?”

Lena just smiles, declines clarifying and settles for, “Or something.”

A gasp of alarm interrupts them before he can ask anything else and Caitlin is rushing towards a computer, pulling up a video feed. Lena turns just in time to catch a yellow light stream down over
what once was the figure of Ray Palmer. Then again over John Diggle. Their bodies disappearing in an instant and suddenly everyone is running back into the lab.

They watch for a moment as Barry rushes straight for Oliver’s body, missing him by just a hair before he too is taken away.

Cisco gapes at the video feed. “Well, this just got a whole lot more complicated.”

Lena sees her vacation getting longer by the second and wonders how possible it is to send e-mail across universes.

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Kara comes back later, much later, and Lena watches as Barry tells her what they suspect happened - the Dominators abducted five members of their group. Kara’s face falls immediately and she reaches out to touch Barry, to reassure him that they’re going to get the rest of the team back.

Kara notices her then and paces forward. Exhaustion is evident all over Kara’s face and in the sluggish way she walks towards her. She’s quieter than normal too and Lena can tell it’s because she’s fighting something inside herself. Lena ventures the mind control has affected Kara more than the others and she files the information away for a later conversation.

“You heard?” Kara asks when she gets close and Lena fights the urge to wrap Kara into a hug, to murmur affection into her hair until the other girl stops looking like she’s carrying the weight of multiple universes on her shoulders.

“I saw actually,” Lena says, and she doesn’t hug Kara, but she reaches out to stroke fingers down the fabric of Kara’s suit spread out on her forearm.

“How are you okay staying here for a little longer?” Kara asks and Lena sees the question for what it is, knows that Kara needs her there even if she won’t say it.

So she answers easily, “As long as we need to.”

Kara relaxes then, smiles a little and reaches out to grab Lena’s hand.

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After a considerable amount of time spent having a very vocal freak out over her team getting abducted, Felicity offers to put Lena and Kara up in a hotel room and they gratefully accept. She even offers access to some kind of superhero fund they have going and Lena attempts to refuse any kind of financial handout - Luthors do not take handouts - but Kara gently reminds her they have no money and that food isn’t free.

With a strongly worded promise to pay the team back in full, Lena allows the loan and she and Kara make their way to the hotel with a quick stop to grab some kind of dinner. As soon as Kara is holding three paper bags full of cheeseburgers and fries, she starts to relax from the tense exhaustion of earlier.

It seems some things never change and at the first bite of one of the burgers, Kara lets a smile pass over her face.

They make it to their hotel room with little incident apart from a few strange looks at the voracious way Kara is shoving food into her mouth, incapable of waiting until they stop. She only does pause when they finally get into their hotel room and she superspeeds her way out of her suit and into a
pair of sweatpants and an oversized sweatshirt that hangs off one shoulder.

Kara plops unceremoniously onto one of the double beds and tugs her bag of food back over, digging in and pulling another burger out while Lena is left to roll her eyes and set her bag down on the desk against the far wall. She had brought an extra pair of clothes, just in case - and now she suspected that she was probably going to need to stop and buy some more.

It’s curiosity more than anything that propels her to open up the laptop Cisco had loaned her earlier that day and do something she usually avoids at all costs. She googles her own name.

For the first time since she was a kid, absolutely nothing comes up from the search. Not a single headline.

It takes considerably more digging than it usually does but she actually manages to locate this earth’s version of her and she can’t decide if she’s happy that her alter-ego exists or if it’s weirding her out. The Luthors don’t seem to be the powerhouse family they are in her world, but they are still a family - just one of moderate wealth that doesn’t make the news half as often.

Kara, who has been scarfing down her seventh cheeseburger while she lounges on one of the beds, looks over at her curiously. “You okay?” The words are garbled around a huge bite of food and Lena rolls her eyes. “Your heartbeat is being weird.”

“Don’t do that,” Lena chastises, but she smiles to take the heat out of it. Lena’s palm pushes against her sternum lightly and she takes a deep breath.

Swallowing the rest of her food, Kara affects a sheepish expression. “I can’t help it. Your heartbeat has always been super loud to me.”

It feels like a much more significant fact than Lena is prepared to unpack, so she moves past it and focuses back on her laptop. There’s a webpage pulled up with a picture of Lionel and Lillian Luthor on it, and she can’t stop staring at it. There’s another one of her and Lillian and they look almost happy, normal even.

The differences between this earth and her own are then starkly apparent. Her father is alive. Lex isn’t in jail. Lillian doesn’t have any sort of paramilitary group under thumb (as far as she can tell). Even the pictures she finds of herself look...mundane.

“This Big Belly Burger stuff is really good,” Kara comments, fishing in the paper bag by her side and shoving a handful of fries into her mouth. “We need this on our earth.”

“We had it,” Lena replies, absently, clicking through pictures of the Earth-1 Luthors. “It was a subsidiary of Luthor Corp that my brother shut down to divert resources to other endeavors.”

Kara makes a horrified gasping sound and Lena arches an eyebrow back at her. “It’s really good,” Kara says in defense, wiping her hands and jumping off the bed to pace towards where Lena is sitting at a small table. “What are you looking at?”

After a second’s hesitation, Lena moves the laptop so Kara can see it. “I was curious if I existed on this earth.”

“And you do?”

Lena shrugs, gestures at the computer. “It seems so.”

“Wow,” Kara breathes out, looking at a picture of her parents looking like a normal middle-to-high
class couple. “Weird.”

“Apparently my father is still alive,” Lena says, smiling even though the thought of it is settling an uncomfortable band around her chest. “And Lex is -” She can’t finish the thought, but imagines she doesn’t need to. Not with the sympathetic twist to Kara’s mouth and the kind set to her eyes. “I think I might even have a relationship with my mother.”

“That makes sense, I suppose,” Kara says, shutting the laptop and sliding it away from Lena. She’s settles on the edge of the bed closer to the desk, and Lena spins around to look at her.

It doesn’t make sense to Lena and she says as much. “How do you mean?”

Kara’s lips thin for a moment. “Well, there aren’t aliens here,” she says. “On this earth. Not until now of course, but that doesn’t totally count.”

Lena’s brow furrows as she tries to catch Kara’s meaning, and when she does her jaw drops. As if her family’s entire problems could be simplified to such a thing. “You mean there’s no Superman,” she says softly and doesn’t add the obvious. No Supergirl either.

“Krypton is still out there,” Kara adds with a wistful lilt to it. “At least, I assume it is. So there was never a reason for Kal to come here, or me to be sent to protect him, and none of my pod dragging Fort Rozz out of the Phantom Zone.”

It hadn’t occurred to her to consider that if Supergirl wasn’t on Earth, then the logical conclusion was that Krypton had never exploded. Everything Kara’s lost on their earth is here, in this universe, and intact.

“Kara,” she starts slowly, her eyes starting to well a bit as the significance of what they’re talking about starts to become clearer. Kara must recognize what Lena’s thinking because she shakes her head with a soft smile, reaching out to grab at Lena’s hands and squeezing them.

“On Krypton, we believed that every moment is a bridge to the next. That everything happens for a reason,” Kara says, a serious set to her eyes. “If Krypton doesn’t explode, I never get to Earth. I never meet Alex or live with the Danvers. I never meet you.”

Lena hurts just imagining such a world, and then realizes she’s in it. Somewhere out there is a version of herself that’s never known Kara Danvers. At first, when she had realized that her family was more intact, she had assumed that in some way her life was happier here, more at peace. But as she faces the reality that Earth-1 Lena Luthor never has a Kara Danvers...


“Me too,” Lena says, and is surprised to discover how much she means it. They blink at each other for a moment, their fingers winding together between them.

“I’m sorry we have to stay here longer than expected,” Kara says, her thumb rubbing over Lena’s knuckles.

“Don’t be,” Lena says with a dismissive shrug, happy for the subject change. “I told you I needed a vacation.”

Kara hums agreeably, dropping Lena’s hands and leaning backwards. “It’s kinda nice when you think about it.”
“Think about what?”

“We’re just us here,” Kara says, looking at Lena softly.

Lena’s brows pull together. “I don’t know what you mean.”

With a shrug, Kara bites a little at her lower lip before continuing. “We’re not - I mean here on this Earth we’re not - there’s no DEO or L Corp, and your mother isn’t trying to kill anyone here and apart from a massive alien invasion going on, I don’t know…it feels like we’re playing hooky or something.”

With a slight pang in her chest, Lena understands what Kara’s trying to communicate and the truth of it sits over her like a blanket. “Less pressure,” she murmurs.

“Kind of,” Kara agrees.

Lena’s not sure it’s entirely true, considering Kara was brought to Earth-1 for the express purpose of being a heavyweight in the team’s fight against the Dominators, but she understands that’s not really what Kara’s talking about. “It’ll be nice,” she says, wanting to reach out again for Kara. “To just be us for awhile.”

“We can learn how to be friends again,” Kara says softly and suddenly the room feels so small to Lena. She clears her throat a little against the sudden thickness that claws up into it. “Without all the other stuff getting in the way.”

“That’ll be nice.”

“I haven’t had a real vacation in like forever,” Kara confesses in a soft voice and Lena smiles warmly.

“Me neither.”

“Like not since sophomore year when we went to Midway City and went on the lake,” Kara adds and Lena almost chokes when the memory of the trip Kara’s talking about comes to mind. They learned things about each other, but it wasn’t as friends. Kara must realize what she said and she straightens, coughs a little and stands. “Anyway, we should probably sleep.”

Lena turns away from Kara, organizes things on the table just to have something to do and nods. “Yeah, absolutely. Sleep.”

“Hey,” Kara says and Lena turns with a questioning arch of her eyebrow. “I know Barry wants to chase down some leads tomorrow around town, but I was thinking afterward we could like...I don’t know...do something?”

“Something?”

Kara shrugs, twists her fingers together and looks generally fidgety. “Go for lunch?”

It’s about the fortieth time Kara has asked her out for lunch since they reunited and each time never fails to remind Lena of the fumbling way Kara had first asked her out. It’s no different now, but Lena finds herself unwilling to say no. Not in a universe that’s comprised of only the two of them and nothing else.

“Sounds good,” she replies, and smiles at the grin that takes ahold of Kara’s face.
“Really?” Kara’s so genuinely surprised at Lena’s answer that she almost feels guilty.

“Really,” Lena repeats and her chest swells at the happy way the skin around Kara’s eyes crinkles.

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Jack Spheer is exactly the kind of guy she knows her mother would be thrilled if she married. He’s well mannered, successful, and he comes from the kind of money that almost matches the Luthors. The fact that she knows her mother would approve of him almost makes her dislike him immediately, but Jack is undeniably charming and nice in an unassuming way.

Plus he’s brilliant, and he has a passion for saving the world that reminds Lena unerringly of Kara.

And maybe that at the end of the day is the reason why Jack’s request to take her out to dinner spikes a stab of pain into her chest.

“I can’t,” she says almost immediately, trying to get the hollow feeling to fade from her chest.

“You mean not tonight or -” He’s still smiling and his invitation is almost casual, no pressure. But he keeps looking at her with kind, soft eyes and Lena’s avoided emotional attachments for two years for a reason.

“I’m not really looking to date anyone right now,” she answers, trying for a practiced and polite smile.

His expression barely wavers, but he shrugs. “I get it,” he says and it just makes it worse that he looks so understanding about it. They’ve been nothing but friendly with each other and she loves working with him and she really needs to stop thinking about Kara right now.

“I’m just not over an ex,” she tells him, reaching out to grasp his forearm. A worry that her rejection might ruin their friendship wraps around her chest, but he’s still smiling at her, shrugging like it’s no big deal. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” he says immediately in a way that feels genuine. “Bad breakup?”

The answer to that isn’t really simple so Lena doesn’t give him one. Just shrugs. “Sort of.”

He grins like she didn’t just reject him in favor of an old flame and reaches out to pat her hand where it’s still resting on his arm. “Look, Lena. We’re friends, right?”

“Yes,” she says. Professional colleagues is more what Lena would categorize them as, but they’ve been working together on a joint project for the past few months now and it’s involved spending a considerable amount of time together - maybe friends was just as apt a description.

“Come have dinner with me,” he says again and puts up a finger to stop her response. “Come out, have a meal, you can tell me all about this moron that let you get away. No pressure. Not a date.”

She laughs a little, if only at the teasing half-smirk he has on his face. “Jack,” she sighs.

“Or we don’t have to talk about that at all,” he adds, putting his hands up in a half shrug. “Your choice. Either way, you get a free meal.”

“I can pay for my own meal,” Lena says with a roll of her eyes.

“Sure, but how else am I going to convince you to spend time with me if I can’t bribe you with free
A smile threatens to take hold of her face and she purses her lips to prevent it. Jack has laughter in his eyes and she finds herself no longer wanting to resist.

“Fine,” she relents, shouldering her purse. “But I get to pick the place.”

Dinner ends up being far more enjoyable than Lena expected. Jack is an interesting conversationalist and he listens to her with a kind of patience she’s not used to. Apart from having a romantic interest, Jack seems to have no other agenda. He doesn’t need her money, and he already has corporate resources of his own, so he doesn’t need anything she can offer from her position at Luthor Corp.

He’s funny and he has good taste in wine and Lena feels comfortable with him in a way she’s only really felt with two other people.

“You have to tell me,” he says after ordering dessert and pouring the last of the bottle of wine in her glass.

“Tell you what?” She smiles at him over the rim of her glass, leaning back in her chair and crossing her legs.

“About the idiot that broke up with you,” he says, flashing her a charming smile.

It doesn’t hurt as bad as it usually does when she thinks about Kara, but there’s still that little twinge of pain in her chest. “Actually, I was the one that did the breaking up.”

Arching a brow, he leans forward, plays with the stem of his wine glass. “Really?”

With a slow nod she takes another sip of her wine, shrugs one of her shoulders. “We were at different places in our lives,” she answers. Another massive oversimplification, but not that far from the heart of it. Idly, she wonders what Kara is doing right now, if she goes on dates like this, if she has to explain Lena to a new person - she wonders what Kara says about it. “It was for the best.”

“Sounds more complicated than that,” Jack says with a knowing glint in his eyes.

“Speaking from experience?” She asks with half a smirk, but his face grows serious when he answer.

“Yes,” he says simply and with a kind tone.

Any trace of a smile erases from her face and she sets her wine glass down to look at him, feeling affection burst unbidden from her chest. “Thank you for dinner, Jack,” she says softly and his lips twitch upward just a bit.

“The pleasure is all mine, Lena.”

--

The next morning, she and Kara both head back to meet up with Barry and see if they have any leads on where the Dominators could be or where they would have taken their teammates.

Lena hangs back with Cisco, Caitlin and Felicity, who have seemed to accept her as a de facto member of their nerd squad (their words, not Lena’s). She helps where she can and keeps an eye on
Kara where they have a tracking program running up on a large monitor.

Nothing comes of it the first day. Nor the second.

At the end of the second day, Barry tells them to go back to their hotel with a **we’ll call you if we need you and a sorry you’re having to stay longer than you probably intended.**

Felicity makes plans to head back to Star City with Cisco and check in with her team. She hands them all small communication devices and basically puts them on call. Kara assures her that she can be anywhere at the drop of a hat and that she’s faster than Barry (he scoffs at that immediately, but the two of them share a smile).

The third day, Lena wakes up around 8am - a late start for her - and realizes she has absolutely no reason to get out of bed. No responsibilities, no pressing work to get done. It’s an odd experience.

She sends a fleeting thought for L Corp and the firestorm she’s surely abandoned it in. Guilt races through her, but she can’t deny that the past few days have been a reprieve from the usual stress of her life, and they’ve pumped a newfound strength into her.

Kara gets them both coffee that morning and sits on the edge of her bed as Lena sips at it.

“What?” Lena asks, after a few seconds of Kara glancing her direction.

Kara shrugs. “What do you want to do today?”

Lena blinks. The idea that she can do whatever she wants, that she has no obligation to be anywhere or be anyone floors her a little and judging from the small smile playing on Kara’s lips, her ex-girlfriend is having similar thoughts. “I don’t know,” she answers honestly.

Kara plays with her coffee cup a little, shrugs. “Iris mentioned that on this Earth there’s **seven** seasons of Buffy.”

“What?!” Lena exclaims, sitting forward and laughing a little. “No way.”

“Yeah,” Kara answers, responding to the happy look on Lena’s face. “And she said I could borrow six and seven if we wanted.”

It feels like a lazy Saturday in college. “I could go for a TV marathon,” Lena admits softly admiring the wide grin Kara gives her in reply.

“Can we order Hawaiian pizza?”

“I don’t know,” Lena says slowly, fighting a smile. “Do they even have that in this universe?”

Kara makes a horrified noise, puts a hand to her chest in exaggerated shock. “Any universe that doesn’t put pineapple on their pizza is a universe I do not want to live in.”

“It’s disgusting, Kara,” Lena replies and enjoys the mock glare she gets in response.

“Just for that I’m ordering three huge, disgusting, high-calorie meat lovers pizzas and eating every single slice in front of you.”

Lena cringes, but she laughs and kicks out at Kara’s thigh, which is like kicking a rock, laughing even harder when Kara makes a show of falling off the bed in a flailing of limbs.

--
Their fourth day on Earth-1 is gorgeous. Bright sunshine and blue skies, and Kara immediately pleads with Lena to spend their afternoon in a park she found not too far from the hotel. It feels a little wrong to be enjoying themselves when the rest of their compatriots are worrying over their abducted friends, but Lena can’t resist the half pout Kara gives her when she asks.

They find a nice spot under a huge oak tree that allows Lena some shade - she burns if she’s in direct sunlight for more than five minutes - but still lets Kara soak up the rays of the yellow sun. Lena puts her back to the tree trunk and swipes through a tablet Cisco had loaned her with all kinds of information about how the multiverse actually works, how breaches are formed, and what metahumans are. The notes on how Barry’s biology works alone are fascinating.

“What are you reading?”

Lena looks up at where Kara’s hanging from one of the tree branches and squints a little at the sunlight that streams through the leaves. “Cisco gave me some of his notes on the particle accelerator. Apparently its explosion is what gave Barry his powers.”

Kara lets go of the branch and falls to the ground, floating a little before she hits the grass. “So boring stuff,” she huffs, dropping down onto her back and resting her head unceremoniously on Lena’s knee.

With a roll of her eyes, Lena tugs at a strand of Kara’s hair. “It’s not boring.”

“Is there math?” Kara asks, crossing her ankles and craning her neck a little to look at Lena.

“Yes.”

“Then it’s boring.” Kara replies in a whisper, like she’s confessing a deep dark secret. “Math is the worst. It’s hard.”

Lena scoffs. “I hate when you do that.”

“Do what?” Kara’s fingers twist together where they’re resting on her stomach, the stretch of her shirt lifting just enough to reveal the skin of her hipbones. Lena tries very hard not to notice.

“Act like you’re stupid when you’re not.”

Kara turns a little so her cheek is against Lena’s thigh and she looks up at her, the sunlight playing attractively in her loose blonde hair. “I’m not doing that. I’m just lazy. Math is hard here. It takes like so many conversions for me to even understand anything and I would rather spend my time doing something fun.”

Lena smiles fondly at the memory of Kara slipping up a few times trying to remember little things like how many days there were to a week - instead of six zeytar to one fanff. “Okay,” Lena concedes, shutting her tablet down and setting it to the side. “What would you rather do then?”

With a wide easy grin, Kara presses a little closer to Lena, her head pushing further into Lena’s lap until her shoulders are hitting the side of Lena’s thigh. “Tell me something about yourself.”

“What?” Lena asks.

“Tell me something about yourself,” Kara repeats, watching Lena expectantly.

“Kara, you know almost everything there is to know about me,” she says with a little laugh.
“Not really,” Kara says and Lena’s smile falters, falls into a frown. “I mean I haven’t actually been around you in four years and you’ve spent a lot of time trying to convince me you’re all different now so…” Kara shrugs, twists her fingers together and wiggles her foot in the air. “Tell me something I don’t know.”

The words stutter into her chest and her heartbeat threatens to start thudding far too loudly so she swallows against it and looks away, out into the park, for a long moment.

“It doesn’t have to be something hard,” Kara murmurs and her hand reaches up to tangle with Lena’s. It’s a comforting gesture, though it does nothing to help the sudden racing of her heart. “Tell me something easy. Like...what did you do on your twenty-first birthday?”

“A laugh bursts out of her, loud and unbidden, as she thinks of the answer to Kara’s question. “Lex took me to Germany.”

“Germany?” Kara repeats with a furrowed brow, her fingers stroking against Lena’s in an absent motion. “Really?”

“Yeah,” Lena says, smiling at the memory of her brother taking her around to all his favorite spots in Bavaria. “It was...” *distracting* is what she wants to say. It had been her first birthday without Kara and the closer it came, the more depressed she had started to feel. Work was something she had become used to using as a distraction tactic, but when Lex noticed she’d logged over ninety hours in the R&D lab days before her birthday, he whisked her away immediately. Using some tech conference as an excuse, they took the earliest flight to Munich and didn’t tell their mother until their layover in Amsterdam.

“It was fun?” Kara ventures and Lena nods. It had been, in its own way.

“Lex got ridiculously drunk on German beer.” Lena laughs a little, wrapped in a happy memory of her brother.

“And you?”

“I made sure he didn’t offend anyone in his stunted German,” Lena says wryly, remembering how her brother had learned all the local slang and attempted to use it at one of the beer gardens to pick up girls.

“Sounds like him,” Kara says and it squeezes tightly in Lena’s gut to be trading memories of her brother with someone that don’t include his rapid descent into madness or the crazed way he had last looked at his trial.

“What about you?” Lena asks to avoid thinking too hard about a time in her life when Lex was just her overprotective brother and not some sort of famous criminal, locked away in prison for life.

“What about me what?”

“Tell me something,” Lena says. “It’s only fair.”

Their fingers are completely intertwined now and resting against Kara’s stomach without Lena even noticing. It seems her free hand has a mind of its own as well because she’s stroking through the loose hair splayed over her lap absentely.

Kara seems either completely unaware of any of this, or completely unaffected, because she just keeps her eyes trained on the leaves and branches above them and taps a little against Lena’s hand. “You know when I came out?”
Confusion pulls her brows down and she looks at Kara. “What?”

“As Supergirl,” Kara clarifies with a half smile.

“Oh,” Lena says, laughing at herself a little. “When you saved the plane.”

“Yeah,” Kara says, the word a little breathy like she’s getting lost in the memory of it. “Alex was on the plane.”

“How did you - she was?”

A little nod. “Yup.”

“So that’s why you did it?”

Kara looks down to where their fingers are twisting together and plays with the watch on Lena’s wrist with her free hand. “I was on a - a date,” she confesses and Lena’s stomach flips a little. “It was going really bad actually.” Kara laughs a little and Lena relaxes. “And I saw it on the news. I knew Alex was on the flight and I…”

“You weren’t going to let your sister die,” Lena finishes for her, squeezing Kara’s fingers and smiling at her encouragingly.

“Alex was really pissed,” Kara replies, nose scrunching up a bit at the memory. “Like super pissed.”

“Why?”

Kara shrugs. “She’s spent her entire life trying to protect me and keep my secret and I just kind of came barreling out into the public eye without any regard for the consequences.”

“You saved your sister,” Lena tells her, carding her fingers through Kara’s hair soothingly. “And now you’ve saved the world so many times I’ve lost count.”

Kara scoffs. “Not that many times.”

“Alex loves you,” Lena says and Kara’s brow crinkles as she gives Lena a very clear yeah I know that expression. “I’m just saying.”

“It felt good actually.” Kara says, turning back to look at the sky. Her fingers click open and close the face of Lena’s watch in a fidgety motion.

“Saving the plane?”

“Saving Alex.”

Lena watches the sun come down through the branches, shading and lighting up Kara’s figure in equal measure and the tree sways a little in the breeze. “I can only imagine,” she murmurs.

“Okay, now you go again,” Kara says, looking at Lena expectantly.

Taking a deep breath, Lena tries to think of some benign memory from their time spent apart. It’s a little difficult because so many of her memories either involve throwing herself into work or - she tries not think of Jack. “Do you remember Logan Bell?”

“The guy who interned with you freshman year?”
Lena nods, ignores the way Kara has now spread Lena’s palm out across the defined muscles of her abdomen and is tracing her fingers there. “He got a job with us after graduation. In my department actually.”

“Okay,” Kara says, drawing the word out in confusion.

Thinning her lips for a moment, Lena takes a breath. “I might have punched him,” she confesses, thinking of the day she finally lost her cool with the man. It was lucky for him she didn’t have anything heavy to throw at him and had to settle for using her fists.

“You what?!” Kara exclaims, sitting up a little and dislodging Lena’s hand from her hair. Kara props up on her elbow to turn and look at Lena and their hands slide down so abruptly that Lena has to pull hers away before it ends up somewhere inappropriate.

She laughs a little at the utterly shocked expression on Kara’s face. “I punched him. And then I fired him.”

Still looking relatively bewildered, Kara stutters a little, shaking her head. “What did he do? That made you punch him I mean.”

With a slight wince, Lena looks away for a brief second. “His work was always subpar anyway. He was lazy and entitled and he had absolutely no passion for the actual job we were trying to do.”

“That’s believable,” Kara says, but she narrows her eyes a little. “But you usually don’t punch people for that.”

“He had a couple of complaints against him. From the women in my department.”

Recognition dawns on Kara’s face and this time her tone drops a register. “What did he do?”

“Just something that absolutely warranted the broken nose I gave him,” Lena answers with a shrug. Just thinking of the way he grabbed at his face, bloody and contorted, still gives her a little thrill of satisfaction. “My mother was infuriated, but I remember Lex standing right behind her, laughing, and then he gave me a set of boxing gloves for Christmas that year.”

Kara laughs, her hair tumbling down in waves that draw Lena’s attention for a brief moment. “Next time you need to punch someone, how about you just let me know?”

Lena pushes lightly at Kara’s stomach and Kara pretends to sway under the pressure. “I did just fine myself, thanks.”

“Yeah, but when I punch people my knuckles don’t bruise,” Kara tells her, holding up a hand between them and grinning. “Your hands are so pretty,” Kara adds, picking up the limb in question. “And they do so many good things. I’d hate to see them get hurt.”

It’s not meant to be flirty, Lena knows this, but it comes out that way and Kara is so close to her and everything about the moment makes Lena think about their field outside campus with Kara zooming around trees and floating in the air as she kissed Lena. Heat blooms across her chest and she tugs her hand out of Kara’s grip with a soft clearing of her throat and a low, “Kara.”

Kara must realize how charged the moment has gotten to because she sits up a little more and puts some distance between them. “Sorry,” she says, licking at her lips. Blinking slowly, Kara shakes her head a little as if she can rattle the feelings out of it and takes a deep breath Lena knows she doesn’t need. “It’s easy to forget here.”
Lena knows exactly what she means. Without the ever constant pressure of their lives and responsibilities back home it’s easy to forget that it isn’t four years ago, that they’re not sitting at a bench on campus or in their field. It’s easy to forget that Lena can’t just lean forward and press their lips together when she wants to.

It’s ridiculously easy and Lena can’t deny that on top of that, it feels good. She had said she needed a vacation and she had, but what she really needed a vacation from was all the stuff in her life that made everything with Kara complicated. She needed to feel like she did in college, the easy casual way she could be with Kara and the way she could let happiness wrap up around her heart without trying to fight it.

“Let’s,” she’s saying before she can stop herself.

Kara’s eyes snap up to meet hers. “Let’s what?”

“Let’s forget,” Lena says softly, holding Kara’s gaze as if it’s the only thing keeping them together.

“Forget what?” Kara asks and her voice is so soft too, like if she speaks any louder it will break whatever’s building between them.

“You said it’d be nice to be just us for a while, right?” Lena replies and the moment feels risky, dangerous even. Adrenaline pools a little on the back of her tongue and she’s sure Kara’s being deafened by the heavy staccato of her heart. “So let’s do that.”

“Lena,” Kara says slowly, still quiet. “What are you saying?”

Reaching out to take ahold of Kara’s hand again, Lena smiles, relaxes her shoulders. “I’m saying let’s forget that everything is crazy complicated between us. We’re here in another universe where we don’t have to worry about either of our jobs or about my crazy family. It’s just us.”

“Just us,” Kara repeats.

“Let’s just do that,” Lena says with a resigned sort of shrug. She’s done fighting constantly against what all her instincts tell her to do around Kara. It’s exhausting trying to resist it. “I want to get to know you again and be around you without second guessing everything.”

“You’re the one that said it would make things too confusing,” Kara says warily and she’s not wrong. At the outset Lena was positive that being around Kara again too much would make everything so much worse, so much harder. But not being around her, not acting normal around her is what’s making everything feel so complicated.

“It doesn’t have to be confusing here,” Lena says.

Kara’s mouth twitches at the corner. “You sure?”

About Kara? Lena thinks. Always. “We’ll likely be here a few more days,” she says. “I’d like to enjoy my vacation before I have to go back and dig L Corp out of whatever hole my mother’s arrest has surely put it in.”

“Okay,” Kara says, squeezing the fingers twined with Lena’s. “I can do that.”

They’re quiet for a bit, just observing each other and breathing in the feeling of things settling between them.

A mischievous look crosses Kara’s face that Lena arches an eyebrow at. “What’s that look?”
“So if we’re being normal,” Kara says and that’s not entirely what Lena meant, but she understands what Kara’s saying. “Does that mean that if, say, I wanted to…”

She trails off and Lena’s brow pulls down in confusion before suddenly Kara’s speeding to a stand and slinging Lena up into her arms like she weighs nothing before taking off at a run towards the pond in the middle of the park. Lena lets out something between a yelp and a shriek as the air gets whooshed out of her and it takes a disorienting second to realize Kara’s intention.

“Kara, put me down!” Lena orders, but she’s laughing as she yells it and Kara’s laughing. Lena shoves at Kara’s arms and Kara makes an exaggerated show of falling to the ground, both of them tumbling against the grass in a fit of laughter until they’re side by side on their backs. It draws attention from an elderly couple feeding the ducks a few feet away, but Lena can’t find it in her to care.

No one knows her here. There won’t be some headline in the gossip section about the youngest Luthor child being seen cavorting around in the park with grass stains on her pants. Her assistant isn’t going to call her in a few minutes to inform her of some fire she needs to put out. There’s no looming presence of her mother to worry about and no one is shooting her looks purely because they know she’s Lex Luthor’s baby sister.

It’s just Kara. Kara looking at her with amused eyes and a happy face and everything feels like it’s out of a dream she’s never really let herself have.

They’re being normal, Lena reminds herself. She thinks back to what she’d do right now if they were in college. If she’s honest, it’s not so much that she’d do one specific thing or act a certain way, it’s that she wouldn’t hold back, she wouldn’t stop herself from touching Kara if she wanted. Wouldn’t stop Kara from touching her.

So she gives into desire and scoots into Kara’s side, dropping her head on Kara’s shoulder and winding her arm across her stomach until their fingers are tangling together. Kara’s arm goes automatically to her back, the palm resting where it always had just above the waistband of her pants and Lena sinks into the familiar way their bodies fit together.

A bird chirps and flies overhead as a breeze ruffles through Lena’s hair and for the first time in nearly four years, Lena feels like herself.

“I missed you,” Kara says, the words ghosting over Lena’s hair. They had said it to each other just days ago, standing on a balcony in National City, but the sentiment feels different right now, more heavy.

“I missed you too,” Lena whispers and this time her heart stays calm, steady in her chest. Kara tightens her hold on Lena and dusts lips against Lena’s hairline. There are no warning bells that go off trying to remind her of boundaries, no spike of heat in the back of her eyes. Just the sound of Kara’s heart pumping in her chest and the contented feeling of coming home.
Chapter 8

When Lena wakes up on day six of their excursion to Earth-1, it’s to an empty hotel room and a note on the bedside table that reads *ran out to get coffee and breakfast - k*

It’s another day of absolutely nothing planned and Lena double checks her computer to make sure the team isn’t looking for them.

With the hotel room empty, she takes the opportunity to get ready for the day, hopping in a long, hot shower that she wouldn’t usually indulge in when she’s home. Showers tend to stay quick and tepid, a functional thing rather than something pleasurable, but now, with no agenda for the day, Lena stays under the hot spray for over a half hour. It feels sinfully good.

Walking out of the bathroom, Lena doesn’t think to realize Kara has probably returned and that’s her only excuse as to why she walks back out in nothing but a towel, loose wet hair falling over her shoulders. She doesn’t even notice Kara until she hears something like a small explosion burst through the room, and Lena jumps so forcefully her back hits a wall.

Hand at her chest to stop the sudden racing of her heart, Lena blinks up to see Kara staring at her, her fist clenched midair and what must be coffee all over the front of her shirt.

They stare for a long moment, Lena trying to keep her breath even until she feels like she can reasonably talk again. “Kara,” she says, still gasping a little. “You scared the *hell* out of me.”

Kara doesn’t respond. She just stands frozen in the middle of the room, jaw moving silently up and down. The only other movement she makes is to point at Lena inarticulately, and that’s when Lena realizes what the problem is.

Tightening the towel wrapped around her body, Lena forces herself not to react too much. She clears her throat and gestures at Kara’s now soaked midair and what must be coffee all over the front of her shirt.

They stare for a long moment, Lena trying to keep her breath even until she feels like she can reasonably talk again. “Kara,” she says, still gasping a little. “You scared the *hell* out of me.”

Kara doesn’t respond. She just stands frozen in the middle of the room, jaw moving silently up and down. The only other movement she makes is to point at Lena inarticulately, and that’s when Lena realizes what the problem is.

Tightening the towel wrapped around her body, Lena forces herself not to react too much. She clears her throat and gestures at Kara’s now soaked shirt, the dark liquid dripping off it onto the carpet. “You should probably change and soak that before it stains too terribly.” The shirt is far beyond repair, but it’s something to say.

It takes another few seconds for Kara to respond, but she blinks down at herself, startling at little, as if she didn’t realize she exploded an entire cup of coffee in her hand. Lena spares a moment to feel disappointed she won’t get to actually *drink* the coffee Kara had clearly bought for her.

“Right, yeah,” Kara is saying and her eyes dart around the room to avoid looking at Lena. She flails about to try and find her bag until Lena points at it with another gentle clearing of her throat.

Then, as Kara is scrambling for it, getting coffee over *everything*, she seems to uncharacteristically lose coordination and stumbles, bumping into the corner of her bed so forcefully that something cracks loudly and the entire frame crashes down into the ground.

They both stare at it with wide eyes for a few seconds before Lena bursts out laughing and passes a hand over her eyes. “You know what,” she says with considerable mirth. Kara’s nose is scrunched up as she chuckles, an attractive blush beating into her cheeks. “I’m going to go back into the bathroom while you…” she waves around the room. “Deal with your life.”

Kara makes some sort of strangled noise, but Lena doesn’t stay around to unpack it. She reaches over to grab a set of clean clothes from her duffel and retreats to the safety of the bathroom. The heat of Kara’s stare burns into her back.
“I wasn’t objectifying you,” is the first thing Kara says to her when she comes back into the room, the words coming out in a heated rush like they were dying to burst out of her the entire time Lena was in the bathroom.

“It’s okay, Kara,” Lena says with a laugh, waving her off. “Honestly.”

The coffee-stained shirt has been traded for something clean and Kara fidgets a little where she’s sitting at the small table in the corner, adjusting her glasses as she looks at Lena warily. “I mean, you’re attractive, obviously. I’ve always found you - you’re pretty I mean - you know I don’t - I just don’t want you to think - we’re so much more than-”

“Kara,” Lena cuts off, stepping forward to put a finger against Kara’s lips. “It’s okay.”

“I feel bad,” Kara confesses when Lena releases her mouth.

Lena arches a brow, is determined not to make a big deal about this. They’re being normal, right? Kara’s seen her half naked so many times it’s hard to count. Even before they dated.

“The only things you should feel bad about,” Lena says with a warm smile. “Is destroying what I’m going to presume was my coffee and then breaking a bed. This room is under Felicity’s name.”

Kara looks appropriately sheepish at the reminder, but she grabs a small coffee cup to her right and holds it out to Lena. “I got you another one,” she says and Lena’s a little surprised she had the time to do that while Lena was changing.

She plucks the coffee out of Kara’s hand and takes a small sip of the hot liquid, arching her brow over the rim of it. “Then you’re forgiven,” she says when she’s done, smiling down at Kara, who beams back.

“So you want to go to the planetarium?”

The sudden change of subject startles Lena a bit, but she recovers, goes to sit at the table next to Kara and sips at her coffee. “The planetarium?”

Kara nods enthusiastically. “Cisco gave me, like, free museum passes to Central City because apparently S.T.A.R. Labs has some kind of reciprocity with everyone I guess. They have a planetarium and it’s only a few blocks from here.”

“Okay,” Lena answers easily.

“Awesome,” Kara breathes. “I want to see if they’ve discovered the same amount of planets here as they have back home.”

“Or if they even have the same amount at all,” Lena adds, considering it. It’s an interesting thought.

“I hadn’t thought of that!” Kara says perking up with wide eyes.

Lena laughs. “Come on, nerd,” she says, standing and holding her free hand out to Kara. “Let’s go.”

“Hey,” Kara replies indignantly, but she takes Lena’s offered hand and stands. “I’m not the nerd in this relationship.”

It warms something in Lena’s chest and she doesn’t fight it, just smiles at Kara and tugs them
towards the door. “Says the girl that suggested we go to a planetarium and count planets.”

“You’re the one going with me,” Kara accuses, but she’s smiling and all Lena wants to do is kiss her. The urge is so strong that her mouth goes a little dry.

“Only because you’re literally my only friend in this entire universe,” Lena teases and Kara shoots her a dry look.

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The planetarium is actually fairly impressive as far as museums from other universes go. Kara is completely enamored with the place, which Lena finds endlessly charming.

“You’re from outer space,” Lena reminds her in a soft whisper.

“It’s all relative,” Kara says, spinning a small display of the solar system. “To me you guys are the aliens.”

Lena hums through a laugh and observes a display case hosting a piece of a dwarf planet.

It’s comfortable to stroll through the exhibits arm-in-arm with Kara. There’s a relief in not having to second guess threading her arm through Kara’s elbow or leaning into her as they wait in line for one of the shows. She marvels for the hundredth time since coming to Earth-1 that not a single person bats an eye towards them. They’re all but invisible amongst the crowd.

“What are you thinking about so hard?” Kara asks after a particularly long stretch of silence. She’s staring at some sort of sextant behind a glass case, glancing up at Lena with a smile.

Lena laughs. “Nothing important.”

They walk through a long hallway with a curved ceiling that maps the history of the universe along its sides and ceilings. A recreation of the big bang echoes through the hallway in a sudden burst of light and sound and Kara laughs, delighted by it as some children skitter by, frightened by the noise.

It reminds Lena of times spent out in a field with the astronomy club drinking spiked hot chocolate out of a thermos and listening to Kara map the stars with her friends, Kara whispering in her ear about which galaxies she had visited.

“Do you keep in touch with anyone from school?” Lena asks as they walk.

Kara stills noticeably and disengages from Lena’s hold to look at her warily. “Why?”

Lena shrugs and can’t figure out why Kara looks suddenly closed off. “I was just curious. Your friends from astronomy club. Max, Aaron, Jos-”

“No,” Kara says cutting her off with a dismissive shake of her head which is noticeably forced. “I didn’t.”

Lena’s brows pull together. “How come?”

Kara’s eyes dart everywhere but at Lena and she fiddles with a nearby display that tracks how long it would take for a postcard to arrive from Neptune. It’s clear that Kara doesn’t want to talk about this particular subject, but Lena can’t imagine why.

“I just didn’t,” Kara answers with a shrug, pressing buttons on the display absently. Lena steps
forward, close enough that her arm brushes up against Kara’s front.

“Okay,” Lena says with an encouraging smile. “You don’t have to explain yourself to me. I was just curious.” She pauses and Kara still doesn’t look at her. “I didn’t stay in contact with anyone after I graduated as I’m sure you know, but since you were there for anot-”

“Actually, I transferred. And I didn’t really talk to anyone back at school after,” Kara interrupts with a thin smile as she finally looks at Lena.

“You transferred?”

Nodding, Kara laughs, but it doesn’t sound happy. “After you graduated, I just...I transferred.”

She thinks to ask why but she’s terrified of the answer. It’s written all over Kara’s face even as she tries to smile, shaking her head and looking down. “It’s not because of what you’re thinking it is,” Kara adds.

“What am I thinking it is?” Lena asks in a soft voice, her chest suddenly tight with emotion.

“I missed Alex,” Kara says instead of answering. “You know that.”

“Kara, I said you didn’t have to explain and I meant it.” Certainly not if their breakup was the main reason Kara had to go to another school entirely.

“Campus was just so quiet after you left,” Kara admits, laughing at herself. “I couldn’t concentrate.”

A tense silence stretches between them and Lena struggles to keep her heart from racing. “Kara,” she says softly and Kara reacts immediately, steps closer and puts a hand at Lena’s elbow in comfort.

“It wasn’t - I don’t regret that decision. It ended up being really good for me and I got a great internship in Midvale and I worked at Noonan’s for a while and then I got to be Cat Grant’s assistant and now here we are and-” Kara blinks, her stare heavy. “I told you that on Krypton we believed that every moment is a bridge to the next. Things happen for a reason. Even bad things.”

It’s hard not to think of Lex suddenly or of her mother, but it’s even harder not to think about how their breakup seemed to fundamentally change the course of Kara’s life. “I’m sorry,” is all she can think to say.

“It’s not your fault,” Kara says with a kind of sincerity that Lena is surprised to find she believes. “No one is responsible for my feelings apart from me. You taught me that.”

The moment feels far too significant and the entire point of this vacation is to forget about all these messy emotions between them so Lena takes a breath and tries to smile. “You’re right.”

Kara squeezes Lena’s arm where she’s still holding it and smirks. “You’ve been saying that a lot lately. Are you sick or something?”

Lena rolls her eyes, but she lets herself laugh and when she pushes her fingers against Kara’s stomach in jest, her ex-girlfriend makes a predictably exaggerated reaction to it, pulling away from the touch in mock pain.

“Come on, dork,” Lena says, and she lets Kara tangle their fingers together. “If we’re going to make the Cosmic Wonder show we need to get moving.”
“Isn’t it cool that they named a show after me?” Kara comments as they start walking, and it takes Lena a good five seconds until she understands the joke. She groans loudly when she does and Kara laughs, the sound of it bright and easy as it threads its way around Lena’s heart.

--

They eat lunch at some restaurant down the block from the planetarium and Lena spends most of the time trying to convince Kara she should include some greens in her meals. Her efforts are repelled by Kara ordering a sandwich that comes with a massive amount of meat on it.

“So,” Kara says, elbows propped up on the table as she takes a huge bite of her sandwich.

“So,” Lena parrots, spearing a carrot out of her salad and arching an eyebrow.

“Tell me something else,” she says, thankfully after swallowing her food.

Lena rolls her eyes, but she smiles. “Tell you something else about what?”

“The getting to know each other thing,” Kara answers, setting her sandwich down and going straight for her fries. “Or re-know each other I guess. The getting to know each other again because we spent four years apart and are now super different people thing.”

It hasn’t felt like they’ve spent four years apart. Not these past few days. Their time on Earth-1 has felt disturbingly similar to college and Lena’s starting to feel like a fool for constantly insisting they’re two entirely different people now.

“What do you want to know?”

Kara dips a fry in her ketchup before swirling it in a small ramekin of mayonnaise and Lena sets her fork down and takes a long sip of her drink to hide her grimace. “I don’t know,” she shrugs. “What did you do after graduation? I remember seeing something on the news about...Japan?”

Clearing her throat against the memories of her months in Tokyo, Lena affects a smile and takes a sip of her drink. “I went there a few weeks after graduation to open up a new technology branch in Tokyo.”

“What was it like?” Kara asks earnestly and Lena doesn’t know how to tell her how isolating the experience felt, how cold and lonely.

“Have you never been?”

Kara shakes her head. “Nope. So tell me what it was like? I have to live vicariously through you.”

Lena laughs a little, picks at her salad. “It was...rainy.”

Kara’s nose scrunches a little. “Rainy?”

“Yeah,” Lena says with a shrug of her shoulder. “It was rainy.”

“That’s it?”

“Pretty much,” Lena answers with a half smile. “I mostly just worked the entire time I was there. And it was rainy.”

Skepticism shades part of Kara’s face, but she doesn’t push Lena, just picks her sandwich back up and takes an exaggerated bite of it, smiling at Lena’s immediate expression of disgust.
“You’re doing that on purpose,” Lena says, but she’s laughing and Kara smiles wide, food bulging one cheek.

“What?” Kara says after swallowing. “You didn’t miss eating with me?”

“That might be the only thing I didn’t miss about you,” Lena teases and she presses her foot against Kara’s shin under the table in a friendly gesture.

“So you’re saying you missed everything else?” Kara asks with a dorky waggle of her eyebrows that makes Lena laugh.

“Okay, your turn,” Lena says.

Kara sits up a little straighter, sets her sandwich down. “What do you want to know?”

There are a million different things that run through her head, but she settles on something that’s been sitting in the back of her brain for the past few days. “When you were mind controlled by the Dominators…” Kara deflates a little, a wary expression taking hold of her face. “You seemed upset. More so than the rest of the team.”

Kara purses her lips a moment before answering. “Well, being out of control is kind of dangerous,” she says softly and Lena sees something in the crinkle of skin around Kara’s eyes.

“I know that, but...is that all?”

It takes a second, but Kara leans forward a little across the table. “Last year, I was exposed to red kryptonite.”

It wasn’t what Lena expected and she mimics Kara’s pose, leaning forward with a quizzical expression. “Red?”

“It was synthetic. Maxwell Lord created it.”

“Maxwell Lord?” Lena rolls her eyes. “Why does that not surprise me?”

“You know him?”

Lena sighs a little. “Lord Technologies and L Corp have a bit of a storied history. Not all of it friendly. Let’s just say we’re aware of each other, but we won’t be dining together anytime soon if we can help it.”

“He’s kind of gross,” Kara agrees. “He totally tried to get with Alex.” Lena’s face contorts into an expression of distaste and Kara laughs. “Exactly.”

“What does red kryptonite do?”

Kara swallows, serious again. “It sort of,” Kara gestures around her head. “Destroys inhibitions, I guess. Takes away any emotional restraint I might have had.”

“That sounds awful.”

“It was,” Kara says with a sad smile Lena feels desperate to fix. “Every negative thought or feeling I’ve ever had just came out and I couldn’t do anything to stop it.” Kara’s voice sounds shaky now, thick with what Lena can tell are tears at the corner of her eyes. “The things I did, the things I said to Alex, and James and Ms. Grant...I couldn’t control it.”
Lena reaches across the table to grip Kara’s hand, strokes her thumb over the knuckles soothingly. “You don’t have to talk about it.”

“It’s fine,” Kara says, but her voice is uneven and Lena squeezes Kara’s hand as tightly as she can. “I just don’t like the feeling of being out of control of my own mind.”

“I understand,” Lena replies in a hush.

Kara seems to recover then, turning her hand over to return Lena’s grip and smiling. “Okay, I told you something hard, now you have to tell me something hard.”

Lena just stares at Kara for another moment. “Kara,” she says slowly, but Kara shakes her head.

“I’m fine,” she replies, clearly reacting to the concerned look in Lena’s face. “For real. So it’s your turn again.”

Letting go of Kara’s hand, Lena sits back in her chair, reaches forward to fiddle with her silverware and thinks of something to say. “I was surprised,” she says, looking down at her plate. “When Lex was arrested.”

When she looks back up Kara has an unreadable expression on her face, but she’s still leaning forward, arm out across the table towards Lena. It takes a second until Kara replies, but when she does it’s with a soft, “So was I.”

“I didn’t know,” Lena continues feeling suddenly desperate to impart this knowledge onto Kara. “I didn’t know what he had planned or that he felt that way about…”

“I know you didn’t.” Kara says and she reaches further until she’s holding Lena’s hand again. “You don’t need to convince me.”

“I just didn’t want you to think that I…”

“Lena,” Kara says and she smiles sadly, tangles their fingers together. “I knew Lex too. I was shocked when I first heard. When my cousin told me about…” Shaking her head, Kara thins her lips a moment. “I never once thought you had anything to do with it.”

Lena did have something to do with it, considering she was instrumental in getting Lex’s warsuit operational, but she doesn’t tell Kara that. The layers of guilt are too thick and she’s not sure she could get it all out without breaking down. “I tried to stop him.”

“I’m sure you did,” Kara replies kindly and Lena feels something like a weight lift off her for a moment. There’s a trust radiating out of Kara that Lena’s not used to and it’s comforting to talk about her brother without seeing suspicion in someone’s eyes, without feeling like she’ll never get anyone to understand that she loves her brother even if she believes he belongs in jail. Kara understands.

“I had to realize that you can’t save everyone,” she says with a mirthless laugh. “Some people are just bad.”

“I don’t believe that,” Kara says softly and Lena sighs.

“I know you don’t. But that doesn’t make it not true.”

Kara is clearly ready to argue the point, but Lena doesn’t want to. She wants to enjoy her vacation and the careful steps the two of them are taking to reconnect and none of that involves a
philosophical debate over whether her brother can be saved.

So she pulls out a tried and true tactic. “Do you want to get dessert?”

The determined set of Kara’s jaw fades instantly and her eyes go a little wide as she smiles.

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It’s only a week into the semester and Lena already feels like she’s behind. Saturday morning she lugs all of her books over to the coffee shop on the far end of campus and sets out to do as much studying as humanly possible so she can feel more on top of everything by Monday.

She sends a quick text out to Kara to let her know what she’s doing and then promptly turns her phone off, stows it in the zippered pocket of her messenger bag and focuses on her work.

Hours pass by fairly quickly as she goes through her notes for her solid mechanics class and then moves on to differential equations. By the time she’s gotten to relativistic quantum field theory, a body is sliding into the chair across from her and a coffee cup is replacing the empty one near her laptop.

“I told you I was studying,” Lena says dryly, but she smiles warmly at Kara and accepts the offered drink.

“And?” Kara asks, leaning back in her chair and propping her feet up against the bench Lena’s seated at. “I know that’s code for ignoring things like food and sleep and fun so I decided I should check on you.”

Lena rolls her eyes and takes a sip of her drink. Her free hand drifts down to sit against Kara’s ankle, stroking against the strip of skin below her pant leg. “I just feel so behind already.”

“It’s only been a week, Lena,” Kara teases and then reaches across the table to pull one of Lena’s textbooks towards her. “What are you behind in?”

“Everything, it feels like. That’s for an elective.”

Kara flips through the book, hums a little as her eyes scan the pages. “Quantum field theory?”

“Yup,” Lena answers with a little pop of the word. She leans back a little further, strokes her fingers up under Kara’s pant leg and spends a moment enjoying the way her girlfriend looks this Saturday. Body draping over the chair, glasses slipping a little down her nose, hair piled messily on top of her head and a sweatshirt Lena immediately recognizes as one of her own.

“It’s like reading a history textbook,” Kara complains, shutting the book and tossing it back down on the table with a solid thud.

Lena laughs. “I apologize on behalf of my primitive planet,” she teases and Kara sticks her tongue out a little. “But I do have a lot of work to do. Do you want to get dinner later?”

Kara shrugs. “Sure,” she answers, craning her neck to peer a little at Lena’s notebook. “Do you want me to do your homework for you?”

“No,” Lena says indignantly, and she kicks a little at Kara’s shin under the table. “I actually have to learn this stuff.”

“Boring,” Kara sighs, sinking further into her chair. “Can we get Ping’s tonight?”
“Not Great Wall?” Lena asks with an arch of her brow.

“I’m breaking up with them,” Kara says in a huff. “They screwed up my order three times in a row last week.”

Smothering a laugh, Lena twirls her lips a little. “Well, as your girlfriend I support you in whatever you want to do.”

Kara hums, picks at her nails a little. “How much longer do you think you’ll be?”

Observing the books and papers she has spread out over the table, Lena shrugs. “I don’t know. I have a lot of work left.”

Letting her head fall back Kara makes an exaggerated groaning sound, but she sends a teasing smile towards Lena. “It’s Saturday,” she all but whines.

“I know, darling,” Lena says with a chuckle. “But I really need to get this done.”

“Fine,” Kara says after a moment, removing her leg from Lena’s grasp and setting her foot back down on the ground as she sits up. “I support you too.”

It makes Lena smile, especially the feigned exasperation in Kara’s face tempered by an affectionate grin. “I’ll text you later for dinner.”

Kara stands, rounds the table and takes Lena’s hand in a loose grip. “I get to pick the movie.”

Pretending to consider it for a moment, Lena purses her lips. “Then I get to pick the dinner order.”

Kara’s eyes narrow a little in consideration and they stare for a long moment before Kara concedes and rolls her eyes. “I guess that’s fine,” she says, but she smiles before she kisses Lena. It lasts a little too long to be truly decent, but Lena brings her hand up to cup around Kara’s neck and keeps her there. There’s practically no one in the coffee shop anyway and everyone that is is far too involved in their own private worlds to notice them.

“Bye,” Lena says when they part, the words whispered between them.

“Bye,” Kara parrots, pressing a final peck to Lena’s lips before striding away.

By Monday, Lena only feels slightly more on top of her work, and she makes an entire thermos of coffee before walking to her 8am class.

She takes her usual seat on the side of the auditorium and is in the process of pulling out her laptop when a presence suddenly slides into an empty seat next to her.

It’s a familiar presence and she has to blink for a few seconds to process it. “Kara?”

“Hey,” Kara says, acting like everything is normal as she sits back in the chair and pulls out her small tablet.

“What are you doing here?”

“I’m in this class,” Kara answers with a casual shrug.

Lena looks around to see if maybe she’s being pranked. Or dreaming. “No, you’re not,” she says, slowly, like maybe Kara confused their schedules or something.
“Yes I am.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Yes I am.”

Lena pinches the bridge of her nose. “Since when?”

“Since today,” Kara says brightly and Lena starts to catch on to what’s happening.

“You just registered into this class?”

Kara nods, twirling a stylus in her hand a little. “I did.”

“Why?”

Kara shrugs. “I needed to fill an elective.”

An incredulous look crosses Lena’s face and she lowers her voice as the professor walks into the front of the room. “With relativistic quantum field theory?!”

Kara shrugs again. “You’re in this class,” she says, smiling. “And if we’re both taking notes, we can study together and stuff.”

Lena’s jaw drops a little, but Kara’s grin is unwavering and she leans forward quickly to kiss Lena on the cheek. “We’re talking about this later,” Lena says, but she can’t stop the smile from spreading over her face at the relaxing feel of having Kara next to her.

“Sure thing,” Kara replies and the professor starts the class with a loud greeting.

The class goes by fairly smoothly, but Lena can’t decide if it’s because of all the preparation she did that weekend or the notes Kara slide her all throughout class with anecdotes about whatever the professor was covering.

--

They spend the rest of the afternoon walking around Central City. They wander aimlessly and without purpose aside from being with each other. It’s something Lena hasn’t done since college and she wraps herself around the feeling of not needing to be anywhere but next to Kara.

“You should come to game night,” Kara comments as they walk. “When we’re back home.”

Lena doesn’t want to think about when we’re back home because it threatens to shatter the careful balance Lena’s found on this new Earth, but she squashes the feeling down and manages to smile. “What’s game night?”

“Just a night where everyone comes over and I kick their butts at Settlers of Catan,” Kara says with a proud smile. “Or whatever game we end up playing.”

Lena laughs. “Then are you sure you want me to come?”

“I’m not scared of you,” Kara says with a playful puff of her chest.

“If you’re still as bad at chess as you were four years ago…”

“Okay, first of all, that’s because you play a super simple version of chess that I am not used to,”
Kara points out and Lena smiles at the memory of Kara listing off the varieties of intergalactic chess she was more familiar with. “And second, you’re very distracting as an opponent.”

“I haven’t a clue as to what you’re talking about,” Lena says with a smile as Kara mock glares at her.

“With your,” Kara gestures at Lena’s face and it makes Lena laugh.

“Well, that shouldn’t be a problem for you anymore, right?” Lena teases and Kara wraps a comfortable arm around Lena’s shoulders.

“You’re right. After four years I’ve built up a complete immunity to your distraction tactics.”

It’s overtly flirty and if they were on Earth-38, Lena would be scrambling for an escape from the line of conversation, but with the freedom of not having to overthink everything it’s much easier to sink into the feeling. To smile at Kara genuinely and without reservation and to laugh when Kara attempts to wink at her but fails miserably.

“So you’ll come to game night?” Kara asks again. “When we get back to our earth?”

And just like that the reminder that this vacation will undoubtedly end stabs through her. Her throat feels a little thick at the thought of it, but she pushes through to keep smiling. “I’ll consider it,” she replies and thinks she manages to make it sound teasing.

Kara grins widely, tightens her hold over Lena’s shoulders. “That’s all I can ask.”

They stop and buy ice cream at some place Barry had told Kara about and it’s the first time Lena’s had the treat in years. It tastes as delicious as she remembers it. Even more so with the happy expression Kara gets when she takes her first bite of it.

The park they hung out in just the other day isn’t too far and they stroll that direction, talking about everything and nothing at all.

“What was it like being Cat Grant’s assistant?” Lena asks. “I’ve always heard that position has a notoriously high turnover rate.”

Kara chuckles. “Ms. Grant was - is - tough, that’s for sure. It wasn’t an easy job, but the rewards of it were-” Kara shakes her head a little. “She’s one of the most amazing women I’ve ever met and she was all I could ask for in a mentor. She’s smart and strong and successful and-”

“If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you have a crush on her,” Lena teases and a blush flames in Kara’s cheeks immediately.

“What?! No!”

“I’m teasing, Kara,” Lena says with a placating hand to her forearm. Kara relaxes, but she smiles sheepishly.

“She’s just one of the best people I’ve ever known,” Kara says and then turns a soft smile to Lena. “Apart from you.”

“Ah,” Lena replies with a little chuckle. “Flattery.”

“I’ve learned a lot about flirting while you were away,” Kara says with exaggerated pride that makes Lena laugh again.
“Are you flirting?” She brings a hand to her chest in mock incredulity.

“If you want,” Kara says simply and Lena has to bite her lip and look away to keep from kissing her.

“Well if we were flirting then I’d feel compelled to tell you I find you very pretty,” Lena says, turning with an overly flirty smile. “Some might even say…” She pauses and Kara’s brow scrunches a little. “Your looks are out of this world.”

Kara groans, her head falling back as she laughs. “Four years and we couldn’t let that joke die?”

“It will never die,” Lena says, threading her arm through Kara’s and laughing along with her.

The moment feels too good. Solid and fragile at the same time.

Lena finishes the ice cream in her hand and chucks the empty cup in a nearby trash can at the same time Kara takes a final bite of her waffle cone. They walk towards the pond in the park, and stride out onto a small dock there. The sun is barely setting, just red and orange hues reflecting over the water and Lena drinks it in as they stop at the end of the walkway.

Kara leans her elbows on the railing there and looks at Lena with half a smile, her eyes moving up and down Lena’s figure in a way that makes Lena feel suddenly exposed.

Running a palm down the side of her jeans, she eyes Kara warily. “What?”

Kara just laughs and her hair waves around as she shakes her head. “You look…I don’t know.”

“Bad?” Her eyes dart down to her ensemble and she knows it must look odd. She didn’t really pack her normal wardrobe. Instead she’s dressed in the only pair of denim she owns, a soft navy sweater and pristine white sneakers she rarely wears. It’s been some time since she’s worn such an ensemble for any stretch of time, but she doesn’t think she looks that terrible in it.

“No,” Kara answers hastily, waving her hand forward. “Of course not. Just...you look like how I remember you.”

Lena tilts her head to the side, isn’t quite sure what Kara means. “Because I looked so different before?”

“It’s been weird seeing you in suits and professional clothing all the time,” Kara comments, smiling. “I’m used to the Lena that wore jeans and sweatshirts and combed her hair with her fingers when she was late to class.”

Lena laughs, rolls her eyes to the side. “I’d like to think my style has improved,” she says dryly.

“I wouldn’t say improved. Just changed,” Kara says softly before her eyes widen just slightly and she adds a hasty, “Not in a bad way. You’re still - I mean you’re still you - I’ve always thought you were gorgeous. No matter what you wear and it’s just-”

Lena stops the tumbling of words with a finger against Kara’s lips and tries to smother a wide grin. “I get it, darling.”

It slips out so easily that Lena doesn’t even realize it, not until Kara’s eyes go large and her cheeks start to color. For a long tense moment she considers taking it back. Her heart is beating so fast she’s sure it’s deafening Kara, but she just clears her throat a little and smiles, pulling her finger away from Kara’s mouth.
Anyway,” she says, turning back to face the sunset and prop her arms on the railing next to Kara.

“It’s gorgeous,” Kara murmurs and Lena can feel the way Kara’s still looking at her even as Lena stares out at the horizon.

“It is,” Lena agrees and when she turns to Kara, they both smile.

--

They stay out late into the night and Lena finds herself loathing the idea that it has to come to an end. It feels all too much like a date, trailing off into the night when they walk slowly back towards their hotel. In college, after their dates, Kara would follow Lena up into her dorm room more often than not, and the week stays true to its form. Kara piles into the elevator after Lena, smiling exuberantly at some of the other people in the small enclosure, and smiles even more when Lena’s hand drifts down to grip Kara’s.

The obvious problem they face doesn’t make itself known until they’ve both gotten ready for bed and Lena comes out of the bathroom to find Kara staring at her bed with a worried expression.

That’s when Lena realizes what’s wrong. Kara’s bed is destroyed, hanging off a cracked frame and obviously out of commission for the evening.

“I can sleep on the floor,” Kara says, when she notices what Lena’s looking at.

“Don’t be silly,” Lena says, though the words feel thick as they come up her throat. “You can sleep with me.”

Kara looks frozen at the idea, just standing there and blinking at Lena like she can’t quite process the idea. “I don’t know about that…”

“We’ve slept together before. Not even a week ago,” Lena says, but Kara continues to stare at the bed with trepidation. Lena reaches out, circles Kara’s wrist with her fingers. “We’re not second guessing, remember?”

The words seem to hit Kara, shifting her expression from one of hesitation to something more neutral. With a shaky smile, she nods and paces towards the bed, slipping into it and scooting towards the edge to leave room for Lena. The sight of it makes Lena second guess her decision, despite her reassurances to Kara that they weren’t doing that. She falters for a moment before moving the sheets aside and sliding into the bed.

Kara’s body heat radiates towards her and Lena shifts a little closer without thinking about it. They’re facing each other, each on the edge of their pillows and even in the dark of the room Lena can make out the way Kara’s eyes are tracing her face.

“Sorry that I broke the bed,” Kara whispers and Lena laughs softly.

“It’s okay,” Lena says and she shifts around the bed, tries to get comfortable.

Kara rolls over onto her back, shifts just as restlessly as Lena feels before huffing a bit. “This shouldn’t be awkward.”

“I can think about fifty reasons why it would be,” Lena jokes and Kara turns back over on her side.

“We’re not second guessing, right?” Kara asks and the question seems suddenly very significant.
Lena swallows. “No.”

“Oh,” Kara says, and Lena can make out a decisive nod before Kara reaches out to drift her hand over Lena’s hip, pulling them in close enough that Lena’s body practically falls onto Kara’s, her face pressing into her collarbone and leg shifting until it’s sliding between Kara’s. The sudden proximity change makes Lena inhale sharply, but her body relaxes against Kara’s as if it has a mind of her own.

The world seems to shrink to this bed and in the darkness Lena feels something shift and settle between them. It’s even easier to shut out the rest of the universe - the multiple universes. It reminds her almost too much of the first time they shared a bed and simultaneously the first time they slept together after being intimate.

There’s nothing sexual about the moment, but Lena can’t stop her mind from wandering. Not when Kara’s body feels so warm and Lena’s fingers can feel defined muscle under Kara’s shirt.

Memory swirls up so strongly that Lena can’t stop herself from pressing closer, the desire for contact suddenly burning over her skin. Her eyes flutter closed when Kara strokes Lena’s hair off her shoulder, fingers carding through it soothingly. Lena’s fingers trace over Kara’s ribs and it’s so much more warm than when they did this in the park.

A voice in the back of Lena’s head tells her that she’s crossing a line that can’t be uncrossed. That when they’re back on their Earth all of this will have consequences, not easily forgotten.

But it feels so simple in the darkness of their hotel room, so easy to shut off all the different voices screaming in her head.

“Goodnight, Kara,” Lena whispers and Kara’s arm tightens around her, a warm hand at the back of Lena’s head.

“Goodnight, Lena,” Kara says, the words hushed over Lena’s hair before warm lips press down and Lena sighs into the feeling.

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The first thing she learns about Kara, really learns, is that she has an almost inhuman appetite. Her penchant for consuming her body weight and then some in food invariably leads to a very sleepy version of her best friend. Lena presumes it’s because her body has to expend the energy of a nuclear reactor just to digest it all.

It’s an interesting thing to learn about Kara, but not nearly as interesting as the fact that sleepy Kara is somehow an even more tactile person than wide awake Kara.

It wouldn’t be a problem - Lena has finally grown used to the way Kara is constantly touching her, holding her hand, playing with her hair, hugging her for no reason at all - except it’s rounding midnight on a Wednesday and after inhaling a family size serving of buffalo wings and a large pizza, Kara’s snuggled on Lena’s bed, strong fingers twisted in the fabric of Lena’s sweatshirt.

Lena’s not entirely sure what to do. One minute, they were just lounging there, watching some documentary about sharks Kara had heard about from Max and the next minute, Kara’s snoring softly, her head at Lena’s shoulder and her fingers pinning Lena to the bed with a deceptively strong grip on her clothing.

“Kara,” Lena whispers, trying to shake her awake, but Kara barely moves, just mumbles and scoots closer to Lena, her face nosing further into Lena’s shoulder.
Lena considers her options. She can try harder to wake her friend - though considering how peaceful and content Kara looks Lena’d feel a little guilty.

She can attempt to leave the bed, pull a pillow and some blankets to the couch and sleep there. Though, she doesn’t know why she’d need to really. It’s not that big of a deal to share a bed with her best friend. People do it all the time. Right?

Except Kara’s body is so warm and it’s pressed up against Lena’s side in a way that’s making it hard for her to consider any of her feelings as friendly.

Warm breath is puffing against Lena’s neck and Kara mumbles again, her fingers tugging at Lena’s sweatshirt insistently despite being asleep. With a sigh, Lena concedes the battle, decides that it won’t kill her to let Kara sleep in her bed. It doesn’t change anything and she can be in control of her own damn feelings.

Grateful she at least changed into something she can sleep in, Lena lets herself settle down into the mattress and attempts to turn over on her side. It’s an immediate mistake.

Kara lets go of her sweatshirt, which is good, but she winds her arm around Lena’s waist as a substitute and suddenly Lena’s back is flush against Kara’s front.

It takes her a good ten minutes to relax, but she manages it, tangles her fingers with the ones sliding over her stomach and lets herself imagine this is a normal thing for a moment. Lets herself imagine that if she wanted to she could turn over her shoulder and kiss Kara goodnight, that Kara would murmur affection into the skin of her shoulder and that her crush wouldn’t be so unrequited.

Another ten minutes later, with imagination squirming in her head, she falls asleep to the sound of Kara breathing against the back of her neck and a warm palm at the top of her abdomen.

When she wakes up she feels uncharacteristically well rested, but Kara has already left the bed. She finds her friend sitting at Lena’s desk chair, twisting her fingers together and looking worried.

“Kara?” Her voice is a little rough with sleep and her brain a little foggy, but she sits up and runs her fingers through her hair, trying to wake up.

“I’m sorry,” Kara says immediately, her leg bouncing almost too rapidly for Lena to really register the motion. She assumes it’s because her brain hasn’t fully booted up yet. The urge to sink back down into her mattress is strong, but Kara looks concerned and she forces the desire down.

“What for?”

“I didn’t mean to fall asleep or, like, be in your bed all night and make you - I just - I know you-”

“Kara,” Lena cuts her off with a hand reaching out. “It’s fine.”

“I feel really bad I know you like your privacy and everything and I-”

“I said it’s fine,” Lena says because her body feels ridiculously relaxed and it’s the first time she’s ever really shared a bed with someone just for sleeping and she’d do anything to wipe the sad look off Kara’s face. “Come back to bed.”

Kara stares at Lena’s outstretched hand for a good moment before taking it and standing. She paces back to the bed and slides in next to Lena yet again. “Are you sure?”

Lena’s already halfway back to sleep, but she glances at the clock - six in the morning. Thursday.
“I’m sure that I don’t have class until nine this morning and neither do you.”

The next time she wakes up, at eight, her head is tucked into Kara’s shoulder and they’re tangled together once more.

--

The next morning Lena wakes up still wrapped around Kara and for a few seconds she forgets everything. The bed is warm and soft and Kara’s snoring just a little. It threads around her like something tangible and when she shifts, it’s to nose against Kara’s jawline, her lips pressing there for a long enough moment that Kara’s hold tightens around her.

Kara mumbles something that sounds a lot like five more minutes and Lena smiles, content to spend the rest of the morning just lying there.

It’s the sound of tires screeching outside that brings her back to present day and when she remembers where she is, she moves away from Kara’s body with a sigh. Kara protests the movement immediately, rolling with Lena and reaching out to keep her in place.

“Kara,” Lena whispers, sagging back down and running a hand up through Kara’s disheveled hair. “Kara, it’s morning.”

“No, it’s not,” Kara protests, eyes still closed and a sleepy pout on her lips. Lena finds it adorable, wants more than anything to kiss the expression off Kara’s face and wake her up with a few well placed touches.

“If you wake up, I’ll buy you breakfast,” Lena says and hopes the allure of food will convince Kara to relinquish her hold.

“You don’t have any money in this universe,” Kara replies, sounding more awake as she pops an eye open.

Lena laughs and tries not to notice the way Kara’s hand is sliding over her hip, her thumb tucking under the hem of Lena’s shirt. “Are you really going to split hairs over the promise of food?”

The other eye opens and Kara smirks a little. “You make a good point.”

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They get the call from Barry just as Kara’s shoving the last of a foot long hotdog into her mouth and Lena is doing everything in her power to avoid seeing it happen. Kara had tried desperately to convince Lena that hot dogs are totally a breakfast food, but Lena was fine with her coffee thank you very much.

Mouth stuffed with food, Kara all but throws the little communicator at Lena with wide eyes and she dutifully picks it up, but not before shooting Kara a dry look.

Barry doesn’t tell her much information apart from instructions to meet back at the hangar. The abducted members of the team have apparently been rescued, but he doesn’t go into detail as to how.

Still chewing on her food, Kara looks at Lena quizzically. “Who was it?”

“Barry,” Lena replies, standing up from the bench they’d been sitting on and holding her hand out to grab at Kara’s. “He wants us back at the hangar.”
They make their way back to the hangar where the group is gathered just in time to see their missing teammates walking in looking no worse for wear.

“What’s our status?” Oliver asks as soon as he stalks in.

Barry sighs, walks forward. “Nothing since the Dominators paid their little visit to mess with our heads.”

It had been quiet since the first day they got there. Quiet enough that a part of Lena had forgotten this wasn’t a real vacation. They were here on a mission.

“Maybe they were trying to pit us against each other,” Ray posits, looking around. “In order to get intel on metahumans.”

“I wish they would just send us an IM with a questionnaire,” Felicity jokes. She catches Lena’s eye and smiles.

“Metas pose the biggest threat to their invasion,” Kara offers. “It makes sense they’d want to get to know their enemies.”

“Maybe it’s time we return the favor,” Oliver says and Lena sees his intention before the group even starts to formulate the plan.

“What do you want to do? Kidnap one of them?” Diggle asks.

“They’re not exactly lingering around Earth,” Barry counters, shrugging.

“But we do know where some are,” Lena adds from behind everyone. They all turn to her with a certain amount of surprise and she shrugs. “Or at least where they were.” She amends again. “When they were.”

Varying degrees of confusion flood their faces and she sighs. “You have a time travelling ship, right?”

Sara smirks a little. “I do.”

“So you know that the Dominators came to earth half a century ago in a failed invasion attempt,” Lena comments and out of the corner of her eye she sees Kara smile, her chin lifting a little in pride.

“You’re suggesting we travel to 1951, abduct a Dominator and interrogate it to determine their intentions?” Professor Stein asks with a certain amount of incredulity.

Lena shrugs, crosses her arms over her chest. “I was just commenting that if we wanted to talk to one of them, we technically have that option.”

“They kidnapped us,” Sara says suddenly and Lena looks over to where she’s standing with half a smirk on her face. “Seems fair.”

Oliver steps forward. “We’ll send a few people to 1951 then. Sara, it’s your ship. You pick the team,” he says to Sara, who nods at him.

“Time travel,” Cisco breathes out reverently and Lena understands that emotion personally. Felicity joins in with equal enthusiasm. “I don’t want to lose my geek cred,” she says as an excuse and she smiles at Lena when she laughs. Barry seems heavily against sending Felicity or Cisco on the
timeship, but he reluctantly agrees.

Felicity walks over stealthily while Oliver and Barry discuss the plan, who is going where. “Do you want to come?” Felicity asks out of the side of her mouth and Lena blinks at her for a moment before she realizes what she’s asking.

“To 1951?” Even the question sounds absurd as she says it, but Felicity nods enthusiastically and she can see Cisco behind her watching them with an excited grin.

Instinct says to answer yes because who in their right mind wouldn’t want to experience time travel first hand, but she catches a glimpse of Kara out of the corner of her eye. Kara’s not looking at her, too focused on what Barry is telling Oliver, but Lena suddenly finds the prospect of leaving her close to unbearable.

“No,” she answers with a half grin at Felicity’s shocked expression. “I’m going to stay with Kara.”

A wave of understanding passes over Felicity’s face and she nods a little, smiling. “Totally understandable.”

The team breaks up then and Cisco and Felicity head off to the time travelling ship, the Waverider as Lena has learned.

“Oh,” Barry adds as they watch the group walk away. “The new president called. Which would be cool under different circumstances.” Kara nods at him and Oliver sighs. “She wants to meet with us.”

“Let’s bring Ray and Sara as back up,” Oliver says and Kara immediately perks up, bouncing a little on her toes.

“What about me? I can do backup.” Kara is far more than backup in Lena’s opinion, but she can already see the brush off Oliver has prepared. It’s written all over his face even before he looks at Kara and asks her to step aside.

Kara looks back at Lena for a fleeting moment who just shrugs and sends a narrowed gaze at Oliver Queen’s retreating back.

Eyes on the conversation Kara is having, Lena doesn’t even notice that Sara Lance has sauntered over and when she finally does notice, Sara has this knowing look on her face as she regards her.

“Hello,” Lena says warily, but she straightens, affects her best CEO neutral expression and arches an eyebrow at the woman.

It doesn’t have its usual effect, Sara’s smile just sort of deepens and she reaches into a crate by Lena’s side, pulling out what must be some sort of weapon and tucking it into her belt. “Lena, right?” Sara asks, digging further into the crate in search of something.

“Yes,” Lena asks simply without giving her anything more. There’s something intentional in Sara’s face that Lena can’t read yet and she’s content to sit back and let Sara make her move.

Sara glances over her shoulder to where Kara and Oliver are still talking, shoots the scene an amused smile. “Kara’s pretty badass,” Sara comments, looking back at Lena as if to judge her reaction. “It’s kinda hot. You guys a thing?”

It becomes crystal clear then what exactly is happening and Lena purses her lips, crosses her arms and sends Sara a practiced smile. “We’re very close friends.”
Sara’s face twists a little. “I see,” she says, straightening up from the crate and mimicking Lena’s crossed arms.

“Can I help you with something, Sara?” And she doesn’t mean it to sound rude, but Sara is becoming more and more of an unknown entity the longer she stands there and Lena feels slightly unnerved by it.

Sara seems to consider that, glances back over to where Kara and Oliver are before shrugging. “Not yet,” she answers with a smirk before striding away. “See you later, Lena.”

As Sara passes by, Kara turns and walks away from her conversation with Oliver, an exasperated expression on her face that floods any thoughts of Sara Lance from Lena’s mind.

Hands on her hips, Kara stomps forward, her steps sounding significantly heavier than usual, and Lena’s a little afraid she’s going to crack the floor under her feet.

“What was that?” Lena asks when Kara steps in front of her.

“He wants to,” Kara huffs a little, rolls her eyes. “Minimize my involvement.”

“Why?”

“Because he’s dumb,” Kara answers petulantly and Lena laughs a little.

“That much is obvious,” Lena replies, glancing over to where Oliver has retreated to speak in low tones to Sara and Mick. “But tell me why for real.”

Kara shrugs. “Doesn’t trust me. Doesn’t trust aliens, I guess, though I’m beginning to think he just doesn’t trust anyone.”

“I’m sorry,” Lena says, reaching out for Kara’s fingers.

“It’s fine,” Kara says, but the crinkle between her brows says otherwise. Lena aches to make her feel better.

“So,” she says swinging their hands a little. “Does that mean you’re free for lunch?”

It does the trick. Kara’s chin lifts a little and a grin spreads over her face.

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They’ve only been on Earth-1 for less than a week, but Kara’s managed to befriend no less than five restaurant owners and they all brighten the minute they see her walk through the door.

They’re halfway through their meal and Kara’s reaching across the table for the ketchup when she notices it. As soon as she does, she can’t figure out how she hadn’t seen it before. But hanging off Kara’s wrist, like it’s always been there, is the bracelet Lena had given her years ago. The sample of self-repairing alloy she’d fastened into jewelry.

Kara must notice the way Lena’s ceased all movement to stare at the item in question because she brings the ketchup bottle over slowly, setting it down with sluggish motions and looking at Lena warily. “You okay?”

It pulls Lena’s attention away and she clears her throat, blinking against the heat in her eyes and picking her silverware up. “Yeah, of course.”
Except Kara knows her too well and she doesn’t buy it for a second. “You don’t look okay,” Kara comments, bending over the table a little to catch Lena’s eye.

Lena laughs humorlessly and glances again at the bracelet. After a deep breath she goes for a casual smile, hopes she succeeds. “I didn’t know you kept that,” Lena says quietly, trying not to read into anything. But Kara’s eyes sit significantly on the item in question and her fingers ghost over it just as reverently as the first time Lena had given her the bracelet.

“I couldn’t throw it away,” Kara says. “If anything, it’s like a marvel of science.”

Lena laughs a little, preens at the subtle praise. “Well, you’re not wrong. I just meant that-” She swallows the rest of the sentence. Kara keeping it and Kara wearing it are two different concepts altogether.

“You meant because it’s an us thing,” Kara finishes for her and Lena nods a little when Kara looks up.

“I like the reminder,” Kara confesses softly, looking back at the bracelet and hooking a finger inside the loop to pull at it lightly. Lena doesn’t want to ask what it reminds Kara of, is too afraid she knows the answer, but Kara continues talking anyway, lifting her eyes to look at Lena. “That there are some things in this world even I can’t break.”

Lena smiles, her heart thudding solidly against her ribcage. “That’s why I made it for you,” Lena says and Kara’s lips thin.

“To remind me that there are unbreakable things?” Kara asks, voice barely over a whisper, and Lena swallows against the lump in her throat.

The conversation feels like it’s about something else entirely - Lena knows that it is, but it doesn’t stop her fromnodding and reaching out to cover Kara’s wrist with her palm, right over the piece of metal she hasn’t seen in four years.

“I’m glad you kept it,” she says and when Kara looks at her with stormy blue eyes, Lena has to pull her hand away to avoid tugging Kara across the table and kissing her.

--

Summer drags on in a way Lena’s never felt it. The months are spent not unlike how she’s spent most of her summers since she young, but the day-in-day-out work schedule has somehow become mundane to her. She used to love the work, love throwing herself in the lab for hours on end and working some problem to death.

And it’s not so bad when she’s elbows deep in some new project. It’s just the going home at the end of the day part that’s become tiresome.

Her bedroom at Luthor Manor feels empty and isolated and without Lex in the house this summer, the hours pass by slowly and without excitement.

Lena tries hard to pretend like it has nothing to do with missing a certain person who is currently in Midvale, but the truth of it screams in her head in the middle of the night when she curls around a pillow in bed.

It’s the kind of want that Lena’s always tried to avoid, a consequence of being attached to someone. So she doesn’t call Kara too often, tries not to sound needy on the phone, but she’s not sure how successful she is.
Kara chats about going to the beach and having family dinners and board game nights and movie marathons. She talks endlessly about Alex and Eliza and some local friends from high school.

Lena listens, laughs when appropriate and asks a litany of questions to avoid having to fill the silence with information about her own day. It wouldn’t be very interesting. Went to work. Came home. Had dinner with my mother. Went to sleep.

“Are you okay?” Kara asks one night, when Lena feels exhausted and incapable of keeping up the pretense that she’s not dying to feel Kara in the flesh, have her next to her in bed.

“I’m fine,” she manages with a soft clearing of her throat. “Just tired.”

“Oh,” Kara says, and if Lena closes her eyes she can almost picture her girlfriend’s face. “Well I’ll let you go then.”

“You don’t have to,” Lena protests, stuck between the desire to fall asleep listening to Kara’s voice and knowing that if they stay on the line she’ll keep herself awake just to keep hearing it.

“Go to sleep, Lena. Call me tomorrow.”

Refusing to seem clingy in any way, she agrees with a soft, “I love you.”

It doesn’t take her long to fall asleep, but the next thing she knows she’s waking up to the soft sound of something tapping on her window.

When the noise registers she shoots up in her bed and looks out towards the small balcony off the side of her room to find a familiar figure standing there and waving excitedly. It takes her a few seconds of just blinking at the image until she realizes she’s not in some sort of dream state.

Kara is grinning widely when Lena opens the balcony door and seconds later she’s being pulled into Kara’s strong arms. The sudden overload of her senses overwhelms her for a minute.

“Hi,” she says after a few seconds, her voice a little rough from sleep.

“Hey,” Kara says brightly, pulling away to look into Lena’s eyes. “I missed you.”

“Why are you here?” Lena asks, enjoying the feel of Kara’s palms on her back, thumbs stroking against the fabric of her shirt.

“I missed you,” Kara repeats, before moving forward to kiss Lena swiftly.

Something in the house creaks loudly enough for both of them to jump and it’s then that Lena remembers where they are. Her eyes go wide and her heartbeat starts to pick up so quickly that Kara’s eyes dart down to her chest.

“My mother will kill us if she finds you here,” Lena whispers, remembering to be quiet. Her mother’s room is far from Lena’s, but she knows the woman keeps odd hours and she doesn’t want to risk a confrontation in the middle of the night.

Kara looks unconcerned. “I’m super sneaky,” Kara whispers back, though her voice is considerably louder than Lena’s was.

Lena slaps a hand over her mouth and shoots her a pointed look, gesturing with a finger to her lips to be quiet.

Kara pulls Lena’s hand away and leans forward, lips against Lena’s ear in a way that undeniably
sends a shiver down her spine. “Do you want me to leave?”

It’s the last thing Lena wants and she shakes her head. “I missed you too,” she confesses in a hush, moving in closer to her girlfriend. “A lot.”

And emotionally it’s very true, but there’s something physical about the yearning that’s just now presenting itself low in Lena’s gut. Just being this close to Kara is making her body feel more awake than it has in what feels like forever.

Kara is all smiles and bright eyes that can barely be seen in the moonlight streaming into Lena’s room. It pulls a matching expression onto Lena’s face that she can’t control and then Kara is pushing forward, nose brushing her own before their lips meet again. It surges warmth down Lena’s body and she barely suppresses a laugh when Kara wraps her arms around her waist and picks her up, pressing them flush against each other.

The only way to keep quiet is to keep her mouth pressed against Kara’s, which Lena is absolutely fine doing, and she keeps kissing her even as Kara moves them towards Lena’s bed and floats them down onto the mattress. Kara’s body feels good against her, a pressure that she had no idea she had missed so much.

It gets hot fast. Kara’s mouth is insistent and her hand is sliding up Lena’s soft sleep shirt and Lena knows that after a month of not feeling this there is zero chance of her staying quiet for the duration.

“We can’t,” she gasps out while Kara’s lips trail down her jawline, her fingers tracing her ribs.

Kara ceases movement immediately, though her head stays tucked in against Lena’s neck and her body sags down into Lena’s. “Sorry,” she murmurs.

“But there is no way either of us can be quiet enough,” Lena tells her. “And the thought of my mother somewhere in the house kind of kills the mood.”

Kara coughs against a laugh, but rolls a little off Lena, her thigh nudging in between Lena’s legs and her head coming to rest against Lena’s shoulder. “Do you want to get out of here?”

Lena looks down at her girlfriend with an amused smile. “To have sex?”

“No,” Kara denies hastily, but loud enough that Lena has to slap her hand on Kara’s mouth again.

“I’m just happy you’re here,” Lena confesses and smiles when she feels a grin spread under her palm. She pulls away and Kara picks her head up to kiss Lena again, soft and slow.

“Fourth of July,” Kara says, suddenly, after she’s laid her head back down on Lena’s shoulder and Lena blinks for a moment.

“Yes?”

“Come to Midvale?”
Lena’s brows pull together. “Why?”

“For fireworks and a cookout and hanging with your super amazing girlfriend,” Kara says with a half-grin. “That’s me,” she adds, pointing a thumb at herself. “I’m the girlfriend.”

Lena has to bite her lip to keep from laughing. “I’m aware.”

“Just making sure you didn’t forget. It’s been like a month.”

“Too long,” Lena says seriously, tracing the lines of Kara’s face.

“I completely agree,” Kara replies with a nod. “So you’ll come?”

It will probably be impossible to get away, or convince her mother she can take the time off, but Kara’s smile is already putting an energy into her body that Lena’s feeding off of and the idea of a small vacation somewhere far away from Luthor Manor and Luthor Corp and all her responsibilities sounds close to heavenly. She agrees with a soft nod and Kara surges back forward to kiss her again, smiling against Lena’s mouth in a way that burns all over Lena’s body.

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When they get called back to the hangar, the team is idling about with a clear vibe of unease threading among them. Kara gives Lena a worried look, and Lena grabs her hand in response, squeezes it lightly before taking a seat near where Cisco is typing rapidly at a computer.

The information the time travelling team has isn’t good and after days of almost nothingness Lena can feel the final confrontation creeping up on them.

A metabomb, Oliver tells them.

Kara shoots her a look and Lena knows they’re both thinking about Medusa. Another universe. Same kind of problem.

It also seems the Dominators have given them a classic ultimatum. Surrender Barry Allen and they’ll leave Earth alone. Fail to do so and they’ll drop the bomb. A bomb with a projected non-metahuman casualty count over two million.

In true superhero fashion, Barry makes an impassioned speech about how he plans to give himself up, make the ultimate sacrifice for the greater good. Kara has something like pride in her face, but Lena knows she won’t let Barry go through with it.

Neither will anyone else, as far as Lena can tell, and as soon as Barry walks away, Oliver steps forward, the rest of the team standing to join him. Without even thinking about it, Lena stands as well, paces next to Kara.

“Barry,” Oliver calls out. “I’m not letting you leave.”

“No offense, Oliver, but you and what army?”

As Barry turns, Kara crosses her arms. “This one,” she says simply and Lena fights a smile.

It feels good, powerful even to be standing there with this group of people who have seen her as nothing more than a part of their team. It doesn’t last. A beeping sound blares through the hanger and the monitors flare to life behind them.

“Guys, that ship in Central City,” Sara suddenly says, breaking the silence. Everyone turns to her
warily. “It’s opening up.”

Everything revs into action then. Everyone is running around, grabbing gear and suiting up, while the tech team is booting up their equipment and handing out nanoweapons that are designed to incapacitate the Dominators. Everyone is already halfway out the hangar when Kara turns back, looking at Lena with her serious Supergirl face.

“Be careful,” Lena says, and Kara steps forward into Lena’s space to press a warm kiss against her forehead.

“Always,” she murmurs, and then she’s gone, out with the rest of the team.

Lena’s left to watch the battle from the bank of computers with Felicity and Cisco and if she tries she can hear the sound of the fight echoing from somewhere outside the hangar. The fight goes smoothly, from what Lena can tell. Kara stays in the air most of the time and the team works to plant as many devices on each Dominator as possible. Biting a bit at her thumb, Lena clicks through some monitoring programs on a computer next to Felicity.

“We’ve still got Dominators virtually everywhere,” she comments softly and Felicity nods, clicks on the comms.

“Good work planting Professor Stein’s nanoweapons, but we’ve still got Dominators all over the country.” Felicity smiles at Lena. “This looks like a job for Supergirl.”

The little dot that represents Kara zooms away from the group in an instant and Lena watches the map light up with indications that more devices are being planted just as Barry’s voice fills the space. “Thanks, Felicity,” he says dryly. “I’m not the least bit insulted.”

With a sheepish smile, Felicity raises her eyebrows at Lena who tries hard not to laugh and only half manages. “Sorry. I meant Supergirl and Flash. This is totally a job for the both of you, that’s what I meant. Supergirl and...Flash.”

Lena laughs then and Felicity swats at her with a hissed shut up even as she smiles. It’s a friendly, comfortable feeling and it distracts Lena for a second from worrying about Kara, who is still flying across the country planting devices.

It’s not long before they get a signal from Oliver to turn the nanoweapons on and Felicity presses the button with a sense of triumph. It only takes a few seconds before they watch the icons indicating Dominator ships blink away one by one and Lena feels the tension ease as each one leaves the screen.

“They’re retreating,” they hear and Felicity grins.

“It’s not just them,” she says looking at Lena. “It’s all around the world.”

Felicity jumps a little and before Lena can react, she’s surging forward, wrapping Lena up in a triumphant hug and squealing a little in her ear. “We did it!”

At first Lena goes stiff, but then she relaxes, allows herself to feel a sense of success and hugs Felicity back.

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When the team has returned and traded their weapons for champagne flutes, Lena can’t help but smile at the accomplished feeling that seems to settle over the entire hangar. Felicity pours her a
glass of champagne and Kara clinks their glasses together with a soft smile.

“We did it,” Kara says and Lena reacts to the happy way her face is lit up.

“We did,” Lena agrees.

“Saved another universe together,” Kara says with a conspiratorial smile. “We make a pretty good team.”

“I think we had some help,” Lena laughs, and Kara makes a feigned scoffing sound.

“I think it was mostly me and you, but whatever.” Kara’s biting against a smile and Lena wants to kiss her so badly. It’s part the triumphant feeling that’s thrumming around the group, intoxicating in its nature, and another part the way Kara looks right now, bright eyes and a flirty half smile Lena has always been weak to.

A voice interrupts them, low and knowing. “Ladies,” Sara says as she steps up to them, holding a small silver flask in front of her. “Whisky?”

Kara declines with a shake of her hand, but Sara is arching an eyebrow at Lena with a kind of challenge in her expression. Not one to be intimidated or to back down, Lena reaches out and takes the flask, putting it to her lips for a long pull.

It burns immediately, bitter and rough against her tongue, but she doesn’t react. Even as it hits the back of her throat and slides down like fire into her stomach she just passes the flask back to Sara, who is observing her with an impressed expression.

“I like a woman who can handle her liquor,” Sara says with a smirk and Kara just sort of looks between them with a confused expression. “This stuff is no joke. Plucked it from the seventeenth-century. Quadruple distilled.”

There are no less than three things in that sentence that Lena doesn’t fully comprehend, but doesn’t comment, just takes a sip of her champagne to wash out the taste of the whisky in her mouth.

Sara has a look in her eye that Lena recognizes easily and she shifts a little towards Kara automatically.

“So, Girl of Steel,” Sara asks in a low flirtatious tone that makes Lena’s spine straighten a little. It reminds Lena a little of college when everyone would attach their eyes to Kara and stare at her for hours. Kara at parties was some sort of magnet; apparently that hadn’t changed. “I have to ask,” she says and Lena bites back on the no you don’t that she wants to say. “Do you lift or anything? I mean, what’s your workout routine?”

Kara’s frowning, looking at Lena in confusion for a brief second before looking at Sara and smiling.

“I uh - I don’t really need to work out,” Kara says, shrugging. “I do some sparring, I guess.”

“Are you telling me that these are just...natural?” Sara asks, reaching out to run a quick finger down one of Kara’s arms. Lena’s eyebrows raise a little and she fights a smile. This kind of brazenness she can almost respect. “Damn, I’m kinda jealous,” Sara comments casually. “Has Felicity seen you knock out a salmon ladder workout yet? She’d probably have an aneurism.”

“What’s a salmon ladder?” Kara says and she looks down at Lena with even deeper confusion. Lena’s sure Kara thinks it has something to do with food, but before she can even open her mouth
to explain, Sara’s talking again.

“And you,” Sara says, looking Lena up and down and grinning. “You’re too hot for the nerd squad.”

Lena laughs a little, shaking her head. “I’m sure Felicity would love to hear that,” she says, keeping her gaze even with Sara’s.

“Good point,” Sara says, gesturing at Lena with her flask and smirking. “Beauty and brains clearly.”

Kara seems to catch on to the conversation the moment Sara flat out winks at Lena and her reaction is a none-too-subtle arm sliding around Lena’s waist, hovering at the small of her back. Sara notices it, and the worst part is that her grin widens.

“Ah, I thought so,” she says, and then knocks back another shot. “Ollie told me that I was making shit up, but he’s an idiot. I should’ve stopped listening to that guy when I was fifteen.”

“You’ve known him since you were fifteen?” Kara asks, and her curiosity makes Lena smile.

“Before that, even,” Sara says, shrugging. “We’ve all got stories. He took me on his boat and then we got stranded on an island for a few years.”

“I was stranded in a pocket of space called the Phantom Zone for twenty-four years,” Kara says, and this time, when Sara offers her a swig of the whisky, she takes it. The face she makes at the taste makes Lena laugh.

Later, after Sara’s left, Kara turns to Lena with a scrunch of her nose. “She was hitting on us, right?”

Lena tries to control her grin and only half succeeds. “Yes.”

Kara gives her a little triumphant nod and adjust her glasses. “I told you I’m so much better at this flirting thing.”

With a shake of her head, Lena just smiles at Kara, bumps a little into her side and laughs, allowing Kara’s arm to pull her in closer.

“So what is a salmon ladder?” Kara asks, whispers, right in Lena’s ear. It just makes Lena laugh harder, and when she’s finally done laughing, looking up at Kara’s red face, Lena suddenly wants to reach up and kiss her. It’s not a new urge, but it rushes up in her like an ache. She brushes it aside, along with all the other feelings being stirred up just by being this close to Kara. No overthinking, not now, when it’s clear they have so little time left here.

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Towards the end of the party, as people are peeling away and the champagne is dying, Cisco walks up to them with a careful smile on his face. “Hey, guys.” He’s holding a black box in front of him and Lena eyes it for a moment.

“Hi Cisco,” Kara greets, and Lena takes a sip of her champagne.

“I made you something,” he says, and Kara perks up a little.

“What?” She glances at Lena and then back at Cisco. “You didn’t have to do that.”
He shrugs and smiles a little, handing the box over for Kara to take. She opens it to reveal a small, circular device that Lena has to lean over to get a look at.

“What is it?” Kara asks, turning it over in her hand.

“It’s an interdimensional extrapolator,” he explains, looking at Lena as he answers. “It creates small breaches so you can use it to cross over to our universe any time you need to.”

“That’s amazing!” Kara says with a bright smile, but Lena realizes what the device really means. They’re going home soon. She tries not to think of it too much, focuses on the feeling of Kara right next to her.

“I also included communication functionality so if you ever need any help, you can always contact the team.”

“Thank you,” Kara says and she hands the device to Lena to look at before wrapping Cisco up in a hug.

“Of course,” Cisco says with a smile for both of them.

Lena turns the small device over in her hands, studying it for a moment before Cisco bends down into her eyeline. “I’ll send you the schematics,” he says with a wink and she can’t help but laugh a little.

And then they’re saying goodbye to everyone else - Sara gives Lena a very firm hug and a whispered warning to take care of Supes. Felicity grabs ahold of the both of them at once, with excited gibberish pouring out of her mouth. Oliver walks over to lead Felicity away with a wave and a grim-looking half smile. Barry and Kara hug for a full five minutes, and when he gently places a hand on Lena’s shoulder and smiles at her so happily, she smiles back.

Kara takes her by the hand, and they begin walking back to the hotel, as something icy begins to pool in Lena’s chest.

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When they get back to their hotel, Lena packs up with sloth-like motions as the reality that their vacation is over starts to sink in. Even Kara moves unusually slow, doesn’t superspeed her way through it like she usually would.

“You ready?” Kara asks eventually, and Lena almost answers honestly, let’s the not at all drop between them.

Instead she takes a deep breath and nods. Fights the growing despair clawing at her stomach.

Kara’s got the device Cisco’s given them in her hand and Lena’s staring at it like it’s a ticking time bomb, waiting to destroy the careful balance they’ve found between them in the past few days. The minute Kara opens the breach they’re back to Earth-38, back to the DEO, to L Corp, to having to worry about her mother or whatever threat Kara is up against next.

They’re back to the watchful eyes of Kara’s family and friends, the press.

The dread Lena feels threatens to choke her and she’s reaching out to stop Kara from opening the portal before she can stop herself.

“Lena?” Kara asks, soft and concerned.
“Can we - I’d - can -” The words get lost somewhere between her heart and her mouth, but she clears her throat and forces full sentences to come out. “Do you think we could stay here for just a little longer?”

Kara lowers the hand holding the device and she looks at Lena with her brows pulled down. “Sure. If that’s what you want.”

Lena nods, shoulders relaxing only when Kara slips the small extrapolator back in her pocket. “There are just things I still want to do here that I haven’t yet.”

“Like what?” Kara asks and it’s hushed between them, so low that Lena’s heart starts to thud loudly in her chest.

It’s probably the three glasses of champagne and whatever weird, suspiciously high-alcohol whisky Sara had, but Lena finds some kind of emotional bravery bubbling up inside her as she studies Kara’s blue eyes. By tomorrow they’ll be back in their normal lives, surrounded by all the reminders of how complicated their relationship is and Lena needs to take something with her from this perfect week.

So without an answer, she surges forward. Her hand grips at the back of Kara’s neck to pull her closer and their lips slide together so easily that Lena thinks Kara whimpers a little at the feel.

There’s a second where both of them freeze. Right as their lips connect, and Kara’s body goes rigid in surprise. Lena’s fingers clench where they’re pressing against the skin of Kara’s neck and she waits to see if Kara will push her away.

It shouldn’t surprise her that when Kara does move, it’s to deepen the kiss and slide her arms around Lena’s waist to pick her up a few inches off the ground, but relief floods through her anyway. It feels so good that Lena smiles against Kara’s mouth. Her fingers trace upwards, pulling Kara’s hair out of her ponytail and tangling in the strands. Kara turns them then, backs Lena up until she’s propped up against the wall near the door and Lena swallows a moan at the feeling of Kara pressed completely against her.

“Lena,” Kara is murmuring, but she’s still kissing her, still gripping Lena’s hips and keeping them together. It’s an intoxicating feeling to realize that there is no one here in this entire universe to interrupt them right now, nothing pressing they need to attend to. Just the reality of the way their bodies still fit together so easily and the tight feeling low in Lena’s gut that’s begging her for release.

The feel of it all swarms Lena’s head so completely that she feels like she’d fall over if Kara weren’t holding her upright. “Please,” Lena says quietly because she can feel the confusion in Kara, the questioning even as she doesn’t stop pressing their mouths together.

Kara has a hand sliding up the back of Lena’s shirt and her lips are trailing over Lena’s jawline. Her head snaps back at the feeling of Kara kissing her neck and it’s a melting, liquid feeling that floods all over her skin.

There’s a crunching sound next to Lena’s ear and when she looks over, it’s because Kara’s slammed a hand into the wall next to her head, strong fingers breaking just slightly into the plaster there. Lena reaches up to hold onto it, the muscles relaxing at the first feel of Lena’s touch and Kara’s whole body sags against her, pressing ever closer, and Lena feels her body get lifted up off the ground again just by Kara’s body holding her tightly against the wall. It’s a show of unconscious strength that sends a thrill through Lena, and when she moans, Kara makes a sound Lena hasn’t heard in four years.
A warm hand is tracing Lena’s side, dipping below the waistband of her pants and pulling a strangled sound out of the back of Lena’s throat. Lena brings her free hand up to cup Kara’s chin, bring their mouths back together, and then, once Kara’s kissing her again, she drifts a hand down to the front of Kara’s shirt, finding purchase on the buttons there and trying to pry them open.

The feel of Kara’s leg threading between her own rips a noisy exhale through her nose and she needs them to be horizontal now. The bed is just visible over Kara’s shoulder and she struggles to think of a way to steer them that direction without having to break apart.

Halfway through a low order to take me to bed, Kara is suddenly zooming away from her, hitting the opposite wall with a loud thud Lena’s positive left a mark. The movement is so abrupt that Lena’s left thinking about the incident in her office just weeks ago, the chill of Kara’s body being ripped away from her.

“Wha-” It’s a battle to get air into her lungs, but she manages and she eyes Kara with confusion.

“I can’t,” Kara is saying, but she’s staring at Lena with hot eyes, her narrowed gaze raking over Lena’s disheveled clothing and her chest heaving in a telltale sign of arousal.

“Kara,” Lena says and she gulps a lungful of air to steady her voice. “What’s wrong?”

Kara shakes her head and even across the distance of the hotel room Lena can tell her eyes are watering behind her glasses, tension settling in her jaw line. “I don’t want it like this.”

The look in Kara’s eye scares her. It’s profound and determined and Lena feels like they’re both stepping up to the edge of a cliff. “Don’t want what like what?”

Kara straightens from the slumped posture she’d taken up against the wall and takes a deep, visible breath as if trying to steel herself. “If we were at home,” Kara says in a soft voice. “On Earth-38. Would you want this?”

Lena doesn’t know how to say that she always wants this because she knows what Kara is really asking and Lena hates that the question doesn’t have a simple answer aside from, “I’m not sure.”

“This matters to me,” Kara replies in a thick voice, as she gestures between them. Lena pulls at her shirt, runs her fingers through her hair. “I need it to matter.”

“It always matters,” Lena whispers, the uncomfortable feeling of tears heating up in the backs of her eyes. The with you goes unspoken, but she hopes Kara hears it.

Kara’s fingers clench visibly, and she looks like she might walk back over towards Lena, but she stays put, nods a little. “I need it to matter at home. I need it to matter when we still have all the crazy stuff happening in our lives.”

“Kara,” Lena says, the name dropping out of her on a broken sigh, and Kara smiles a little despite the visible tears threatening to drop.

“When we do this again,” Kara continues and Lena’s heart flutters at the when. “You need to be sure.”

“I’m sure that I want this,” Lena manages to get out through the thick feeling in the back of her throat.

“I mean everything else,” Kara clarifies. “Sure about me.”
The truth sits on the tip of Lena’s tongue, scrambles to get loose, but she bites against the *I have always been sure about you* that threatens to break her.

“I want you in any and every universe,” Kara confesses and Lena’s sure she’s going to have a stroke with the way her chest feels. Everything has gotten far more serious than she ever intended, and she feels like the farther they walk down this path the harder it will be to turn back. “I don’t care about all that stuff back home, like how I’m Supergirl, and you’re trying to rebuild your company, and your mother is apparently some supervillain and all that. I don’t care.”

Silence stretches for a tense moment until Kara’s saying words in Kryptonian that slice across Lena’s insides. Words Lena was sure she’d never hear again. They’re the closest thing Kara’s language has to an *I love you* and it smacks into Lena like something physical.

“Kara,” Lena says with a shake of her head. She swipes a finger at the corner of her eye and keeps her jaw tight.

“So, I don’t care about all that other stuff, but I know that you do,” Kara continues with kind, understanding eyes that Lena’s not sure she deserves. “I respect that. I’m just not going to do this with you until…” She shakes her head, shrugs a little. “Until I can have all of you. Not just this fleeting moment in another universe.”

“I’m sorry,” Lena croaks and her throat starts to ache with the strain it takes to keep from crying.

Kara paces forward then, reaches out to wind her hand around Lena’s neck with solid, profound pressure. “Don’t be,” she murmurs. They’re close together again and just the sudden invasion of her senses with *Kara* threatens to break lose the dam keeping her tears back. “You have to know it’s not because—”

Lena’s gaze snaps to Kara and she sees the *want* in her face mixed up with all the other emotions. It’s in the way Kara’s eyes flit down to her mouth and the way the hand on the back of her neck is warm and tight.

“It’s not because I don’t want to,” Kara finishes. “I’m always going to want you.”

It does nothing to quash the desire to press forward and kiss Kara again, but her words are echoing around in Lena’s skull and she understands on a deep level that this isn’t something they should do now, here, no matter how much she aches for it.

Lena lets out a watery laugh that comes out a little more bitter than she intends, but she reaches up to grip the forearm resting against her shoulder. “I know,” she whispers, sagging into the hold Kara has on her neck. “It’s the champagne,” she jokes, if only to get the emotional waterfall they’re standing under to ease a little.

“It’s not,” Kara denies, staying serious in a way that tethers Lena to the moment. “I’ve been thinking about kissing you since the day in the park.”

Lena’s chest feels tight with the memory of it, the memory she’s been desperate to hold onto. It’s a feeling she’s so sure is going to evaporate as soon as they step foot through the portal to their Earth.

“Since the day I walked into your office with Clark, really, but in the park it felt—”

“Yeah,” Lena says, clearing her throat and trying to smile. “I know. Me too.”

“I have waited four years for you to come back,” Kara whispers between them and Lena’s heart
shatters. It feels like standing in a regional airport years ago with Kara dropping hushed affection as Lena made a decision that would change both of their lives. “I can wait longer.”

It’s an awful feeling to be caught between telling Kara not to wait around for something Lena isn’t positive she’ll ever really let herself have, and the desperate feeling to drown in the security Kara’s words give her. She isn’t sure where Kara gained some kind of infinite capacity for patience, but it’s clear she has and it only makes Lena feel like she keeps making the same mistakes with Kara. Keeps hurting her.

“When did you get so patient?”

Kara makes an indignant scoffing sound. “I’ve always been patient.”

“You don’t have a patient bone in your body,” Lena teases, but Kara doesn’t laugh, just looks seriously into Lena’s eyes.

“I do when there’s something worth waiting for.”

The silence between them then is profound Lena feels like it’s something tangible, settling over her shoulders and pressing against her chest.

“I’m afraid I’m just going to hurt you again,” Lena confesses and it’s at odds with her actions earlier - as if she didn’t realize that attempting to cross a line on Earth-1 wouldn’t have consequences on Earth-38.

“Lena,” Kara says, drawing the name out into a smile. Their foreheads press together and Kara sighs. “I have never in my life regretted a single moment you and I have spent together. Even the painful ones.” She pauses, takes in an unsteady breath and repeats the words in Kryptonian. I love you.

The tears come then, unable to be restrained any longer, and she hates the creeping feeling of despair that’s threading around her spine. Lena has regrets. A wealth of them actually. But she doesn’t tell Kara that, doesn’t let her know how much it aches to think about the list of things she’d change about their history if given the chance.

It goes against every single thing Lena knows they need, every single boundary she’s set up between them and she knows that there’s just no going back after she says it, but it’s too hard to keep it in anymore.

“I love you too,” she says in a shaky whisper, even though the words feel like they burst out of her, crashing through all her walls to smack Kara in the chest. It feels a little like a weight has come off of her entire body.

“I know,” Kara replies after a few seconds, the words coming out on a wet sounding laugh. She picks her head up to press a warm kiss to Lena’s forehead and Lena leans into the feeling, her eyes closing briefly. “That was never our problem.”

Lena laughs mirthlessly, her fingers reach out a redo a few buttons on Kara's shirt just to have something to do. "This weekend felt amazing," Lena says softly. "Thank you."

"That feeling doesn't have to stay here," Kara tells her in a whisper, but Lena doesn't know how to believe that. She nods anyway and Kara looks at her sadly, but doesn't push.

Then Kara steps away, holding out her hand for Lena to take and pulling the extrapolator out of her pocket and holding it up.
“Come on,” Kara says, with a wry grin. “Let’s go home.”

Home had always been a fleeting concept to Lena, but as her palm slides over Kara’s, the solid, sure pressure of it grounds her in the same way it always has. It feels like the park when they were all wrapped up in each other. *Go home,* Lena thinks. She hasn’t left home for the past week.
Chapter 9

It had been easy to think of Earth-1 as not that different than Earth-38, but the differences come flooding in just as soon as Lena and Kara step through the portal into Kara’s apartment. Here, she’s a Luthor, and Kara’s a Super, and the world is not as kind.

Kara’s words still ring out between them we don’t have to leave that feeling here. But Lena can’t help but feel the walls between them come back up. Less solid than before, sure, but there nonetheless. She tries not to immediately stiffen in reaction or let Kara catch on to what she’s feeling, but she knows that’s a long shot.

“Lena,” Kara says, and her tone indicates pretty clearly that she sees right through Lena.

“Yes?” Lena asks with a gentle clearing of her throat. She drops Kara’s hand and runs a palm down her side, hating the sudden clammy feel in it.

Kara’s lips thin and she hands over the small duffel she carried for Lena through the breach. “You don’t have to pull away from me,” Kara says. “I’m not going to pressure you.”

Lena shakes her head, still feeling completely unstable from their emotional confrontation of moments before. There’s a lingering sense of Kara all over her skin and if she licks out against her lips it’s like she can still taste her there. “I’m not pulling away,” she says quietly, each word coming out slowly, carefully.

“You can stay here tonight. If you want,” Kara says and she moves as if to touch Lena again, but hesitates and something goes tense between them. “If you’re not ready to face real life yet.”

There are what feels like a thousand different emotions rattling around in her head, voices yelling at her to do one thing or another and she can’t seem to think straight. There’s one begging her to let Kara take care of her, to avoid the world, and the familiar voice of her mother urging her to be a Luthor. But she also knows that the comfort Kara’s offering is emblematic of a larger question, about the path she wants their relationship to take from here on out. And that - she has no idea what to do about that, right now.

“Thanks, but I’ll be alright,” she manages to say and Kara looks at her sadly. “I have responsibilities I neglected for a week that I need to tend to.”

“I know,” Kara says and she sounds so resigned, defeated, like she knows what Lena’s going to decide at the end of the day and Lena doesn’t know how to tell her that she hasn’t made any decision. That her lips still feel swollen from kissing and she still remembers what it felt like to get pressed against a wall by Kara’s body. The skin at the small of her back still tingles from the feel of Kara’s fingers tracing there and there’s absolutely no way she can come back from that.

Lena opened Pandora’s box. With no regard for what would come out. Their I love yous still sit solidly between them and Lena just needs some distance to sort out her brain before she continues to crash into Kara consequences be damned. If she keeps going, it’s going to destroy both of them and it will be entirely her own fault.

“Hey,” she says softly and she sets her duffel bag on the ground to walk up to Kara. Just being close again makes Lena’s body start to hum and her mouth goes a little dry when Kara’s eyes drop immediately to Lena’s mouth. “I’m not forgetting. I couldn’t even if I tried.”

There’s no hesitation when Kara reaches out this time and their fingers tangle out together. “Okay.
I’m not trying to - I want to give you whatever you need. I don’t want things to be weird between us just because we’re back here."

There seems to be a disconnect between what Lena needs and what she can have and it’s darkly apparent in this moment when all she wants to do is press back against Kara’s body and fall in a tumble down onto Kara’s bed. “I know. We’re fine,” she says softly. “I promise.”

“I want to give you the space to figure us out. No pressure.”

Figure us out, Lena thinks and she feels the ball get placed even more firmly in her court. Kara’s decision is all over her face and Lena knows that all she has to do is say yes and Kara is all in again. Part of her thinks that Kara never stopped being all in. It was Lena who had walked away, after all.

When she leaves it’s with a warm kiss to the corner of Kara’s mouth and a tight hug that Lena feels her entire ride over to her apartment.

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The first sign that something is wrong with her brother is the sloppy way his tie hangs from his neck, the top button of his shirt open, and the disheveled look of his hair. The second sign is the bottle of whiskey dangling from his hand.

Tullamore DEW. Whiskey Lex likes to drink when he’s sad.

He’s draped across an armchair in the living room when she gets home and concern flashes through her immediately.

“Lex?” She throws her purse and jacket onto the couch and paces over to him. His head lolls a little on the back of the chair and he smiles at her even if his eyes can’t quite focus. He’s not obliterated, but he doesn’t seem that far from it either.

“Hey there, little sister,” he drawls and he makes a finger gun gesture with his free hand at her.

“Are you okay?” Lex likes to drink, but he never gets sloppy drunk, is always some form of put together. It’s the Luthor way, after all. She sends up a silent thank you that their mother is in Madrid and doesn’t have to berate her golden boy for not handling his liquor appropriately.

“Oh, I’m great,” he answers in a tone that conveys he is quite the opposite.

She sits down on the coffee table across from him and reaches out to touch his knee. “What happened?”

Silence stretches for a long moment and he just looks at her, gaze glossy and unfocused.

“Nothing,” he shrugs and she gives him a look until he sighs. “I was seeing someone,” Lex admits, his eyes rolling to the ceiling. He props the bottle of liquor against his knee and points at her. “I was like really seeing someone.”

It comes as a complete surprise to her and she feels a stab of guilt that she wouldn’t know something so vital about her brother’s life. She gets so wrapped up in her own things, in doing well at her internship, pleasing her mother, graduating early, Kara. “Lex, what happened?”

“Clark,” Lex answers, the name clicking off his tongue bitterly.
“You were seeing Clark?” Lena asks, trying to figure out what her brother is saying. “Who’s Clark?”

“Clark happened,” he clarifies before taking a pull of the whisky. “I was seeing someone and then Clark happened.”

“Who is Clark?”

“Clark is my best friend,” Lex answers and then he laughs mirthlessly. “Was my best friend.”

For the first time in her life Lena feels entirely distant from her brother. The idea that he could have two important people in his life that she knows nothing about squeezes painfully at her heart. Has she really been that wrapped up in her own life so selfishly?

“Bastard,” Lex bites out, but Lena recognizes the look in Lex’s eyes. He’s not angry at Clark. He’s angry at himself.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Lena asks in a careful tone.

He shakes his head, but sits up suddenly, looking serious. “You and Kara,” he says. “You guys are good?”

Lena’s chest aches a bit to think of her girlfriend up in Midvale, and her voice is hoarse when she finally speaks. “Yeah, we’re good.”

He nods, slowly, eyes narrowed. “You hold on to that,” he tells her, pointing with the bottle of whiskey. The liquid sloshes violently against the glass sides. “Enjoy it before it’s over.”

“Lex,” she says softly, sadly. Talking about Kara as something that could ever be over feels painful.

“We’re Luthors, Lena,” he says, licking out against his lips, eyes fluttering. “We’re not meant to have things that last.” He laughs again, this bitter broken sound she’s never heard come out of his mouth. “I mean look at mom and dad,” he continues with a sardonic smile and she assumes he means their father’s untimely death. It only confuses her more and Lena wants to fix the almost maniacally hurt look in Lex’s eyes.

He shakes his head and waves the bottle around again. This time she grabs out for it and easily takes it from his hand.

“Why don’t we stop drinking out of the bottle like we’re uncivilized,” she says in a light tone as she puts the whiskey out of his reach.

His eyes roll over a little and he licks his lips. “Okay, Mother,” he replies sarcastically and Lena just shoots him an exasperated look.

“Do you want to talk about what happened?”

“Nothing happened,” Lex answers and Lena sighs until he continues. “No, really.”

He leans forward, sitting up and clasping his hands between his knees. His tie swings down and a curl of his hair tumbles forward on his forehead. “Clark is a good guy, you know? Like the best guy I know. I get it.”

“So…” Lena ventures a guess. “This…girl?” She pauses to confirm and Lex just gives her a droll
look. “Okay so this girl that you’ve been seeing. She left you for Clark?”

Lex laughs, falls back in the chair with a thud and Lena wishes he were sober so she could get a
grip on this conversation. Then again, if he were sober she doubts they’d be talking about it at all.

“I left her actually,” Lex says with this haughty smirk that seems all out of place.

“You left her for Clark?” Lena tries and Lex laughs again.

“What do you mean when you say ‘left her’?” He asks and she doesn’t, but she thinks it’s more a setup question
than a real one. “He’s this great wholesome perfect American boy. Good guy Clark. Who
wouldn’t fall in love with Mr. Perfect?”

He says it in what she’s sure is supposed to come off as sarcastic or mocking, but Lena can read the actual respect, maybe even love that Lex holds for this mystery man. “And do you know what I am?”

“Lex,” she says softly because she starts to sense where this is going and her chest aches for the
pain in her brother’s eyes.

“I’m Lex Luthor,” he tells her, voice dripping with disdain as he says his last name. “I’m the genius billionaire golden child of Lionel and Lillian Luthor and I love my work more than I could ever love anything else.”

“That’s not true,” Lena tells him seriously, leans forward a little to get him to hear her.

“Isn’t it?” His eyes narrow critically, lips thin. “We’re the Luthor children, Lena,” he tells her again, like she’s going to forget any time soon. “Our sole purpose on this Earth is furthering our family’s legacy. You and me.”

“You’re sounding too much like Mom,” Lena says in a soft careful voice, not knowing how to help him.

“Mom has a point,” Lex says with a shrug of his shoulder and that’s when she knows Lex is too far
gone to be rational.

“You’re drunk,” Lena deadpans.

With a sloppy grin, Lex shrugs. “Doesn’t make me wrong.”

“We’re more than just our last name, Lex.”

He nods slowly, looks away with a sad twist to his lips. “I loved her,” he says and it takes Lena to realize they’re back to mystery girl and not still talking about their mother. “I loved her as much as I’m capable of.”

A twist of guilt digs deeper. All the times they’d talked about Kara, about Lena’s love life and her fears and everything and not once had she thought Lex might be going through the same thing. “But you left her,” she says softly and he smiles. The kind of smile Lena knows hides pain.

“Better to leave someone before they can do the leaving,” he says sagely and Lena thinks there’s red rimmed in his eyes, but she doesn’t think she’s ever seen her brother cry. Isn’t sure she’d know what to do if he starts now.

“Why does anyone have to do the leaving?”
His smile deepens, darkness swirling in his eyes. “They’ll all leave in the end,” he says with such dramaticism to his tone that she almost laughs. “I’d rather be the one that leaves than the one that gets left.”

“That’s hyperbolic.”

He rolls his eyes, ignores her statement. “I left her so she can be happy and go off with the most perfect of all humans, Clark. Clark who gets the girl and the happiness and everything and -” he laughs again. “He was my best friend.”

Lena’s throat feels thick with empathy for her brother. “Let me get you some water,” she murmurs. “Maybe some food.”

“No,” he says when she gets up to move and he reaches out to grab her wrist, keep her there. “Can you just stay for a bit?”

With sad eyes she tries to smile reassuringly, grips at the hand holding onto her arm and sits back down. “Of course.”

In the morning, after Lena makes sure Lex wakes up to a bottle of aspirin and a large Gatorade, her brother is all apologies and has only vague recollections of their conversation.

Lena doesn’t have the heart to drag him through it all over again and he looks leagues better than he had the night before. His hair is back to being immaculate, tie in a perfect knot and suit tailored to perfection. He buys her lunch at her favorite restaurant in Metropolis and acts like nothing is wrong.

Lena lets him.

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Her apartment isn’t as swarmed with press as she had thought it might be and she assumes that’s largely because she up and disappeared for a week. There are only a few reporters camped out, a few flashes that go off as she dodges them and ducks inside her building.

She isn’t there for long, just to drop her bag off and change into something more appropriate for heading into L Corp.

It’s late afternoon, but she knows her inbox has to be overflowing with things she needs to take care of and based on the three hundred notifications on her phone, all from today, she’s sure even her team of secretaries haven’t been able to handle everything.

By the time she gets to L Corp the evening security shift is just coming on and the man at the desk shoots her a surprised smile when he sees her, waving her through the checkpoint with a, “Welcome back, Miss Luthor.”

There’s very little of her looking forward to having to spend the next few days putting out fires and facing the fallout of her confrontation with her mother, but there is undeniably still a part of her that feels better just walking into this building, her heels clicking with authority against the floor. Painful as it may be, stressful as it may be, this is an area she knows how to navigate. She knows the players and the rules and has rarely felt out of her depth here.

Jess is at her desk when she gets up to her office and she sends Lena a relieved smile the minute she sees her, standing up. “Miss Luthor, so good to see you.”
“I’m sure,” Lena says with a wry smile. She hikes her bag higher on her shoulder and takes a deep breath. “I’m going to go through my inbox, catch up on what I’ve missed. I’d appreciate not being bothered.”

“Of course, Miss Luthor,” Jess replies and Lena sends her a warm smile.

“Thanks, Jess.”

There’s a pile of files waiting for her on her desk, including a stack of cards detailing all of the phone calls she missed over the past week. It’s overwhelming, but she has to start somewhere and with a deep sigh she sits down at her chair and pulls the stack over.

It takes her hours, but she puts a dent in the paperwork she’s behind on and responds to as many messages as possible before she feels like she might pass out at her desk. She packs up whatever work she can bring home and spends another two hours in her bedroom cleaning out her inbox and checking up on the progress of a few projects.

There are about ten different letters and messages from her legal team as well as her mother’s, and she knows one of them is a notification of the court dates, but she can’t think about that yet.

Kara texts her somewhere around three in the morning: hope you’re okay. sleep well, Lena. She doesn’t bother texting back, but the text brings some measure of comfort after a long, tiring day of phone calls and emails and panicked investors.

She falls into a restless sleep eventually surrounded by a scattering of papers and her laptop still open and glowing into the dim light of her room.

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In the morning, Lena forgets for a second where she is. For half of a second, she thinks she’s in the hotel room on Earth-1, and that Kara is going to come striding in with a cup of coffee and a smile. She blinks awake and stretches the ache out of her shoulders and neck for sleeping in an awkward hunched over position.

With a heavy sigh she pulls herself out of bed and mentally preps herself for another day of playing catch up. She’s walking into the lobby of L Corp when she gets a text and her heart flutters a little to see Kara’s name pop up on the screen. The unanswered text from last night floats above a new one on her screen.

is it bad that i kind of miss jitters? the text reads and Lena smiles fondly at thinking of the local coffee shop they frequented in Earth-1’s Central City.

Before she steps into her elevator she types out a quick why would that be bad?

The response comes as she’s sitting down at her desk. isn’t it kind of mean to noonan’s?

A laugh drops out of her before she can stop it and the tense feeling she’s had since waking up starts to ebb, just a little. I don’t think coffee shops have feelings.

It’s a quick interaction, but it’s easy and lacks the kind of emotional depth that their last meeting had. She hasn’t seen Kara since they came through the breach, but the casual way Kara slipped back into their text conversations as if nothing’s changed makes Lena feel like she can breathe a little easier.

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As Lena plunges herself into damage control at L Corp, Christmas season falls over National City like a blanket of green and red and white lights. It largely escapes her attention until a memo about the annual Luthor Family Fundraising Gala passes her desk - a Christmas tradition as much as she’s ever had one.

Lex is in prison and her mother is on her way there. Holding the gala seems pointless to some degree, but she hates the idea it would look like she’s admitting defeat, surrendering her family’s name and reputation.

After a moment’s consideration she sends a quick email to her assistant and drafts a short memo about changing the name and purpose of the gala - L Corp instead of Luthor Family and New Year’s instead of Christmas - as well as revising the guest list. It’s a gamble to do something so drastic this close to the date of the event, but she never got anywhere by playing it safe.

It’s late into the evening when a knock interrupts her part of the way through responding to an e-mail about a weekly development meeting.

Jess walks in and Lena startles a little, suddenly remembering she’s kept her secretary here so late. “Jess please go home, you don’t have to be there.”

With an indulgent smile, Jess ignores the directive completely and walks a little closer to Lena’s desk. “A Winn Schott is here to see you. I told him you didn’t want to be disturbed, but he was insistent. He said you were expecting him?”

Brows pulling down, Lena closes her laptop and sits up a little. “Send him in.”

Jess retreats and soon after Winn walks into her office looking hesitant and holding a white plastic bag. Standing, Lena tilts her head to the side, a quizzical smile on her face. “Hello, Winn. What can I do for you?”

“Hey,” he says with a little wave before walking towards her. “Sorry, I know it’s super late.”

“Not at all,” she says and gestures towards a chair opposite her desk before taking her own.

“Kara sent me,” Winn replies and Lena feels a smile pull across her face unbidden. “With food.”

In the week since they’ve been back on Earth-38, Kara and Lena have barely had a chance to see each other. But Lena has grown used to the rhythmic nature of their texts, has settled back into expecting Kara’s odd, off-topic greeting in the mornings, and the even stranger late night commentary on things happening in the city or questions about Lena’s day. It reminds her, the littlest bit, of the summer they spent apart in college. It’s a comfort in a complicated time at L Corp, and Kara is reaching even further to ease her with this.

Lena arches a brow as he sets the bag on her desk and takes a seat. “Food?”

“I believe she called it ‘no pressure vegetable chow mein’ and told me to make sure I emphasized the no pressure part,” he answers.

Lena laughs a little. “Just because?”

Winn shrugs. “I’m just the delivery boy.”

“She didn’t have to do that,” Lena says, but she tugs the bag closer and peers inside. The smell alone is making her mouth water and she realizes quite abruptly that it’s been hours since she last ate. She wonders if Kara had known somehow, or if she had simply predicted. “Neither did you.”
“Ah, it’s nothing,” he says with a dismissive wave.

“Can you please inform my ridiculous girlfriend that she doesn’t need to send her friends to bring me food and if she does it herself it doesn’t feel like pressure?” It’s meant mostly as a joke, but Winn doesn’t laugh and after a second she realizes what she’s said. A glance at Winn, who has a slack jawed wide-eyed look about him, lets her know he heard it loud and clear.

It’s a testament to her years of practice in not visibly reacting to anything that she doesn’t so much as flinch when she rewords the sentence in her head. Girlfriend doesn’t have to mean anything. Women call girls that are their friend girlfriend all the time.

It was the kind of slip that Lena was certain would provoke a few pokes and prods from a therapist, but right now - there’s no room to confront what her subconscious and mouth have just combined together to do. She’s had so little time to think about her and Kara’s relationship and its future, and has simply revealed in the companionship Kara’s given her without pressure. But as always when it comes to the two of them, something is hovering under the surface.

There’s absolutely zero way her sentence could be construed in a friends way, judging by Winn’s face, but she forces her expression to remain neutral as Winn gapes at her in the hopes he’ll become convinced he hallucinated it.

“I’ll - I’ll let her know,” he finally croaks out, still looking completely bowled over.

They both sit there for a bit in only slightly uncomfortable silence before Lena realizes she needs to do something before the memory of what she said is the only thing Winn walks away with. There’s been something nagging at her brain for a few weeks now and it’s no better time than any to bring it up. “Actually, it’s good that you’re here. I was hoping you could take a look at something.”

Surprise pulls across his face, but he sits forward a little. “Really?”

“Yes,” she answers succinctly before standing up. “Come with me.”

She walks towards her office door turning only when he doesn’t follow right away. He has a worried expression on his face as he glances between the bag of food on her desk and her face. “Kara kind of made it really clear that I make sure you eat the no pressure chow mein.”

With a touch of exasperation, Lena laughs, raises her eyes to the ceiling and gestures for Winn to follow her. “It will keep. And I won’t tell her if you won’t.”

He looks torn for a moment long before conceding and following after her quickly, a wide smile on his face.

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After getting Winn the requisite security clearance and fitting him with a visitor’s badge, they make their way down to the labs at the basement of the building and Lena watches Winn’s wide-eyed stare around the room with growing affection for Kara’s best friend.

The minute they make it through the door Winn shoots away from her towards a nearby desk and stands in front of a small display of computer monitors that light up the minute he gets close. “This is face activated isn’t it?” he breathes out as the computer runs through a scan of his head.

Lena crosses her arms and watches him with a bemused smile. “It is,” she answers.

“I read a rumor about this. That you’re not just tracking points on a face, but scanning about seven
layers deeper than that. I heard it’s part of a larger robotics program, like you’re going to have sentient robots in every household.”

“I’d love to talk about it,” Lena says, and she glances over to see Lana Lang walking her direction. “But that’s not what we’re down here for.”

“Right, yeah, of course,” he says walking slowly backward and waving at the computer.

“Miss Luthor,” Lana greets when she gets close enough and Winn turns to step up back next to Lena. “I’d say that you’re here late, but I think that’s becoming our thing.”

Lena laughs warmly, but Winn just looks between them, a little confused, so Lena introduces them. “Lana, this is Winn Schott,” she says and then pauses a moment before adding, “A friend of mine.”

It’s a strange sentence for her mouth to form, but she pushes through it and Winn looks so suddenly pleased that Lena can’t help the way a smile takes hostage of her face. “Nice to meet you,” he says, shaking her hand.

“Can I help you guys with anything?” Lana asks and Lena shakes her head, puts a warm hand at Lana’s arm and squeezes in a friendly gesture.

“No, we’re fine. I just wanted Winn to take a look at something. Fresh pair of eyes and all that.”

“Of course,” Lana says with a polite smile for both of them. “Let me know if you need anything.”

“Thank you, Lana,” Lena says before stepping past her towards a back hallway that leads to their more secure workstations.

Inside a room at the end of the hallway that requires a triple security check holds some of the projects Lena keeps most private. The room only opens to a scan of her own DNA and Winn watches with some fascination as she presses her hand to the small device on the wall.

“Is this where you hold the keys to a proton cannon or something?” Winn asks when they step inside. “Because that would be cool.”

She laughs, arches an eyebrow at him and he just smiles. “Not exactly.”

The room is fairly large, and she leads him towards the back where a long table holds the plans to something she’s been working on ever since she came to National City and saw Kara again.

With a deep breath, she inputs a few commands and a hologram of a suit pops up. “Kara mentioned that you built her suit,” she says and Winn’s eyes roam over the information Lena’s displaying. “I was hoping you’d be open to suggestion.”

“No way,” Winn breathes, stepping forward as Lena pulls up a few different schematics for some ideas she’s had. “You and me, you mean? Working on Kara’s suit?”

Lena shrugs. “I just had some thoughts.”

A moment of silence happens and Winn’s face looks tight with something before he breaks out into a wide, enthusiastic grin and extends his fist towards her. “Science bros!”

Perplexed, Lena just sort of stares at his fist for a moment, but his smile never falters and he just wags his fist around like she’s supposed to do something with it. Intuition tells her this is akin to a high five and she hits her own fist lightly against his. It only makes him smile wider, triumph
lighting up in his eyes.

She laughs and so does he and it feels so easy.

Later, after she and Winn have spent a few companionable hours toiling away in the lab, Lena texts Kara to thank her for the food.

You didn’t have to do that, she sends.

It takes Kara a bit to respond, but when she does it’s a pointed, i hope you ate it or winn is in trouble.

Lena wavers on a reply for a few seconds before sending if you’re worried about such a thing you should do the delivery yourself. She waits a moment longer before adding a no pressure.

The response is immediate and Lena smiles a little at Kara’s okay i will accompanied by three smiley faces.

It’s a random Thursday afternoon when she hears what she thinks is laughter coming from outside her very thick office doors and she sends a puzzled look at them for a long while.

When the laughter comes not just once, but more than five times, Lena gets up to investigate who is standing outside her office hosting a comedy of show of some kind and is greeted by the image of her ex-girlfriend standing in front of her assistant’s desk. The two of them laughing at some apparently hilarious joke.

Jess notices her immediately and startles, sitting up in her chair and wiping the smile off her face so quickly that Lena feels a twinge of guilt that she interrupted the happy moment. Kara however, doesn’t stop smiling. If anything, her expression grows when she looks at Lena.

“Hi,” Kara says brightly.

“Are you here to see me?” Lena asks slowly.

Kara grins. “Duh.”

“Sorry, Miss Luthor,” Jess adds. “I was just about to send her in.”

“It’s no problem, Jess,” Lena replies with a shake of her head. She feels a little foolish now that she’s come out here, but Kara steps forward with a warm expression.

“Jess was telling me about this place called Lulu’s that has a burger made with grilled cheese as the buns,” Kara says, in a nearly reverent tone. “It’s also got fries and cheese curds on it and if you can finish it you get your meal for free and a t-shirt.”

In a natural reaction, Lena lets out a soft chuckle and rolls her eyes fondly. She looks at Jess. “Do me a favor, and don’t tell her such things. You’re not the one that has to watch her eat it.”

It seems to make Jess relax a little and she puts her hands up in front of her. “Of course not, Miss Luthor. Never again.”

Lena backs up into her office door to open it and gestures for Kara to walk inside even as her ex-
girlfriend lets out a grumbled, “No one told you you had to watch me do amazing things.”

Jess laughs at that and so does Lena and they share a quick smile before Lena follows Kara into her office.

“What’s up?” Lena asks as Kara walks over to the couch and sits down. It’s only then that she notices a brown paper bag in her hand.

“I come with food,” Kara says with a grin.

Lena quirks a brow. “More no pressure chow mein?”

“No pressure burgers this time,” Kara corrects and Lena sighs.

“You’re atrocious for my diet. Not everyone has your metabolism nor your lead lined stomach.”

With an affectionate laugh, Kara pulls out a foil wrapped item and looks at Lena knowingly. “I didn’t just meet you, you know,” she says with a touch of exasperation. “I got you a black bean burger instead.”

“Oh,” Lena says with a little laugh. She walks forward and takes the offered item before sitting down on her couch next to Kara. “Well, in that case.”

Kara frowns a little, distaste twisting in her lips as Lena unwraps her food. “And you say that I’m the one that’s gross to watch eat.”

They share a companionable silence for a moment, as Kara takes the food out and hands over napkins and condiments.

“So what’s the occasion?” Lena asks after a minute of unwrapping the food and setting things out on the coffee table. “First you send Winn with food and now this? Are you actually afraid I’ll forget to eat or something?”

Kara shrugs. “No, just wanted to,” she says. “You said I could come by with no pressure foods of my own.”

“Well, thank you,” Lena says softly and Kara smiles so prettily that Lena has to look away.

It feels a lot like college and, once again, Lena’s reminded of the limbo she’s somehow put them into. The feeling of Kara when they pressed together in their hotel room on Earth-1 still lingers in her memories, still haunts her late at night when she dreams. The attraction that has always been between them has seemed to only intensify, even though they’ve hardly seen each other since they got back. Sometimes, Kara will send a text before Lena goes to sleep, and she just desperately wants. It’s terrifying, all over again, how badly she wants Kara Danvers - and it’s made worse by knowing what she's missing.

The knowledge that she has to do something about this chips away at her sanity. They can’t stay in this undefined area forever. Lena has to make a decision.

It’s just hard to remember all her reasons for keeping them apart when Kara is smiling at her a few feet away while she munches on french fries. They felt like thin reasons before. Now, after all they’ve been through recently, they feel mostly ridiculous.

“How has your week been?” Kara asks around a mouthful of food and Lena shrugs a little.
“A lot of lawyers,” she says wryly and Kara gives her a sympathetic look.

“Stuff with your mom?”

Lena nods, sets her food down on the table in front of her and dusts her hands off. “Her trial is set for after the holidays, but her lawyers and mine have been in and out constantly. Trying to set up witness lists, square away discovery.”

“Are you going to testify?” Kara asks and Lena leans back on the couch, crosses her legs and looks out the wide bank of windows across the office.

“Yes,” she answers simply and when she looks over, Kara’s setting her food down, leaning back against the couch and facing Lena.

“Is that what you want to do or something you think you have to do?” Kara asks softly and if it were anyone else Lena might scoff at the question.

“I want her to answer for what she did,” Lena says and when Kara doesn’t say anything for a moment she adds, “But she’s still my mom. As much as I ever had one.”

Kara reaches out across the couch to touch Lena’s shoulder, a warm palm sliding over the fabric of her shirt there and Lena sags into it just a bit, sighing through a dry smile. “Can we talk about something else?” Lena asks and Kara smiles sympathetically.

“Of course,” Kara says, taking her hand back and Lena nearly leans towards it to chase the contact. “Though I don’t have anything interesting to talk about. My week has been seriously boring.”

“Really?” Lena asks, a tad surprised. “No big bad for Supergirl?”

“Nope,” Kara answers with a shrug. “And Snapper’s got me doing fluff pieces mostly. Holiday season I think. Everyone is being good and boring.”

Lena laughs a little. “When you think of what could be considered interesting in our lives that might be a good thing.”

Kara laughs too, smiles. “Very true,” Kara says softly. “Kind of like we brought a little of Earth-1 back with us.”

“A decision, she thinks wryly as Kara hands her a french fry and an easy smile. Her mind scoffs at her. It’s becoming more and more obvious that there isn’t much of a decision to make. It’s clearly more a matter of accepting something her heart has been trying to tell her for years.

“I know,” Lena says and Kara gives her a crooked grin that skips across Lena’s heart.

The decision to take over Luthor Corp wasn’t so much a decision as something Lena just did. It seemed natural after all. A Luthor had to be in charge and with her mother all but washing her hands of the company after Lex was convicted, it left only one person really capable of filling the
The decision to move HQ to National City takes a bit longer to come to.

Moving out of Metropolis has to happen. The city is far too tied into the company. Her brother’s reputation is at the forefront of just about every resident’s mind, shadowing Luthor Corp’s public image with his madness. The company is never going to recover in Metropolis - Lena knows that, the Daily Planet’s rabid reporters know that, and so does her board of executives. Even Jack knows, though he’s barely spoken to her since she’s taken over the company and withdrawn herself from his life.

She holds meeting after meeting to decide the most viable option and tries oh so very hard to avoid the obvious choice.

National City.

It’s on the other side of the country from Metropolis, they already have corporate property there and a wealth of other subsidiaries are located nearby. It’s the perfect fit.

It’s also where Kara, and now Supergirl, live.

(She learned this two years ago because of a random phone call from CatCo shortly after Lex was arrested. Lena received a message that Cat Grant was looking to set up an interview and frankly, getting a call from the Queen of All Media wasn’t something Lena could readily ignore. If she was going to be answering questions, she might as well answer them from the best, and not from the sanctimonious Clark Kent at the Planet.

So she returns the call casually one afternoon only to feel her heart stumble at the clear, bright voice that picks up the phone.

“Cat Grant’s office, how can I help you?”

There’s no introduction, but there needn’t be and Lena curses herself for not letting Jess set the phone call up instead so she could have avoided this. Lena feels frozen and apart from a quick sharp inhale, she makes no noise. It doesn’t matter though, Lena knows she’s making noises her human hearing can’t detect, but someone else’s can.

And when the voice comes back, Kara’s voice comes back, it’s hesitant and somehow knowing in its tone. “Hello?”

Lena slams the phone back down before anything else can be said and tells Jess she won’t be doing any interviews about Lex’s arrest. If anyone from CatCo calls, she doesn’t want to hear about it.)

So Kara is in National City and Lena’s faced with the decision of moving her family’s entire company that direction. It’s juvenile that Kara’s presence there is what deters her from making the best choice immediately. Even though her mother’s left the board and has absconded off somewhere to grieve, Lena can feel her taunting voice in the back of her mind, reminding her that Luthors can’t be bogged down by small people problems. Her ambition should override her apprehension, but it’s still there, like a rock in her heart.

It’s a big city, she tries to tell herself. Kara might not even work at CatCo anymore. She might be a permanent superhero now, only let out in the night hours to fight crime and do good.

She tells herself to stop thinking so much with her heart and stick to matters of the brain. This is the right move for Luthor Corp (soon to be L Corp) and her own personal drama shouldn’t stand
in the way of that.

It shouldn’t matter at all - it had been years since she had said goodbye to Kara in that airport, and though it was rare for her to go a day without thinking of Kara or, now, Supergirl, it was silly. Kara Danvers is part of her past. A fond part, sure, but the past is meant to stay there.

When she finally delivers her decision to the board, she’s pleased at the reaction she gets. Part of her expected a bit of a fight, but most of them seem somewhat impressed and it pumps confidence behind her decision that she didn’t have before.

A week later she has an apartment and her Metropolis penthouse, the one she’s lived in for three years, is already on the market.

She tells Jack as soon as the decision is made - doesn’t want him to hear it in the news. He’s not shocked, but there’s anger simmering just beneath his sad smile and Lena aches at the sight of it. It doesn’t seem to stop him from offering to help her pack and that only makes her feel worse.

“You’re too good to me, Jack,” she confesses when he comes over with a stack of packing boxes and other supplies.

He smiles the same crooked grin he’s been giving her for years, but it’s sadder than it usually is. “When are you going to learn that there’s no such thing?”

They work methodically. Most of her bigger items are being handled by a moving company and some of it is either being donated or sold with the penthouse. She and Jack focus on her more private items, the things stored in her bedroom and deep in her closet.

In the midst of clearing out one of Lena’s bookshelves, Jack stops, a copy of A Brave New World in his hand. “You know. You don’t have to do this. You don’t owe it to anyone. Least of all your family.”

She turns from where she’s kneeling near her bedside table, sorting through a drawer there. “I’m not doing it out of duty, Jack,” she tells him.

“You’re telling me this has nothing to do with your family?” Jack asks and he drops the book in his hand in the box in front of him. “Moving all the way across the country? Leaving Metropolis and the entire life you’ve built here. The life we’ve built?”

Lena stands, faces him. Doesn’t know how to tell him that this is old hat for her. Uprooting a life she’s built is something she’s done before and this time it won’t hurt nearly as bad as it had before. “I’m not going to just up and leave my family’s company twisting in the wind,” she says quietly, willing him silently to understand.

“You don’t have to run Luthor Corp, Lena. You could stay here. Work with me at Spheerical on Biomax,” he pleads and she feels heat start to build behind her eyes, guilt twisting in her gut. “We could change the world together, Lena. You know that.”

Lena’s lips purse, knows there’s truth to what he’s saying, but it doesn’t sway her in the slightest when it comes to the decision she’s made. They’ve been debating this in some manner for the past few days and Lena doesn’t know how to get him to understand.

Tightening her ponytail, she turns away from her bedside table and walks into her expansive closet, observing what’s left there. She sighs when she feels him follow her and he leans up against the door frame.
“I’m a Luthor, Jack,” Lena says. “That hasn’t changed. I’m the only one that can captain the sinking ship that is my family’s legacy right now and I plan to do so.”

“You are not responsible for your family’s legacy.”

She starts to shift some of the boxes she had already packed in the closet and shoves them towards the door where he’s standing. “It’s not about responsibility,” she tells him with a clenched jaw and when she hands him a box to set outside with the others she maybe shoves a little harder than necessary.

Breath pushes out of him with the motion and he shoots her a pointed look. “I don’t understand why you have to leave, I’m sorry.” He sets the box outside and looks back at her, reacts to her skeptical expression. “I am. I mean, do you even want to be doing this?”

There’s a question hidden there that Lena can sense. Jack is finally asking what he really wants to know - is he worth less to her than her family’s company, her family’s legacy, her own career.

Lena doesn’t have a simple answer to that. She loves Jack. Even if it’s not in the same way he loves her. He’s been nothing but supportive and steady and he’s filled a portion of a void inside her heart that she thought could never be touched again. He’s her best friend at this point and the only stabilizing influence in the insanity that’s been plaguing her for the last year.

But the hard truth of it is that none of that is going to stop her from moving to National City. None of it is going to stop her from leaving him behind.

She thinks of Kara for a moment, thinks of her face in the regional airport close to four years ago and thinks that if that wasn’t going to stop her back then, Jack certainly wasn’t going to now.

“I do want to,” she answers in a soft but firm voice and she watches Jack’s shoulders deflate. He shakes his head, but steps further into her closet with a sigh.

“Okay,” he says and it’s with a resigned shrug of his shoulders. With a deep breath he scans the closet in front of them. “What else needs to go?”

She starts pulling more boxes out, taping up a few that were left open and after a few more minutes of handing off boxes to Jack and giving him instructions, she stumbles upon it.

She’s been meaning to get to it, but her Kara box is sitting in the corner, dusty and untouched for years. The sight of it pulls her breath in abruptly and she feels frozen, incapable of doing anything other than stand over the box and stare down at it. It’s a nondescript box and there’s no indication as to what’s inside, but Lena knows what is. There’s a telltale bump in the packing tape from when her shaky hands couldn’t quite get it to go straight in her haste to pack everything up.

She stares at it for long enough that she doesn’t notice Jack come up behind her until he wraps his arms around her waist, ducking his head into her neck. “Are you okay? I didn’t mean to make you feel worse about this.”

Her fingers twist with his own large ones where they’re settling over her stomach and she tries to laugh. “You’re fine. I know this is hard.”

“For both of us,” Jack murmurs and Lena just blinks watery eyes at the box on the ground.

“Yeah,” she says softly.

“What’s in that?” Jack asks after a moment, his chin jutting out from Lena’s shoulder towards the
“Some stuff from college,” is all Lena can think to answer and he straightens a bit.

“The classic ex box?” He asks in a way that almost sounds like it’s funny and Lena jumps a bit at the idea of being so easily read. He laughs, jostles her in his arms a little. “Oh come on, that’s literally the only thing you ever talk about when it comes to college. What else would it be?”

“I should probably get rid of it,” Lena says though just the idea of that burns uncomfortably in her throat. “I just can’t.”

“I burned the one I had for my high school girlfriend. She was the worst.”

Lena laughs as he lets her go and turns her around to face him, a teasing grin on her face. She tries not to wonder if Jack will have a Lena box and if he’ll burn that one too. “I’m not going to burn it.”

Jack shrugs. “Just a thought.”

Lena abandons the box in question in the closet and tugs Jack back out into the bedroom, decides to focus her efforts on finishing her bookshelves and some of her more personal items. They work in companionable silence for a long while.

“I’m sorry,” Jack says eventually, soft and sincere. “I really don’t mean to make this harder for you.”

“It’s okay,” Lena says, shrugging and walking over to put a palm against his cheek. He’s looking at her softly, a small smile quirking on his lips. “It means you care.”

He scoffs, smirking with that teasing wrinkle around his eyes. “Care? I would never,” he says, and it makes her laugh.

A week later, when he hugs her goodbye at the private air hangar she’s procured to leave the city, he tells her to say hi to Supergirl for him in what’s clearly meant as a joke. They both laugh and she rolls her eyes if only to keep herself from reacting any other way to the reminder that the plane waiting for her is only going to take her closer to Kara.

“I’m sorry, Jack,” she says when they pull apart and she’s not sure exactly what she’s apologizing for, but there’s understanding in the sad smile Jack gives her.

“You have nothing to be sorry for,” he tells her with such sincerity that Lena finds herself believing it. “Have fun conquering another city.”

She kisses him goodbye, hugs him again and holds him close for a long moment just inhaling against the familiar and comforting scent of him. “I’ll miss you,” she murmurs.

“Me too,” he says before letting him go.

Despite the fear and anxiety that grips a hold of her heart as she boards the plane, leaving Metropolis for National City feels a lot less like running from something and a whole lot like moving forward.

--

On a random Saturday afternoon she full on runs into Kara. Actually runs into her.
She’s been back in National City for months now, has never seen Kara randomly once and then it just happens. It’s in a liquor store not far from her building and as she rapidly turns the corner onto the pinot noir aisle, focused on answering an email on her phone, she smacks into Kara’s side.

At first she’s sure she’s hit a wall until a familiar pair of arms are holding her up by the waist and for a moment, she feels as if she’s a teenager again in the main floor of the science building outside a small coffee shop.

“Hi,” Kara says and unlike the first time this happened, she doesn’t let Lena go right away. They stay interlocked, Lena pressed into Kara’s body by strong hands at her hips. It’s hard to not mind when Kara’s face is stretching wide with a smile.

“Hi,” she repeats blinking surprised eyes at Kara and trying to catch her breath.

After another moment of staring at each other, Kara slowly lets her go, but doesn’t take a step back, her body heat reaching easily through Lena’s coat. “This feels familiar,” Kara says in low tone that can only be described as intimate. Lena’s cheeks feel a little warm at the sound of it.

With a gentle clearing of her throat, she shifts a little to put some space between them. “What are you doing here?”

Kara adjusts her glasses and it brings unneeded attention to the bracelet on her wrist. Lena swallows and moves her gaze away. “I’m going to Alex’s for dinner tonight and I wanted to get something to bring over,” Kara answers and Lena’s brow furrows.

“At this liquor store?”

“Yes,” Kara says slowly, her eyes looking away and smiling sheepishly.

“You live across town.”

“I was in the neighborhood,” Kara says and Lena wants to laugh. Technically, Kara is in every neighborhood always considering the speed with which she can travel.

“Sure.”

“This is the only place that carries Alex’s favorite wine,” Kara adds, reaching in front of her and grabbing ahold of a bottle. Lena raises a skeptical eyebrow that makes Kara chew a little on her bottom lip.

“Right.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Just stocking up,” Lena says and she pulls her trench coat a little tighter around her waist. “My lawyers are bleeding me dry of my office scotch and I keep drinking all my home scotch.”

“Can’t have that,” Kara says, laughing, and she turns suddenly, holding the bottle of wine and heading off further down the aisle, toward the whisky and scotch aisle. Lena follows after her, bumping into Kara’s arm companionably. “I don’t know how anyone can drink that stuff. It tastes like antifreeze.”

“There’s no accounting for taste,” Lena says, and Kara gasps, looking affronted at the insult. Lena reaches upwards on the shelf to grab ahold of the bottle she needs when they arrive, and Kara places a hand on the small of her back to stabilize her. It feels like fire, right through her coat.
God, she really should devote some time to thinking about this, before she runs into Kara on the street and somehow ends up in Kara’s bed.

Kara straightens a little. “Hey! Do you want to come over for dinner tonight?”

“Sorry?” Lena asks, juggling the three scotch bottles she’s procured from the top shelf. Kara takes one out of her hand, and it becomes much easier to manage as they walk their way toward the front of the store.

“Do you want to come with me to Alex’s?” It’s an earnest question that Lena almost says yes immediately too before she remembers herself.

“I don’t want to intrude on sister time,” Lena replies and she glances over to where a man is scanning the cabernet sauvignon on the other side of the aisle. He looks at her, clearly recognizing who she is and Lena can’t help the way she shifts a bit, uses Kara’s body to block his line of sight. The blatant staring has become more and more prevalent as news increases about her mother’s trial. It reminds her too much of when Lex first got arrested.

“It’s not sister time,” Kara replies and she looks over her shoulder at the man. Whatever Kara’s face looks like, the man doesn’t linger on it long before scurrying to another aisle. “Maggie will be there.”

“Oh,” Lena says and Kara looks back with a half smile that looks more irritated than happy.

“Yeah.” Kara rolls her eyes. “I’m a total third wheel, but Alex really wants me and Maggie to get along.”

“Do you not get along?”

Kara shrugs, turns over the bottle of wine in her hand and traces the label. “We do, for the most part. It’s just Alex and I have been kind of weird since they started dating and I don’t know. I could use a buffer. If you’re interested.”

Lena’s not really sure what to say. It sounds suspiciously like a double date and though Lena feels weak to the uncomfortable way Kara talked about the dinner she also isn’t sure it’s something they should be doing.

Apparently, however, Kara is a mind reader because the next thing she says is a hasty, “Not like a date. No pressure.”

It’s not like she has other Saturday night plans other than finishing some work and ordering takeout. “Okay,” she says and Kara brightens so quickly that Lena’s heart feels light.

“Yeah?”

“As long as it’s okay with Alex. I don’t want to intrude.”

“Maggie’s the one that’s intruding,” Kara grumbles and Lena’s brow furrows a little.

“Did Maggie do something to you?” Lena asks, tilting her head a little to keep eye contact with Kara.

“What? No,” Kara denies but it sounds overly hasty and draped in feigned dismissiveness.

“Are you sure?”
“Yes,” Kara sighs. “So you’ll come to dinner?”

Lena only hesitates a few more seconds. “If you’re sure Alex won’t mind.”

With bright eyes, Kara shakes her head so rapidly Lena almost loses track of the motion and she laughs. The man at the register looks up at the noise, and his eyes linger on Lena’s face as she hands over her scotch. He stops staring when Kara clears her throat and sends a heavy glare his way, handing over Lena’s last bottle. He doesn’t look up once through either of their transactions, actually, and it makes Lena laugh, that Kara Danvers has finally managed to cultivate a scary expression.

“I’ll pick you up at six,” is all Kara says, once they get outside, before she presses a kiss to Lena’s cheek and speeds away, into the late afternoon of National City.

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“That’s never fun,” Lena adds with a wry smile for both sisters. Alex hands her a glass of wine and Kara smiles.

“Got caught finishing paperwork,” Alex answers.

“Maggie’s not here yet,” is all Alex says to them when they show up at her door. Kara shrugs and pushes past Alex into the apartment and Lena smiles, hands over the bottle of wine to Alex - it only marginally shifts the frown on her face.

“Shall we?” Kara asks, heading to Alex’s kitchen and beginning to open cabinets. Alex follows in her direction and picks up a corkscrew, the two of them working to pour three glasses of wine without so much as a word about it to each other.

“She’s late?” Kara asks, looking at the oven. She tips her glasses down her nose and answers the question herself. “Lasagna? Like...Eliza’s lasagna?”

Alex shrugs, takes a sip of her wine. “Yes.”

Kara looks affronted by the idea, but smothered quickly with a, “Well that’s fine. More for me.”

“Neither of you are getting any until I’m done yelling at both of you.”

Alex’s gaze narrows. “What?!”

Alex is glaring from where she’s leaning forward against her kitchen island and she points at each of them with purpose. “I’ve kept my mouth shut since you got back because obviously you guys are going through something but if I ever find out you just up and left for an entirely different universe without so much as a plan or backup or…” Her expression is a threatening shadow of anger and Lena looks at Kara with wide eyes.

“Alex,” Kara starts with a disbelieving smile tugging at her lips. “We didn’t-”
“A text message, Kara,” Alex grits out, her attention slicing to her sister. “You sent me a damn text message saying you were off to another universe to help Barry and that was it!”

“We were fine!” Kara protests.

“You took a civilian to another universe on a whim without so much as a check-in with me or anyone else at the DEO.” Alex says and Lena can sense the tendril of fear that underlines the anger.

“She’s not a civilian,” Kara argues and Lena thinks to tell her that’s splitting hairs a bit, but Alex and Kara have squared off with matching glares. Lena’s not exactly eager to jump in the middle of that. “It’s Lena.”

Alex face shadows at the words.

“I expect this kind of behavior from her,” Alex says pointing at Kara and Kara’s nose curls up a little, defensively. “But you,” Alex continues, looking at Lena. “You’re supposed to be the rational one. How could you-”

“Don’t talk to her like that,” Kara interjects heatedly and she shifts a little until she’s more in front of Lena.

“Kara,” Lena says, but Alex plows through, keeps talking.

“Oh don’t do that, she’s fine,” Alex says, glowering. “She can handle it.”

“That’s not the point,” Kara retorts, puffing up a little.

“You’re right. The point is that you both made a decision to basically vacation over on another universe for a week without a second thought!”

“It wasn’t vacation,” Kara argues. “We were there to help Barry fight off an alien invasion.”

Lena clears her throat a little and looks away from where Alex is glaring at them. Sure they went to Earth-1 to help fight the Dominators, but that felt more like a side purpose for the trip. Most of the week could easily be described as vacation. They had even called it as such multiple times.

Alex’s frown deepens as if that were even possible. “What if you had died over there, Kara?! What then?! It’s not like I can just pop over to another dimension to save you.”

“I wasn’t going to die, Alex. Don’t be dramatic,” Kara waves off.

“That’s not something you can control!” Alex retorts and Kara takes in a deep breath in preparation for something. It’s a sign this argument is about to escalate even further and Lena steps forward, puts a hand on Kara’s arm that deflects her instantly.

“We’re sorry, Alex,” she says with a placating smile. “It won’t happen again.”

Alex is tracking Lena’s hand where it’s stroking the skin of Kara’s arm and her glare almost intensifies. It makes Lena pull away a little and Alex sighs.

Before anyone else can say anything, there’s a knock at the door and the three of them jump a little.

“This isn’t over,” Alex tells them, pointing at Kara first, then Lena.

“Jeez,” Kara whispers sheepishly as Alex walks towards the door to answer it. “I didn’t know she
Lena retakes her grip on Kara’s arm, slides her palm down until they’re holding hands for a moment. “Not as mad as that one spring break.”

Kara groans a little at the memory and they both laugh. “That was *your* fault,” she accuses in a whisper.

Lena rolls her eyes. “It was *your* idea. Don’t go blaming me now five years later.”

They mock glare at each other until Alex clears her throat and they turn to see her standing with Maggie, a tight expression on her face that Lena’s starting to think is just how Alex looks these days.

“Maggie, right?” Lena says politely and she steps forward, away from Kara, to shake her hand. Maggie looks surprised, but she recovers with a smile, shakes Lena’s hand and nods.

“Yeah, good to see you again, Lena,” Maggie replies, gaze shifting behind Lena to Kara. “Hi, Kara.”

“Hi, Maggie,” Kara says and Lena can sense Alex’s exasperation.

The timer on the oven dings then, as if it can sense a growing tension in the room, and Kara turns quickly around.

“Let’s eat,” Alex says, hand at Maggie’s back as she leads her to the table.

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Dinner is relatively uneventful until they’re mostly finished with the meal and have seemingly run out of the polite icebreaker types of conversation topics because Maggie picks up her glass of wine and smiles at Lena and Kara from across the table.

“So how long have you been together?” Maggie asks and Alex chokes so violently on her wine that everyone looks over.

“Sorry,” Alex mumbles looking uncharacteristically sheepish as she wipes liquid off her chin and sets her glass down. “Wrong pipe.”

Maggie runs a palm down Alex’s back soothingly for a moment before turning back to Kara and Lena with an expectant expression, easy smile on her face.

Lena spares a glance for Kara before answering. “We’re not, actually,” she says and tries to ignore how much it feels like lying.

The answer pulls such a quick look of surprise across Maggie’s face that Lena starts to wonder if she’ll ever be able to escape the constant assumption that she and Kara are together. “Really?”

“Yeah,” Alex answers for her with a dry tone. “Feels like they’ve been together for like seven years doesn’t it?”

When Lena looks over, Kara is glaring at her sister and Maggie’s smile is shadowing into something more confused. “Sorry,” she says with a shake of her head. “I don’t mean to be awkward. It’s just the way Alex talked about you and -” She laughs a little, looks at Lena with a touch of hesitation. “I mean there are rumors.”
“We get it all the time,” Kara tells her with a wave of her hand and Lena’s brows pull together when she looks at Kara. Lena knows that she gets asked all the time if she’s dating Kara, but she hadn’t realized Kara was getting the same kind of questioning.

“What rumors?” Alex asks suddenly, turning to her girlfriend.

Maggie shrugs, glances at Lena again. “Nothing, just talk.”

Lena catches on and laughs a little. “That I’m gay you mean?”

The table goes a little still, which she thinks is completely ridiculous considering, and Maggie nods.

With an amused smile, Lena brushes it off. “It’s not a rumor. Nor a well kept secret.”

Maggie relaxes some at that, but the Danvers sisters seem to be locked in some kind of staring contest. “I don’t mean to bring up something unpleasant.”

“It’s hardly unpleasant,” Lena says with a tilt of her head, quizzical at the slightly uncomfortable look in Maggie’s face.

“Kara and Lena are old friends from college,” Alex suddenly says, ripping her gaze away from her sister to join the conversation. Kara takes a stab of her food and grumpily shoves it in her mouth.

“Oh,” Maggie replies, looking between them and picking her wine glass up. Her gaze seems to narrow critically, a lot like it looked the first time she met Lena. “That’s cool.”

“So, Maggie,” Kara interjects with one last hard cut of her eyes to Alex. “I hear you worked with Supergirl a few times this week.”

Alex shoots Lena an exasperated look that almost makes her laugh, but Maggie is answering before she can with a heavy sigh. “I did, yeah.”

“What was that like?” Kara asks and it’s clear that she’s preparing for some kind of praise, if the here, watch this look she gives Alex is any kind of indication.

Maggie’s lips twist a little as she considers the question. “It was fine,” she answers. “If you like the feeling of doing all the hard work and then having someone swoop in last minute and take the credit.”

“What?!” Alex and Kara both ask at the same time, turning to Maggie. On instinct, Lena’s hand drifts to Kara’s leg when she feels tension run through Kara’s body.

Maggie shrugs, her smile never wavering. “Supergirl is great,” she says though it only sounds half sincere. “But nothing can beat out good old fashioned police work. I spend weeks on a case, conducting interviews, collecting evidence, setting up stakeouts and stings and everything. Supergirl shows up last minute, punches a few guys and she’s the hero.”

“She’s just trying to help,” Kara says defensively and Alex’s gaze is darting nervously between her sister and her girlfriend. Lena understands the wary expression in Alex’s face and thinks a little of the one and only time Kara and Lex got into an argument not unlike this one.

“I don’t think Maggie is saying she isn’t,” Lena adds, squeezing Kara’s leg under her hand. Kara’s fingers grip at Lena’s and she relaxes a little. It doesn’t escape her attention that Maggie notices the motion even though it’s under the table.
“I’m not,” Maggie agrees and she takes a sip of her wine.

“Dessert,” Alex blurts out and stands. “Kara why don’t you help me out with dessert?”

Everyone else startles a bit and Kara looks at her sister for a long, very unsubtle moment before standing. “Yeah, dessert. Okay.”

That leaves Maggie and Lena to smile at each other and shrug while the Danvers sisters continue a hushed argument in the kitchen.

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The walk home is silent, but companionable, and it’s probably the most content Lena’s been on a Saturday night in forever. At least as far as her life on Earth-38 is concerned.

As they get to the front steps of Lena’s building, they stop, and it feels so much like stopping off at Lena’s dorm room that Lena almost tugs Kara inside on instinct.

It doesn’t help that Kara lingers in the same way she would in college, hesitating in Lena’s orbit for a long moment, not saying anything and Lena heart stops with the sudden idea that maybe Kara’s working up to kiss her goodnight. That is, until Kara starts talking.

“What did you think of Maggie?”

Lena’s brow furrows and she shrugs. “Alex seems to really like her. And Maggie seems to really like Alex. I’m happy for them.”

“That’s not really what I asked,” Kara says and Lena feels puzzled.

“I don’t really know Maggie,” Lena answers, and as she watches Kara’s expression something clicks in her brain. “Is this about Maggie or about Alex?”

Kara pulls a face and tries to brush the question off with an obviously forced laugh. “What? Why would it be about Alex?”

Lena hums a little. “Do you remember when we first started dating?”

Kara’s face clears, a smile taking hold suddenly and Lena reacts to it in kind. “Of course,” Kara says.

“Do you remember the big fight you and Alex had over Fourth of July when I came out to Midvale?”

Looking away, Kara seems to consider that with a twist of her lips. “Yes.”

“You and your sister have an insane bond,” Lena says with a soft laugh. It’s hard not to think of Lex, but she manages to stay focused. “Sometimes when other people get introduced to the mix there’s an adjustment period.”

“That’s not what this is,” Kara protests, but Lena just smiles knowingly until Kara rolls her eyes.

“I just want you to know that to many people I’m mysterious and unknowable,” Kara says, and it makes Lena laugh, imagining there are people in this world who can’t read Kara’s emotions as clearly as she can. They’re all written on Kara’s face.

“Try to remember that you love your sister and that you’re happy that she’s happy,” Lena says.
“Well, obviously,” Kara says with a certain amount of petulance that Lena finds adorable. She wants to run her thumb over Kara’s lower lip where it’s poking out just slightly. It’s hard to remember why she shouldn’t. The memory of their last kiss burns through her and for a heartstopping second she almost throws caution to the wind and steps into Kara’s personal space. It’s only Kara’s sudden change of subject that stops her.

“So, Christmas,” Kara says with a determined expression. “I’m not going to even ask you if you have plans and I’m just going to tell you that you should come over. We’re celebrating at my place like Thanksgiving and everyone is coming over. Winn, James, I think even Lucy might stop by.”

Lena’s brows pull together. “Lucy?”

“Lucy Lane,” Kara supplies and Lena’s eyebrows shoot up.

“You’re friends with Lucy Lane? As in Lois Lane’s sister?” Metropolis and National City are an entire country apart from each other, but sometimes Lena thinks they’re a lot closer than she could have ever imagined.

“Well, I think she’s a lot more than just Lois Lane’s sister, but yeah,” Kara replies with a teasing lilt to her voice.

“I didn’t know that.”

“She’s deputy director of the D.E.O. actually.”

Lena blinks as she takes in this information. “How have I not met her yet?”

Kara shrugs. “She spends most of her time at our other base or travelling around the world. She’s kind of a big deal. Hotshot lawyer and everything.”

“Really?”

“Oh yeah,” Kara gushes with an almost dreamy look in her eyes. “She’s like stupid smart and successful and don’t tell Alex, but I’m pretty sure she would win in a fight between the two of them.”

Lena laughs. “You’re joking.”

Smiling, Kara just shakes her head. “Nope. She’s awesome. I haven’t seen her in what feels like ages.”

Feeling amused, Lena smirks a little, decides to tease Kara. “Wow, first Cat Grant and now Lucy Lane. Do you just have a thing for women in positions of power?”

Kara gapes a little, sputters when she realizes what Lena’s implying. “What?! No.”

Lena pulls her lips into her mouth a bit through a smile. “You clearly have a type.”

“Lena,” Kara admonishes, but she flushes attractively and Lena grows warm at the sight.

“Just an observation.”

With a roll of her eyes, Kara shakes her head. “She and James used to be together, actually.”

“Really?” Lena starts to piece together parts of Kara’s life that she’s missed, the timeline slowly making more sense.
“Before you and James?”

Kara stills. “Before me and James what?”

“Before you dated.”

“Who told you we dated?”

“Kara,” Lena says with a knowing drawl. “Even if no one had said anything, it’s not that hard to figure out.”

Kara’s eyes are wide and there’s a faint dusting of red in her cheeks. “Who said something?”

Brows coming together, Lena steps closer, reaches out to squeeze Kara’s arm. “Why are you acting so weird about this?”

“I’m not,” Kara denies and Lena’s mouth thins for a moment.

“It’s okay,” she tells Kara and meaning it. “You could do a whole lot worse than James Olsen.”

Kara can’t quite meet Lena’s eyes and Lena’s not entirely sure what the problem is. Both of them had dated other people and maybe it’s not the first subject she wants to talk at length about, but they’re certainly capable of such a thing.

“He’s won a Pulitzer after all,” she jokes, if only to get Kara to react. Kara does, a short twitch of her lips.

“We didn’t really -” Kara shrugs a little. “I wouldn’t say we dated. We kind of...almost dated.”

“We don’t have to talk about it,” Lena says. “I was merely asking about James and Lucy.”

“It’s just kind of weird to talk about with you.”

“Kara,” Lena says with a gentle smile. “We’ve been over this. Both of us have dated other people. It doesn’t have to be weird.”

“I don’t think I want to hear about who you’ve dated yet,” Kara says in a soft, careful tone, half-wary, half-defensive.

Lena’s jaw drops a little as she decides how to reply. “I wasn’t - I was just-,” she shakes her head to get her brain and mouth to connect better. “Let’s rewind the last minute and go back to Christmas.”

It takes a moment before Kara seems to acquiesce, nodding and dropping the tense look. “I’m not trying to pressure you,” she says and then rolls her eyes a little. “Even though I guess I am trying to pressure you because I know you and am sure you have some kind of ridiculous plan to make it a working holiday or something and I refuse to allow that to happen.”

Lena laughs, but doesn’t deny it. It’s not too far from the truth, though that’s more because of her family situation than anything else. “I feel appropriately pressured,” she answers and Kara grins.

“So you’ll come?”

Knowing that arguing with Kara will get nowhere and that the majority of her doesn’t even want to argue, she nods. “I’ll come.”

“Okay, good, because I already made you a stocking,” Kara answers with a little rock forward on
the balls of her feet.

Lena’s eyes start to widen and Kara seems to notice, hastily adds, “a no pressure stocking.”

“It’s fine, Kara,” she says, laughing. And it is. Of all the things to feel pressured by, a stocking doesn’t exactly make the list. She plays with her watch a little and smiles. “I already bought you a gift and it’s, frankly, I must say, amazing, so you better bring your A game this year.”

“Oh so we’re doing that again?” Kara asks with a playful smile. It’s an old competition in college to see who could out gift the other. Lena had an obvious advantage in spending limit, but Kara had always been the better of the two of them when it came to expressing sentiment through presents.

Lena shrugs, feigning indifference. “Are you scared?”

“Of you?” Kara scoffs. “Please.”

They both laugh at that and a warm feeling swirls around them so swiftly Lena inhales deeply against it, eyes fluttering just a little at the strong swoop of desire to sink into it. Kara is smiling and Lena wants nothing more than to tug her inside, pull her into the bed and drown in the solid feeling of being together.

There’s an answering look in Kara’s eyes, but it’s different than before. There’s no longer the almost achy longing that sat between them when Lena first came to National City. It’s changed somehow since their trip to Earth-1 and Kara has this crooked grin on her lips.

Inevitability, Lena thinks. It feels inevitable in a way she fought against before.

“Thanks for coming tonight,” Kara says, breaking Lena from her thoughts before stepping forward to pull her into a warm hug. Lena clutches at the back of Kara’s jacket and inhales against the comforting scent of Kara’s body pressing against her.

“What are friends for?” Lena responds and feels a puff of air against her hair when Kara laughs.

“I’ll see you soon,” Kara says when she pulls away and Lena nods. There’s an almost giddy feeling about the moment and she can’t help but feel eighteen again, breaking under the weight of an unstoppable crush on her best friend.

“You will,” Lena replies and with that Kara walks backwards and away, waving at Lena before she turns the corner. A burst of sound later and Lena catches sight of a telltale blur streaking up into the night sky.

--

When it finally happens neither of them plan it. Perhaps that was the key all along, Lena will think later, but at present, nothing of the sort is running through her head.

The only thing she can think about is Kara’s hands dipping lower than they ever have before, tugging at the waistband of her jeans.

They’re supposed to be studying. Lena’s notes for their quantum field theory class are spread out on the floor near the bed and they’re supposed to be going over them, but Kara had looked so pretty with her glasses slipping down her nose and the open collar of her shirt exposing a strong collarbone. Lena couldn’t be held accountable for the unstoppable need that shot through her. Why would she resist kissing her girlfriend if she doesn’t have to?
Which is how they ended up here. Because kissing had led to more kissing which had led to Lena’s shirt ending up somewhere across the room and Kara’s hanging off a bed post.

They’ve gotten this far before. Eleven times before actually - not that Lena’s been counting.

Each time seems to inch closer and closer to what they both seem to want, but Kara always pulls back eventually. It hasn’t bothered Lena and they seem to keep making progress.

It’s especially evident now when Kara doesn’t seem to be stopping as she pulls Lena’s pants down her legs in a swift motion.

The thud of her heartbeat distracts even her and she wills it to slow down lest Kara tune into it and lose her confidence. But then Kara’s smiling down at her, their hips fitting together and Lena can’t help but arch against the contact. The soft fabric of Kara’s joggers rubbing on the now bare skin of Lena’s thighs.

“All right?” Lena asks, bringing her hands up to cup Kara’s cheeks. Her body feels like it’s buzzing with need, but she doesn’t want to push Kara too far, wants to keep checking in with her.

Kara nods, her gaze flicking down between their bodies and Lena feels the heat of it all over. “It helps to listen to your heartbeat,” Kara says in a soft confession.

“I thought that made it worse,” Lena says.

Kara shakes her head. “Not if I focus on just that.”

Lena can’t imagine that’s true. Her heartbeat feels erratic and unsteady and the electric feel of Kara’s palm sliding up her side isn’t helping. “Really?”

With a nod, Kara presses further down, noses against Lena’s jaw to press kisses across her neck. “Sometimes, when I’m really nervous or freaked out I like to listen to it and if I can focus the world down to just your heartbeat. It helps me calm down.”

“I thought you said it was distracting,” Lena says and she’s not really sure why she’s still talking while Kara’s mouth is against her jawline, but maybe Lena’s just as nervous about this as Kara’s been. If it continues the way it’s been going, it would be her first time, and as certain as she is that Kara’s her perfect choice, it’s still a new thing.

“It was, but it’s not anymore,” Kara says and she pushes up, a hand pressed down into the mattress near Lena’s head. “It’s better when I push all the other white noise out and just focus on you. Everything feels so much clearer.”

Lena smiles at that, cups Kara’s cheek with one hand and swipes her thumb across Kara’s bottom lip. “Yeah? Are you sure? I don’t want to pressure you into something that is too hard-”

“Yeah,” Kara breathes, interrupting her. “Are you okay? Do you need to stop?”

“What? No, I’m fine.”

Skepticism crinkles between Kara’s brows. “You usually don’t talk this much.”

Lena feels indignant at that, scoffs and Kara kisses her cheek swiftly. “I didn’t mean it to be rude,” Kara adds. “I just want to make sure.”

“I’m fine,” Lena repeats and she swallows against the thick feeling of arousal in her throat.
Kara’s hips are still pushing insistently between her thighs and everything feels warm and rife with intention. “I’m just worried about you.”

“I’m okay,” Kara says reassuringly, her free hand travels down Lena’s side until it’s cupping at her hip. “More than okay.”

They’re kissing after that, slow and soft and the kind of kissing that melts Lena’s insides. She doesn’t notice the slow roll of her hips into Kara’s, or how it feels like there’s no air in the room, or how, when Kara pulls off her underwear, she stares with the most wondrous expression.

There’s only Kara, and it’s perfect.

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we’re doing secret santa do you want in? Is the text she gets on Wednesday and Lena stares at it for a good ten seconds before googling what Secret Santa is and responding.

who is we? seems to the be most important question, but Kara merely responds with an extremely unhelpful all of us as if that answers anything.

Instead of engaging in what could easily be a back and forth text chain that leads nowhere, Lena picks her office phone up and dials Kara’s number.

“Hi,” Kara says, a little breathlessly when she answers.

“Hi,” Lena parrots, brow furrowing at the background noise coming through from Kara’s end. “Are you flying?”

“Yes,” Kara answers casually, like that’s a normal thing to be doing at six in the evening in the middle of the week. “What’s up? Are you in on Secret Santa?”

“Who else is participating?”

The wind tunnel noise seems to slow and Kara’s voice comes through a little more clearly. “Alex, James, Winn, possibly Maggie but Alex won’t get back to me about that, Mon-El, me, you, hopefully.”

“I’m not sure I know James or Winn well enough to play. I don’t want anyone to be disappointed,” she says, scrolling down on the wiki page open to the Secret Santa article.

“You’ll be fine,” Kara says and the distinctive sound of a crash resounds down the line.

“Kara, are you okay? What was that?”

Kara makes a noise like she’s lifting something heavy - a sound Lena’s not sure she’s ever heard before. “I’m fine, just stopping this robbery - will you quit that, I am on the phone!”

Lena’s eyes go a little wide and she turns to look out her office window as if she could see Kara there. “Kara,” Lena breathes.

“Don’t worry about it, just come to the bar tonight at eight, we’re picking names out of a hat,” Kara says in a rush of words. There’s another sound like breaking glass and a crunching of metal before Kara is grumbling again. “Why do people try to outrun me? I mean, come on.”

“Kara maybe now is not the time to-” The sound of gunshots breaks out down the line and Lena’s heart starts to thud uncomfortably against her ribcage on instinct.
“Actually yeah, I should probably go,” Kara replies and there’s a quick rush of wind followed by a grunt of pain. “Okay, yeah, see you at the bar at eight, love you, bye.”

And with that, the line disconnects and Lena’s left to stare at her phone, bewildered and wondering when exactly her life became like this.

It doesn’t hit her until minutes later that Kara ended the call with a casual love you and when it does Lena thinks she’s starting to understand why everyone in their life assumes they’re together.

Frankly, Lena’s starting to assume it herself.

--

Everyone is already at the bar when she walks in a little after eight and not a single one of them bat an eye when she slides into a stool next to Kara. In fact, Winn actually smiles at her widely and James gives her a companionable nod.

When she offers to head to the bar and grab everyone a fresh drink, Mon-El gets up with her and offers her a charming smile. “I’ll help,” he says, following her.

They order a full round for everybody and while they wait Mon-El leans an elbow on the bartop, looks over at her with an expression that seems somehow ominous.

“So,” he starts and she eyes him warily.

“Yes?”

“You and Kara are close, right?” Mon-El asks, playing with some short straws in a jar near his hand. “I think Winn said you guys were like,” he pauses, looks up as if trying to find the phrase and then makes air quotes, “BFFs? And that that is some sort of high distinction on this planet.”

Lena glances to where Winn is sitting, gesticulating wildly at James. “You could say that.”

“Great,” he answers immediately, a wide smile. “I was hoping you could help me.”

“With Kara?” Lena asks, eyebrow arched. She has a sinking feeling that she knows where this conversation is going and makes a mental note to talk to Winn about whatever the hell he told Mon-El.

“Yes, you see I have, what I believe you guys here call a crush on her,” he explains casually and Lena just blinks at him for a moment before he clarifies further. “I have feelings. Of a romantic nature.”

“I know what crush means,” Lena says slowly.

“Oh good,” he replies and his smile widens. “I thought maybe you could put in a good word for me or help me figure out how to tell her.”

“I don’t think I’m the right person to ask,” Lena says, and she glances again to the table where Kara is now laughing at Winn. It’s an attractive look on her and Lena can’t help but smile at the sight despite her current conversation.

Mon-El must notice her gaze because he follows it and smiles himself. “Yeah, she’s like ridiculously pretty, right?”

Lena sours a bit, frowns. “Objectively true,” she deadpans and looks to where the bartender is still
making their drinks. Next time she goes up to the bar with Mon-El she needs to remember to order something easy. Like a bottled beer instead of anything that involves pouring something.

“I know Alex said she’s chosen a mate, but I don’t get it. I haven’t seen her actually with anyone.”

Lena fights the urge to scrub her palm down her face in exasperation. “Maybe you should just ask Kara,” she says with a sigh.

“Since you’re her best friend I was thinking you might have some insight,” he replies with what she’s sure is meant to be an engaging smile. “A mate isn’t exactly an insurmountable obstacle anyway, but it’s always good to know what I’m up against.”

Lena bristles just a little at that, turns a confused expression his way. “Not an insurmountable obstacle?”

“We’re not on Krypton,” he says leaning closer to whisper it as if it’s a secret. They’re in a damn alien bar. “Or Daxam. And according to Winn, the concept of mating is like, pretty old fashioned here. People don’t really like to be bound by it.”

“I’m not sure Winn is your best source for advice on this subject,” Lena says wryly if only to counter the line of assumptions Mon-El continues to make about Kara’s love life.

“Well, that’s why I’m coming to you. Do you know who her mate is?” He asks with an earnest tone that Lena almost feels bad for. “I’ve seen her with that bracelet lately, but no sign of an actual mate to go along with it.”

Lena stills, processes the words. “What do you mean bracelet?”

“She’s wearing a bracelet,” Mon-El says with a confused twist to his smile like Lena should understand what that means.

The only bracelet Lena’s seen Kara wear is the one Lena herself gave her years ago and that’s been a relatively recent development as far as Lena is aware. “What does that have to do with anything?”

Mon-El shrugs. “I thought maybe it was a mating bracelet.”

Before she can inquire further, the bartender steps up to them and puts the first two drinks down between them.

“Anyway,” he says when they’re alone again. “Any advice? I hear flowers are a thing here. Should I get her flowers?”

Lena feels torn for a moment.

She could tell Mon-El the truth. That he’s setting himself up for failure, that Lena would bet her family’s fortune on Kara rejecting him and that she’s fairly confident that she’s part of the reason Kara wouldn’t be receptive to his feelings.

She feels a certain claim on Kara. It’d be foolish to think otherwise after all they’ve been through. As she thinks on it, the last few weeks have felt suspiciously like they’re dating again - the only thing missing is Lena explicitly agreeing they are. Kara made it clear that it was Lena’s decision to get back together and she feels like every interaction they’ve had recently has merely inched her closer and closer to that point.

But they’re not dating. Not in the official sense. And Kara is her own person and if a cute boy from
Daxam wants to hit on her, Lena isn’t going to turn him down on Kara’s behalf.

“I would just tell her,” Lena says after a moment. “Put yourself out there and see what happens.”

“He asks incredulously and the bartender comes back with the rest of her drinks.

Arching a brow and lifting her chin a little she just smiles, the kind of smile she likes to shoot at unsuspecting old white male executives that consistently underestimate her. “That’s right. All you can do tell her how you feel and see what she says. There’s nothing complicated about it.”

He still looks entirely skeptical, but she doesn’t stick around to explain. Grabbing as many drinks as her hands can hold she turns away from him and walks back to their table.

Kara is smiling at her as she approaches and Lena tries to ignore the way her eyes keep getting drawn to the piece of metal wrapped around Kara’s wrist.

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Kara is smiling at her as she approaches and Lena tries to ignore the way her eyes keep getting drawn to the piece of metal wrapped around Kara’s wrist.

It’s not a mating bracelet, obviously, because Lena had never intended it to be as such, but she feels something nag at the back of her brain. How had Kara never mentioned the intricacies of Kryptonian mating? They’d had millions of conversations about Kara’s homeworld and its culture yet somehow it had never come up.

It’s a struggle not to start to connect the dots in her head. She’s fairly positive she’s not prepared for the big picture of it.

“You okay?” Kara asks when Lena slides on a stool next to where Kara’s standing and hands her a drink.

“Yeah,” Lena says even as her brain feels all over the place. “So when do we do this Secret Santa stuff?”

“Now,” Winn answers from across the table and he points to a small bowl in the middle filled with tiny pieces of paper.

They pass the bowl around to pick names out of it and Lena feels nervous at the idea of having to buy a decent gift for anyone at the table that isn’t Kara or maybe Alex. James would be difficult, Mon-El would be near impossible, but her nerves settle a bit when it’s her turn and she pulls a piece of paper out with a crooked Winn scratched over the surface.

Winn is someone she’s pretty sure she can handle, and about six different ideas pop into her head immediately.

Kara leans over with a clear intent to spy on her paper and Lena pulls away so abruptly she bumps into James, who just laughs at them.

Eyes narrowed and lips thin, Kara eyes the spot on Lena’s chest that Lena’s pressed her paper against. “I have x-ray vision, you know,” she comments, touching the rim of her glasses with the tip of her finger.

Lena is suddenly very aware of where exactly she has her slip of paper pressed and she arches an eyebrow at her ex-girlfriend. “You wouldn’t dare.”

Kara fights a playful smile and goes to say something before a peanut hits the side of her head and they both look over to find Alex glaring at them. “Can you keep the gross to the privacy of your own homes?” Alex asks dryly and Lena clears her throat a little, folds the piece of paper and slips it into her purse where it hangs on her chair.
It’s exactly the way Alex used to talk to them when they were dating and when Lena glances at Kara she thinks, not for the first time, that there really isn’t a choice to be made. No matter how hard they try, they always end up like this, like a couple even when they’re not.

It’s only made worse when Kara continues to stand next to where Lena is sitting, her hand brushing over the small of Lena’s back at random times. Lena doesn’t notice it for long moments until she spots Alex eyeing them with exasperation and Winn looking at them both with a grin he is clearly trying unsuccessfully to suppress.

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They don’t meet up to exchange their gifts. Apparently the object of the game is to leave them in random places to be found by the recipient. Lena’s a little grateful she doesn’t have to have an audience for both the giving and receiving.

Her gift shows up one afternoon as she’s coming back from a lunch meeting. It’s a brown paper package tied with string and leaning up against her desk.

“From your Secret Santa,” Jess says with a certain amount of mirth in your voice. “I’m under strict orders not to disclose their identity, but since you’re my boss you obviously outrank this person. I had it scanned by security. It’s safe.”

Lena laughs a little, picks up the rectangular looking package. Thin, but relatively large. “It’s no problem. Thank you, Jess.”

“Anytime, Miss Luthor.”

She sits in her desk chair and rips open the gift, wondering who it’s from. It’s been a long time since she’s received a Christmas gift, or a present at all, and even though she expected this one, it still warms a soft spot in her chest.

As soon as the brown wrapping is torn away it becomes clear who got her for Secret Santa.

The picture is from the gala L Corp held for the children’s hospital months ago. She and Kara are standing facing each other, or rather she and Supergirl are. The photo seems to capture nothing and everything all at once.

To anyone else it might just look like two people smiling at each other, but Lena can see it between them. Kara’s got her hands on her hips, but there’s a happy crinkle around her eyes and Lena’s body is leaned in towards Kara as they talk. They look together even though they’re standing feet apart.

James. He’s the only one capable of taking such a picture in the group and probably the only one that could see what Lena can see.

She hits a button on her phone that connects her to Jess. “Can you get me James Olsen over at CatCo on the line please?”

It’s only a few minutes later that the call is clicking through and a bright sounding, “Good afternoon, Lena,” is coming down the line.

“It’s a beautiful picture, James,” she says warmly and he laughs.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he says, but there’s a clear amount of tease in his voice. It’s so different than the cautious distrust he’s had for her in the past, or the wary acceptance he’s
seemed to have of her presence. “But I’ll pass along the note to Santa.”

Lena laughs. “I just wanted to thank you. You have quite the eye.”

“The camera did all the work,” he replies.

“I doubt that’s true.”

“I appreciate the compliment, but it helps when you have a great subject.”

“You’re too kind.”

There’s silence for a bit before he answers. “I know I may not have been the warmest to you in the past, but I want you to know that it’s only because I care about Kara.”

Lena exhales through a smile. “I know that and it’s understandable I assure you. I’ve had much colder receptions. You’ve been fine.”

James chuckles. “Kara might disagree with you.”

With an affectionate roll of her eyes, Lena laughs. “She often does.”

“I’m glad you like the picture.”


“Merry Christmas, Lena.”

“Merry Christmas, James.”

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It’s not hard to acquire a gift for Winn and most of what she needs for it is stored in L Corp. It only takes her an extra few hours during the work week to finish it.

She has absolutely no idea where Winn lives and abandons subterfuge for texting him to come to her office instead.

It’s more than worth it, because she gets to see his face when he sees his gift and Lena feels about ten stories high just at the sight of it.

“How did you know?” Winn asks incredulously, stomping forward towards his gift with childlike excitement in his face.

“Kara mentioned that you were a fan of the sport,” Lena says casually, leaning up against her desk and watching him eye the small robot on the floor. “I used to dabble in it in college.”

Winn turns to her with a look of pure surprise. “Dabble in it?”

She shrugs. “It was a hobby.” With a gentle clearing of her throat, she makes a decision. “Lex and I used to build them together actually. When we were children.”

There’s strangely nothing but sympathy in Winn’s expression and he doesn’t even comment on what she’s said. Instead he rubs his hands together excitedly and picks up the small remote control that’s sitting on top of the robot. “This is awesome. I can’t wait to test it out.”
She chews a bit at her lower lip, glances towards her office door. “There might be another one downstairs in an empty storage unit.”

Winn’s eyes widen and a slow smile crawls over his face. “You’re so my new best friend,” he breathes. “Don’t tell Kara.”

She just laughs. “Merry Christmas, Winn.”

When he walks over to hug her, it doesn’t feel forced and she doesn’t hesitate to return the gesture. “Merry Christmas, Lena,” he whispers over her shoulder.

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Christmas ends up being not entirely unlike Thanksgiving except that it’s hosted at Alex’s apartment.

Even though this time Lena doesn’t hesitate before walking up to the door that’s just barely muffling the laughter and conversation inside, Kara swings it open before she even gets two feet away. There’s a wide easy grin on Kara’s face and she’s dressed in the most ridiculous ugly Christmas sweater Lena has ever seen with what must be reindeer antlers propped up on her head, a little askew.

“Hey,” is all Kara says before rushing towards her to wrap her up in a tight hug. Lena laughs and returns it with a swift kiss to Kara’s cheek that she doesn’t even think about before doing.

“I’m so happy you’re here,” Kara says when they pull apart and Lena breathes in against the warm blanket of affection that covers her suddenly. There’s a delicious smell wafting out of Alex’s apartment, the door only slightly ajar, and she can hear the familiar voices of Alex and Winn arguing over something.

“I am too,” she replies with a smile she couldn’t smother if she tried. She reaches up to tug at Kara’s fake antlers until they sit straighter on her head. “Merry Christmas.”

A faint blush dusts Kara’s cheeks, but she smiles back at Lena, reaches out to tangle their fingers together. “Merry Christmas.”

When she walks into the apartment, it’s an overwhelming feeling to be greeted like she’s one of the family.

Winn ambles over immediately to hug her and starts talking animatedly about a modification he’s been considering for his battle bot. Mon-El waves excitedly. James smiles at her genuinely and kisses her on the cheek in greeting. He introduces her to Lucy Lane who looks unsurprised to see her there.

“So nice to finally meet you,” Lucy says with a bright smile. “I feel like I’ve heard a million stories between James and Alex and Kara.”

Lena laughs politely. “Nice to meet you as well. I always heard that Lois Lane had a much cooler younger sister.”

A crooked smile crosses Lucy’s face in reaction and she sends an impressed look at James. “I told you I’d like her.”

Even Alex doesn’t so much as blink before greeting Lena with a quick hug and a swift instruction to grab the damn pot holder will you I think the casserole is burning. Lena does as instructed and
pulls the object out of the oven just as Eliza comes over to say hello and shoots Alex a disdainful look.

“Don’t make the guests do that, Alex,” Eliza says after hugging Lena tightly.

“She’s not a guest,” Alex waves off, dipping a spoon in a dish of mashed potatoes and testing a bite. “She’s Lena.”

It makes Eliza laugh, and when Lena catches Kara’s eye they smile warmly at each other.

Eliza pours Lena a glass of wine and with an apology for her daughter’s manners, pushes Lena into the living room to socialize while they finish cooking.

James and Winn are in a heated argument about what to put on the television, which Mon-El is observing with curiosity. Lena is left to talk to Lucy Lane, and she smiles at the other girl before coming to sit next to her on the couch.

It’s a pleasant conversation. They have a surprisingly large amount of things in common, from growing up in the shadows of overachieving siblings to overbearing parents to moving out of Metropolis.

Not for the first time, Lena finds herself talking about her personal life with someone other than Kara and not feeling out of sorts. Lucy doesn’t even flinch at the mention of her brother and Lena’s left wondering why exactly that would be.

It should be expected by this point, but it still blindsides her when Lucy casually asks, “So how long have you and Kara been together? I have to admit last time I was in town I thought that she and James might…” Lucy trails off with a quick glance to where James is standing with Winn towering over Alex’s DVD collection.

Lena laughs this time because she no longer knows how to react any other way. “We’re not together, actually,” Lena says and she shrugs at Lucy’s surprised expression.

“I’m sorry,” Lucy says, with wide eyes. “I just assumed from the way everyone talked about you two. I guess I shouldn’t have.”

Lena shakes her head, swirls her wine around little. “You’re not the first. Frankly, I doubt you’ll be the last.”

Lucy’s gaze goes critical then, a little narrowing of her eyes and she glances over Lena’s shoulder a few times before saying, “Are you sure you’re not together?”

Brow furrowing, Lena tilts her head. “I imagine that’d be something I’d be aware of.”

Lucy’s lips twist a little in amusement and she looks over Lena’s shoulder again. “You might want to tell Kara that because the way she looks at you reminds me a little too much of the way she used to look at James last year when I was sure they were in love with each other.”

Lena twists around to follow Lucy’s gaze and finds Kara smiling at them before turning away so swiftly she bumps into Alex, who lets out an indignant noise and swats at her sister with a spatula that immediately bends on Kara’s arm. When she turns back to Lucy, the other girl is smiling over the rim of her glass.

“Kara and I have a history,” Lena confesses in a lower tone and she wonders why it’s so easy to talk about this with a virtual stranger when it’s been something she’s all but avoiding bringing up...
around anyone else.

“That much is pretty obvious to anyone,” Lucy says dryly. “I’ve been in a room with you less than a half hour and I can tell.”

“Maybe you merely have heightened observational powers.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere,” Lucy says with a smirk and before Lena can answer James is sliding into a spot on the couch next to Lucy, his arm winding above her shoulders. “Did you two decide on a movie?” Lucy asks him, leaning into his body a little.

“Winn thinks Die Hard is a Christmas movie,” James says with a little laugh and Lucy looks at him plainly.

“It is,” Lucy replies and Winn brightens from his spot on an armchair opposite them.

“See!” He says pointing at Lucy but looking at James, who just rolls his eyes.

Lucy smiles at her as James and Winn continue what sounds like an old argument and Lena half listens as she sips her wine and sinks further into the couch cushions.

The rest of the evening is spent eating far too much food than should be humanly possible and even Kara looks somewhat stuffed by the time they’re done.

When it’s all finished James and Winn kick everyone out of the kitchen with an insistence that they do the clean up. Despite Alex’s many protests that they’re not allowed to mess up her kitchen, she finally acquiesces and grabs a bottle of wine to bring into the living room.

They spend entirely too long debating what game they should play. In the end they decide on Monopoly and Kara puts on It’s a Wonderful Life on mute in the background.

It reminds her of long Christmas nights when her father was still alive and the family would gather in the oversized den in Luthor Manor. Her parents would sip on brandy alexanders and she and Lex would sit on the floor and fall asleep to whatever movie was playing late that night.

The feeling isn’t that different from now except there’s a touch more laughter and teasing and Alex doesn’t even glare at her when Lena wins the game. Instead she just rolls her eyes in exasperation and lets out a tired, “Of course.”

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By the time they’re walking out of Alex’s apartment, Lena feels full of food and perhaps a glass too many of wine. She’s not drunk, but she’s not sober either and she can’t help but lean into Kara when they make it out onto the sidewalk. Kara immediately twists an arm around her waist and holds her upright with a solid embrace that Lena sighs against.

“Can I fly you home?” Kara asks lowly, voice close to Lena’s ear.

The wine is making her a touch sleepy and generally more agreeable and she just nods. “I have to give you your gift.”

“Me too,” Kara says and she gestures towards the large tote bag slung over her shoulder

They walk around Alex’s apartment building towards a side street that’s empty and quiet. Kara glances around furtively for a second before pulling Lena up into her arms and jumping up into the
The flight is quick and Lena spends it with her face buried in the crook of Kara’s neck fighting the urge to fall asleep there.

“Make yourself comfortable,” Lena says when they walk into her apartment. She tosses her coat and purse onto a stool in her kitchen as she passes by and waltzes back to her bedroom where Kara’s gift is stored. She changes quickly into something more casual than the black dress she had been wearing before and when she comes back out, Kara is standing in the kitchen with a red and white wrapped package in front of her.

Lena sets her own gift on the table next to it and smiles.

“You first,” Kara says, pushing the gift across the table.

Lena takes her time pulling the wrapping paper off in precise motions that she knows irritates Kara, if the way she huffs a little is any indication. It only makes Lena move a little slower and fight a smile.

Inside the box is a folded up navy sweatshirt and when she pulls it out it has S.T.A.R. Labs printed across the front. Lena laughs.

“I wanted to give you a reminder of our epic adventure to Earth-1,” Kara says proudly. “Plus, I know you’re super lacking in the sweatshirt department these days so…”

“Thank you,” Lena says, with a grin that Kara returns.

“There’s more,” Kara adds, pointing to the box where there are indeed two more items.

The first is a framed picture that Lena lets out a little surprised laugh when she sees them. The first is a picture of Felicity, Cisco, Caitlin and herself bent over a computer monitor and discussing something. Cisco is gesturing towards the computer and Felicity is shooting an exasperated look in Lena’s direction while Caitlin squints at whatever is on the monitor. “Who took this?” Lena asks with a quizzical look for Kara.

“Iris,” Kara answers. “She was cataloging some of our work for a story of hers and she passed along a few pictures. I know you don’t really keep pictures around anymore, but I thought it’d be kind of fun to have.”

Lena can’t stop staring at her own image. The casual smile she’s giving Felicity and how easily she fits in the group - she doesn’t look out of place at all. She looks like a natural extension of the team. She looks like she belongs. The memory of what it felt like on Earth-1 beats across her skin for a heavy moment. “It’s great,” she says.

The last item in the box holds a long square metal plate that Lena looks at quizzically for a moment before Kara reaches out to tap a hidden button on one of its sides. Suddenly a hologram bursts forth and Lena nearly drops the device in reaction.

“What…” Lena says softly as she observes what she realizes must be game pieces spread out across the board. If she didn’t know better-

“Imperiex chess,” Kara tells her and Lena’s eyes go a little wide at the mention of a game Kara had only told her about in passing many years ago. “I had Winn help me create something similar from the files in the Fortress of Solitude.”
“I don’t know how to play,” is all Lena can think to say and she eyes the different pieces, the way the game board spreads out across the kitchen island. It doesn’t look too far off from the chess she’s used to, but she can spot a few differences - a different arrangement of tiles, more pieces.

“I know,” Kara says and she presses the button again to shut down the game. It pulls Lena’s gaze back to Kara’s. “I thought I could teach you.”

It’s just an offer to learn a new game, but Lena feels it beat heavily against her chest. “Really?”

“If you want,” Kara says softly and Lena smiles, imagines long nights spent with Kara over a table trying to learn a game Kara had once classified as chess on steroids.

“You’re my favorite,” Lena replies equally as soft and a smile stretches so widely across Kara’s face that Lena feels her own mouth mimicking it in reaction.

“Still?” Kara asks, but there’s a teasing bent to her lips.

Lena smiles and the truth drops out of her before she can keep it inside. “Always.”

They stare at each other for a long charged moment, matching smiles stuck on their faces before Lena takes a deep breath and pulls a small box over.

“Oh, your turn,” Lena says handing the present over to Kara’s eagerly awaiting hands.

Kara tears into her gift with none of the precision Lena had. The gift wrapping flies off the small box and when she pulls out what’s inside, a small silver circular device, she stares at it with clear confusion on her face.

Lena takes it from her hands with a small smile. “I’ll show you how it works,” Lena says.

“What is it?” Kara asks, tracking Lena’s movements.

“I’m going to show you,” Lena laughs and she steps towards a light switch. With a flick of her finger they’re shrouded in darkness and Lena sets the device on the kitchen island, presses the button.

Seconds later the small device hums to life and a massive hologram springs forth, shrouding them both in a projection of a star chart. It’s three dimensional and massive, extending far outward - there’s a cluster of stars situated right in front of Kara’s face, and she reaches out to touch them. Lena watches as Kara’s eyes widen when an informational display pops up, explaining the name of one of the stars.

It takes a few seconds of Kara’s eyes wandering through the projection before her eyes land on a large red star. She lets out a soft exhale and a breathy, “Lena,” as she advances on it. Lena comes to meet her in the space.

“It’s like a star chart,” Lena explains and Kara laughs a little, looking around.

“This is a little more than a star chart,” Kara says and even in the dark Lena can see Kara’s growing smile. “This is - I mean this is-” Kara walks through the image for a moment. “This is Rao, right, and here’s Krypton, and Daxam...”

Lena nods slowly. “It’s programmed for both the Andromeda and Milky Way galaxies, but the area around Krypton is the default. So...watch this.”
Lena reaches out to grab ahold of the much smaller bright speck of Krypton, next to Rao, and when she pulls her hands apart, Krypton expands right in front of them, coming to the size of a beach ball. It’s surface is not extremely detailed, but Kara reaches out to rush her hand over it anyway, spinning it in the air as a factbook pops up in front of her.

Kara steps closer to Lena, close enough that they can see each other’s faces more clearly and there bodies are brushing against each other. “How did you even do this?”

“It was an idea I had in college,” Lena admits and it comes out easier than she thought it would. “You used to chart the surrounding stars, remember?”

“Years ago,” Kara says with a bewildered expression.

Lena shrugs. “I still have some of the charts, and Winn helped me fill in the rest with some of the DEO resources. It wasn’t that hard to build, data-wise. The hologram technology was a lot harder to work with, really.”

“You’re a genius,” Kara says, and she looks away from Krypton to stare at Lena with such open admiration and love that Lena nearly kisses her right then and there. “I love it.”

“It can also project the night sky. Ones for Krytpon too, if you just,” Lena says, trekking back to the machine at the center of the room. Kara’s face drops into shock when she flicks a switch and an unfamiliar night sky appears on her ceiling.

“You used to talk about how much you missed the night sky back home and I thought maybe you’d like-”

“I love it,” Kara interrupts, looking upwards and reaching behind her blindly to grip Lena and wrap her up in a tight hug. “I love it so much. Thank you so much.”

“Merry Christmas, Kara,” Lena murmurs, her face buried in the soft skin of Kara’s neck.

Kara doesn’t respond, just presses a warm kiss to the side of Lena’s head and hugs her a little tighter.

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The office is blissfully empty during the week after Christmas right before the New Year. Most of the employees have the time off and even Lena’s team of assistants were given paid leave for the holiday as a bonus for all the insanity the past few months have been.

Lena takes the opportunity to get as much work done as she can and returns to her habit of spending late nights in the R&D lab wading through projects.

It shouldn’t come as a surprise to see Lana Lang one of those nights, but she still jumps a little when a steaming cup of coffee is set next to her tablet at her workstation.

“It’s the holidays, you know,” Lana teases, sliding into a stool opposite Lena and bringing her own mug of coffee up to her lips.

Lena shoots her a dry look, but picks up the offered drink with a smile. “What are you doing here?”

Lana shrugs, leans her elbows on the table and smiles. “It was either come in and get ahead on some work or sit at home with my two cats and drink a bottle of wine by myself. Easy choice.”
Lena laughs, sets her stylus down and rolls her head a bit around her neck to ease the ache that’s settled there. “Well, I am grateful for the coffee as always.”

“What are you working on?” Lana asks, peering a little at Lena’s screen.

“Nothing really,” Lena answers, pushing some of her notes away from her with a noisy exhale. She’d been trying to solve a problem with one of their robotics projects, but her brain can’t stop replaying the image of Kara’s face and it’s all she’s been able to concentrate on.

Lana observes her for a bit, her gaze narrowing subtly. “Are you okay?”

The question surprises Lena a bit, unused to anyone but maybe Kara asking after her wellbeing. She laughs on instinct. “Of course. Why do you ask?”

With a shrug of her shoulder and another careful sip of her coffee, Lana’s lips thin in consideration. “You’ve just seemed out of it. Haven’t been down here as much. Is it everything that’s going on with…” Lana gestures with one hand and it takes a second before Lena realizes what’s being implied. Stuff with her mother.

Startled to discover she hasn’t actually spent significant thought on her family drama for some time, Lena actually laughs. “No, it’s not that.”

“But it’s something.”

Lana has become somewhat of a friend since Lena moved to National City. A bond had been forged over long nights in the lab and easy collaboration over project after project. There’s a trust there that Lena didn’t create purposefully, but realizes is there nonetheless. It’s comforting to have a friend so separate from anything to do with Kara or her family. And that’s the only reason the truth comes dropping out of her before she can stop it.

“I’ve been going through some things with an ex of mine.”

Lana arches an eyebrow in clear surprise and sets her coffee mug down to give Lena her full attention. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Lena sighs. She doesn’t really want to talk about it, doesn’t feel like navigating that emotional minefield right now, but she thinks maybe saying some of what she’s feeling out loud will help her sort through it.

“We dated in college,” she tells Lana. “And now we’re back in each other’s lives and…”

“You want to get back together?” Lana ventures and Lena shrugs, lips thinning.

“It’s more complicated than that.”

“What’s complicated?”

Lena chews at her bottom lip a moment, slides her palms around the hot mug and takes strength from the heat seeping into her palms. “I broke up with her, “ she says simply after a moment. “And when I’m around her sometimes I forget why.”

Lana blinks. “Well if you broke up I’m sure you had good reasons.”

“I’m not so sure anymore,” Lena confesses, softer than before. “They made sense when we were in college. I was graduating early and I had so much responsibility ahead of me and now we’re
different people, but we still fit together the same way we used to.”

It feels good to say this to someone else, to put it out there in the universe instead of keeping it locked up inside.

“Then maybe you need to stop thinking with your heart for a second and use your head,” Lana offers and it surprises Lena. It’s exactly the opposite of the kind of advice she’d expect from someone in this context and her confusion must show on her face because Lana laughs.

“We’re scientists, Lena,” Lana says simply, standing up and taking her mug with her. “Maybe you just need to go through it logically. Think of each reason and decide if they still matter now or not. If they do, then stay broken up. If they don’t, stop torturing yourself over it.”

It’s a wonder why Lena hadn’t thought to really do that before. She’s been so caught up in the onslaught of emotion being around Kara again had brought about that she’d failed to step back and look at the situation like a scientist, questioning and logical.

“It’s not a bad idea,” she muses.

Lana rounds the workstation, sets a warm companionable hand on Lena’s shoulder. “Don’t be the one who stands in the way of your own happiness,” she says with a sad twist to her smile. “Trust me.”

Lana walks away then, retreats to her office and Lena is left to stare at the steam still curling up from her coffee while she contemplates what Lana’s said.

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She makes a list.

There are a few items on it detailing the reasons her younger college self had for breaking up with Kara all those years ago. They’re not all the reasons she had, but they cover the big stuff and Lena spends an evening at home going through each one with a glass of wine in her hand.

They all get crossed out in some manner.

They no longer live in different parts of the country. Not that that was ever an insurmountable obstacle in the first place all things considered.

Her mother isn’t a governing influence in her life anymore. In fact, Lena is the only member of her family not in jail or heading there. For all intents and purposes, she’s the head of the Luthor family these days.

Their careers are much more settled than they were in college. Lena may still have workaholic tendencies, but they’re no longer fueled as much by a driving need to prove herself to her mother or to climb a corporate mountain she’s already conquered.

Their lives are admittedly much more dangerous than they were in college, but if the past few months have taught Lena anything, that’s something that isn’t going to change whether they’re together or not. With Lex in prison and her mother about to follow him, the danger Lena brings to the relationship has been significantly lessened at the very least.

None of her reasoning holds up as she walks through each line in the list.

As a scientist, the conclusion is obvious.
Her heart tells her that she and Kara still have things to talk about, to work through, to figure out before they actually dive back into anything at all, but Lena no longer feels a pressing need to be the one keeping them apart anymore.

As she gets to the end of her list and finishes her glass of wine she realizes there’s nothing keeping her from taking the next step forward. Logically, she has no reason not to.

It’s a heartstopping kind of moment and she feels her chest squeeze as her heart catches up to her brain. She wonders if Kara can hear her right now, if across the noise of the city she can pick out the way Lena’s heart is beating, faster and heavier and with a purpose it didn’t have before.

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L Corp rents out an old massive train station that’s now been converted into an event space and hosts a New Year’s party in place of the Luthor Family Fundraising Gala. The guest list remains the same, but the name changes from Luthor Family to L Corp and she sets up donation plans for a variety of charities instead of funneling the money into the family foundation as it’s always been done.

The company invites many of the usual suspects - though she eliminates some of the people more loyal to her mother or brother from the list. It’s a snap decision a few days beforehand to invite Kara and by extension the rest of the friends.

It’s on a whim more than anything, and while she expects Kara to say yes she doesn’t expect the enthusiastic response she gets from the rest of them.

Winn sends her a text with a selfie of him in oversized plastic glasses that say *Happy New Year* across the darkened lenses. A *this is black tie appropriate right?* accompanies the picture. She laughs before sending back a note that he can wear whatever he wants.

The party is a raging success and they manage to pack the event - they reach their projected fundraising goal less than two hours after the doors open.

With a glass of champagne and a practiced smile, Lena spends her time working the room, shaking hands and thanking guests for their attendance and generosity. It’s sometime around ten - or at least Lena thinks it is - that she spots Kara hovering near the appetizer table in a sleek black dress, hair piled on top her head.

She looks gorgeous even as she stuffs a potsticker into her mouth and grabs three more into a cocktail napkin.

Winn is next to her, but he’s facing away from the table and he’s the first to spot Lena, face brightening immediately as he waves. With a polite goodbye to the group of investors she’d been speaking to she makes her way over to where Winn and Kara are.

As soon as she’s close enough Winn moves in to greet her and Lena shouldn’t be surprised that he goes for a hug, but she is a little and Kara’s lips are pressed into a small smile at the sight.

“Happy New Year,” Lena says to them, and when Winn releases her, Kara steps forward with a quick kiss to Lena’s cheek that could easily be misconstrued as friendly, but it makes Lena’s throat go a little thick. “Thank you for coming.”

“Wouldn’t miss it,” Winn says. “James and Lucy are at the bar with Alex.”

With a quick glance that direction, Lena smiles to see the trio standing in line near one of the many
bars around the room. “I’m glad you all could come.”

“I’m just here for the free food,” Kara jokes with an adorable scrunch of her nose that makes Lena laugh.

“I don’t doubt it,” she teases back and they smile at each other for a long enough moment that Winn has to clear his throat.

Jess approaches her then, subtly from the side and touches her briefly on the elbow, leaning close to whisper. “I’m sorry, Miss Luthor, but you wanted to be informed when Mr. Graves arrived.”

“Thank you, Jess,” Lena says with a tight smile and a glance towards the entrance where the man in question is indeed walking in. “I’ll be right over.”

Turning back to Kara and Winn she takes a deep breath and smiles regretfully at them both. “Sorry to cut and run, but this is work for me.”

“Totally,” Winn says with a shake of his head and a wave of his hand. “No worries.”

Kara looks at her with the kind of understanding she remembers from late nights in her dorm room after a particularly draining family event. It makes her want to reach out and grab Kara’s hand so Lena can have her by her side the rest of the night. She takes a sip of champagne to quench the desire and with a last smile walks away.

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The problem with the highly attended, overly successful event that she’s hosting is that she doesn’t really get to enjoy herself. It’s only made slightly worse by the glimpses she gets of where Kara is standing with her friends, drinking cocktails and laughing at a high top on the side of the room.

After what feels like the millionth stale conversation riddled with pleasantries and disingenuous condolences about her mother, Lena needs a break and retreats to a back hallway where a bathroom takes residence. She spends a good moment checking her makeup and fiddling with her hair, taking deep breaths before she has to go out and face the party again.

For a bit, she runs through her New Year’s toast in her head and makes sure she remembers all the talking points before exiting the bathroom with her armor back at full strength.

Kara is waiting for her, propped up against the wall opposite with a bottle of champagne and two glasses. It startles her and she jumps back a little, hand to her chest.

“Hi,” Lena says when she’s caught her breath and her heart isn’t racing. She runs a palm down the front of her dress to ensure it’s straightened. Kara looks dangerously attractive right now and she’s looking at Lena with darker eyes than normal and a tiny smirk on her face.


“Of course,” Lena says on reflex and Kara gives her a knowing smile that urges her to tell the truth. “These kinds of things always exhaust me,” she admits and after a beat adds, “Even without my mother.”

Kara laughs a little. “Well,” she says, and she holds the items in her hand up. “Do you want to go hide away with me? It’s almost midnight.”

The idea is so appealing that her stomach tightens just thinking of it, of leaving the loud sound of
the event space for something quiet. “I can’t leave my own party, Kara,” she says with a certain amount of regret.

“Yes you can,” Kara insists and she pushes the glasses into the hand holding the champagne bottle before reaching out to grab Lena’s hand. “It’s almost midnight. Everyone is focused on the countdown and who they’re going to kiss when it hits the new year. Winn met some girl from your IT department and has been flirting with her all night. It’s gross and I don’t want to be there for that anymore.”

“I’m supposed to make a toast,” Lena argues, but her brain kind of derails when she remembers there’s a kissing tradition associated with this holiday and Kara’s suggesting they be alone for the big moment.

“*After* midnight,” Kara says. “They won’t miss you for the next few minutes.”

Lena thinks to protest further, but Kara is already pulling her away, heading to a back stairwell like she has a plan. “Where are we going?”

“I know a place,” is all Kara offers and not long later they’re walking out a roof exit. Lena feels suddenly grateful the building they’re in doesn’t have too many floors. Kara often forgets that not everyone has her stamina nor her ability to walk up several floors in heels and not break a sweat.

The roof has a small patio section off to the side with tables and Kara leads them that way, setting the glasses down on the table before releasing Lena’s hand. The exhaustion from earlier starts to settle over Lena and she’s suddenly grateful for the relative silence of the roof space and the calm feeling she gets as she leans against the railing to overlook the city.

Kara comes up next to her, leans close enough that their arms brush. “Do you remember New Year’s Eve sophomore year?”

Lena laughs. “I remember you getting hit by fireworks trying to fly in Metropolis,” she says with the same kind of disapproval in her voice as she had years ago.

The smile that stretches on Kara’s face starts sheepish, but then it deepens into something more warm. “Worth it, though,” she says in a low tone that clenches in Lena’s gut.

The party can still be heard from inside the building, muffled but distinct enough that Lena can hear a countdown starting. A companionable silence stretches between them as they listen and watch a few stragglers on the street below jump around and yell out the numbers.

When the clock strikes midnight, Lena turns to face Kara with a smile. Lena opens her arms for a hug that Kara easily steps into and they hold each other for a long moment before letting go.

It feels safe. Warm.

“Happy New Year,” Lena says, still in Kara’s personal space, close enough that she can feel body heat against the chill air. Kara’s eyes dart to Lena’s lips so obviously that her whole being pulls forward on instinct.

“Happy New Year,” Kara repeats and then before anything else can be said, Lena moves to press a quick, *almost* friendly peck to Kara’s lips.

It’s a nothing kiss. Easily dismissed and moved on from - New Year’s Tradition and nothing else - but neither of them leave each other’s airspace for a long profound moment and something that’s been wavering between them shifts into place.
There’s intention in the moment and Lena feels it like a string tugging at her ribcage towards Kara. A decision she made ages ago flares up in her chest and starts to feel solid, tangible.

“I really want to kiss you again,” Kara confesses in a hush, the words dropping with a small puff of breath against Lena’s mouth.

She swallows, pokes her tongue out briefly to wet her suddenly dry lips. Pandora’s box, she thinks. And then she decides to stop thinking. “Okay,” she murmurs, it isn’t like before. Kara doesn’t surge forward and neither does Lena. There’s no sense of urgency or desperation. No pent up emotion demanding to come bursting out.

It’s just soft and warm and wrapped in a field full of memories when Kara smiles and then presses back against Lena’s mouth. It feels right in a way nothing has since they’ve been back and it somehow feels better than the kiss in Lena’s office or the one on Earth-1.

Lena’s arms wrap around Kara’s neck and strong arms weave around Lena’s waist until she’s getting pulled up against Kara’s body like she has thousands of times.

Kissing Kara is always a full body experience and her heartbeat thumps loudly where it’s pressed against Kara’s chest. She feels lightheaded and free and she can’t stop smiling against Kara’s lips, laughing a little when Kara keeps grinning too.

She thinks to say I missed you, missed this, but it’s been said between them before. She’s not sure how to convey how differently she means it.

The opportunity to say anything is ruined anyway by a soft clearing of a throat from not too far away and they both jump, Kara setting Lena down immediately as they turn to see who’s interrupted them.

It’s Jess. Looking entirely sheepish and hesitant, but that’s when Lena remembers where she is and who she is and she steps away from Kara with an apologetic smile.

“It’s time for your toast, Miss Luthor. I’m sorry to interrupt.” Jess has a bit of a playful smile on her face when she nods at Kara. “Miss Danvers.”

“Yes of course, no need to apologize,” Lena says and she swallows thickly, adjusting her dress and sparing a thought to fix her makeup when they get back inside. She’s sure her lipstick is a mess. “I’ll be right down.”

With a nod and a smile Jess leaves them be and Lena turns a wry smile towards Kara.

“Hi,” Kara says with a laugh and she reaches out to grab Lena’s hand, swinging their arms loosely.

“Hi,” Lena repeats and she laughs too.

“Could have been worse,” Kara comments, tilting her head towards the roof exit Jess just used.

“Could have been Alex.”

Laughing again and nodding sagely, Lena wags a finger at Kara. “Very true.”

“Come on,” Kara says, turning to head back inside. “I want to hear your toast.”

They make no mention of the kiss or all that it meant and Lena thinks maybe that’s because they don’t have to. Understanding passes so easily between them that words sometimes can’t quite
measure up.

Except that’s how it’s been ever since Lena came to National City. Ever since they saw each other again for the first time, since they kissed in Lena’s office, on Earth-1. Since they started texting every single day and talking and integrating into each other’s lives again. They’ve been waverling in this unclassified area, circling around each other over and over and over again.

Kara had made it clear that it was Lena’s decision. That if she wants to stop this back and forth between them then she has to take the leap first.

They’re almost at the door that will lead back into the building and Lena feels nerves buzz across her skin as her mind makes a decision her heart had already solidified years ago.

“Kara,” she says softly Kara stops, turns to Lena expectantly. “Would you like to have dinner? With me?”

Silence stretches and distantly Lena can hear the sound of more fireworks across town, the celebratory screams of people on the street.

“What?”

“Dinner,” Lena repeats, her heartbeat heavy in her chest. “With me. To talk about everything.”

Kara bites at her bottom lip for a moment. “Like a date?”

Lena takes a deep breath if only to steady the shake in her hand. “Like a date,” she answers and Kara’s mouth slowly transforms into a brilliant smile. “Sort of.”

“A date,” Kara repeats like she can’t really believe what’s happening.

It’s a vulnerable moment and Lena beats back an insistent voice in her head that says she might regret this, that she’s making a mistake she’s been trying to avoid making for years. “Yes, a date,” Lena says with an encouraging smile. “You remember what that is, right? It’s where you explore the possibility of romance.”

“One day, you will stop making fun of me for that, right?” Kara asks, then gets a little more serious, stepping closer to Lena. “Are you sure?”

The question brings back an image of Kara leaned up against a hotel room wall, staring at Lena with desperate, sad eyes. *When we do this again you have to be sure.*

“I have always been sure of you,” Lena tells her quietly.

Kara smiles, looks down with an adorable scrunch of her nose. “Yeah?”

“I don’t want to be the person that stands in the way of us,” Lena says and Kara looks back up at her. “Not anymore. I want to figure this out. Together. If you want.”

Kara’s eyes seems to search Lena’s, darting around for a long moment before Kara grins wider. “Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Dinner,” Kara says with a nod. “To explore the possibility of romance.”

It isn’t exactly being together again, because there’s still so much they need to talk about. It isn’t
dating, or calling Kara her girlfriend, but when she makes it back to the main room and climbs up the stage, she feels like the circles they’ve been chasing around each other all these years might finally be stopping.

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They’re naked in Lena’s small bed, and somehow the conversation turns into Kara explaining myth after myth about the old Kryptonian Gods. Lena’s not sure how it happened really, but she listens with rapt attention.

Religion had been something fairly taboo in her very science oriented family and she finds herself undeniably intrigued when Kara speaks of the different belief structures on Krypton.

“So Flamebird was like, this god that would refresh the world through fire basically.”

“Like a phoenix?” Lena asks, tracing Kara’s ribs with her finger. Kara’s body feels blissfully warm against the chill of the room.

Kara thinks for a moment, likely trying to remember what a phoenix is exactly before nodding. “Yeah, I guess it is kind of, but a little different. Vohc, her brother, would build the world and then Flamebird would burn it down and he’d build it again in an endless cycle.”

Lena laughs a little. “I think Lex would appreciate this myth,” Lena comments and Kara pulls a face.

“Except they were kind of in love too,” Kara says and Lena’s lips twist even as she continues laughing.

“Okay, nevermind. Why do all pantheons have so much incest in their stories?”

Kara shrugs. “I don’t have an answer to that.”

Lena laughs a little. “Aren’t you supposed to have the answers to everything?”

“You’re confusing me with you,” Kara says, reaching up to tug on a loose strand of Lena’s hair.

Lena smiles indulgently, presses a warm kiss to the skin under her chin that makes Kara smile. “Okay, so there’s Flamebird and Vohc and they’re stuck in a cycle of build and destroy. Is that it?”

“That’s where Nightwing comes in. He was created by Rao to hunt down evils, but he wasn’t really allowed to walk among the other Gods. He was just stuck in the shadows keeping Rao safe.”

“Sounds lonely.”

Kara hums. “But he was allowed to be with Vohc and they were really close friends and then one day Vohc introduced Nightwing to Flamebird and they instantly fell in love.”

Lena props her chin up on Kara’s chest, slides a little closer. “Why do I get the feeling that isn’t going to end well?”

Kara’s palm slides up Lena’s spine. “Love triangles rarely do?”

“Remind me never to get involved in one.”

Kara laughs. “Why would that ever happen?”
Lena shrugs teasingly. “You never know.”

A look of feigned consideration shadows Kara’s face. “You did have lunch with Emily the other day,” she muses and Lena swats at her.

“Stop it,” she chastises, but she laughs when Kara pretends to get hurt by the hit. “Tell me the rest.”

“Vohc built this huge monument that was supposed to represent his love for Flamebird, but Flamebird’s duty was to destroy everything Vohc built. Rao had commanded it. So she did and it destroyed Vohc in turn. He stopped being a builder and became a breaker.”

“Loss can do that to a person,” Lena murmurs and Kara leans forward a bit to kiss her. They get lost in the feeling for a short moment before Lena laughs against Kara’s mouth.

“Finish the story before you try for round three,” she orders and Kara falls back against the pillows, groaning and smiling at the same time.

“Vohc was enraged,” she says with a shrug. “He wanted revenge, so he took a bunch of sunstone crystals and sealed Nightwing in the Phantom Zone.”

“The Phantom Zone? Like where you were?”

Kara nods. “Yeah. It’s separate from all time and space.”

“How sad,” Lena comments, dragging her hand over Kara’s stomach and enjoying the shiver that it brings up in Kara. “So they were just separated forever? Nightwing and Flamebird?”

“Not forever,” Kara says her tone turning into something more reverent, fitting a religious myth. “The point of the story is that Nightwing and Flamebird are interconnected in a way that can’t be denied or broken. Throughout the centuries no matter what tries to come between them they are destined to repeat the cycle over and over again.”

“The cycle of separation?”

Kara shakes her head. “They will always return to the world in some form, find each other and fall in love. Even though they may be betrayed by friends or separated by circumstance they’ll be reborn again and again solely to find each other.”

Lena is silent for a moment, thinking.

“Do you believe in that?”

Kara’s brow crinkles. “In the myth?”

“In destiny,” Lena clarifies.

Kara mulls over that, considers for a moment. “I believe in fate.”

“There’s a difference?” Lena asks.

“This is why you shouldn’t cut your philosophy credit,” Kara says pointedly and Lena groans, rolls her eyes.

“I’m a scientist, philosophy hardly feels important. I do the readings.”
An affectionate smile spreads across Kara’s face and Lena pushes up to kiss her, smiling against Kara’s mouth and enjoying the lazy feel of their bodies pressed together. “So you believe in fate,” Lena says when the pull apart, her finger tracing the line of Kara’s lip for a moment.

“Fate is like the way your life goes regardless of what you do about it. Like inevitability. You can fight against it, but you’ll always end up in a specific place. No matter what Nightwing and Flamebird do, they will always die and be reborn and meet. Those are like fixed points in time.”

“And destiny?” Lena asks.

“Destiny is something you have to take part in. Like an inner potential that you have to access. So like my cousin,” Kara says and Lena nods encouragingly. “I think my cousin was destined to be a hero, but he had to decide to be one for it to happen. He could have just as easily stayed hidden, never revealed himself to Earth as Superman.”

Lena’s not entirely sure she sees the distinction, but she smiles at Kara anyway. “So fate?”

“Fate,” Kara repeats, pulling Lena more solidly on top of her. “Are we done with the philosophy lesson now?”

“I don’t know. You had a point,” Lena teases. “I have been slacking in that class and it’s a graduation requirement. I should probably consider a tutor.”

“I’m very expensive,” Kara replies, before twisting them over so Kara’s the one pressing down against Lena.

Lena pretends to be confused. “I was talking about Emily,” she says barely able to smother her teasing smile. “She’s a philosophy major, I think, and-”

The rest of her words get drowned out by the sound of Kara’s laughter and the solid press of her lips against Lena’s.

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They don’t manage to have dinner for the first week after New Year’s day entirely because Lena’s schedule goes crazy. The closer they crawl towards her mother’s court date the more work she’s had to do between meeting with lawyers and her PR team.

L Corp saw a bump in popular opinion after the charity event, but they’re still walking on thin ice as news coverage over her mother’s arrest continues, interspersed with anecdotes about Lex’s trial.

Lena’s had to cancel five dinners in a row each with profuse apologies that Kara’s laughed off. “No pressure, Lena,” Kara says with a smile in her voice.

“I don’t want you to think I’m avoiding it or going back on what I said,” Lena tells her and Kara just laughs again, soft and intimate.

“I know you’re not doing that. And I know you’re busy,” Kara says. “Sometimes I think you forget that I used to date you and I know what you’re like.”

They finally set a date almost three weeks after Lena actually asked her to dinner and she’s so close to being able to attend this one. It’s just a matter of clearing out her inbox and signing off on a few projects and she’s homefree.

As soon as the thought crosses her mind, she gets a call from an unknown number. For a good five
seconds she considers letting it ring through to voicemail, but something possesses her to answer.

“Hello?”

“Lena? It’s Alex.”

Surprised, Lena sits back in her chair, turns a little to face the balcony. “Is everything okay?”

“I would like you to come into the DEO,” Alex says her voice unnaturally even, like she’s forcing it to stay steady. “Today. I’ve sent a car for you.”

“It’s the middle of a work day, Alex.”

“It’s an emergency,” Alex grits out and Lena’s stomach drops.

Silence for a brief moment, she turns more fully to the balcony and studies the blue sky. “Where’s Kara?”

“There’s a car outside your building,” Alex answers and Lena’s heartbeat picks up as she stands. “Please get in it.”

“Alex,” Lena protests, but the line has already disconnected and Lena is left glaring at her phone.

For a long moment she contemplates ignoring the directive, a tad irritated that Alex thinks she can just order her around, but there’s a tight feeling in the pit of her stomach that tells her Kara is in trouble. It’s the only reason Alex would reach out like that.

Lena checks her phone again, looks at the last messages Kara sent. Their conversation that morning had been a discussion about a story Kara had picked up - finally something interesting! not that i’m excited a girl is missing - and reminders about their date that night.

There was even a casual mention of maybe meeting for lunch before Kara told her i have to meet maggie to see if she can help with this case but i’m excited for dinner! me too Lena had sent. be careful - hope you find the missing girl.

always is the last thing from Kara she has in her phone.

It’s been radio silence all afternoon and while that’s not unusual, necessarily, it does nothing to assuage her growing fear.

After packing up her stuff and informing Jess that she’s taking an offsite meeting, she heads down to find a black car waiting for her and a very DEO-looking gentleman at the wheel.

The ride towards the downtown base is silent and Lena tries to stop her brain from imagining worse upon worse scenario. She calls Kara halfway there because she can’t stop herself and three calls in a row go straight to voicemail.

Her watch hangs heavy on her wrist and she considers for a long moment pressing the button, but stops herself. Knows that if Kara is in trouble, but still in a place where she could hear the signal, it would be torture. If Kara’s hurt or - Lena tries not to go down dark mental paths, but her mind has never been great at straying away from those.

Alex is waiting for her when she gets to the DEO, pacing back and forth in as nervous and agitated manner as Lena has ever seen. She only stops moving when she sees Lena stride towards her.
“What happened?” Lena asks even though she can read it all over Alex’s face.

“How’s this?” Alex’s lips purse, her hands on her hips. “Kara is missing.”

Lena’s jaw drops a little and she blinks, perplexed. “I’m sorry?”

“How’s this,” Alex repeats.

It’s like something physical dropping heavily in the bottom of her stomach.

“How does that mean?” Lena asks because her brain can’t wrap itself around the idea. Neither can her heart.

Alex looks uncharacteristically speechless then, no answer forthcoming and she can see the worry now in the rim of Alex’s eyes, in the unsteady way her hands sit on her hips. Alex never looks anything but stalwart and focused and seeing even the tiniest fracture in the girl across from her makes Lena ache with concern.

“I need your help,” Alex says softly and Lena steps forward and reaches out to squeeze Alex’s forearm briefly, a swift gesture of comfort and solidarity.

“You have it,” Lena says firmly and Alex’s chin lifts a bit in response before she nods and turns.

Lena follows her up towards the central platform and wonders if wherever Kara is she can hear the heavy drumbeat of her heart.
Chapter 10

The DEO is a flurry of movement that does nothing to calm Lena’s suddenly raw nerves. Her brain feels sluggish as it tries to process what it could mean that Kara’s missing. She tries not to think of what it means for National City that Supergirl is missing. That concern feels far more distant than the fear creeping up her spine because Kara seems to be in some kind of trouble.

Lena’s always been worried for Kara - emotionally, for most of their time together, and even sometimes physically. Ever since she saw Supergirl arrive, that worry has only gotten worse. Most of it’s been motivated by knowing what kind of example Lex has set for how to attack Kryptonians, but now - now Kara is missing, unable to be helped easily, somewhere Lena can’t reach her.

As she follows Alex further into the base, she tries to compartmentalize her feelings, shoving the unease she’s started to feel to the side and focusing on the fact that Alex brought her here to help. Having some kind of mental breakdown isn’t going to go far in the way of contributing to the effort of helping Kara.

On the central platform of the base Lena spots J’onn standing there, hands at his hips as he observes a bank of monitors with a wealth of information spread across them. Winn sits in front of him, typing vigorously at a computer and Lena tries to follow what’s happening on the screens. Not much of it makes sense, however, until Alex starts to give her context.

“We think she went through some kind of transmatter portal,” Alex says as they step up next to J’onn. Lena follows where Alex is pointing, where a picture of some kind of half-oval device is displayed on the monitor.

With a shake of her head to push out her more distracting thoughts about what kind of trouble Kara could be in, Lena squints a little at the picture, reading the information there and studying what’s being displayed. “I’m sorry,” she says, clearing her throat. Her fingers play with the clasp of her watch in fidgety motions, popping its face open and closed, but it helps a little to calm her rattled nerves. “A transmatter portal? I’m not sure I understand.”

At the sound of her voice, Winn spins slightly in his chair seeming to just notice her. “Lena,” he greets with a relieved sounding sigh and a small smile. “Finally someone here that can speak my language.”

At the first glimpse of his face, Lena jumps a bit, tilting to get a better look in concern. “What happened to you?”

Winn waves her off, smile fading. “Long story, don’t ask.”

He spins back around, grabbing a tablet and holding it out in her direction. When she rounds the desk to grab it, a layout of design schematics stares up at her. It takes a second for her to realize what she’s looking at - the blueprints to the portal. She pinches her fingers together on the screen and then pulls them apart, studying the various parts and what it all means when it’s put together.

For a moment she forgets that she’s looking at this because it’s the key to helping Kara and thinks about the different ways this kind of technology could be applied in the real world. It stuns her for a moment as she realizes the industries a portal like this could revolutionize.

Alex’s voice breaks her from her thoughts and brings her careening back into reality. “There was a pile of Kara’s clothes on the ground near this portal. We found it in a warehouse across town and
we think she went through it intentionally.”

Lena frowns. “Then we know where she is? Where the portal leads?” Lena asks, looking around at the grim faces of the team. This doesn’t sound like Kara is missing and then it occurs to Lena. It’s not so much that Kara’s missing, but that she’s in danger. A new spike of fear takes hold of her throat, stronger and more insistent than before. Alex frowns heavily, her jaw tightening as she looks up at the large central screen.

“We do,” J’onn replies and he sounds distressed by it. “Agent Schott?”

“Yes,” Winn says with a twirl of his fingers in the air before he starts typing and a new window pulls forward displaying a planetary system Lena isn’t fully familiar with. “The ionization trail leads to the Arcturus System. Planet 51 ARC B.”

Lena struggles to remember nights when Kara would ramble on and on about distant planets, stars and systems, tracing patterns and constellations on Lena’s ribcage, but nothing triggers as she looks up at the planet on the screen. The name isn’t at all familiar.

“Maaldoria,” J’onn clarifies and his face conveys nothing but anxiety. “They call it Slaver’s Moon.”

“Sounds friendly, right?” Winn asks with a dry look for Lena.

“Was she -” Lena has to swallow against the sudden dry feeling in her throat. “Was she aware that’s where it would take her?”

“Unlikely,” Alex replies with a frown. “Maaldoria has a red sun.”

The low level of edginess that Lena had been fighting since the minute Alex had called her ratchets up instantly, and worry takes over in her brain, her stomach turning over suddenly. She stares down at the schematics on the tablet before turning wide frightened eyes towards the informational screen Winn still has displayed on the bank of monitors. She knew that Kara’s powers were derived from the yellow sun, and if Maaldoria has a red sun like Krypton did, Kara would be powerless, alone and unprotected on a strange planet with an ominous name. It feels like her heart nearly falls out of her chest. Next to her, Alex’s hands clench the desktop so hard that they turn white.

“Yeah,” Winn says softly, staring at her as the realization washes over her like ice water. For the first time since she’s arrived, he looks worried and scared and about as sick with the idea of Kara alone and vulnerable as Lena feels.

“Agent Schott is working on getting the portal open,” J’onn supplies, his voice softening as he looks between she and Alex. “Once we’re able to do so safely we’ll send a team through.”

The DEO sounds too quiet as the four of them stare around at each other, each of them looking as terrified as Lena feels.

The only contribution Lena feels she has to offer is worry at this point and she can’t help the helpless look that crosses her face. She looks to Alex. “Is there something I can do to help?” She
glances at Winn. “Do you need another set of eyes on the portal mechanics?”

Winn turns to her, but before he can speak, Alex is stepping forward. “Actually, I brought you in to help me.”

Lena turns back to Alex, quirks an eyebrow. “With what?” Anything to get her mind off of the danger Kara is in sounds like a great plan to Lena.

“I’ve been working on a device that harnesses the power Kara gets from a yellow sun,” Alex starts, looking a little more settled to be talking about something other than where Kara is stranded. “Sort of like a sun grenade. We’ve been prototyping it for a few months, but I’d like your opinion.”

It doesn’t fully explain Lena’s role, but it gives her a better sense of purpose and she nods at Alex. “You think she’ll need her powers?”

“Maaldoria isn’t exactly known for welcoming visitors,” J’onn adds. “Our team can handle themselves, but it’d be a nice thing to have when we find Supergirl. Any little bit helps.”

Lena tries not to focus on what not welcoming to visitors might mean for a powerless Kara.

“I’ll do what I can,” Lena replies and Alex makes a this way gesture with her head, and she’s already halfway off the platform by the time Lena realizes she needs to follow quickly. With a squeeze to Winn’s shoulder and a nod for J’onn, Lena follows Alex away from the platform and back towards where the labs reside.

When they’ve achieved relative privacy, Lena asks the question that’s been worrying her. “Is she alone over there?”

Alex rolls her eyes a little before answering and the causal reaction surprises Lena. “We think Mon-El went with her,” Alex says, holding the door to a small lab open for Lena to walk through. “His glasses were on the floor next to Kara’s clothes.”

“What do you think it was connected to the missing persons case Kara was working?” Lena asks, following Alex to a small workstation, where a cavalcade of tools sit out, waiting for someone to put them to use. “With that girl, Izzy? She mentioned she was meeting Maggie this afternoon to discuss it.”

“As far as I can tell, yes,” Alex answers, pulling a small case over and opening it. “Leave it to Kara that right after I tell her how dangerous it is to just go jumping through portals to places I can’t follow without backup or any kind of planning, she goes and does exactly that. All because of one missing girl and her raging hero complex.”

The turmoil in Alex is nearly palpable and Lena reaches out on instinct, grips Alex’s forearm in what she hopes is a comforting gesture. It would work on Kara, but Kara isn’t here - maybe Lena needs this small connection just as much as Alex does.

“She’ll be okay,” Lena murmurs and tries to get herself to believe in it. “She’s always been a fighter.”

“Yeah,” Alex says with a noise between a scoff and a laugh. “That’s what I’m afraid of.”

They look at each other in grim understanding for a solid moment before Alex picks up a small tablet nearby and hands it to Lena. “Let’s get to work,” she says softly and Lena nods.

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The day a mystery girl saves a plane from crashing in National City, Lena is in London. It’s well past midnight, but she’s still on Metropolis time and doesn’t tend to sleep that much anyway, and after a long day of meetings, Lena’s eternally grateful the bar in her hotel is still open and still serving food.

Halfway through her second glass of wine and just as her late night dinner is being set in front of her, a breaking news alert bursts across the TV hanging over the bar and Lena watches as blurry footage appears.

The words plane disaster averted by unknown hero captions a grainy picture of the scene - a plane that looks like it has just performed a water landing and a figure standing on the wing, dripping water into the wind. Lights are flashing all around them, but their face is tilted downward, looking down at the wing of the plane.

It’s a girl, that much is obvious, and she stands there for a long moment before jumping into the air and away. That’s all it takes for Lena to know. She’s seen that jump a million times. Has witnessed it first hand.

Kara.

It doesn’t fully hit her until the morning. The news runs a story calling Kara Supergirl and it feels like only moments later there’s images of Kara everywhere in a blue and red suit not unlike Superman’s.

Days later Lex calls her and asks quite derisively if she’s seen the news that the newest Super has leaked oil into the National City bay. It’s hard, to not act defensive, and it’s even harder not to worry when she sees footage of Kara getting blasted around by Reactron, a couple more weeks later.

The copy of CatCo Magazine that ends up in her pile of mail is what hits everything home for her. The face on the cover is undoubtedly Kara, wide blue eyes and tousled blonde hair. She looks determined, and strong, and so utterly like the girl who used to tell her quite firmly that skipping lunch was not allowed, even if she was on the verge of almost being done with her work.

The interview seems stilted and Cat Grant takes quite the brush to the story, but Kara still manages to come shining through off the page in a way that’s familiar and new to Lena all at once. It’s especially evident in the irritated way Kara grits out that she doesn’t want to be asked about starting a family if her cousin isn’t going to be subject to the same questioning.

It burns through Lena to think, for half of a second, that perhaps Kara doesn’t want to talk about a family because of the two of them. It’s why Lena avoids the questions herself when asked.

The arrival of a new Super means even more eyes than usual have turned back to Metropolis and if anyone is looking that direction, it’s practically Luthor tradition to step into the spotlight. Her brother and mother are all too happy to provide quotes about living in a city with an alien superhero, about what kind of relationship Luthor Corp has with Metropolis’s very own.

Making front page news has made it harder and harder for Lena to ignore Lex’s growing vitriol for Superman and aliens in general, which has seemed to only have gotten worse in the last few years. It had seemed distant before, something she just accepted about her brother. But now that Kara’s suddenly been thrust in front of his crosshairs, conversations with Lex seem to end in argument nine out of ten times.

It comes to a head one afternoon when Lex’s assistant finds her in her office to hand deliver a short
press statement about a proposed Alien Amnesty bill with instructions to sign on the bottom. Lena barely gets past the first sentence before she’s storming up to the penthouse level of the building and barging into his office.

“Lex, what the hell is this?” She asks without any preamble. The paper in her hand crumples a little in her grip as she holds it up in front of her and her lab coat swings around her as she takes long angry strides towards his desk. Lex’s laughter sounds off-key and strange when he turns around in his chair.

“Good afternoon to you too, Lena.”

It gives her pause for a moment and she takes a breath, levels a narrowed gaze at her brother. “What. Is. This?”

“It’s a statement against Senator Crane’s introduction of the Alien Amnesty Bill,” Lex says, shrugging and adjusting his tie. His hair is unkempt, and there’s a glass of scotch on his desk. She stares at him for a beat, before looking down at the words written across the page in her hand.

“Aliens are a danger to a modern society, and Luthor Corp strongly disagrees with the so-called Alien Amnesty bill. It is no work of amnesty; it is an invitation to our destruction.” Lena reads, stepping forward and slamming the paper down on the desk. Lex tilts his head to the side, considering it.

“Sounds well crafted to me,” he responds with an unaffected expression. “You didn’t even get to the best part.”

“Since when are we in the business of making political statements?” Lena asks. What she really wants to say is what the hell is your problem but isn’t prepared for that kind of throwdown with her brother.

“Since there’s a new Super over in National City trying to play God like her dear cousin,” Lex all but spits out looking nothing like the loving brother Lena’s used to. He stands, props his hands on his desk and paints an imposing picture, the skyline of Metropolis looming behind him through the floor to ceiling windows. “There’s two of them now, Lena. Wake up. There’s probably more lurking about the country like sleeper cells.”

“National City has been nothing but protected since Supergirl came out! Just like Metropolis has been for years,” The argument isn’t new to them, but Lena feels like her brother is slipping farther and farther away from her each time they have it. There’s unchained anger in his eyes and the smile he plasters on hasn’t felt friendly in months. “And what if they decide they no longer want to play protector?” Lex posits in a calm tone that manages to sound maniacal regardless. “What if they turn on us? What then? Who will protect us then?”

“Superman has been nothing but a hero, Lex,” she says carefully, having heard this line of argument a hundred times.

Her brother regards her for a moment, critical and unyielding. It’s the kind of look she’s seen him give corporate rivals and competitors, but never at her. “Sign the statement, Lena,” he commands, sounding more like a CEO than brother.

“I won’t put my name on that,” she says, refusing to back down. “And you shouldn’t either.”

“Your name’s already on it,” he bites back and when he picks up the paper on his desk he thrusts
it forward with a finger tapping against the Luthor Corp letterhead.

“Don’t release this statement,” Lena all but pleads, shaking her head. “This is bad business.”

“It’s not about business, Lena!” He all but yells, slamming the paper back down on his desk so forcefully that she jumps back. The glass of scotch sitting nearby sloshes violently and threatens to topple before he grabs for it. “Luthor Corp is Metropolis. And I will not sit idly by while a ticking time bomb waits to detonate. Superman is a wrath on this city. And so is his cousin.”

“Superman-,” she starts, but barely gets the name out before his face is darkening even further and he slams another fist down on the table.

“You don’t know him like I do,” he says in a low ominous tone that Lena has no idea what to do with. “He has to be stopped. And so does she.”

“Lex,” she breathes and she searches her brother’s face, finds only anger and pain. “You sound like you want to kill them.”

For a long moment he doesn’t respond. Then a smile crosses his face that almost looks normal, almost looks like the brother that practically raised her. He sets his drink down and fixes his tie again, tightening the knot at his throat before smoothing an unruly hair back onto his head. “We have to stop them,” he says. “They can’t win. And I will do whatever is necessary to protect you, this company, this family, the world. Whatever is necessary.”

“Lex,” Lena whispers, watching him as he stalks over to his drink tray. His hands are shaking, and when he turns to offer her a drink, the ice he’s slipped in the glass rattles loudly. Fear shakes through her, fear for Kara and her family, for Lena’s own family - for Lex, who doesn’t seem like Lex, anymore.

“It’s the truth, Lena,” he says, the glass still extended between the two of them. The gulf seems like it’s widening. “Someday I hope you’ll understand.”

A little more than a week later, after Superman gives a quote to Clark Kent that he’s concerned for Lex and his anti-alien rhetoric, Lex destroys a swath of downtown Metropolis in an attempt to kill the Man of Steel.

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They work in relative silence for long minutes, Alex walking Lena through how the device works and what she’s trying to accomplish. It’s a brilliant design and Lena spares a moment to feel impressed by the eldest Danvers woman. Kara had always talked about Alex as though she had hung the moon and stars - getting to know Alex had shown how interesting she actually was. But clearly, her time with the DEO had done even more good for her.

The grenade is nearly finished as far as Lena can tell, and all she’s really contributing at the moment is handing Alex the tools she needs and humming confirmation whenever Alex explains a certain part or mechanic. It occurs to her that her presence in the DEO is a tad redundant. They’ve already found Kara, they’ve assembled a team to go through the portal to retrieve her and Alex seems to need little help in completing her yellow sun grenade.

Perhaps bringing Lena in is some kind of protocol or something Kara had requested in the event of an emergency. She tries not to think that they brought her in under some kind of suspicion and assuages the thought with the knowledge that Alex, at the very least, seems to trust her.

Curiosity, however, gets the better of her after long moments of working in silence and she can’t
stop the question from bubbling up. It’s better than handing off small screwdrivers and imagining how exactly Kara could have died by now.

“Alex,” she starts slowly and waits for Alex to acknowledge her. “Why did you really bring me here?”

Alex looks up with a knitted brow. “What do you mean?”

“You clearly don’t need my help with this,” Lena says, gesturing towards the grenade. “And you already know where Kara is. I’m just curious why you felt the need to bring me in.”

Alex looks at her for a moment, lips thin in consideration before she shrugs and turns back towards the device. “Honestly? I needed someone else to worry with.”

Once she processes the words, Lena laughs and detects the hint of a smile at the corner of Alex’s lips. “I’m fairly certain everyone here is pretty worried. I’m sure the whole DEO has been on high-alert since you realized she was gone.”

Alex face grows serious when she looks back at Lena. “That’s different,” she says softly and sets the device back on the table. She sighs, stretching her hands into the air.

“Different?” Lena asks, until it dawns on her what exactly Alex means and she clears her throat in realization, glancing away from the hard set of Alex’s eyes. “Right.”

Silence stretches between them while Lena tries to think of what to say. She wonders briefly how much Kara’s talked to Alex about everything that’s gone on between them in the past few weeks, or months even.

“Look,” Alex says after a few seconds, turning more to face Lena and putting a hand on her hip. It’s not hard to sense the turn in conversation and she finds that she isn’t entirely thrilled to be having an emotional confrontation with Kara’s sister at the moment - certainly not while the turbulent feelings of concern over Kara’s wellbeing are still churning in her stomach.

“Alex,” Lena says, and it comes out like a warning that Alex easily ignores.

“Can I just say something?”

Lena shrugs her shoulders just slightly, sighs. “Can I stop you?”

Alex gives her a bland, unimpressed look, but pushes forward. “Kara’s too nice to give you an ultimatum.”

“An ultimatum regarding what?” Lena asks, though she imagines she knows the answer.

“About you two,” Alex answers and she looks entirely uncomfortable to be having this conversation. “It’s that hero complex. She sometimes forgets she’s allowed to feel things, to be angry about stuff.”

Lena can’t disagree with that. It was true even in college when Kara would often disregard her own feelings in favor of the feelings of others. She can’t imagine that habit has gotten any better considering Kara’s new roles as city protector and superhero.

“When you guys broke up she wasn’t even mad about it. She went a little crazy for a while there, but she wasn’t mad,” Alex says and there’s bewilderment in her tone. “The only time she’d really talk about you was to say how she hoped you were happy or that she was proud of some ridiculous
thing you had done that made the news. It was so…”

*Kara*, Lena adds in her mind and can’t help but smile even as her chest starts to feel constricted. All those times she had turned on the news only to feel frightened for Kara, and Kara had only managed to be proud. Alex shakes her head and lets out a sad laugh.

“Do you know I caught her once eating an entire vat of mashed potatoes and watching one of your TED talks?”

The words startle through Lena with a mixture of affection and a heavy dose of despair. “Really?”

“Yeah,” Alex says with a wry smile. “She made me watch it with her. She kept talking about how smart you were and how she always knew you were going to do amazing things. All while shoveling an inhuman amount of mashed potatoes in her mouth. It was gross.”

Lena aches for the image of Kara Alex is presenting. It feels like she can’t breathe, all of a sudden, picturing Kara watching out for her in all the years they were apart, and not being angry - not *hating* her, like she had thought she would in her darkest moments.

“Normal people would be just a little mad if their girlfriend unexpectedly broke up with them and then went radio silent for years,” Alex continues and Lena can’t disagree.

“Kara’s not exactly normal,” Lena says just for the sake of having something to say. Her throat feels like it’s swelling with emotion. Talking about this stirs up memories of lonely hotel rooms in Tokyo, then later in London, Oslo, Capetown, Buenos Aires, Sydney, of how she did all she could to avoid thinking about Kara - and Kara had apparently embraced it.

“Kara’s amazing,” Alex corrects with conviction in her eyes for a heated moment before they soften and Alex adds, “And so are you.”

It surprises Lena and does nothing to make the heavy weight against her chest feel better. “Alex,” she breathes.

“I’m not saying any of this to be mean,” Alex tells her and the truth of it is written in the earnest expression on Alex’s face. “You *are* great. You’d have to be for Kara to be *this* attached to you.”

Lena laughs, but the sound is thick with emotion and she feels jittery with the conflicting swamp of emotions in her brain. “I know you’re not trying to be mean,” she says softly, drawn to the way the Danvers sisters always seem to look out for each other.

It’s a struggle not to think of Lex, but she restrains herself knowing that that mental path will only topple her already tenuous control over her emotions.

“I know that you guys have some weird, complicated thing happening,” Alex says. “Or I guess I should say that you guys think you have some weird complicated thing going on, but for Kara’s sake, at the very least, you have got to figure it out.”

Lena sighs, knowing this is the heart of the conversation Alex has started and she’s frankly a tad surprised it’s the first Alex has said anything to her. Another part of her feels amused it’s coming up long after she and Kara had already taken the first steps towards doing exactly what Alex is telling her to do. The amusement doesn’t last long when all it does is remind her that Kara is missing and those steps are in danger of being the only ones they end up taking.

“Clearly, something happened when you were on Earth-1,” Alex states definitively and Lena arches an eyebrow at the assumption, no matter how correct it may be. Alex mimics the expression
as if in challenge for Lena to deny it. “Kara’s been weird ever since you got back and even weirder since New Year’s.”

The memory of a rooftop, of fireworks and cheering and the feel of Kara’s smile against her mouth washes over her like a warm blanket and she fights a smile. “Alex,” she says softly, but Alex just puts her hand up.

“Let me finish,” she replies, frown serious. “I think you love my sister. I think that you guys weren’t together that long, but it was still,” she makes a gesture with her hands, her eyes going a little wide and lips pursing. Lena thinks she understands.

“Yeah,” she agrees easily. It’s still that way, even having not been together for four years.

“And I think you’re one of the smartest people I know, but that doesn’t always work for you,” Alex finishes with a wry smile.

Lena laughs a little, rolls her eyes. “I think it’s worked quite well for me,” she ventures and Alex gives her a dry look that makes Lena lift her hands up in surrender. “Just saying.”

“The point is that Kara is all this,” Alex continues, putting a hand to her chest with a fond smile that Lena feels pull across her own face in reaction. “Sometimes too much. And sometimes you let yourself be all this.” She points to her head, shrugs a little. “Definitely too much.”

Her brow arches at that and doesn’t know how to tell Alex that it was listening to her head over her heart that put her back on the path towards reconciliation with Kara. If the way she’s felt since coming to National City is any indication she wishes she knew how to be a lot less heart. It’d certainly have been much less painful to leave Kara four years ago, less painful to see her again, less painful to keep them apart.

“Like I said before, Kara’s not going to be the one to say this. She doesn’t know how to put her foot down when it comes to you.” Lena almost laughs thinking of all the times Kara’s all but ordered her to do something in the past few months. “This dance you guys are doing is ridiculous and acting like everything’s just fine is getting exhausting. If you’re just doing this to leave again like you did before you will break Kara and I for one am not going to-”

“Alex,” Lena interrupts as Alex starts to ramble, not unlike the younger Danvers is often prone to doing. There’s a heat building behind her eyes at the thought of leaving Kara again. It scratches at her throat and Alex looks at her, brows raised in expectation. “I do love her,” she says and the words come out rough around the edges, wet and thick sounding. It reminds her of Kara’s absence and the possibility of never getting to say the words to Kara again spikes a hot flare of anxiety through her. “I haven’t been trying to hurt her intentionally and I have no intention of doing so in the future.”

It takes a moment of clear consideration before Alex’s shoulders sag. “I know,” she says sounding somewhere between sad and fond. “But for a genius, you make incredibly stupid decisions when it comes to stuff like this.”

It makes Lena smile a little and she plays with her watch in an attempt to quell the shaky feeling in her hands. “And what, in your opinion, is a smart decision about this?”

Alex’s lips thin as she observes Lena for a long moment before her mouth twitches up a little at the edge and she huffs out a little laugh that doesn’t sound all that funny.

“I care about both of you. I’m not trying to…” Alex shakes her head, seems to lose the words, but
Lena thinks she understands. Her chest feels swollen with emotion and affection for Alex she’s not used to and for the second time, thoughts of Lex knock on the back door to her mind.

Reaching out to grasp Alex’s forearm, Lena smiles and catches Alex’s eyes with a solid gaze. “I have made a decision,” she tells her, allowing herself another moment to reminisce the way Kara had looked on the rooftop of the L Corp party, beautiful in the lights of the city, looking at Lena with a smile on her face. “Has Kara not told you?”

“Told me -” Surprise shadows across Alex’s face, brows knitting together. “You’ve made a decision?”

Lena nods, thinks of the way Kara had looked as Lena asked her to dinner. “Yes.”

Alex studies Lena’s face for a long moment before clearly finding something she’s looking for, the tense lines around her eyes relaxing. “And you’ve told Kara?”

Rolling her eyes just slightly, Lena laughs. “In a way.”

After a second more of consideration, Alex lets out a little disgusted sound, but she’s smiling. “I knew you guys were doing something weird when you both disappeared at your party.”

Lena pushes against the forearm she’s holding, enough to sway Alex just a little and they both laugh. “Your big speech was really inspiring, though.”

That pinched expression Lena’s grown used to seeing on Alex’s face returns and her lips thin. “You could have stopped me at any point.”

“And deprived you of your Big Sister Moment? Never,” Lena says with feigned seriousness and a teasing twitch of her lips.

Alex makes a noise halfway between a scoff and a laugh and turns away. “How did you get more annoying with age?”

Lena props her hip up against the table they’re standing near and asks a question that’s been bothering her ever since this conversation started. “Has Kara really not told you any of this? You guys talk about everything.”

It’s odd to think that Alex hadn’t been the first person Kara had went to after their moment on the roof. Lena had been there, after all, when Kara and Alex had a weekly phone call that would last hours in college. In fact, some of those conversations involved a little too much detail for Lena’s comfort.

Alex turns back to the desk, leans forward with her arms spread out to prop herself up and blows out a heavy breath that seems to be an answer within itself. “Things have been weird lately,” she admits in a small voice and the fear Lena’s felt since Alex uttered the words Kara’s missing sits under Alex’s words and threads into Lena’s chest. “I don’t really know why.”

Before Lena can prod further, Alex straightens abruptly, her gaze locking on something outside the glass walls of the lab and when Lena turns it’s to see Maggie Sawyer standing outside in the hallway smiling hesitantly at them. Alex, however, doesn’t look happy at all to see her girlfriend. Her jaw clenches visibly and she mumbles a what is she doing here before abruptly exiting the lab.

Lena watches through the glass as the two of them engage in a conversation that seems to grow heated the longer it goes on. Maggie’s face is the only one Lena can see from this angle and she watches as it goes through a journey of emotions - worry, confusion, sadness. Eventually Maggie
seems to affect an expression of resignation and with a last glance through the glass towards Lena turns to walk away.

Alex watches her leave for a few moments before turning back to reenter the room. Lena busies herself with the grenade on the table and futilely tries to look like she wasn't watching the confrontation. The uneasy vibe that had floated around them since Lena walked into the DEO seems to intensify, filling the room.

Alex wordlessly picks up a tablet, glances at the grenade Lena’s holding and inputs a few commands. Lena allows the silence for a few seconds before asking, “What was that about?”

“Nothing,” Alex says and it almost sounds genuine, apart from the telltale crinkle around Alex’s eyes that gives her away. Kara, somehow, has a similar giveaway, and the thought of Kara reminds Lena, all of a sudden, why she’s here. Another shot of fear goes through her.

Lena considers leaving it be for a moment. Alex clearly doesn’t want to talk about it and neither of them are particularly adept at these conversations, the last few minutes aside. Talking about Kara is one thing, talking about Alex’s love life feels much more tumultuous.

The thoughts of Kara, however, makes Lena feel a twinge of responsibility for the eldest Danvers sibling. If Kara were here right now, she’d be prodding at Alex further in an effort to comfort her sister.

Eyes drifting to the ceiling for a brief moment, Lena takes a deep breath and pushes on. “It didn’t look like nothing,” she says pointedly and Alex noticeably bristles.

“It’s nothing,” Alex repeats and when she drops the tablet angrily onto the table, Lena doesn’t even flinch. That kind of emotion she understand fairly well and she smiles sadly.

“You know,” she says slowly, trying to decide which angle to approach Alex’s emotions from. “We’re going to find Kara.” Her voice breaks a little on the words and she’s sure that’s lessened their credibility, but she focuses on keeping it together. Worry for her sister would explain Alex’s uncharacteristically loose grip on her emotions. It seemed to be a family trait: once, in college, Kara had nearly flown to National City in the middle of the night when Alex had mentioned she had a stomach flu on the phone.

“I know that,” Alex grits out and it sounds about as certain as Lena had. She reaches out to take the grenade from Lena’s hands and starts to fiddle with it in quick, angry motions.

Silence stretches for a bit and Lena glances out of the lab towards where Maggie once was, considering a change of tactics. “Does Maggie know?”

“Does Maggie know what?” Alex asks and she looks around the desk for something until Lena reaches over and hands her a screwdriver. Alex glares at it for a second before taking it begrudgingly from Lena’s hands.


“What?” Alex asks with a steely edge to her voice. Lena looks her straight in the eye.

“Of course not,” Alex answers, tone dripping with incredulity. “That would require telling her Kara’s secret identity.”

“It just seems like something you might consider sharing with your girlfriend,” Lena says carefully, knowing how protective Alex feels over Kara’s identity. Idly she remembers the conversation Kara and Alex had after Alex realized Lena knew Kara’s secret - Kara walked around in a slump for a week before they finally reconciled. “Maybe not the Supergirl part, but at the very least what
you’re going through. I’m sure she’s worried about you.”

It feels somewhat settling to focus on something like this instead of the fear over Kara’s well being that’s threatened to consume her.

Alex exhales noisily, finishes her fiddling and all but slams the grenade back on the table. Absently, Lena’s grateful the grenade is seemingly harmless to humans. With the way Alex is moving, the device is liable to detonate at any moment. “She’s not my girlfriend anymore,” Alex says, the words sounding like they’re ripped out of Alex’s mouth and Lena startles a bit in surprise.

“What? What happened?”

With a clearing of her throat and a straightening of her spine, Alex affects a casual expression that doesn’t fool Lena for a second. “I broke up with her.”

“Just now?!” Lena asks and she tries to keep her voice from raising, but isn’t that successful.

Alex’s face darkens, jaw clenching for a moment. “I’m not taking relationship advice from you of all people,” she snaps lowly and Lena knows it’s the fear and the sadness mixing up to make Alex want to lash out. The urge to bite back bubbles up in her throat, but she keeps control of it.

“Alex,” Lena says, but it doesn’t come out as a soft as she wants it to. She clears her throat a little and tries again. “I’m just asking.”

“I just want to focus on getting this to work and then finding my sister,” Alex says, visibly shaking her head and blinking as though fighting against tears. Lena’s chest aches a bit, but she understands what Alex is saying, understands the need to focus on something as a coping method against strong surges of emotion.

After a moment, Lena concedes with a soft, “Of course,” and pulls a tablet towards her, pushing the grenade back towards Alex.

They get back to work in companionable silence, but Lena feels the need to add one more thing and she takes a deep breath before speaking.

“I know a little bit about pushing people away out of fear.” Her voice is quiet as she says it, soft and careful as to not startle Alex and it seems to do the trick.

Alex’s shoulder sags a bit and she blows out a low breath. Lena continues before Alex can respond, hoping to get the words out before Alex has a chance to snap at her. “Just...if you want to talk to someone.”

It looks for a moment like Alex might say something scathing again, her jaw clenching for a long few seconds before she visibly deflates completely. “Thanks,” is all Alex says before turning back to her work once more.

They’re just finishing up with the first grenade when J’onn steps into the lab, striding forward with authority and purpose. She and Alex both straighten to greet him.

“Agent Schott believes he can open the portal,” J’onn says and anticipation starts to curl in Lena’s gut. “It’s time.”

“We’ve only had time to make the one,” Lena says, worried that even this one will actually do the trick, especially after Alex has just slammed it into the table a few times.
“Then we better make it count,” J’onn says. “Suit up, we’re heading to the portal in five.”

He leaves them alone again with a terse look and Alex takes a deep breath before turning to Lena.

After a moment of hesitation, Alex reaches out, squeezes Lena’s shoulder warmly for a long, profound moment. The contact relaxes her, feels solid in a way she reacts to. “Thanks, Lena,” Alex says softly and Lena waits a second before doing something completely out of her comfort zone.

Alex stiffens the second Lena brings her arms up to pull Alex into a hug, but she softens soon after and they both cling to each other for a long moment. “We’ll get her back,” Lena murmurs before they step away from each other.

“I know we will,” Alex says with a confidence that starts to restore some strength into Lena’s bones. “I’m glad you’re here.”

Lena allows herself a wry smile. “Because I’m the smartest person you know?”

“Because we both love her,” Alex says simply, but with the most genuine smile. The words beat against Lena’s chest and sit there for a few warm seconds. The fear and anticipation feels easier to control just knowing that Alex shares it, that she understands.

Lena nods, takes a deep breath. “And because you wanted someone else to yell at her for jumping through a portal without backup.”

Alex laughs and Lena feels lighter. “She had Mon-El with her.”

Lena picks up the grenade from the table and hands it to Alex with a dry look. “My point stands.”

Humming through a smile, Alex takes the grenade and turns to leave. Lena follows.

--

“So Alex is coming this weekend,” Kara tells her casually as they’re eating lunch in one of the campus dining halls.

Lena pokes around her plate and tries to control the look of distaste on her face. Campus dining is something she only tolerates when Kara forces her to and she’s mostly able to limit that to Pizza Wednesdays and Asian Fusion Fridays. “What for?”

After taking a big gulp of soda, Kara shrugs and goes for indifferent, but Lena can detect the almost tangible way she’s buzzing with excitement. “It’s my -” Kara looks around a bit, leans forward across the table until Lena does too. “It’s my Earth birthday.”

“It’s your birthday?” Lena asks and feels a stab of guilt she wouldn’t know something so fundamental about her girlfriend.

“Kind of,” Kara answers and Lena’s brows knit together.

“What does that mean?” Dropping her fork onto her tray she abandons trying to eat her food and makes a mental note to stop by the campus store. Kara is shoveling rice and orange chicken into her mouth at a near-reckless speed. It’s disgusting.

“It’s not my real like day-I-was-born birthday,” Kara says, and then shrugs. “It’s the date of when my pod landed here and Kal took me to the Danvers. Alex and I always celebrate it with this whole big thing.”
“Isn’t that a bit-” Lena trails off, not sure how to frame the question. Kara cocks her head to the side, clearly confused, and Lena tries to explain. “I mean...it’s kind of sad, right? The day you landed here? Or rather, why.”

Kara blinks, then a small smile comes across her face, as she leans across the table to grab ahold of Lena’s hand.

“I love the Danvers,” Kara says and she lowers her voice again as a couple passes by their table. “I was really, really sad when I landed here, because it meant that Krypton was – Krypton was gone. But they’re my family. And I like celebrating when I became part of their family.”

Lena suddenly wants to stand up out of her chair and hug her girlfriend, whose smile is soft and whose hand is tracing over her knuckles, as though Lena is the one who’s discussing the death of her home and forceful introduction to a whole new planet.

“You know, the symbol Kal wears, the S-shape,” Kara says, drawing it in the air just over her own chest. Lena nods, lacing her and Kara’s fingers together, watching Kara’s smile as she looks at Lena. “It’s not an S. It means el mayarah. Stronger together. That’s what it means to be a part of the House of El. On Krypton, my birthday was a celebration of being a part of my family. And so on Earth, I like to celebrate that too.”

“Stronger together,” Lena repeats, watching as Kara’s fingers and hers interlock on the wood of the table. Kara grins, tugging at her hand.

“Usually, Alex takes me out into the woods for a camping trip where she lets me do stuff I normally can’t like start the fire with my eyes,” Kara says. “And we eat so many marshmallows. It’s awesome.”

Kara’s back to shoveling food in her mouth, and the thought of marshmallows taking the place of the rice and chicken nearly makes Lena shiver in disgust.

“Alex must really love you if she’s willing to take you into the woods and watch you stuff marshmallows in your mouth for a weekend,” Lena says, with a teasing smile.

There’s food bulging out of one side of Kara’s cheeks when she smiles and Lena rolls her eyes and looks away. “You watch me eat almost every day, so what does that say about you?”

Lena laughs. “I must love you too,” she replies in a dry tone and after swallowing, thankfully, Kara smiles again.

“I mean, Alex sort of hated me when I got to Earth,” Kara says. “Last night, on our phone call, she lectured me for thirty minutes about how I shouldn’t use my powers around you, so I think she still sort of hates me sometimes.”

“She loves you,” Lena says with a dismissive wave of her hand. “Yelling at you is how she shows that she cares.”

Kara hums a little, shovels another helping of food into her mouth. “Kind of like when Lex sends you twenty page long critiques on some new engineering project you showed him?”

It makes Lena smile to think of her idiot brother, who’s somewhere down in Rio right now, setting up a new factory location. “Yeah, kind of exactly like that.”

“He must super love you then,” Kara says with a wise tone that sounds unnecessarily exaggerated.
“Be nice,” Lena warns and she pushes her foot up against Kara’s shin under the table.

Kara just shrugs, sets her fork down for a moment and looks at Lena with a soft smile. “I super love you.”

It hangs in the air a moment and Lena savors the feeling of hearing it, of seeing it so obviously reflected in Kara’s expression.

“I super love you, too,” she replies after a few seconds and the smile that stretches across Kara’s face is unmatched.

The one that comes when Kara gets back from her weekend with Alex only to find a Happy Birthday cake on Lena’s desk comes close, though.

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The ride to the portal site is filled with Winn walking her through how the portal works, showing the tablet he’s preprogrammed and explaining what the various controls do. Lena listens as much she can, watches as Alex checks settings on her gun, rechecks them, checks them a third time. The tac team is in some other van, and so Winn’s talking is the only thing making any noise. She’s managed to borrow some more comfortable clothes for the trip, tired of walking around in heels and a skirt.

When they get to the warehouse and stand in front of the portal, Lena allows herself a quiet moment of awe, her eyes running over its edges while the team sets up equipment and double checks their gear. It’s so alien-looking, and she wishes that it was simply an engineering marvel, not a barrier between her and Kara.

Winn hovers over a small panel and Lena strides over to him watches over his shoulder as she fiddles with the controls. He shifts a bit so she can see better and she follows the commands he’s inputting with her eyes.

“Are you going to tell me what happened to your face?” Lena asks eventually in a quiet whisper. There’s a repeating loop of Kara, injured and alone on an unfriendly planet in her mind and just like it was with Alex, it’s helpful to focus on someone else’s problems.

Winn’s lips push together in consideration for a moment. “I was mugged,” he answers and Lena sees the lie for what it is. This particular evasion tactic is far too familiar to her.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” she says in a deadpan tone she hopes conveys to Winn that she doesn’t believe him. From the way his eyes skitter away from hers she imagines it was successful.

Eventually Alex calls them over and Winn shows her the tablet he’s programmed, moving to hand it over to her until she waves him off.

“Keep it,” Alex says. “You’re both coming with me.”

It surprises Lena, but she has to admit she’s a bit pleased. She had assumed Alex would force her to stay here, protected and safe. It’s something Kara would have tried to do. Tried being the operative word.

Winn, however, is less than thrilled. His eyes go immediately wide and he tries to shove the tablet towards Alex, and then toward Lena when it becomes clear Alex isn’t budging.

“N-no. Look, it’s preprogrammed, so you just hit the button and you’re thinking with portals. You
don’t need me.” He looks at Lena with a desperate plea in his face, fear etched around his eyes. It feels very out of character from what she knows of Winn and she wonders what she’s missing, imagines it has something to do with his claim of having been mugged.

“I want your hands at the controls,” Alex says. “And Lena there to back you up.”

Winn shakes his head, backs up a step. “No,” he says in a slow drawl of the word. “Lena knows this just as well as I do, she’ll be fine.”

“If you think for one second that Kara won’t murder me for leaving Lena alone at the portal while we go retrieve her, you’re an idiot. I need both of you there,” Alex persists. “If we can’t get the portal to work from that side we’ll be stuck there and I want two sets of eyes on it.”

“Agent Schott,” J’onn adds in a firm authoritative voice. “She wasn’t asking you. That’s an order.”

Shoving the tablet suddenly into Lena’s hands, Winn backs away with wide eyes, waving his hands in front of him. “I’m sorry, no,” he manages to get out in a tumble of stuttered words before walking away.

Alex sighs, watches him go before looking at Lena for a moment. “You want to come, right? Because I can’t exactly order you.”

Lena just gives her a droll look that Alex rolls her eyes at before walking away after Winn.

That leaves Lena with J’onn who smiles at her kindly. “Come on,” he says with a jerk of his head. “Let’s get you some gear.”

--

If anyone had told her years ago that she’d be stepping foot on a planet distant to Earth on a rescue mission because Kara had jumped through a transmatter portal, she would have laughed incredulously.

In college, the most exciting thing she had ever dreamed she and Kara might do together was get married. Maybe a honeymoon in an exotic location or start a family. Those dreams had seemed big enough. Interstellar travel hadn’t really made the list, but now they’ve done things like foil the genocidal plans of her mother and save an alternate earth from an alien invasion, so it seems perfectly in line with everything that’s happened so far.

“Outer space,” Winn breathes out reverently as he looks around them and Lena follows his gaze. She feels exactly the way he sounds and a smile crosses her lips unbidden as she takes in the sight of an entirely new planet. It’s very orange, and there’s a hulking planet up in the sky, bearing down on them. It’s amazing, reminds her of how excitedly Kara had talked about traveling through the stars with her father.

Winn turns to her with wide disbelieving eyes and an excited grin. “We are in outer space,” he whispers and she laughs.

Alex steps up to them, all business, her gun already up and ready. “And if you don’t want to stay in outer space forever, figure out how to dial us home,” she says, pointing back at the portal. She looks at Lena. “I’m tracking Kara’s earpiece. Make sure this thing is open by the time we come back.”

Instinct pulls her in the direction Alex is walking, with a strong desire to be there when they find Kara, see for herself that she’s okay, but she knows her particular skill set is put to best use here
You’re leaving us here alone? No guards?!” Winn asks with the same fear from earlier creeping into his voice. Lena reaches out to put a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

Alex puts on what Lena’s sure is supposed to be a comforting smile and waves him off. “You’ll be fine,” she says, already backing up to walk away. She gives a final nod to Lena before turning and jogging after the rest of the team.

“I am not a red shirt,” Winn starts chanting under his breath and Lena squeezes his shoulder, wonders if his fear is just a normal anxiety over being left basically alone on an unfamiliar planet or if it’s something deeper.

“Come on,” she says softly. “Let’s get this thing up and running.”

They work together efficiently, Winn standing in front of the control panel and attempting different commands, Lena watching information feed through the tablet in her hands. Winn moves with agitated motions, punching in different commands with shaky, almost angry pokes of his fingers and he keeps grumbling under his breath in a way that’s starting to give Lena a headache.

“Do you want to talk about it?” She asks after a few seconds of Winn mumbling something about his own imminent death.

“Talk about what?” He asks absently, eyes still on the control panel.

Lena watches him for a moment. “We can start with why you’re lying about getting mugged.”

He jumps at that, finally pulling his gaze up from the device and eying Lena warily. “I’m not lying.”

“Sorry,” she says with an apologetic tilt to her lips. “But I’m not very easy to lie to. And you’re not a particularly competent liar.”

“We don’t have time for this,” he says with a trace of heat as he turns back to the panel and hits a few more buttons. When nothing happens he lets out a frustrated noise and balls up his fist like he’s going to punch the thing into submission.

“Letting the fear take over isn’t going to help us get out of here,” Lena says in a slow, steady tone.

He scrubs his hands over his face, pressing against his eyes for a long moment before blowing out another angry sounding breath. “Fine. I wasn’t mugged and I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Okay,” Lena says, hands up defensively. “I’m just asking. We need to stay focused here and if there’s something-”

“How are you so calm?!” Winn interrupts, looking at her incredulously. “We’re here in outer freakin’ space because Kara’s powerless and got trapped here and now we’re all alone which means if we get ambushed, which we probably will be because they’re most likely watching this portal in some way, we’re going to-”

“Winn!” Lena interjects before he spirals completely. She steps up to him and puts a calming hand on his shoulder. “I’m not calm.”

“You sure could fool me;” he says bitterly, but he relaxes a little at the contact.
“Up here,” Lena replies, gesturing to her head. “I’m right there with you. There’s a lot of insane stuff going on. My girlfr -” she chokes a little on the word, shakes it out of her head. “Kara is out there powerless, you’re right, and that’s terrifying, and I’m worried about her. But the team is relying on us to get this portal open again. Which means that wasting time worrying is only preventing me from helping her. She needs us focused.”

“I - I - can’t,” Winn says, looking at her desperately.

“Yes, you can,” Lena tells him with as much conviction as possible.

“Alex gave me this speech before we left, but I’m not Alex, okay? And I’m not you, either. I don’t carry a weapon or have combat training and I’m not a cool CEO who’s a genius. I like computers and staying inside and-”

“Winn,” she says again, firmly, in a way that demands attention. “We’re in this together, okay? We’re going to open this portal and Kara and Alex are going to come back and everything is going to be fine. But only if you put your fears aside and focus.”

They look at each other for a long moment, Winn breathing visibly deep as he seems to mull over what she’s saying. On a final long inhale he nods, lifts his chin up in a show of bravery. “You’re right.”

“I am right,” Lena says, and she smiles. “Thank you for noticing.”

Winn glares a little, shaking his head and adjusting his flak jacket on his body from where Lena’s grabbed it to get his attention. He turns back to the portal, cracking his neck before trying again.

The portal remains dormant through the first few tries and Winn hits the side of the panel he’s working with in frustration. Suddenly, the portal flashes to life in a burst of purple energy before growing immediately dark again.

“That did not happen how it was supposed to happen,” Winn says to her with a sigh. Lena agrees, walks a little closer to the portal and checks something on her tablet, trying to ignore how it’s been over thirty minutes since Alex and the tac team left them, how the portal won’t open even if the team or Kara ever gets back.

A sudden yelp turns her attention back to Winn and she drops the tablet in her hands when she sees some creature pulling him away from the control panel and throwing him to the ground. She’s frozen for a moment when the alien pulls a gun on Winn who scrambles backwards a bit in fear.

“Hey!” Lena yells out because it’s the only thing she can think to do, and it does the trick. The alien pulls his weapon away from Winn and points it at Lena who puts her hands up immediately.

“It’s two versus one here.”

It distracts the creature for just long enough and Winn suddenly jumps into action, picking a heavy rock up off the ground and shoving it at the gun until it’s knocked away from both of them. As Winn pushes up off the ground and winds back to punch their attacker, Lena runs towards the weapon, getting there in seconds and picking it up off the ground.

With a small hope that guns work relatively the same no matter the planet, Lena points the weapon in the direction of Winn and the alien, hovering the fight in her sights until she can get a clear shot.

Winn is handling himself just fine from what Lena can tell, but she keeps the weapon trained forward in case it turns ugly. A few seconds later Winn gets in a final punch, the alien flinging down on the ground with the impact.
Lena relaxes the weapon and tosses it aside, smiling when Winn looks at her with an expression of pleased surprise.

“I’m not the red shirt!” Winn exclaims with a happy triumphant smile, throwing his arms in the air and then grabbing ahold of her by her own flak jacket, pulling her into a tight, victorious hug. “I’m not the red shirt!”

Lena laughs a little at him, her heartbeat still pumping with adrenaline as he releases her and she bends over to pick up the tablet she dropped, grateful to see it’s still intact. Winn is still jumping around in victory over the creature on the ground.

“You! You’re the red shirt,” he’s telling it and just then she hears the distant scream of a familiar voice. When she turns around, Kara is sprinting towards them, followed by Alex and the rest of the DEO team, and a crowd of twenty or so random people she seems to have accumulated since coming here. Lena had long resigned herself to Kara gathering friends at absurd rates, but coming to an alien planet only to find twenty human friends seems a bit crazy.

“Winn!” Kara yells out followed by an even louder shout. “Lena!”

Lena feels relief flood through her as Kara closes in on them, even though Mon-El is gesturing wildly at Winn, “Start the car! Start the car!”

Winn moves quickly towards the control panel and starts to input commands just as Kara comes rushing up to her, swooping her into a tight hug that Lena immediately returns, the tablet dropping back to the ground with a distant thud. She feels the portal whoosh to life behind them and Alex yelling at the team and Kara’s new friends to go through, but she can’t concentrate on much apart from the feel of Kara in her arms again.

It feels different than it usually does, and Lena suddenly realizes it’s because Kara’s powerless. Kara’s body feels warm with exertion and she’s breathing like she actually needs to. There’s strength in the arms that have wrapped around Lena’s waist, but it’s not the same kind of strength as before. It doesn’t feel like Kara’s restraining herself or teetering on the edge of squeezing too hard.

Instead it feels like Kara’s really hugging her and Lena sinks so quickly into the feeling that everything else blocks out for a profound moment as Kara squeezes her.

“You okay?” Lena asks quietly, into the soft feel of Kara’s hair and Kara’s arms squeeze even tighter, the feel of a smile against Lena’s neck making her grin.

“Better now,” Kara murmurs against the skin of Lena’s neck and she just barely hears the words, but they make her pull Kara in closer.

“Kara!” Alex is yelling and they break away, turn to Alex who is gesturing at the portal with a pointed look on her face. “Hug later, portal now.”

“Right, yeah, of course,” Kara says, moving backwards and just as she’s about to pull them both through the portal a strangled, “Supergirl!” cries out from behind them and Kara freezes. They all turn to see a young blonde girl getting pulled away from them and back behind the rocks.

Kara doesn’t hesitate. She drops Lena’s hand immediately and rushes off towards the scream with a loud, “Izzy!”

“No, no, no, wait!” Mon-El yells, and Kara sort of feels similarly, but Alex just looks at Lena and pulls out the grenade they worked on from her side with a small nod.
“Let’s hope this thing works,” Alex says before pulling the pin and throwing it up into the sky.

Lena watches with anticipation caught in her throat as the grenade detonates and they’re clouded in yellow light so intense she flinches away from it, squinting. When she looks back up, Kara is hovered into air with renewed strength pumping through her and a happy smile on her face that Lena feels stretching across her own in reaction.

“What was that?” Mon-El asks as they watch Kara shoot her laser vision at an oncoming spaceship. The ship explodes into pieces around them and Lena feels herself relax.

“Yellow sun grenade,” Alex answers with a pleased smirk on her face. “A little taste of home.”

Mon-El smiles at both of them as they watch Supergirl do what Supergirl does best. “Nice,” he says with an impressed tone.

Danger abated, Kara comes speeding back to them, girl in tow, and she pushes Izzy, Mon-El and Alex through the portal. “Let’s go,” she says, grabbing at Lena’s hand and pulling them through quickly.

On the other side, Kara wastes no time in turning towards the control panel and destroying it, shutting the connection off immediately. After a tense moment, the entire warehouse breaks out into a relieved round of applause and cheers and Lena feels everything relax.

Kara lets out an exhausted sounding laugh and she squeezes Lena’s hand before stepping away to hug Alex firmly. Lena can just make out the, “Thanks for coming to get me.”

Winn bumps Lena’s shoulder companionably and Lena smiles at him while J’onn steps forward.

“Welcome home, Supergirl,” he says, before wrapping Kara up in a hug.

“Thanks, J’onn,” Kara replies with a wide grin.

The joy twists around the entire group warmly and Lena feels a sense of togetherness she’s only just starting to get used to.

“Well,” Alex says, noticeably more put together than Lena had seen her all day. Kara wraps an arm around Alex’s shoulders and they lean into each other. “Celebratory drinks?”

Kara perks up a little, looks at Lena. “Celebratory drinks on me,” Kara agrees with a little smirk.

“Yeah, they better be,” Alex says with a frown returning to her face. “But don’t think that’s going to get you out of the don’t jump through space portals without backup lecture.”

Kara groans, but she’s smiling, and Lena laughs when Alex winks at her.

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They reconvene at the alien bar a little over an hour later and they pack the place with DEO agents and friends. Kara settles immediately next to Lena, listening as Winn explains his whole fight sequence and smiling happily as their legs bump together under the table.

A few minutes after posting up at their usual hightop in the back corner, James comes striding in with a look of concern on his face. Lena taps Kara gently on the thigh when she sees him and Kara stands up.

“James!”
“Kara!” He says, walking forward with purpose. “I just heard about what happened. Are you okay?”

Kara steps up into his arms immediately and they hug tightly. Lena can see the way James visibly relaxes at the contact and she smiles, understanding that feeling personally.

“I’m fine,” Kara reassures him, stepping out of the embrace, but keeping her hands on his biceps and smiling up at him.

“You should have called me,” he says with a little heat and he glances at Winn. Lena follows the gaze, sends Winn a quizzical look, but he just looks into his beer.

Kara’s head tilts a little, brows together. “There was nothing you could have done, James. I was trapped on another planet.”

Alex comes over to the table with a round of shots and sees the exchange. “James,” she greets with a tight looking smile and a gesture towards the drinks. “Celebratory tequila. You in?”

James looks like he’s ready to say more, but manages a nod and matching smile for Alex. The entire moment makes Lena feel like she’s missing something. From the way Kara glances at her after James steps away, it seems as though they share the feeling. Kara just shrugs a little and slides back onto her stool next to Lena, their shoulders bumping together.

They all take a shot off the tray and clink their glasses with a triumphant resounding, “Cheers!” Lena laughs at the sour expression Kara makes after throwing the tequila back and Lena hands her a lime from the small cup full of them that Alex has brought with the shots. Winn is nearly gagging across from her, with Alex patting him on the back.

“I would have thought after four years you’d be better at that,” Lena comments quietly with a fond smile, and Kara sucks on the lime in her hand for a quick second before rolling her eyes at Lena. She spins in her stool a little more so that their knees knock together, leaning closer to Lena.

“Has tequila suddenly stopped being gross in the last four years?” Kara asks, chucking the lime in her empty shot glass and throwing it back on the table. There’s still a lingering look of distaste on Kara’s face and she swipes the back of her hand across her mouth. Lena gives half a thought to kissing her to taste the tequila, then, but thinks better of it.

Lena just laughs, licks out against her lips and enjoys the taste still present there, a little salt and lime mixed in. “You don’t have to take it,” she says in a soft whisper she’s sure only Kara can hear. “It’s not like it does anything for you.”

Kara shrugs. “I don’t wanna be left out,” she says and it’s the same answer she’d given Lena years ago when Kara would choke down whatever weird shots one of their friends would order at the bar.

“Doesn’t this bar have that offworld liquor you were telling me about?” Lena asks, remembering the drunken string of text messages she had received from Kara months ago.

Kara’s eyes go wide in remembrance and she shakes her head at Lena. “We’re not drinking that.”

“Well, from what you told me I can’t drink it,” Lena laughs.

“Trust me,” Kara starts with a teasing smile on her face. “Neither of us can drink it.”

“I don’t know,” Lena says, bumping her shoulder a little against Kara. “You’ve seen me inebriated
far too many times. Turnabout is fair play.”

“That’s not the same,” Kara argues. “You’re like an unfairly composed drunk person and I’m…” Kara gestures around in a way that makes Lena laugh.

“I’m sure you’re fine,” Lena says smiling even deeper when Kara looks appalled at the suggestion.

“Are you forgetting that I told you I ripped Alex’s car door off?”

“I’m not forgetting,” Lena laughs. “But I imagine avoiding that is as simple as not allowing you anywhere near cars or things equally destructible.”

Kara’s eyes narrow. “Everything is destructible for me.”

It makes Lena laugh again. “Not everything,” Lena says and she reaches out to tug at the heavy bracelet on Kara’s wrist.

For a moment, as Kara tracks the motion of Lena’s hand, she goes entirely still, her face frozen as they look at the jewelry together. “You’re right,” she says after a second, with a tight smile for Lena. “Not everything.”

Suddenly everything seems to have gotten more serious than Lena truly intended and Kara’s eyes drop significantly down to Lena’s lips. There’s still a mix of adrenaline and lingering anxiety from the events of the day warring in her system and the desire to press up against Kara’s body burns across her skin like wildfire.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” Lena says in a voice barely above a whisper and Kara scoots somehow closer, their heads ducked together amidst the noise of the bar. One of Kara’s hands has settled on the back of Lena’s stool, brushing against the small of her back.

“I’m sorry I worried you,” Kara murmurs, and she reaches out to clasp Lena’s wrist right above her watch, sliding down to hold her hand for a warm moment. Their hands come together easily, settled on Lena’s thigh.

“I think that’s something I’m just going to have to get used to,” Lena comments wryly and a look of consternation crosses Kara’s face.

Before Lena can comment, something rattles the table violently and Lena jerks backwards while Kara leans forwards to steady their drinks before they tip over, her hand on Lena’s back pressing tighter. They both look to where Alex is sitting, her fist clenched on top of the table and Winn standing next to her and staring at her with wide eyes. Over Alex’s shoulder James is making a big show of not looking at anyone and Lena observes the scene with confusion as the three of them hastily try to look like they weren’t all three having a tense conversation.

“Sorry,” Alex says, looking over at them, but she doesn’t look all that apologetic as she turns away from the table. “I’m getting another drink.”

Kara looks to Winn as if for answers, but he just shrugs at them with an exaggerated look of ignorance on his face before picking his beer up and turning to James, muttering something that Lena’s sure Kara could hear if she wanted to. But Kara’s turning back to Lena.

“Anything happen to Alex while I was gone?” Kara asks, following the retreating form of her sister with critical eyes.

Lena considers the questions, but imagines Alex’s ire is largely derived from worry over her sister
all day. “She spent most of the day worried about you,” Lena answers and thinks of Maggie’s
impromptu visit to the DEO. Some of Alex’s edginess no doubt is also coming from that.

Kara chews at her bottom lip. “Do you think she’s actually really mad at me for going through the
portal?”

Lena quirks a brow at Kara. “She wouldn’t be the only one, if that were the case.”

A startled look crosses Kara’s face before she shuffles the expression into something more
chagrined. “You’re mad?”

“Perhaps mad isn’t the correct word,” Lena starts and she does best not to bow immediately to the
apologetic almost-pout that takes hold of Kara’s face. “But for a person that spends so much time
lecturing me on risky behavior…”

With a slight narrowing of her eyes, Kara huffs a little. “I don’t know how many times I need to
explain the difference between invulnerable superhero,” Kara says in a hush, jerking a thumb at
herself. “And very vulnerable human to you.”

“Remind me again just how invulnerable you were on Maaldoria,” Lena says with a pointed raise
of her eyebrows.

“Well I didn’t know I was going to be powerless when I jumped through the-,” Kara argues and
then seems to recognize the mistake in her line of logic the minute Lena’s eyebrows rise.

“I don’t want to fight about this,” Kara adds, but from the way her chin lifts Lena thinks maybe she
actually does.

“We’re not fighting,” Lena counters. “I’m merely pointing out your hypocrisy.”

“Lena,” Kara sighs, looking exhausted for the first time since she got her powers back. Lena takes
pity on her and runs her palm down Kara’s back soothingly. Kara melts a little bit, grabbing again
for Lena’s hand and playing with her fingers.

“Alex might also be upset because she broke up with Maggie earlier this afternoon.”

It takes a second for Kara to compute what she’s saying, but when she does her spine straightens
abruptly and a shocked expression takes hold of her face. “She what?!”

Lena hums, picks up her martini glass from the table and takes a prim sip of it. “You’ll have to ask
her as to why, but as far as I know, Alex called it off before we went to rescue you.”

Kara’s jaw is dropped in an incredulous expression for a good few seconds before she looks up
again at her sister and shakes her head disbelievingly. “She didn’t.”

“She did,” Lena says. “And I have to imagine it’s because Alex copes with high emotional stress
about as effectively as I do.”

That brings Kara’s gaze back to Lena quickly and she gives her a startled look until she notices the
teasing smile playing on Lena’s lips. “Funny,” she deadpans with a scrunch of her nose.

Lena merely sips at her drink and shrugs.

“I’m going to go talk to her,” Kara says, glancing to where Alex is leaning up against the bar
talking to one of the DEO agents sitting there.
“Okay,” Lena says. “Probably a good idea.”

Kara lets out a noisy exhale before puffing her chest out a little as if bracing for something. With a quick barely-there kiss to Lena’s cheek she, strides away towards Alex.

In seconds, the stool next to Lena is occupied by a grinning Mon-El who taps his beer bottle against the glass in Lena’s hand. Her grip tightens on the drink in an effort to stop it from spilling and she sends him a startled look that he seems to ignore. Kara’s managed to push their stools close enough together that being this close to him is jarring and not particularly welcome.

“So I think I’m going to tell her tonight,” he says, with no preamble and Lena sets her drink down, turns a little towards him while moving her stool away. Out of the corner of her eye she catches Winn and James arguing over something, Winn gesticulating animatedly while James watches with his arms crossed.

“You’ve lost me,” she tells Mon-El. “Tell who what?”

It occurs to her before he even answers what they’re talking about and a feeling of dread crawls up her spine.

“Kara,” he says sagely before taking a long pull of his beer. “I’m going to tell her tonight.”

She resists the urge to roll her eyes, but only just barely and manages a practiced smile. “I’m happy for you,” she says even though she knows she’s setting him up for failure. She considers for a moment letting him know this, but decides he’s likely obtuse enough to ignore her warnings regardless. Something from their previous discussion comes nagging back into her brain suddenly and she adds, “Still unconcerned with the fact that she’s mated?”

Mon-El shrugs, leans his elbows on the table and takes another sip of his beer. “I figure at this point her mate either died on Krypton or just...doesn’t want her.” He pauses for a moment and Lena fights the uncomfortable turn of her stomach. “But that’s not what I’m talking about telling her.”

“What –” Lena stops in the middle of reaching for her drink again as she starts to think maybe the alcohol is affecting her more than she realizes. “I’m not sure what you’re referring to.”

“I want to be a hero,” Mon-El says with this proud little smirk on his face. “Like Kara.”

Lena blinks, isn’t sure why he felt the need to come to her of all people with this information, but tries to remain polite. “Good for you.”

“You should have seen her on Maaldoria,” he says in an awed kind of tone. “She was awesome.”

Lena doesn’t doubt it. Kara had always seemed amazing to her and the past few months have only solidified it in Lena’s mind. “I’m sure.”

“I mean there she was, no powers, no backup, no plan, and she just stood up between a bunch of strangers and a gun that could have easily killed her like it was nothing. They hit her a few times with some serious electricity and she still protected everyone.” Mon-El tells her this like he’s reporting something benign and not letting Lena know just how close she came to losing Kara forever. It feels like ice is pumping through her veins, and she imagines that Kara can probably pick up her rapid heartbeat.

“She’s amazing like that,” Lena manages to get out in an even tone, even though her hand feels like it might start shaking at any moment. She crosses her arms and digs her fingers into her biceps just
to stay steady.

Mon-El hums appreciatively and Lena’s not thrilled with how that sounds, but he seems oblivious to the exasperated look on her face. “Plus, I think working with her will definitely go a long way in proving myself worthy.”

Lena arches a brow. “Worthy?”

He smiles. “Of mating?”

“Excuse me,” she says no longer willing to engage in this line of conversation with him. She stands up with a soft clearing of her throat. “I need to use the facilities.”

“Of course,” Mon-El says with another grin and a saluting gesture with his beer bottle. Lena swallows a sigh and walks away.

As she rounds the corner to the bathrooms, the familiar sound of the Danvers sisters arguing halts her in her tracks.

“You went through the portal without so much as a second thought!” Alex is saying and Lena doesn’t have to see the two of them to visualize their faces - the glare on Alex’s face and the stubborn indignation on Kara’s.

“I told Mon-El to tell you what I did. It’s not my fault that he has terrible decision-making skills.”

“You should have called me yourself,” Alex argues.

“Why don’t we talk about the fact that you brought Lena to space!” Kara says, her voice rising in pitch.

“Oh don’t try to change the subject-”

“I’m not changing the subject. I’m asking you why on earth you thought it was okay to bring my - my - to bring Lena to space. Especially after you lectured me not weeks ago about bringing a civilian to another universe.”

“It’s Lena,” Alex retorts and Lena barely suppresses the laugh that wants to come out at that, her eyes darting to the ceiling as she covers her mouth.

“Oh, so that’s a good enough reasoning when you use it, but when I-”

“I use it for different reasons than you do, Kara and-”

“She didn’t need to know I was in trouble, Alex. Everything was under control and all you did was freak her out and then put her in a dangerous situation.”

“Oh, I’m sure Lena would just love to know you wanted me to keep her in the dark about things that affect you. I don’t know if you’re aware of this but typically you tell one’s.”

Considering she’s now become the subject of this argument, Lena feels entitled to interrupt them and turns the corner with a clearing of her throat loud enough to startle both sisters.

Kara’s eyes go wide at being caught, but Alex just rolls her own, shoulders sagging in exasperation.

“Hi,” Lena says simply, looking at them both with amusement playing at her lips. “Don’t mind me.
I’m just trying to use the restroom.”

Lena points beyond them and she sees a blush start to dust Kara’s cheeks even as Alex continues to glare at both of them.

As she squeezes past them and towards the door at the end of the hallway, brushing against Kara’s front as she does, she barely makes out a snapping of fingers and Alex’s hissed, “Focus, Kara.”

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The explosion can be heard all the way across campus and even in the small enclosed study room in the library, Lena feels the walls rattle. Grabbing her laptop and notebook before it goes skittering across the table, Lena freezes, waits to see if anything will follow and wonders if it’s possible to have earthquakes this far inland.

Long seconds pass before another boom can be heard reverberate against the walls. This one muted, but still loud and Lena grabs her cell phone out of her bag.

Just as she’s unlocking her phone, a group of students go running down the hallway past her study room and she stands quickly to open the door. It lets in a sound of muted panic and she catches the next person that comes jogging towards her.

“What happened?”

He doesn’t stop much, but turns to answer. “Explosion in Newland,” he says, slightly out of breath. “Chem labs I think.”

The information drops like a weight in her stomach. Newland Science Hall. Kara’s there right now, working on a project with her lab group.

Abandoning her stuff, Lena tears out of the room and follows the stream of students already heading towards the building in question.

It’s chaotic.

The sound of the fire alarms can be heard blaring out of broken windows and there’s shattered glass all over the ground. The building is still standing, but Lena can smell the scent of something burning, chemical and acrid in her nose.

There’s only one thought in the forefront of her mind and she doesn’t hesitate in running towards the building entrance knowing Kara’s likely still inside. The only thing that stops her is a hand latching onto her arm and pulling her to a halt so abruptly her heart leaps up into her throat.

“Hey, hey,” the familiar voice of Kara’s friend Aaron beats through the chaos in her mind. “You can’t go in there, Lena. It’s not safe.”

It takes a second for her to react, but when she does it’s to pull her arm so violently out of his hold that he has no choice but to let her go. Kara’s inside and Lena doesn’t really care what anyone has to say about what she can and cannot be doing right now. Without saying anything to him, she makes as if to leave again, but his words stop her.

“She’s not in there,” he tells her softly and she looks back at him to see his hand outstretched, finger pointing to the side where a group of people has congregated.

Pushing people aside with little regard for how aggressive she’s being, Lena makes her way
through the crowd until she finally finds what she’s looking for.

Kara is kneeling next to another person Lena doesn’t recognize, holding a small cloth to the girl’s head. The fabric is bright red with blood and Lena does a quick visual rundown of her girlfriend. It’s impossible, as far as Lena knows, for Kara to bleed, but she can’t help but needing to reassure herself regardless. Her heart feels like it’s going to pound out of her chest with anxiety and she takes long purposeful steps towards Kara.

A few feet away, Kara’s head cocks suddenly, one side tilting upward, and then she’s standing, instructing the girl to keep pressing the cloth to her wound in a soft murmur.

Lena doesn’t stop. There’s soot as if from a fire on Kara’s cheek and her hair is in complete disarray. The fabric of Kara’s jeans is ripped at her knees and Lena knows Kara is invulnerable, unbreakable, made of steel, but none of that knowing stops the shake in her hands.

Kara takes a step away from the group, turning around with her arms open and Lena walks right into them, arms wrapping around Kara’s neck. It isn’t until Kara’s arms wind around her waist and she gets picked up into Kara’s body that she relaxes, blowing out a low breath.

“I’m okay,” Kara says softly, strong hands spreading out over Lena’s back. “I’m okay.”

Lena just pushes her face into the crook of Kara’s neck and closes her eyes, blocks out the sounds of panic and confusion in the crowd around them for a long moment, trying to fight back the tears crowding her eyes. “What happened?” Her voice is no more than a whisper into the skin under Kara’s jaw, but she knows her girlfriend can hear her.

“I don’t know,” Kara says. “I think I was closest to the explosion, though. I should probably get away from here before someone notices. I think this was your shirt, too, so I’m sorry about that and I promise to-”

“Kara,” Lena whispers, and Kara’s arms tighten around her, pulling her somehow closer. She thinks she’s being moved further away from the insistent sounds of the crowd, but it’s hard to keep track as she tries to listen to Kara’s breathing and her heartbeat.

“You could have died,” Lena whispers, and she hears ambulances suddenly. This hug has probably gone on too long to be normal, but she can’t quite extricate herself from Kara’s arms. She needs this. She needs to know Kara is okay.

“I really couldn’t have,” Kara says, and she laughs a little. “I think - I think some other people might have if I hadn’t been so close to it, though.”

“That isn’t better,” Lena says, suddenly, rearing back to glare at her girlfriend, who looks bewildered at the anger being directed at her.

“Lena,” Kara says, her hands coming up to wipe at Lena’s face.

“If you - if you had been human, you would have died,” Lena whispers, and Kara’s face is almost impassive for a moment, before it softens. “I can’t do that.”

“You can’t die?” Kara asks, like she’s trying to make a joke. It makes Lena angry, that Kara
would joke when Lena’s terrified, when Lena had thought - for one second of her life - that Kara Danvers was dead and wasn’t coming back to her.

“No, you can’t die,” Lena says, shoving a little at her girlfriend’s shoulders. “I can’t live with you being dead. It’s not acceptable.”

“I’m not dead,” Kara says. “I’m right here, Lena. I’m not going to go anywhere. I promise. I love you. Please calm down.”

She tries to let Kara help her, but she doesn’t start to feel okay for a few hours, after Kara’s ditched her burnt clothes, showered, and held Lena through four documentaries. Even when Kara falls asleep later that night, Lena’s head presses as close as she can to listen to Kara’s heart beat.

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When they leave together and walk out of the bar, it feels so natural that Lena doesn’t hesitate in allowing Kara to fly them home when she asks. Perhaps it’s the tequila or the gin still settling in her system, but she feels drowsy and content when Kara picks her up. The adrenaline of the day has washed through her system and exhaustion has started to take its place. The only thing she can think of doing is setting her head on Kara’s shoulder and falling asleep to the steady sound of her heartbeat.

After everything that’s happened, Lena dreads the idea of putting distance between them now and her fingers itch to keep Kara in touching distance as a constant reassurance she’s alive and well. When they get to Lena’s apartment and Kara escorts her inside, she tries to think of a way of asking Kara to stay without sounding desperate.

Things are still just uncertain enough that Lena’s not sure how to act. As a girlfriend she’d merely tug Kara further into the apartment and push her into bed. As a friend she could ask Kara to stay the night without it sounding suggestive.

As something in between, Lena has no idea what to do.

“Would you like a drink?” Lena offers as she hangs her jacket up in the hall closet and strides towards the kitchen. Kara follows her and idles in the entryway.

“I’m okay,” Kara says, sounding subdued and tired.

“Food?” Lena replies, though as she runs through a mental list of what might be in her kitchen she thinks perhaps takeout might be their only option. “We missed dinner, after all.”

Kara seems to react to that, managing to straighten up and cringe at the same time. She takes a step into the kitchen towards Lena. “I’m really sorry about that by the way,” she says and a look of abject worry passes over her face.

“For missing dinner?” Lena asks with a little laugh, not understanding why Kara looks so concerned suddenly.

“Yes.”

“Kara,” she says stepping forward until she can reach out and grab Kara’s hand. “You needn’t apologize. I think you had a pretty good reason.”

“I just-” Kara hesitates, twists their fingers together nervously and Lena tracks the motion with confusion swirling in her head. “I was really looking forward to it and I’m sorry I screwed it up by
getting stranded on some planet.”

“I was looking forward to it too,” Lena says with a genuine smile, studying Kara in an attempt to read whatever Kara’s hiding between the words. “It’s not entirely your fault that we had to miss it.”

“It’s not as if anyone forced me through that portal,” Kara argues. “Not for lack of trying, I suppose.”

Lena laughs a little if only because she can’t understand the hesitant look on Kara’s face. “Kara, I cancelled on you nearly five times because work got in the way. Surely you were due a rain check as well.”

“That feels different.”

Shrugging, Lena squeezes Kara’s hand to stop her fingers from fidgeting and smiles. “It’s not.”

There’s a skeptical crease to Kara’s brow when she looks to Lena. “Are you sure?”

“Sure I’m sure,” she says. “Maybe we should just set a date for four different dinners as contingency plans. That way we always have a backup date.”

There’s surprise in the way Kara’s face shifts that Lena’s not sure how to decipher. “So you want to reschedule?”

Maybe she’s had more to drink than she realized. It’s the only thing that could account for how much trouble she’s having following this conversation. “Why wouldn’t I want to reschedule?”

“I just wasn’t sure if what happened made you rethink your position,” Kara answers softly. And after a moment of unpacking that, Lena figures it out.

“You’re afraid I’m going to change my mind,” Lena says in a quiet voice, realization making her tone go breathy around the edges. “Kara.”

“I mean, I missed our date because I jumped through a portal without knowing where it would take me and I did that because I’m Supergirl and that’s my job now and that’s obviously a little different than college and maybe you don’t want to-”

The words start to ramble together as they continue to tumble out of Kara’s mouth and Lena reaches up to stop her with a finger at her lips. “Kara, stop.”

Kara obeys, closing her mouth with a soft click.

“We’ve spent all that time talking about me and my feelings,” Lena says softly, kicking herself for not realizing something as simple as this earlier. “We haven’t really talked about yours.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why are you afraid I’m going to change my mind?” Lena asks and she thinks of her conversation with Alex at the DEO just hours ago.

“We’re different people,” Kara says but the words sound forced and awkward. “You kept telling me that and I realized that if anyone is different here it’s me. It’s not like you fell in love with Supergirl all those years ago or signed up for all the baggage she brings with her.”

Lena thinks on that for a moment watches Kara’s face carefully. “Why do you refer to Supergirl in
the third person?”

Kara shrugs. “That’s how it feels sometimes.”

It brings back a memory of Kara in her kitchen months ago as she told Lena about her mother and Cadmus. The symbol on Kara’s chest had felt like a beacon at the time, blinding Lena and making it hard to focus. The image of Kara’s face falling when Lena sent her from the room to change spikes a cold feeling of guilt in Lena’s chest.

“You’re just as much Supergirl as you are Kara Danvers,” Lena tells her. “Or Kara Zor-El for that matter. I fell in love with all of them.” Lena pauses, realizes there’s no point in hiding a truth that’s already been spoken between them. “I’m still in love with all of them.”

“My life is way more complicated than it was in college,” Kara says in a whisper and Lena tries not to laugh.

“Kara, darling,” she says in as soothing a tone as she can manage. “No one’s life is as easy as it was in college. Mine certainly isn’t.”

“If you could walk away then,” Kara starts in this small voice that makes Lena’s throat burn with the threat of tears. “I don’t see what would stop you now.”

It takes a second before Lena feels like she can speak without breaking the dam holding the sudden wave of tears back. “Walking away wasn’t easy for me back then,” she says and forces herself not to remember the way Kara’s face had looked all those years ago. “It was brutal and the only thing that kept me going was a stubborn belief that I was doing the right thing.”

Kara nods, a sad smile teasing her lips that makes Lena want to pull her close. But this needs to get said before Lena loses the moment.

“I don’t want to say I regret it,” Lena continues carefully. “I regret that I made decisions based on things that didn’t matter to me as much as us. But you’re the one that always says each moment is a bridge to the next. Things happen for a reason, right?”

“Right,” Kara breathes and her smile shifts a little bit into something warmer than before.

“All that time we spent apart - I have to believe it happened for a reason. Maybe part of that reason is so that I could stand here in front of you and say with confidence that I don’t want to walk away from this again. Not without fighting for it first.”

Lena takes a deep breath, smiles and feels the rims of her eyes fill just a little. “I’m probably going to make at minimum thirteen more mistakes when it comes to us.”

Kara laughs suddenly, relaxing the tension. “Lena Luthor admitting she makes mistakes all the time?”

“Don’t be smug,” Lena warns at the growing smirk. “And I said thirteen mistakes.”

“That’s oddly specific.”

“As a scientist, I pride myself on accuracy,” Lena says, grateful for the way Kara’s eyes have softened from earlier.

“Nerd,” Kara teases and Lena rolls her eyes, shoves Kara with enough force that Kara immediately reacts to it with an exaggerated sway that makes Lena laugh.
“After all that we’ve been through,” Lena says, still smiling, but growing serious once more. “I’d be crazy not to give this a shot again. I need you to believe me that I’m not going to change my mind about that.”

Kara sighs, but she nods, adjusting her glasses with a quiet chuckle. “I believe you.”

“Okay,” Lena says and she reaches out to cup Kara’s cheeks, bringing their eyes into contact. “Please know that I love you. Regardless of anything else.”

Kara’s expression is serious then and her hands reach out to grip Lena’s hips. “I know.”

“Good,” Lena says and with a final smile she lets Kara go to step away. “Now that that’s settled do you want that drink? I think I might have some food in here, but we can always order from Gordo’s down the block.”

They step deeper into the kitchen and Lena opens her cabinets, surveying what’s inside.

“Is Gordo’s the place with the red velvet cheesecake?”

“Probably,” Lena replies, shutting her cabinet with a look of distaste for its barren innards. She fishes in the bag she’s left on the counter and pulls her phone out. “Do you want me to order some?”

“I’ll do it,” Kara says immediately reaching for Lena’s phone and she knows that means they’re going to end up with far more takeout than they actually need.

“Kara, don’t over order,” Lena warns and Kara scoffs.

“I have never in my entire life over ordered,” she says with a look of feigned indignation that makes Lena laugh.

The moment feels easy and warm in a way that’s so comforting after all the events of the day. Lena wants to sink into and live there forever, the rest of the world blocked out indefinitely. Kara is looking at her expectantly like she can trace where Lena’s thoughts have gone.

It strikes Lena for the hundredth time that day how close she was to losing Kara forever.

“You okay?” Kara asks after a moment of silence and Lena nods, smiling tightly.

She rounds the counter and reaches out to grab Kara’s wrist, palm sliding over the solid feel of Kara’s bracelet.

“I’m really glad you’re here,” she says softly and without overthinking it presses a soft but significant kiss on Kara’s lips. Kara returns it, slipping closer and pulling Lena in, lifting her up off the ground just the littlest bit. It centers Lena, pulls her away from the anxieties that have been plaguing her all day.

Kara is the one who pulls away, a smile stretching across her face as she raises Lena’s phone up.

“I love you,” Kara says, pressing a kiss to Lena’s forehead. “But I’m starving. Please tell me you want cheesecake.”

Lena rolls her eyes, knowing she’s going to have a fridge full of takeout by the end of the night.

Later, after she takes delicate bites of a slice of cheesecake, and Kara’s managed to eat four entire pieces, Kara mumbles something about having to go. The clock is hovering around one by now,
but Lena still feels shaky at the thought of Kara being away from her.

“Just stay,” Lena says, and Kara, who’s halfway off Lena’s couch, blinks at her. “I know we still need to sort some stuff out, but I - I don’t want to be away from you, right now. So just stay, if you want to.”

“I - uh, I, sure,” Kara starts, looking a little shocked at the offer. She clears her throat, manages a smile. “Yeah, okay I want to.”

So Lena hands over some sweats and a t-shirt and packs up what’s left of their Gordo’s order and slips it into her fridge.

When she finally makes it into her bedroom, Kara is playing with the Imperiex chess set Lena had set up on her dresser, humming down at the pieces with a look of intent focus that charms Lena to the core.

“When are you going to teach me how to play?” Lena asks, letting her hair down from her bun, feeling Kara’s eyes latch to her as she reaches in her dresser for her sleep clothes. Kara makes another humming noise.

“Probably ten years from now after we have our date,” Kara wryly and with a short laugh. Lena glares over at her, but is happy to see the insecurities of earlier seem to have evolved into teasing. She shakes her head a little before slipping into the bathroom and changing quickly. When she comes back out, Kara’s still in the midst of her game, but she’s moved it to the bed, sitting up against the headboard and staring down at the holographic pieces.

Lena slides into the bed next to her, but Kara barely looks over, just studies her game and Lena props her elbow into the mattress to watch as the game pieces hover in the air over the board. Before she gets a chance to ask for the strategy or even the most basic rules, Kara is moving one piece across the board quickly, and the game board begins shooting off holographic confetti with a large display that says she’s won.

“Congratulations,” Lena says, laughing as Kara huffs and turns the board off, moving it back to Lena’s dresser and flopping back into the bed.

“That was just the AI,” Kara tells her and manages to look completely petulant about it. “I wanted to see how difficult Winn programed it.”

“Clearly no match for you,” Lena says, sliding further onto her pillow as Kara follows, rearranging the blankets until they’re both settled.

“Well sure. Beating a computer is one thing,” Kara replies. “It’s not really a challenge.”

“Maybe you can get Mon-El to play you,” Lena says. Kara groans, glaring up at Lena as she leans over to turn out the light. She can’t see Kara’s face particularly well in the darkness, but as her sight adjusts she can just make the indignation cutting lines around Kara’s eyes.

“A Daxamite playing Imperiex chess,” Kara scoffs out in a tone that conveys just how ridiculous that notion apparently is. “Sure. When Lumirs fly.”

Lena laughs, her brow knitting. “What’s a Lumir?”

“Something that doesn’t fly,” Kara replies promptly. “Obviously.”

“Obviously.”
Kara shifts and Lena tries not to jump when their legs brush against each other. “Did I mention that Mon-El told me tonight that he wants to be a hero? He like wants me to start training him.”

“I can’t imagine why,” Lena deadpans, really not interested in talking about Mon-El of all people while she’s in bed with Kara.

Kara stills. “What does that mean?”

Lena purses her lips and decides she feels no fidelity to Mon-El’s secrets, if his crush could even be considered one. “Well, he likes you, Kara. I’d think that would have something to do with it.”

Kara makes a strangled noise, like the idea is both surprising and disturbing to her.

“He does not,” Kara whispers, and Lena laughs at the expression that’s contorted Kara’s face, visible even in the darkness of the bedroom.

“Is it a Daxamite cultural tradition to kiss people you don’t like?”

“He had a fever,” Kara retorts. “And I already confronted him about it. He doesn’t like me.”

“How are you still so oblivious about stuff like this?” Lena asks but she can’t help the laughter that keeps coming out of her, charmed by the innocent bewilderment on Kara’s face.

Kara doesn’t answer for a moment, just glares at Lena through the darkness before her eyes grow suddenly wide. “Rao I totally forgot,” she breathes.

“Forgot what?”

Kara affects a smug kind of look. “Speaking of obliviousness, guess who was on Maaldoria?”

Lena jerks back a little, surprised at the sudden turn in conversation. “Who?”

“Your ex-girlfriend,” Kara answers with a haughty lift of her chin. It only confuses Lena more until Kara clarifies, “Veronica.”

It takes Lena a second to realize what Kara’s saying but when she does she narrows her eyes and shoves Kara’s shoulder. “How many ways do I have to tell you that Roulette and I never so much as dated before you understand?” Lena mutters and Kara grabs at the hand Lena’s used to push at Kara’s body, tangling their fingers together between them.

Kara hums in a disbelieving tone that makes Lena want to smack her again, but she keeps talking before Lena has the chance. “She was running the operation on Maaldoria with the Dominators,” Kara says. “I knew she was the worst, but human trafficking is really a new low.”

“I wish I could say I was surprised,” Lena says wryly and Kara shrugs a shoulder, shifts a little closer on the bed.

“She’s trapped there for now at least. I don’t feel bad about it,” Kara says looking almost guilty for saying that. “I don’t blame her for hitting on you all the time, but I do blame her for being a generally terrible person.”

A comfortable silence stretches between them and Lena yawns, eyes fluttering closed when Kara’s feet brush her shins.

“Mon-El said you were very brave over there,” Lena whispers, clinging to the feeling of Kara so close now that their fronts are almost touching.
“Not really,” Kara says dismissively and Lena keeps her eyes open, studies Kara’s face in the dim moonlight illuminating the room.

“He said you stood in front of the group and let them electrocute you,” Lena points out and she untangles her fingers from Kara’s to reach out and brush away a strand of hair from Kara’s temple. It makes Kara hum a little and shift impossibly closer, her eyes fluttering on the verge of shutting completely.

“Yeah, that didn’t feel great,” Kara answers easily and she licks her lips in a sleepy motion. “But I couldn’t let them hurt the others.”

It burns through Lena, suddenly, the heady mix of fear and love that’s always blended through her as she’s watched Supergirl. “Always the hero,” Lena murmurs and Kara’s hand drifts to Lena’s hips, sits there warmly over the fabric of her pajamas.

“Just doing my job,” Kara jokes but Lena knows it’s so much more than that.

The fear threatens to take over once again, but Lena steadies herself with the feel of Kara so close at hand.

“Thanks for staying,” Lena whispers, and Kara smiles back.

“Thanks for letting me.”

When Lena finally drifts off to sleep it’s with her head on Kara’s shoulder, her arm thrown across Kara’s body and wrapping around her ribs. It feels comfortable and content and Lena truly relaxes for the first time in what feels like weeks.
Chapter 11

Lena wakes up to an empty bed and cold sheets. None of that is unusual, but she’s pretty sure she didn’t dream Kara falling asleep next to her last night.

A clamoring sound in her kitchen answers her confusion and when she walks out of her bedroom it’s to the sight of Kara in her Supergirl suit hovering over a stove Lena rarely uses.

“Hey!” Kara greets when she notices Lena’s presence. Dropping a spatula onto the counter with a clang, Kara strides over to her and presses a warm kiss to her cheek. “Good morning.”

“Morning,” Lena greets, squinting a little at the bright stream of sunlight coming through a far window. She decides to decipher whatever Kara is doing after she makes coffee and with somewhat robotic movements she walks over to her fridge to pull out a can of ground beans.

“I got you some already,” Kara tells her just as she’s pulling the coffee out and when she turns Kara’s holding a styrofoam cup with a Noonan’s logo on the side. Lena regards it for a long moment before Kara shakes it a bit. “I kept it warm,” Kara adds, gesturing towards her eyes with her free hand.

With a small laugh, Lena deposits the coffee grounds back in the fridge and reaches out to take the cup from the smiling superhero in her kitchen.

“You’re up early,” she comments, taking a sip and swallowing a sigh of relief that Kara didn’t get her some insanely sugary coffee drink.

“Early morning robbery in the warehouse district,” Kara answers, returning to whatever she has cooking on the stove. Pancakes, Lena realizes, as she peers over.

“You’re cooking?” Lena sips more at her coffee, trying to get her brain to boot up, and slides onto a stool at her kitchen island.

Kara looks over her shoulder with a wide grin that Lena finds herself returning. “You still like pancakes, right?”

Lena hasn’t had pancakes in ages and her mouth waters at the thought of having them now. Breakfast isn’t something she partakes in very often apart from her daily cup of coffee. “I do,” she murmurs, taking another sip of her drink. The warmth of it floods her chest and she spends a quiet moment watching Kara fiddle with her stove, flipping a pancake in a small pan.

“You didn’t have to make me breakfast,” Lena comments after a few comfortable moments, she reaches over towards a laptop sitting out on the island and flips it open.

Kara shrugs, slides a stack of pancakes onto a plate and sets it down next to Lena with a smile. “I ate all the cheesecake from last night which you paid for and then you let me stay the night, so it’s only fair.”

Fingers hovering over her keyboard, Lena sends a startled look at Kara. “You ate the leftover cheesecake already?”

The expression on Kara’s face is somewhere between nonchalance and sheepish. “Yes?”

It’s then that she notices the vase of tulips sitting on the edge of the counter basked in early
morning sunlight and she looks at them quizzically for a moment. “Did you buy flowers?”

Kara glances over to the arrangement and Lena can make out the hint of a blush creeping into Kara’s cheeks. “They’re pretty, right?”

For all the cold anxiety of the night before, Lena feels nothing but warmth in the moment and she sips at her coffee some more, humming against the rim. “Very,” she murmurs and Kara grins. “What’s the occasion?”

Kara shrugs, looks honest when she answers. “Just having a good day.”

Arching an eyebrow at the digital clock on her microwave that reads 6:13, Lena laughs. “Hasn’t been much of a day yet,” she comments.

Unconcerned, Kara just shrugs again, pours pancake batter into a pan. “Still good.”

The morning is spent with Supergirl idling in her kitchen making stack upon stack of pancakes while Lena sips coffee and checks her e-mail. It’s a new experience, but not uncomfortable and Lena can’t help but think it’s pretty close to perfect.

She tries to ignore the other feeling deep in the recesses of her mind that the feeling is nothing more than fleeting.

When her brain has finally fully turned on and she knows she needs to start getting ready lest she’s late for work, she gives Kara an apologetic smile and a soft kiss to her cheek. “I need to head into the office. Thank you for the pancakes.”

“Anytime,” Kara replies with a happy set to her eyes. “I have to get going anyway. Gotta report to Alex really quick and then head into CatCo,” Kara says jerking a thumb towards Lena’s balcony. Idly Lena wonders if anyone has noticed the frequency with which Supergirl seems to show up at her apartment.

“Try not to jump through any space portals today,” Lena teases with a squeeze to Kara’s forearm.

“I don’t know, I might find one to jump through just to avoid talking to my boss,” Kara grumbles and Lena’s brow quirks.

“What did Snapper do now?”

Kara shrugs, looking annoyed more than anything. “He wasn’t exactly thrilled that I went off on the story about the missing girls,” Kara says. “Or that I promised Izzy’s mother we’d find her.”

“But you did find her.”

“Sure,” Kara says, but she rolls her eyes. “He’s just not the most agreeable person on the planet.”

“I haven’t found many journalists who are,” Lena comments which only makes Kara make an exaggerated show of indignation.

“I’m perfectly agreeable,” she says, hands on her hips and chest pushing up just slightly. The morning sunlight falls across the red symbol on her chest and Lena laughs.

“Of course, darling. My apologies.”

Kara’s posture relaxes a bit at that and she chuckles. Their eyes lock for a long heavy moment and Lena feels a blush start to form in her cheeks at the unmasked affection in Kara’s expression.
“Anyway,” Lena says with a soft clearing of her throat. “I really do have to get ready.”

“Right,” Kara replies with a quick nod.

Lena turns away and makes it to the corner leading towards the back hallway when Kara calls out towards her. “Lena?”

“Yes?” Lena asks, halfway around the corner and turning to quirk an eyebrow towards Kara in question.

Kara shifts a bit on her feet, lifts her chin before asking. “Dinner this week?”

A spark of anticipation runs up her spine, but she manages not to react to it. Instead, she just runs through her calendar in her head for a moment before answering. “Friday?”

Kara nods, looks so obviously like she’s trying not to smile and shrugs with such exaggerated indifference that Lena laughs. “Cool, cool. Friday. Sounds good.”

“Have a good day, Kara,” Lena says pointedly and she leaves her - her - she leaves Kara in her living room and heads for her shower.

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The week drags on.

It’s filled with a constant march of lawyers interspersed with the occasional meeting with her PR team. On top of that there are no less than four projects behind schedule and Lena hasn’t even started to prepare for her budget meeting Thursday.

Her Tuesday evening is spent down in the R&D labs slogging through some of the more stalled projects. Sometime long after her stomach has protested the fact that she’s forgotten to eat dinner, Lana stops by her workstation with a cup of coffee and a small paper bag.

“Danish?” Lana offers and Lena sits back with a smile, rolling her head around her neck against the stiffness that’s settled there.

“Only if we’re sharing,” Lena replies and she picks up the mug of coffee Lana’s set down and takes a careful sip.

“Of course,” Lana says with an easy grin, settling on a stool next to Lena and observing the program Lena has running on her laptop. “Is that Project Ferris?”

Lena hums an affirmative and leans back, allowing Lana a better view of the screen as she continues to sip at her coffee.

“Do you mind if I…?” Lana gestures towards the laptop.

“By all means,” Lena replies, scooting a bit to give Lana room and allowing the other woman to pull the laptop towards her.

Lana starts typing away at the program and Lena watches, sipping at her drink silently until Lana speaks again. “So how did it go?”

“How did what go?”

Lana looks over a minute, never pausing in her typing and arches a brow. “With the ex. Did you
“figure things out?”

“Oh,” Lena says, laughing softly. "I think so."

"And?"

“And it went fine I suppose,” Lena shrugs a shoulder. "Sort of."

Lana chuckles. “Sort of?”

“Jury is still out,” is all Lena can think to say. At the very least her relationship with Kara seems to be on some kind of discernable path now that their date hovers on the horizon, but everything still feels fragile. “We have a...we’re having dinner Friday.”

“That’s good,” Lana says, eyebrows raising encouragingly.

“We’ll see,” Lena replies with a shrug of her shoulder, but a smile threatens to bloom across her mouth at just the thought of going on a date with Kara. She feels eighteen again and it’s a struggle to keep her expression workplace appropriate.

“I can’t imagine that can be easy with everything else going on in your life,” Lana replies, eyes on the laptop. Lena watches the tweaks Lana is making with some interest, but her lips purse at the comment.

“Everything else meaning…?”

Lana’s fingers falter over the keyboard for a second before she responds with a quick look towards Lena. “I just meant with everything happening with the company, your mother, the fact that you seem to have acquired Supergirl as a new bodyguard.”

Lena laughs at the last bit and almost adds that it’s not really a new addition to her life, but instead just picks her coffee back up and takes a pointed sip of it. “Frankly, I have a lifetime’s worth of experience dealing with my mother and this company is doing fine.”

“I didn’t mean any offense,” Lana says, a flicker of worry in the corners of her eyes.

Lena manages a warm reassuring smile and shakes her head. “It’s fine, Lana. I appreciate the concern.”

“If you ever need to talk…,” Lana offers and Lena takes a breath, keeps the smile on her face from wavering.

“Thank you,” Lena says, but she keeps her eyes pointedly on the laptop and scoots back towards her desk in an effort to end the direction of the conversation. “That’s an interesting addition to the code.”

With a lingering look towards Lena, Lana nods and pushes the laptop back towards Lena as she begins to explain her idea. “It should help with that little glitch with the electroluminescence in the panels. I saw a talk at Wayne Research Institute about it last year, but they had no idea how to get the light waves to work. It was purely theory.”

“We’re a bit past theory here,” Lena comments and Lana glances over her shoulder with a grin.

“Why do you think I work for you and not for Bruce Wayne?”

“A multitude of reasons, I’m sure,” Lena says with a wry laugh. “Would you really want to live in
I think I want a dog Kara texts her as Lena’s leaving L Corp for the day. It’s late and Lena had been close to falling asleep in the back of her car when her phone buzzed with the message. She laughs so abruptly when she reads it that George, her driver, turns a bit in his seat and she muffles the sound with a slight cough.

We’re too busy to take care of a dog Lena types before she realizes what it implies. With a soft shake of her head she deletes the words and tries again. The exhaustion of the day is clearly getting to her. You’re too busy to take care of a dog she corrects.

Kara sends back a series of sadface emojis.

With a soft smile Lena imagines what Kara must look like as she types the message. Maybe start with a plant.

plants here can’t play fetch is all Kara responds with and Lena’s eyes go a little wide.

I don’t even want to know Lena texts back and just as the car is pulling up to her building Kara responds with a quick yes you do and a winking emoji.

It’s not immediately clear what tugs her out of a deep sleep, but she finds herself blinking awake into the darkness of her dorm room and reaching for the girlfriend next to her that’s...not there. Her hand slides across empty sheets for a confusing moment before she sits up and surveys the room. Kara had come over late last night after a disagreement with her roommate and Lena was fairly confident Kara wouldn’t just wake up in the middle of the night and leave.

“Kara?” Lena asks, trying to clear the sleep out of her throat and squinting to make out the shadowed figure of her girlfriend staring out the window across Lena’s dorm. It takes a second calling of her name before Kara reacts, turning her body back towards the bed.

“Sorry,” Kara says softly and Lena sits up in bed, swinging her legs over the side of the mattress and pulling her hair up. “I didn’t mean to wake you up.”

A glance at the digital clock on Lena’s desk informs her it’s just past three in the morning and she turns concerned eyes towards Kara, standing and padding over to where she’s sitting.

“Why aren’t you in bed?”

Kara shrugs, looks back out the window. “Just couldn’t sleep.”

Lena’s brow furrows at that. Kara is one of the deepest sleepers she knows. After a big meal or a long day Kara’s basically lights out seconds after her head hits the pillow. “How come?”

Reaching out to run her fingers through Kara’s hair soothingly, Lena presses in close, smiling at the way Kara leans into the touch, eyes fluttering just a bit in reaction. Kara lets out a sleepy sigh. “No reason.”

The lie is easily detectable, but Lena can’t tell if this is one of those times Kara wants her to push
back or leave her be. She knows there are just some things Kara doesn’t like to talk about. At least not yet. “You sure?”

Kara looks up and Lena can see the exhaustion shadowing around Kara’s eyes giving them a haunted look, visible even in the moonlight streaming through the window. “Bad dreams.”

“About?” Looking back out the window for a moment, Kara’s shoulders seem to tense up as she considers the question. “Sometimes it helps to talk about nightmares. If only to realize how absurd they sound when spoken aloud.”

Kara laughs, but it doesn’t sound amused. Bitter if anything. “That won’t work for these nightmares.”

The tone of Kara’s voice is unfamiliar to Lena. Dark and thick with emotion. Nothing like the casual, easygoing demeanor she has in the light of day. “Kara, what’s wrong?”

Silence stretches for another moment and Lena continues to run her fingers through Kara’s hair, across her forehead and the back of her neck. After a bit the touch seems to do the trick and Kara relaxes slowly. “Sometimes I dream about my planet dying.”

Lena’s fingers still and she moves a little to look into Kara’s face more squarely. “What do you mean?”

Swallowing visibly, Kara’s mouth takes on a grim frown before answering. “I watch it exploding, falling apart around me and I can hear...I can hear...”

“You can hear?” Lena says softly. Kara’s eyes have taken on a distant look like she’s replaying the images in her head and Lena’s chest aches for what Kara must be feeling.

“I can hear my mother’s voice,” Kara whispers, eyes welling with tears that Lena immediately reaches out to swipe away. “I can hear her saying goodbye.”

“Kara,” Lena says, unable to find the kind of words to soothe that kind of pain. She’s not sure those words exist. Instead, she settles for threading her arms around Kara and pulling her into her body in a firm hug, stroking the back of Kara’s head and leaning down to press a warm kiss there.

“It always feels so real.”

“I’m sorry,” Lena murmurs against Kara’s head.

“I couldn’t save them. Couldn’t save anyone.” The words are mumbled into the thick fabric of Lena’s sweatshirt, Kara’s hands clenching around the cotton at the small of her back.

“You were just a child,” Lena says, but Kara’s hands grip tighter to Lena’s sweatshirt, her head shaking back and forth.

“I should have been able to do something,” Kara whispers, her voice shaking.

Lena doesn’t know what she can say to that. So she strokes her fingers through Kara’s hair, lets Kara cry into her sweatshirt.

“Come back to bed,” Lena whispers, eventually, after Kara’s seemed to calm a little, her shoulders shaking less and the tears coming less frequently. She nods against Lena’s chest, and when Lena lies back, Kara’s head places itself squarely over her heart, breathing shakily.
Kara whispers something in Kryptonian that Lena doesn't understand and her hand presses against Lena's ribs as if to assure herself that Lena is there.

"I love you," is all Lena can think to say and Kara's hand pushes more firmly against Lena's body before she repeats the sentiment against Lena's collarbone.

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Wednesday morning, Winn stops by her office with a sheepish smile as he peeks inside her door.

“I wasn’t aware we had an appointment, Mr. Schott,” she says with a teasing smile he laughs at.

“Battlebot buddies don’t need appointments, Lena,” he replies, striding forward across her office floor before flopping into one of her office chairs lazily. After a second he straightens, a look of sudden worry. “Unless you’re super busy and I’m totally messing up your day in which case I’m very sorry and I-”

Lena holds a hand out to stop the sudden flow of words with a chuckle. “It’s fine, Winn. I was just reviewing some-” she trips over the words a moment, looking at the file pulled up on her laptop. “Some documents for my mother’s upcoming trial.”

A look of sympathy crosses Winn’s face and he leans forward a little. “Sorry. That’s never fun.”

Closing her laptop, Lena smiles thinly. “I’ll certainly be happy when it’s over.”

“Yeah that’s how I felt when my father was first arrested,” Winn replies wryly. “And the second time he was arrested actually. Kind of feels like it will never be over.” Lena’s eyebrows raise at that and Winn hastily shakes his head in reaction. “Not to imply it will never be over for you of course. Obviously it will be. You’ll totally send your mother to prison for the rest of her miserable existence-”

“Winn,” Lena interrupts with a soft laugh as Winn’s eyes continue to grow wider the longer he’s allowed to speak.

“I really need to learn how to shut my mouth.”

“Again,” she says with an amused smile. “It’s fine. If anyone gets what all this is like, it’s you. I know what you meant.”

He takes a deep breath, manages to smile back at her. “It’s not exactly a club most people would want to join,” he replies. At the arch of her brow he adds, “The murderous parent club.”

“Ah,” she says with a conceding chuckle. “Well, here we are nonetheless.”

“I’ve always felt family is what you make of it anyway you know? Blood isn’t everything,” Winn says with a heavy expression on his face.

Lena considers that for a moment, thinks over the way her mother enjoyed reminding her that she wasn't a true Luthor, and the way Lex had never once treated her like anything other than his sister. It's true enough. Blood isn't everything. “I suppose you’re right.”

“I am right,” he agrees, a teasing smile growing on his face. “Thanks for noticing.”

Laughing at having her own words from Maaldoria thrown back at her, Lena leans back in her chair.
“So, to what do I owe the pleasure of your visit?” There’s a white paper bag in his hand and she arches a brow, gesturing towards it. “Playing delivery boy for Kara again?”

“Actually,” he says, setting the bag on her desk. “This is from me.”

A spike of surprise crosses her face and she puts on a tentative smile as she reaches for the bag. “From you?”

“It’s not edible. Sorry to disappoint,” he tells her with a grin and she reaches in to pull out a small glass vial full of some kind of broken rock-like material.

She observes the item for a moment before quirking a brow at him. “What is it?”

“It’s an apology present,” he says. “And a thank you present too I guess.” He pushes his lips together for a moment as if considering. “It’s a I’m glad you were with me on that creepy planet where we almost died present.”

The crooked grin on Winn’s face makes her laugh and she turns the vial over in her hands a little. “That doesn’t exactly explain what it is.”

“Rock samples,” he answers, looking pleased. “They brought some back to the DEO after our mission and I managed to,” he gestures vaguely, “procure some for us.”

She looks back at the item in her hand with surprise. “This is from Maaldoria?”

“The one and only,” he says. “I thought you might want to have a souvenir.” He reaches into his messenger bag and pulls out a matching container. “I keep mine on me all the time just so I can rub it in everyone’s faces that I’ve totally been to outer space.”

“That doesn’t seem like something you’re really supposed to be telling people,” Lena says, still eying the shattered rock pieces in her hand.

Winn shrugs, puts his vial back in his bag. “James was totally jealous and that’s really all that I care about.”

It makes Lena laugh again and she sets the vial down on her desk. “Clearly a priority.”

“Clearly,” he parrots with a wide unaffected grin. The exchange warms Lena’s chest for a comfortable moment.

“Thanks, Winn,” she says, voice slow and sure and full of affection. “If I had to get stuck on a hostile planet, I’m glad it was with you.”

Winn’s smile seems to grow impossibly wider and he laughs a little. “I’m happy we’re friends, Lena.”

It startles her for a second, but she manages not to react other than a sincere smile and a nod. “Me too, Winn.”

--

She’s sitting through a meeting with her finance department when a text comes through and she reads it under the cover of the conference room table. It’s a picture of a small bamboo plant sitting on a kitchen counter. A kitchen counter she recognizes immediately. I got a plant is the caption and Lena bites her lip to keep from laughing. She’s getting much more adept at not reacting to Kara’s
texts in the middle of meetings.

Very intelligent to pick a plant that’s nearly impossible to kill Lena replies before setting her phone face down on the table in front of her and making an effort to focus on the meeting. Her CFO stands at the other end of the room in front of a projector displaying the past five years cash flow.

As she walks out of the meeting a half hour later she peeks at Kara’s response. RUDE and manages to walk around the corner towards her office before laughing.

Jess gives her an odd look, but Lena just smiles.

--

Mid-afternoon Thursday Lena gets a picture of what looks like a cardboard cutout of a young girl with its head missing. There’s no accompanying explanation, but a second picture comes next of Mon-El looking sheepish with his hands in the air as if in mid-shrug.

Lena laughs a little. Training going well?

* a work in progress, Kara texts back.

--

do you still like italian?

Lena ponders the text for a moment, leaned up against the cushions of her couch. The evening news plays on the TV across the room. Food?

The eyeroll in Kara’s response is obvious. *of course food. what else would i mean?*

Lena laughs. Considers a response. *Men?*

*gross, Lena. answer the question.*

*Doesn’t everyone like pasta?*

Her phone rings in response and Lena imagines it’s because Kara thinks pasta is too important subject to speak about over text messaging. Lena lets it ring for a few seconds before answering with an amused, “Hello.”

“Are you incapable of giving a straight answer?” Kara asks in lieu of a greeting and Lena laughs.

“Well I’d make a joke about my sexuality, but-”

“*Lena,*” Kara interrupts with clear exasperation.

“Yes, dear?” Lena replies automatically.

A soft clearing of her throat comes across the line. “Do you still like Italian food?”

“Yes,” she answers. “Why do you ask?”

“I’m picking a restaurant,” Kara responds in a tone that clearly conveys the unspoken *obviously.*

“What for?”

A moment of silence before Kara answers. “For our date.”
It’s not that Lena had forgotten about their date at all except...she kind of had. Not forgotten exactly, but certainly had not been thinking of it when Kara mentioned restaurants. “Right, of course.”

“Did you forget?” Kara asks, but it sounds more teasing than hurt and Lena rolls her eyes.

“No,” she denies, but Kara laughs. “I didn’t!”

“Try not to stand me up tomorrow.”

“Well, I might have to if my date continues to make fun of me,” Lena says, frowning as the news turns from shaky cellphone footage of Guardian to more news on her mother’s upcoming trial. She flips it to another channel.

“I’m not making fun of you,” Kara denies. “I’m just making sure you didn’t suddenly become forgetful in the last four years.”

Lena laughs, watches a game show begins on the TV. “Not all of us can have nearly eidetic memories, Kara.”

“I’m sorry you have to compare yourself to such a high standard,” Kara jokes, her voice warm and happy. “It must be quite a burden.”

Lena lets out an exaggerated sigh. “One I’ve had to carry for far too long.”

“That hurts,” Kara deadpans and there’s silence for a moment before they both laugh.

It feels good to lean further into the plush cushions of her couch and listen to the sound of Kara typing over the line. “Are you writing?”

“I’m looking at restaurants,” Kara answers. “I told you that like ten seconds ago. This is why I’m worried about your memory.”

“Restaurants for what?” Lena asks, but she’s unable to keep the mirth out of her voice and Kara lets out the most long suffering Lena she’s ever heard. “Why are you so concerned about choosing a restaurant?”

“I’m not concerned,” Kara says. “I just want it to be good. First dates are important.”

“This isn’t exactly a first date,” Lena tells her, a floaty feeling swooping into her stomach.

“Still.”

Lena makes an agreeable noise, watches as a trivia question flashes on the screen. “Which two planets in our solar system rotate clockwise?” Lena reads aloud.

Kara’s answer is nearly immediate and absent sounding, “Venus and Uranus.”

The correct answer gets displayed a few seconds later and Lena quirks a brow, but is unsurprised to find that Kara was right. “You’re right.”

“Of course I’m right. Why did you need to know that?”

“I’m watching some trivia oriented game show,” Lena replies.

“Most people rest their brains after a long day of work.”
Lena laughs. “How do you know I had a long day?”

“Didn’t you have a budget meeting?” Kara asks and Lena warms a bit that Kara would remember random details of her schedule.

“I did.”

“You hate budget meetings. I remember Lex telling me you once nearly threw a tablet at some guy’s head during one.”

“I’d like to think I’ve grown more even-tempered from when I was eighteen,” Lena says wryly.

“So you didn’t throw any tablets today?”

“Throwing things is not my default reaction to anger,” Lena insists and Kara laughs. “Most of the meeting was spent debating areas of our construction spending. Perhaps you could help me find a better way to explain to my budget committee that unless Supergirl and Superman stop destroying our properties, we need that money just to stay afloat?”

Kara makes an affronted noise that makes Lena laugh.

“I don’t try to destroy things,” Kara says. “And neither does Kal.”

“I don’t know what sort of vendetta you have against L Corp, but we should really find a way to resolve it before we go bankrupt. You’re making it increasingly hard for me to live the glamorous lifestyle I’ve worked so tirelessly to have.”

“Lena,” Kara groans, and Lena laughs some more.

“If it’s something I’ve done, I’m-”

“Stop it,” Kara says, but she’s laughing too. “I’ll do better at not destroying L Corp owned properties.”

“I can draw you up a map so you know which places to avoid.”

“That’d be very helpful,” Kara deadpans. “Speaking of destroying things, Mon-El beheaded another four hostages in training today. I’m starting to think he thinks that’s the goal of training.”

“Beheaded... on purpose?”

“Well not exactly,” Kara answers. “He just has a really high collateral damage problem.”

“And I’m sure when you first started training it all went flawlessly,” Lena says though she suspects it probably did go much better than it seems to be with Mon-El.

“I wasn’t constantly destroying cardboard cutouts of civilians, that’s for sure,” Kara says. “Most of my training was just Alex throwing me around the Kryptonite training room and punching me in the face a lot.”

“I’m sure Alex found that very therapeutic.”

“What? Punching me in the face?”

“I’d imagine.”
Kara laughs. “Are you implying that there have been times you’ve wanted to punch me in the face?”

“Of course not,” Lena replies immediately and then waits a beat before adding, “Throw something big and heavy your direction maybe…”

“Joke’s on you,” Kara says in a haughty kind of tone. “I have cat like reflexes.”

“So that time you fell out of my second story dorm room window and broke two bicycles was just…”

“That doesn’t count and we also agreed to never talk about that,” Kara says and she lets out an aggrieved sigh. “How did this conversation turn to me? I was telling you how much Mon-El is the worst when it comes to this superhero stuff.”

Lena chuckles softly. “I’m sure it’s frustrating, but just be patient with him. It can’t be easy to just become a superhero overnight. Especially when he has someone like Supergirl to compare himself against.”

“It wouldn’t be so bad if he would just listen to me,” Kara says with an irritated sounding sigh. “I tell him to protect the fake hostages and he - tries to fight the attacker instead.”

“I can see how that’s a problem.”

“It’s just irresponsible,” Kara mutters. “He has to realize that protecting the people comes first and he just - doesn’t get it. Sometimes I don’t even know why he’s trying to do this.”

“It seems fairly obvious to me why Mon-El wants to do this. Or rather why he wants to work with you.”

“It is?”

“We’ve been over this, Kara. The boy likes you.”

“Not this again,” Kara groans, and Lena can even imagine her rolling her eyes.

Lena can’t help the small smirk that pulls the corner of her lips up. “I’m afraid I’m painfully familiar with what someone is like when they’re crushing on you.”

Kara lets out a laugh, her typing pausing for a moment.

“At least you knew you had a crush,” Kara says, and Lena laughs too, remembering the bewildering few weeks leading up to Kara asking her out when Kara would stare at Lena for concerning, terrifying lengths of time. “I had to google it.”

A deep wave of affection washes over her as she listens to Kara resume her typing.

“I’m looking forward to our date,” Lena admits in a soft voice.

Kara’s silent for a moment before she replies, “Me too.” Her voice is warm and full of affection that Lena finds herself responding to all over. For a brief second she considers how it would sound to tell Kara to come over immediately.

“I should let you go,” Kara says with a slight cough that makes Lena think Kara’s not immune to the feelings between them either. “But I’ll see you tomorrow?”
“Absolutely,” Lena answers, and a sharp jolt of excitement shocks through her.

---

Friday arrives with little fanfare, but Lena wakes up with anticipation building low in her gut at the prospect of what the evening will bring.

She considers texting Kara as she’s on her way out the door, but stops herself at the thought of seeming so over eager. Nevertheless, she can’t help the smile plastered on her face as she strides into her office. Jess startles when she notices it and looks even more perplexed when Lena sets a coffee cup from Noonan’s on her desk.

“Non-fat cinnamon latte, right?”

Jess stares at the cup for a few seconds before reaching out for it and nodding. “Y-y-yes. Thank you, Miss Luthor.”

“Of course, Jess. You’re a great assistant. Happy Friday.”

Just as the doors to her office are closing she hears Jess call out a bewildered, “Happy Friday!”

There’s a stack of papers on her desk waiting for her review and she offers them a disdainful look before setting her purse down and dropping into her chair. A quick glance at her inbox tells her that it will take nearly all morning to get through the usual Friday morning e-mail dump and with a sigh she scoots forward to begin.

Mid-morning, as she’s halfway through an e-mail to her lawyers about a scheduled deposition this week, Kara walks into her office. She turns a surprised smile towards her until she notices the worried cut to her jaw.

“Kara?” Lena asks, half out of her chair as Kara stalks forward, her eyes darting all around the office as if she’s waiting for something to jump out at her. “Is everything okay? I wasn’t expecting you until—”

“Are you okay?” Kara interrupts, gaze cutting sharply into Lena before flitting away again towards the large expanse of windows. Rounding the desk, Kara continues to look outside and Lena tracks the motion in an effort to figure out what’s going on.

“Of course I’m okay,” Lena answers slowly and before Kara can move away again towards something else in the office to inspect, Lena reaches out to encircle her wrist with enough force that she stops. “Why do you ask? What’s wrong?”

There’s a harried look in Kara’s eyes that Lena can’t read. It reminds her for a moment of what Kara looked like months ago right after they caught Roulette, then later in Lena’s office after the gala. Scared, Lena thinks. Kara looks scared.

“Have you had any strange visitors this week? This morning?”

Lena’s brow furrows and she laughs a little. “Not that I’m aware of.”

“What about weird phone calls or…” Kara gestures around the office. “Electrical anomalies?”

Arching her eyebrow, Lena looks pointedly at Kara. “Electrical anomalies?”

“Like the lights going out randomly or a socket not working or huge flashes—”
“I know what it means,” Lena says, putting a hand out to stop Kara’s ramble. “But what are you talking about?”

“Have you had any? Here or at home?”

“No,” Lena answers and she pushes forward a little to rub her thumb against the crinkle between Kara’s eyebrows. “Are you okay? What’s wrong?”

The phone on Lena’s desk rings suddenly and Kara jumps so abruptly that Lena startles herself, her heart leaping up in her chest for a moment.

“Kara,” Lena says slowly trying to catch her breath. She presses the palm of her hand to her chest in an effort to slow her heart and reaches out with her other hand to grip Kara’s forearm. “Calm down.”

“Sorry,” Kara mumbles and she manages to look contrite while Lena reaches over to send the still ringing phone to voicemail.

“What’s wrong?” Lena repeats, feeling anxiety start to take hold at the unease she can sense flooding off of Kara.

Kara takes a deep breath and puts on a look that Lena’s sure is meant to seem casual, but instead accomplishes quite the opposite. “Any chance you could come with me today? Call in to work?”

Lena crosses her arms over her chest and arches a brow at the sudden request. “Apart from the fact that I’m already at work, I’m also the boss. I don’t call in.”

A twitch at the corner of Kara’s lips is the only visible reaction she gets to that and Kara’s jaw remains tight, determined. “I’d like it if you would come into the DEO instead. Spend the day there with us.”

“This is becoming a pattern,” Lena jokes if only to buy time for wading through the confusion she’s feeling. “Are you and Alex trading off weeks or something?”

Kara’s face scrunches up in puzzlement. “What?”

Lena sighs. “Why do you want me to come into the DEO?”

Kara’s lips purse a moment. “Because I just do.”

With a soft huff of a laugh and a roll of her eyes, Lena shakes her head. “I have a job to do here, Kara,” she says. “A company I’m desperately trying to rebuild, a PR disaster I seem incapable of running away from and a significant amount of trial prep to do regarding that small incident with my mother a few months ago. You’re going to have to do better than that.”

It takes a moment of just staring at her before Kara seems to finally relent.

“There’s this girl,” Kara says and Lena has zero idea what to do with that opening line so she just waits. “She’s kind of like my nemesis.”

“Have a nemesis?” There’s a mildly impressed tone to the question Lena can’t quite suppress. Sometimes she forgets that the girl she met in college - the one that told corny space jokes and consistently ate pizza for breakfast - is a full fledged superhero, the kind with an arch nemesis.

“Yes. Livewire,” Kara answers.
Something pings in the back of Lena’s brain. “Why is that name familiar?”

“She’s not my biggest fan,” Kara continues. “And she kind of has an itch for murder and general rampaging.”

“I was under the impression you apprehended her,” Lena says and watches Kara’s face contort into a look akin to anger.

“She broke out of prison last night.” Kara’s lips push together. “Again.”

It explains the fidgety way Kara keeps looking around. “I see.”

“So I thought she might….” Kara’s lips thin as she readjusts her glasses and seems to struggle for the words.

“You thought she might come after me?” Lena asks, a crease in her brow. “I don’t understand.”

“The only thing predictable about Livewire is that death and destruction follows her wherever she goes and I don’t want you to get caught up in that.”

“I can’t imagine why I’d ever be in her crosshairs,” Lena replies.

Kara is silent for a moment and Lena raises her eyebrows expectantly until Kara just thins her lips and shrugs. “I just don’t want to run the risk.”

“Kara, I understand you’re worried, but I can’t - hiding me at the DEO every time you’re concerned something bad might happen isn’t a sustainable way of living,” Lena says, slowly and carefully in an attempt to get Kara to understand.

“Just today,” Kara pleads. “Until I can figure out what she’s up to.”

Lena’s not foolish enough to fall for that, but she finds herself drawn to the detectable tremble in Kara’s stature. There’s nothing terribly pressing at work that she can’t accomplish remotely and after a moment’s consideration, she concedes.

“Today,” she says and makes it sound enough like a warning that Kara’s face doesn’t brighten entirely.

--

A gang takes control of First Metropolitan Bank in the heart of downtown Metropolis and Lena watches the news coverage in her dorm while talking on the phone with Lex.

“They think it’s Intergang,” Lex is saying and Lena knows he’s standing in his penthouse office, observing the scene from his floor to ceiling windows. The bank is in clear view from Luthor Tower and Lex has already commented on how annoying it is trying to work with the sound of sirens serving as near constant background noise.

“Morgan Edge is knocking over banks now?” It’s never been confirmed that the local media mogul was behind Intergang, but that didn’t make it any less true in Lena’s eyes.
Lex laughs. “They don’t just keep money in banks, Lena. I imagine he has loftier goals in mind.”

“I don’t understand,” Lena comments, watching a video feed of police cars forming a line outside the front of the bank. “Where’s Superman? I feel like a bank heist would be easy for him.”

“Ah, the question of the hour,” Lex replies with clear exasperation in his tone. “Our local American hero is nowhere to be found. Perhaps bank heists are beneath him.”

Before Lena can comment more, the door to her dorm is opening and Kara walks through, tossing her backpack on a nearby chair and smiling.

“Hey, Lex, I should go,” Lena says, returning Kara’s smile.

“Kara just walk in?” Lex asks knowingly and Lena laughs.

“It could be pressing school work I have to get to.”

“Yeah, yeah. Tell her hi for me,” Lex says just as Kara waves her fingers in the air, clearly able to hear Lex through the phone.

“I will. Love you.”

“You too, little sis.”

Lena throws her phone on her desk just as Kara approaches and she stands to kiss her girlfriend hello, enjoying the way Kara wraps her arm around Lena’s waist and lifts her until they’re pressed close together.

“How’s Lex?” Kara asks when they break apart.

“Irritated by that,” Lena answers, gesturing over Kara’s shoulder towards the television.

The caption on the news coverage mirrors Lena’s question from earlier. Where is Superman? is scrawling across the bottom of the screen under some footage of a police tactical unit pulling up to the scene.

“What’s happening?” Kara asks, disengaging from Lena to put her full attention on the screen.

“A group of masked men took control of First Metropolitan Bank this morning,” Lena tells her, watching as Kara rounds the small couch in front of the TV and sits down on it.

They watch the news for a moment, Kara’s eyes rapt with attention on the screen. “They have hostages?”

“Twelve I think,” Lena answers, sitting down on the couch and eyeing the television as information scrolls across the screen. “The police are negotiating, but if this is an Intergang job, I doubt they’ll get anywhere. Morgan Edge has a reputation.”

“Where is -,” Kara’s body goes tense as she seems to finally read the headline on the bottom of the screen. “Superman’s not there.”

Lena blinks, watching as police mill about, the negotiating tent under focus from the helicopter camera.

“No. He’s not,” Lena says. “Do you...I thought maybe you might have some insight as to where he is.”
Superman is always an intense subject between the two of them - it’s the one thing Kara is the most closed off about. They don’t talk about him most of the time and frankly Lena’s content to ignore his existence as much as he can.

A mixture of fear and annoyance pass over Kara’s face as she stands, hands on her hips. “I have no idea where he is or why he wouldn’t be there.”

Lena watches her for a few seconds before the headline changes to an even more dramatic Will Superman Help?

“I’m sure he’s just running late, Kara,” Lena says. “And it’s not as though anything truly awful has happened yet. The hostages are all alive.”

“He should be there,” Kara says, and her eyes flare into a vibrant orange that Kara immediately shakes away, rubbing at the bridge of her nose beneath her glasses. “Those people need help and he should - be helping. That’s the point, right?”

“The point of what?” Lena asks, watching as her girlfriend starts to pace and shake out her hands.

“The point of these powers,” Kara says, stopping and holding her hands up to look at them. “To help people. To protect people.”

“Kara,” Lena tries to interrupt, but Kara keeps talking with a look on her face that starts a pit of worry in the bottom of Lena’s stomach.

“I should go help,” Kara says suddenly, her pacing stopping as she turns back to the TV with purpose in her expression. “I could help same as he could.”

“Kara,” Lena tries again, worry creeping into her tone at the idea that Kara could fly off and expose herself like that.

Of course, Superman chooses just then to fly onto screen, the bright red of his cape rippling out behind him as he dives through a glass window on the side of the building. Seconds later, a gaggle of gang members are deposited into police custody, and hostages are stumbling outside into the daylight.

Lena gets a text from Lex: Looks like the Man of Steel finally woke up from his nap. It makes her smile, but when she looks back up at her girlfriend, who’s watching the screen intently, it drops away.

“Kara?”

“Hmmm?” Kara doesn’t turn to look at her, just watches as Superman shakes the hand of the hostage negotiator with a bright smile.

“You okay?”

“Yeah, of course,” Kara says turning to look at her then. Her expression is serious and she looks so much like her cousin for a second that Lena almost startles when she sees her.

“Come here,” Lena replies, reaching out her hand until Kara relaxes a little and grabs onto it, dropping down onto the couch. Lena tangles their fingers together and reaches over with her free hand to tug at the heavy metal of Kara’s bracelet. “You weren’t really going to just fly off to Metropolis were you?”
Kara is quiet for a moment. “I can help just as much as he can,” Kara answers in a soft whisper.

Lena’s not quite sure what to say to that and doesn’t know how to react to the small tendril of fear that works its way up her spine. The idea of Kara putting herself in the kinds of situations she’s seen Superman in makes her hands go a little shaky. “I know you can,” is what she settles on. “But you don’t have to.”

“What if I want to?” Kara asks, bringing her eyes up to lock into Lena’s.

“What do you want to do?”

Kara’s eyes dart around Lena’s face as if they’re searching for something. It takes a few seconds until she responds. “I don’t know.”

It does nothing to relax the thread of worry that’s been created in the pit of Lena’s stomach, but she manages a soft smile. “You help me,” she tells her girlfriend. “Just by being you and by being here every day.”

Kara doesn’t look very assuaged by that and Lena squeezes her fingers hard enough that she hopes Kara can feel it. “Who else do you know that could pick up my entire bed with one hand when I lose my cell phone?”

That, at least, makes Kara laugh. “Well I’m happy to be of some use.”

Lena’s not sure what to do with the grim set of Kara’s eyes that lingers for a moment so she settles on reaching up to tug a strand of Kara’s hair. “Hey, I love you.”

Kara’s shoulders relax and she smiles, leaning over to press a warm kiss to Lena’s cheek. “I love you too.”

--

When they arrive at the DEO it seems like everything is on high alert and Lena wonders if she’ll ever have reason to step foot in this base when there’s not some sort of world ending emergency happening.

Winn is waiting for them up on the central platform and Mon-El gives her a little wave and a smile as they approach. J’onn stands to the side, nods at her, “Miss Luthor.”

“Director,” she greets.

Kara has changed into her supersuit and the cape swishes around her legs as she steps forward toward to look at the wall of monitors now displaying a dossier that reads Leslie Willis. Lena eyes it and reads over the informational sections Winn has pulled up on the screens.

“Gather round, gather round,” Winn says with a completely inappropriate amount of enthusiasm. Kara cuts him an immediate glare and he tries to smother the look on his face. He coughs gently and straightens. “So Livewire,” he starts and Lena gives him a subtle encouraging nod as Kara stalks forward, her eyes roaming the pictures on the screen.

“And who knows what havoc she will wreak when she resurfaces,” Winn says, still a little showboaty in his delivery. He swipes up on a tablet and a massive picture of Livewire appears on the screen. “We’re talking full on rats in the attic here, people. Except the rats are electrified and the attic is on fire. Behold!”
Despite the severity of the situation, Lena can’t help but want to laugh at Winn’s production. Mon-El looks just about as enthusiastic as Winn does where he stands looking up at the monitors. “Oh yeah,” he says. “I am so ready to kick some non-cardboard crazy ass.”

“This is serious,” Kara practically hisses at both of them, stepping forward and pointing at the screens. “Livewire is despicable. She never should have been in a human facility. All of the human parts of her are gone,” Kara argues, looking at all of them and Lena senses the unrest. “She should have been here where we could make sure that she didn’t get out!”

A cracking sound resonates through the small area and they all turn to see Kara’s broken the corner of a nearby monitor in her anger. She glances at it for a moment with wide eyes before trying to play it off and Lena steps up to her, cutting in front of Mon-El who looks like he’s about to say something completely unhelpful.

“Hey,” Lena says softly and she runs a quick hand down Kara’s arm hoping to relax her. “We’ll get her.”

Mon-El bounces around behind them, punches the air a few times. “You’ve already defeated her twice,” he comments, stepping up to them with a casual grin on his face. “What’s the big deal?”

J’onn turns a sharp look towards him. “The deal is that she brings death and destruction.”

“Yes, right,” Mon-El says softer this time and a little chagrined. “That’s bad.”

Alex interrupts them then, stepping towards the group with a quiet but firm, “J’onn. Can I see you for a sec?”

The group seems to tense up. Kara and Winn exchange somber expressions as J’onn walks away towards Alex.

“How’s she doing?” Kara asks Winn who just shakes his head sadly. Lena’s puzzled as to what this conversation is about, but doesn’t get a chance to ask before Kara huffs again, slamming a fist down onto the nearest desk. It’s hard enough that it dents the surface a little, but doesn’t break and Lena can see that Kara’s barely holding it together.

With a glance towards Winn, who is looking at her with what do we do eyes, Lena steps forward and tugs at Kara’s cape. “Why don’t we step outside?” Lena offers with what she hopes is an entreating smile. “Get some fresh air.”

“We need to find her,” Kara says, the words tight and angry as she looks at the screen where a picture of Livewire still sits.

“Winn’s working on that,” Lena argues, stepping closer and wrapping her hand around Kara’s wrist. Her palm slides over the fabric of her suit and she feels a small barely detectable lump there that Lena realizes must be Kara’s bracelet. She settles over the familiar metal and presses it against Kara’s arm.

Winn nods as he falls into a nearby chair and spins towards a monitor. “Yup. I am on it. No worries. I will let you know the nanosecond we find something,” he says with a smile and Kara observes him for a moment before relenting.

“Fine,” she grumbles and allows Lena to lead them away towards the small landing platform on the other side of the base.

They’re outside mere seconds before Kara is disengaging from Lena’s grip and stalking up to the
low wall on the side of the platform with a noisy exhale. “I hate this,” she hisses and Lena sighs, walks up next to her.

“Hate what?”

“Waiting,” Kara answers, her hands spreading out on the edge of the low wall. “While she’s out there doing who knows what. Planning something. Probably killing people.”

“We’ll find her, Kara,” Lena says again threading as much conviction as she can in the statement. “You don’t know that,” Kara argues, her eyes trained forward, jawline cutting a tight angry line.

“You’re right,” Lena concedes, switching tactics. “Logically I don’t know that. There’s no way I could.”

Finally, Kara turns, her face twisting with surprise and a little confusion. Lena can’t help but smile at it and she leans a hip up against the small wall, looks at Kara with an open expression.

“I have faith in you,” Lena says softly and Kara’s body posture relaxes just enough to be noticeable, her hands leaving the wall as her body moves to face Lena. “And you’re not alone.”

Kara glances back inside the base at that to where Lena knows Winn is still in view, Mon-El pacing around behind him. “Yeah,” she says softly.

“The team will find her and they will help you defeat her again. Alex, J’onn, Winn, Mon-El,” Lena waits a beat before adding, “Me.”

Kara sighs. “That’s what I’m afraid of,” she confesses softly and Lena doesn’t know what that means exactly.

Kara’s phone ringing breaks the moment and she pulls it out of a hidden pocket in her suit, looking at it with a quizzical expression. “It’s James,” she says softly before answering.

Lena listens idly as Kara has a quick one-sided conversation and watches a bird fly by the window against the blue sky of National City.

After a few moments she’s aware of Kara hanging the phone up and sighing. “James has something he wants to talk to me about, I’m going to head over to CatCo,” Kara says and then she looks at Lena for a moment, expression waver between a multitude of emotions.

“What?” Lena asks, looking down self-consciously.

“You’ll stay here? Until I get back?” Kara asks and Lena hates the feeling that she’s being coddled, but knows that if she leaves Kara will only be distracted. And with an arch nemesis that the entire team seems to fear out there, Lena doesn’t want to be something that could potentially harm Kara.

“Until you get back,” she concedes and Kara nods, blowing out a low breath.

“Thanks,” Kara murmurs before stepping up and pressing a warm kiss to Lena’s forehead. “I’ll be back soon.”

Lena barely gets out a bye before Kara is jumping up into the air and away.

--
Eventually Lena wanders back inside the base, finds Winn and hovers near him, helping with what she can. It’s clear that she’s not here with an actual purpose this time, and it’s frustrating, but Winn is chattering at her about Livewire’s powers and her fighting skills.

After a bit, Alex steps up to them and smiles at Lena. “Hey,” she says. “Can I talk to you?”

“Of course,” Lena says and Alex gestures for Lena to follow.

They walk deeper into the base until Alex pulls her into a spartan looking room and closes the door. For a few moments, Alex doesn’t say anything, just observes Lena critically for long enough that Lena fights an urge to laugh.

“If this is another big sister talk about what Kara and I are doing-”

“It’s not,” Alex says, cutting her sentence off. There’s an expression on Alex’s face Lena can’t quite read and grim set to her mouth that makes Lena feel instantly wary.

“Then…”

“Did Kara ever tell you how she and Mon-El escaped from Cadmus?” Alex asks and the question comes so randomly that it takes a few seconds for Lena to realize what Alex is talking about.

“Escape from my mother you mean,” Lena adds wryly and Alex’s lips twitch upward.

“Yes.”

“She didn’t,” Lena answers and feels a twinge of guilt. She hadn’t thought to ask. The only thoughts that had consumed her that night was the discovery that her mother was in charge of a massive paramilitary organization intent on killing Kara and all other alien lifeforms.

Alex’s lips thin for a moment, her gaze solid on Lena’s as she seems to consider something. “She had help. From the inside.”

Lena perks up at that idea. “There’s a mole in Cadmus?” That seems like important information and maybe something that should have been talked about more in the last few weeks. If anything, it’d be extremely useful in her mother’s upcoming trial.

“Our dad helped them,” Alex says softly and Lena just feels even more confused.

“Your-” she blinks, shakes out her head a little and tries to put pieces together in the correct order. “Jeremiah?”

Kara hadn’t ever talked much about her adoptive dad. He was gone long before Lena had ever met Kara. Presumed dead was the story Lena had gotten and that had been it. The only times they had ever really spoken about it was leading up to a holiday or the anniversary of his disappearance - Alex had come to visit and she and Kara had disappeared for an entire weekend.

Alex nods. “Yeah.”

Lena can only muster a disbelieving smile. “I’m sorry,” she says slowly like maybe she’s not hearing something correctly. “I was under the impression that he was…”

“Dead,” Alex finishes for her in a simple deadpan and Lena nods. “Yeah, so was I.”

“But he’s not.”
“So Kara says,” Alex tells her and Lena wonders how this is the first she’s hearing of this. The business with her mother and Kara’s kidnapping was months ago. Had she really been so wrapped up in her own things, in everything going on with her relationship and her family that she’d failed to pay attention to something so significant happening with Kara?

“Why didn’t Kara tell me?”

“Dad’s sort of a…” Alex gestures vaguely. “Hard subject.”

Lena imagines that to be true, but she and Kara have never been people to shy away from hard subjects. Certainly not with each other.

“I think she feels guilty about it,” Alex says. “Hank Henshaw came for him after they spotted Kara and I flying. They blackmailed him into joining the DEO because he was harboring a Kryptonian.”

“Hank Henshaw? The man with the metal mask?” Lena asks, trying to fit what she knows about all of these people into a complete picture. Alex sighs, rubs at her forehead.

“The one and only.”

“Alex…” Lena says as a cold realization starts to creep up her spine. “Are you saying Hank Henshaw knows that Kara is Supergirl?”

Alex’s brow furrows a moment. “Yes. I...guess he does.”

“And Hank Henshaw works for my mother,” Lena continues and sees the obvious conclusion appear on Alex’s face, a deep frown stretching across it.

A tense silence stretches for a few seconds. “Let’s not leap to conclusions,” Alex says and Lena almost laughs.

“That’s not a leap, Alex. That’s a fairly obvious certainty.”

“If she were going to do something with that information, she would have already,” Alex posits.

“The fact that she hasn’t done anything with that information means she’s planning something,” Lena says as her brain shuffles through memory after memory. The idea that her mother might be aware of Kara’s identity is startling and terrifying.

Alex pinches at the bridge of her nose. “Your mother is in custody.”

“That’s not as comforting as one may think,” Lena says wryly.

“All the more reason to find my father.”

“Why are you telling me all this?”

“I was hoping that since you have some ties to…”

“To Cadmus,” Lena finishes in a dry, even tone.

“Not like that,” Alex says hastily and she sounds so much like Kara in that moment that Lena relaxes a little. “Just that you might have resources I don’t have access to.”

“Are you under the impression my mother gave me the nuclear codes or something?”
“No,” Alex says with an irritated roll of her eyes. “But let’s not pretend you don’t have a certain amount of power or pull when it comes to these kinds of things.”

“What kind of things are those?” Lena asks, feeling defensive.

“Lena,” Alex sighs. “I’m just...It’s not exactly an operation I can have on the books here at the DEO,” Alex admits, glancing to the side in a somewhat paranoid gesture. “I’d rather keep this...in the family, so to speak.”

After digesting that for a moment, Lena considers the situation. “Do you think he’s working for Cadmus. For my mother.”

“No,” Alex denies with sudden vehemence. “If anything, he’s a double agent. But Kara was clear he wasn’t being held captive. And he didn’t seem injured or anything.”

Lena considers her words for a moment. “My mother has a tendency of inspiring loyalty. Through a variety of means.”

“My dad would never work for Cadmus. Not if he didn’t have to. And certainly not without a very good reason,” Alex argues, her eyes still flitting around the room, clearly afraid of being overheard. Lena spares a moment to think Alex’s choice of venue for this conversation is probably not ideal if she’s hoping to shield its content from the DEO. “I thought that if anyone can understand this kind of grey area, it’d be you.”

“There’s nothing grey about my mother,” Lena says with a laugh and a cross of her arms. “Trying to exterminate the entire alien population of National City is fairly black and white.”

“I wasn’t talking about Lillian,” Alex says with a pointed look and Lena gives her a confused look for a moment until she realizes what Alex might be referring to. Her expression shadows for a moment at the idea of talking about her brother.

“Those situations hardly compare,” Lena says and her voice stays even. “I don’t know what you think you know, but-”

“I don’t know anything,” Alex interrupts. “I just imagine you know what it’s like to have a complicated family.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Lena says with a wry quirk to her lips.

Alex’s shoulders relax from their tense look of earlier. “Look with the trial coming up and everything, would you just keep your ear to the ground? If you hear anything about him…”

“Fine,” Lena says with a conciliatory nod of her head.

“I’ll give you access to some of our Cadmus files in exchange. There might be something in there that could help you with the trial anyway.”

“This doesn’t need to be a trade, Alex,” Lena says.

“Regardless,” Alex replies, crossing her arms. Lena imagines she’s about as comfortable feeling indebted to someone as Lena is.

“Okay,” Lena concedes with a short laugh.

“I’m only asking because I trust you,” Alex says and Lena arches a brow in surprise. “And because
“Whatever you need,” she says and means it, feels suddenly just as incapable of saying no to Alex as she does with Kara. “We’ll find him.”

Alex smiles. A real, genuine smile that Lena’s seen mirrored on Kara’s face. It warms a cold spot deep in her heart, starts to fill a void that hasn’t been filled since Lex went to prison.

--

The alarms go off just as Winn is pointing out something in his tracking program to Lena and when the sound fills the base Lena flinches. The monitors suddenly light up and on one of them Lena sees a news feed, camera footage of Livewire attacking the NCPD.

Lena stands so abruptly the chair behind her rolls backwards with the motion and Winn sits up with enough force that his keyboard knocks forward and he has to catch it before he can type anything. He opens up a comm line with Kara.

“Kara, Livewire-”

“I know. I just saw it on the news.” Kara’s voice comes across the line and it’s full of anger Lena knows is masking fear. “I’m suiting up and heading over there. Send Mon-El.”

Mon-El, who has been watching the monitors behind Lena, looks at both of them before nodding resolutely and turning away.

“He’s on his way,” Winn tells Kara.

Lena steps up next to Winn, leans forward on the desk towards where she knows Winn’s mic is. “Kara, be careful.”

“Always.” Kara’s response is automatic, but does little to reassure Lena.

Alex comes running up to them at that moment, skidding to a stop next to Winn and watching the monitor with worried eyes. “What happened?”

“Livewire is at the NCPD.” Winn tells her and they all watch fretfully on the monitors as Kara shows up on the screen.

Winn’s phone rings suddenly and he pulls it out of his pocket. Whatever he sees on the screen makes him glance at Lena and Alex evasively and he stands, pushing his chair away and moving backward.

Alex looks at him with narrowing eyes. “Where are you going?”

“I-uh,” he gestures vaguely at the monitors and Lena looks at them again to see Mon-El and Kara talking to Livewire. There’s no sound, but Lena can see the way Kara is gesturing, her body in a fighting stance even as she’s talking. “I have to go,” Winn finishes in a mumble of sounds and without further explanation he races away from them in a hurry.

“Winn!” Lena yells out in a surprised tone as she watches him disappear around a corner.

“Let him go,” Alex dismisses, eyes still focused on the monitors.

Lena looks at Alex, confused. “Where could he have to be at a time like this?”
Sighing, Alex grabs Winn’s chair where it’s still rocking back and forth and straightens it, gestures for Lena to sit in it. “James is Guardian,” Alex answers like that explains anything and Lena startles.

“What?”

“James is Guardian and Winn is helping him,” Alex clarifies and her tone conveys just how displeased she is with the information.

“Does Kara know?”

“Nope,” Alex says with a pop of the word. She gestures at the chair again. “So with Winn gone, I need you to be Winn.”

Lena sits down slowly, trying to process the information, but she gets distracted by the bright flash of light on the monitor and she more clearly understands why everyone calls her Livewire.

“You’re the best option for understanding his programs,” Alex says and her hand stays on the back of the chair as Lena turns towards the computer in front of her, scooting forward to do as Alex asks.

“Why does Kara not know?” Lena asks if only to focus on something that isn’t the sight of Kara suddenly beginning to fight against Livewire. The sight of a long blue thread of electricity wrapping around Kara’s wrists and flinging her about the space makes Lena’s throat ache with worry and she can tell by the clenching of Alex’s fingers against the leather back of her chair that the emotion is shared.

“Because they’re both idiot children that haven’t told her,” Alex grumbles, her eyes intent on the fight. “Can you get audio on this?”

Still facing away from Alex, Lena rolls her eyes to the ceiling and almost laughs, reaching forward to type in a quick command. Audio bursts through the speakers near them.

Guardian, or James, Lena thinks, rides onto the scene suddenly and they both watch silently as the battle continues. Kara is yelling something indistinguishable at Mon-El, pointing over at officers on the scene, her comm lines fried by all the electrical surges and the audio only working off the security cameras.

From what Lena can tell it doesn’t seem to be going that well. Livewire seems to have an accomplice of some kind, a man Lena assumes is a prison guard based on his uniform. She spots an identification program Winn had running and pulls it up on another monitor to her right.

The scene on the large monitors suddenly becomes a mess of electrical flashes and moving bodies until suddenly all the movement stops.

“They’re gone,” Alex breathes and Lena looks around the video feed to see only Kara and Mon-El standing together observing the scene, Kara’s whole body tense as she looks over at the armored body of Guardian on the ground unmoving. Her heart squeezes at the thought of James being injured or worse.

“Gone for now. But probably not forever,” Lena ventures and Alex makes a noise of confirmation, blowing out a tired breath. The identification program pings loudly then, zeroed in on the image of the prison guard’s face.

--
Mon-El returns first and he’s got James in full Guardian armor in his arms. Alex guides him to a nearby medbay where they lay him down on a bed. Winn follows close behind, but there’s no sign of Kara yet.

“She went to do a quick sweep of the city,” Mon-El tells them.

Lena fiddles a bit with the clasp on her watch, hovers around while Alex checks on James and Winn stands anxiously next to his bedside.

“Just a concussion likely,” Alex says. “He’ll wake up soon.”

Lena exits the room having nothing to contribute and as she’s walking back to the central room she spots Kara landing on the small platform at the far end of the space.

“Hi,” Lena says as she paces over and Kara looks exhausted, her face drawn down into a heavy frown. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” Kara replies, but it doesn’t sound believable. Lena steps in close, reaches out to run her hand down Kara’s arm and tangle their fingers together. Kara squeezes Lena’s hand, but after a few seconds lets the hand go and stares tensely into the base. “Mon-El’s here?”

“Yes,” Lena answers, studying Kara’s face. “He brought James into the medbay. Alex is looking him over.”

Kara laughs bitterly and Lena feels out of depth with the dark display of emotion on Kara’s face. “James is Guardian,” Kara says, but it doesn’t seem like she’s telling Lena that information. It sounds incredulous and disbelieving and like Kara might break the next thing she touches.

“I heard,” Lena replies and Kara cuts a sharp gaze towards Lena. The look makes Lena want to flinch, but she just manages not to.

“What is it with everyone in my life thinking they can go out and fight supervillains?” Kara asks, throwing her hands up in the air in frustration. “James, Winn, you.”

Lena frowns. “What did I do?”

Kara ignores the question, puts her hands to her hips, her jawline cutting an angry line. “I’m the one with superpowers, I’m the one who is bulletproof. A fancy suit and a bunch of technology isn’t going to save James from, I don’t know, a bazooka to the face.”

“Kara, James is a grown man,” Lena argues.

“He’s a grown human,” Kara counters and her eyes are narrowed at Lena.

“You can’t protect everyone, Kara,” Lena continues, undeterred by the look on Kara’s face. “Certainly not from themselves.”

“Watch me,” Kara says darkly and before Lena can continue to argue, J’onn is stepping up to them. His face is guarded as he looks between them and not for the first time, Lena finds him entirely impossible to read.

“Mr. Olsen is awake,” he says and Lena relaxes her shoulders.

“That’s good,” Lena says, glancing at Kara, whose glower has only seemed to have deepened. Kara doesn’t reply, just moves past J’onn and stalks away.
Lena hesitates a moment, wavers as J’onn looks at her like he can read the unease in her mind. “Go ahead,” J’onn says after a moment and he tilts his head the direction Kara went in subtle instruction.

--

The team is all congregated around James when Lena walks into the room, just feet behind Kara’s stomps. Everyone goes silent immediately, Mon-El cutting off mid sentence as Kara turns to face the room, anger etched so obviously into her features that Lena can feel the room react to it.

Winn practically cowers where he’s sitting and Alex looks at Lena with an obvious *oh boy* expression.

Lena walks over to where Winn is sitting, smiles at him encouragingly and watches as Kara continues to glower at James.

A few seconds of silence stretches before Kara finally talks, her voice quiet but threaded with betrayal. “That’s a cool suit. Lead outer shell,” she says, gesturing at James. She glances at Winn. “Yours?”

Winn nods, but looks away and Lena watches Kara’s fists clench at her sides. The urge to step up and touch Kara flushes through her, but she restrains herself, knows that Kara needs to get whatever it is that’s eating her up out.

“I was gonna tell you,” James says and Winn points, sits up a little. “I told him to tell you last night.”

Alex sends pointed looks at both men. “I told you both to tell her weeks ago.”

Lena watches Kara react to that and cringes a little, knowing everything is about to escalate quickly.

“You all knew?” Kara asks and she looks around the room with a mixture of incredulity and hurt on her face.

Mon-El immediately raises his hand. “Uh - um I didn’t,” he says and he laughs a little. “I thought James was a professionally handsome desk person.” Mon-El reaches out to slap James on the shoulder and the motion sends the other man sprawling forward a little.

Kara looks at Lena then and the question is obvious. Instead of answering verbally, Lena just shakes her head and it wipes a little of the pain off of Kara’s face.

“Kara,” James says and Kara crosses her arms. “This is between us. Not them.”

“Yeah,” she replies, nodding a little. Her voice is calm now, but Lena knows it’s forced, can tell in the restrained way Kara is standing that she’s seconds away from exploding. “You’re right.” Kara looks at all of them. “Can we have a minute please?”

Alex reacts immediately, seems to sense exactly what Lena can and looks at Lena with wide eyes as she says, “Yeah,” and walks out of the room.

Mon-El catches on next and Winn jumps up too, leaving only after giving James a quick smile of solidarity.

Lena hesitates, looks at Kara with concern. The anger is palpable in the room and Lena worries
that in the heat of the moment Kara might say or do something she’d regret. There’s an electric feel to the air that Lena always associates with Kara’s loose grip on her emotions and subsequently her powers.

Kara must understand Lena’s hesitation because she sends her a soft smile. “I’ll be fine,” she says quietly and James glances over to where Lena is standing, offers her a smile and nod as well.

With that, Lena leaves James to his fate.

--

She remembers that they have dinner plans about two seconds before she opens the door to her dorm room to reveal Kara’s smiling face. “Hi,” Lena greets and she hopes it doesn’t sound surprised, but based on the way Kara’s grin falters she’s sure she hasn’t succeeded.

“We’re still going to Khan’s, right?” Kara asks, looking unsure.

“Yeah of course,” Lena says, stepping aside so Kara walk into the dorm. “I’m just running late.”

After pressing a quick kiss to her lips, Kara strides past her and drops down onto the bed in the corner. “Did you forget?”

“No,” Lena says hastily, even though she had. Her mother had called that afternoon and she had a meeting with her advisor about graduation that did not go swimmingly and in all of that she just hadn’t been thinking about a date with her girlfriend. It was a rare mistake for her; forgetting about Kara only made her feel worse about her day.

“You forgot,” Kara accuses, crossing her ankles and stretching out on the bed.

“I didn’t. I just got busy,” Lena denies again and it comes out a little snappish, but there’s irritation from everything else in her life pooling in the back of her head and Kara is just an easy target at the moment.

“You okay?”

“I’m fine, Kara,” she says, moving over to the small sink in her room and reaching for a hairbrush. “I’ve just had a long day.”

“I’m sorry,” her girlfriend replies, sitting up a little. “I can leave.”

The offer deflates Lena’s ire and she looks over at Kara as she’s pulling her hair back. “Don’t leave. I’m the one that’s sorry. It’s not your fault. Give me five minutes and I’ll be ready.”

Kara remains silent while Lena works on straightening her clothing and checking what little makeup she had on that day. The thought of having to leave her dorm and socialize in public isn’t exactly the most appealing at the moment, but she knows the night will end on the couch with Kara watching some brainless television show and that alone starts to improve her mood. It’s something to look forward to at the very least.

Khan’s is, for once, not packed, and Kara is happy to monopolize the attention of the grillers and eat an insane amount of food, while Lena slowly starts to settle into the rhythm of being with her girlfriend. Kara’s endless stream of anecdotes about the psych class she’s taking make her laugh, and when they get into a debate about whether rice or noodles are better in the stir fry, she’s almost forgotten about her day.
Except, as they’re walking home, Kara brings it up again.

“Are you going to tell me why you’ve been so stressed lately?”

“I haven’t been stressed,” Lena denies.

Kara doesn’t respond, just looks at Lena with a disbelieving expression, even while she swings their joined hands.

“I haven’t,” Lena repeats and Kara sighs, stopping them on the path to Lena’s dorm and tugging at Lena’s hand until they bump into each other.

“I wish you’d let me help you.”

“You do help me,” Lena says, reaching up to rest her hands on Kara’s shoulders. “This is just stuff with my family. I can handle it.”

“You don’t have to handle it alone,” Kara insists. “Don’t shut me out of that part of your life.”

“I’m not shutting you out of anything,” Lena says even though that’s exactly what she’s doing. Her mother’s near constant disapproval and reminders of Lena’s obligation to her family isn’t something she wants Kara to have to worry about. She just wants this - them, here, blissfully alone.

“If there’s something bothering you, I want to know about it,” Kara replies. “Isn’t that how this thing is supposed to work?”

“This thing?” Lena asks with a teasing quirk of her eyebrow.

“Us,” Kara clarifies. “Don’t distract me.”

“How am I distracting you?” Lena laughs and her humor only deepens when Kara just vaguely glances down at where their bodies meet, her hands pressing into Lena’s lower back.

“Lena,” Kara sighs when Lena just continues to laugh. “I’m serious.”

“I know, darling,” she says and she reaches up to cup Kara’s cheeks, pressing closer until they kiss for a long moment. “If there’s something you can help with, you will be the first to know.”

“Even the stuff you don’t think I can help with,” Kara says. “You can still talk to me about it.”

“I know.”

“Like, I want to know if your mom’s making you crazy,” Kara says, starting to move again even though they’re still face-to-face. It produces a funny stuttering walk, Lena giggling as Kara’s hands press onto her waist and lift just the littlest bit, so she no longer has to walk backwards.

“You should assume that as a baseline,” Lena says. Kara hums, smiling softly. “You tell me things, right?”

“Of course,” Kara says. “But I don’t have a lot to tell. I tripped over a tree root today and had to fall on my face on the south quad. And the waitress at Salt and Pep gave me a whole extra order of mac and cheese bites at lunch for free.”

“Wow,” Lena says, faking amazement even as Kara rolls her eyes. “My mother lecturing me about my responsibilities is meaningless in the face of the image of you faceplanting on the quad.”
“Lena,” Kara groans, even as she laughs. Lena leans upwards again, even as Kara steadily keeps walking them backwards. Kara’s smile against her lips is by far the best thing about her day, and she makes sure to tell her so.

James walks out of the medbay first, paces past the group with a quick wave and a smile. He looks relatively unharmed, but visibly tired and he doesn’t get more than a few feet away before Winn is jumping up and jogging after him.

Alex is staring at the medbay James just exited and Lena follows her gaze. They sit there in silence for a few moments both of them clearly waiting for Kara to appear, but nothing of the sort happens. Eventually she hears Alex sigh. “I should go talk to her,” she says, but the words sound uncharacteristically hesitant and Lena stands instead.

With a friendly squeeze of Alex’s shoulder, Lena gives her a reassuring smile. “Let me,” she says and Alex doesn’t even protest.

Kara’s still in the medbay, her figure an angry ball of tension on the far side of the room. There’s a crushed centrifuge on the table next to Kara and Lena sighs.

“Kara,” she says quietly, pacing towards her slowly.

No response comes, but Lena remains undeterred. When she gets close enough to Kara to touch her, she reaches out to grasp lightly at the other woman’s elbow in an attempt to get Kara to face her. “Kara, look at me,” she orders, and slowly Kara turns though her posture remains tense and coiled.

“What?” Kara bites out in an angry tone Lena isn’t used to.

The instinct to comfort is too strong for Lena to do anything other than insinuate herself into Kara’s personal space and pray that physical contact can ease the tight look of despair in Kara’s eyes.

“What happened with James?” Lena asks softly, moving so she’s between Kara and the workbench they’re standing near. Her hands reach out to hold Kara’s, but Kara crosses her arms, closing her eyes tightly and opening them again.

“He thinks he’s some kind of superhero now because Winn made him some fancy armor,” Kara says in a bitterly sarcastic tone. “He - he says he wants to help people like his dad did, like I do, and that I should understand, but he could have died. He’s human and I’m just so-”

Kara cuts herself off, making a frustrated noise.

“On top of that Mon-El,” Kara says and she makes an angry frustrated gesture for a moment before continuing. “Mon-El still won’t listen to me. Almost got people killed.”

“He’s new to this,” Lena offers, unsure of how to calm Kara down at this point.

“I don’t know why he’s even working with me if he can’t get something as simple as protect the people above all else right.”

“We already talked about this,” Lena says, reaching out to settle her hand on the symbol on Kara’s chest, half-covered by her crossed arms. The rapid thump of her heartbeat is strong beneath her fingers.
“I think I’m allowed to be impatient with him when there are civilian lives at stake in a city I have sworn to protect,” Kara says. “I just need everyone to be safe. And all of you seem incapable of cooperating.”

“Kara,” Lena starts, slowly, until she grabs Kara’s attention. “These people love you. And they admire you. You can’t help that you inspire something in them and that they feel a duty to help just as much as you do.”

“For the millionth time: I have superpowers,” Kara says with a frustrated sharpness to her voice. “Girl of Steel, remember?”

“There are a lot of ways to be a hero without powers,” Lena argues. “Are you saying that Alex is unfit for her job because she can’t stop a speeding bullet?”

“I’m saying she’s in danger because she can’t stop a speeding bullet.”

“And yet you couldn’t stop Alex from doing what she does because it’s a part of her,” Lena says. “She loves you and wants to protect you. And I’m sure James feels the same way. We’re a team, right?”

Kara’s jaw remains tight, her eyes betraying a hint of glow in a way that tells Lena Kara is barely holding on to her emotions. “James should find another way to help that isn’t putting himself directly in the line of fire. I don’t care that he has a cool shield. He’s got Winn out there in the field with him armed with nothing more than a keyboard.”

“You can’t just wrap everybody up in wool and hope nothing bad happens. That’s not realistic. Life is dangerous. Especially for people like us.”

Blue eyes bore heatedly into Lena’s. “People like CEOs?”

Lena’s chin lifts, unwilling to back down even in the face of Kara’s growing ire. “At my gala, the one I set the trap at? I saw an opportunity to help and I took it. Even us boring CEOs can find ways to contribute.”

“That’s not what I meant,” Kara says and Lena resists the urge to roll her eyes.

“I was protecting you in whatever way I can. Just like Alex does every single day. And just like James wants to and even Winn.”

“I don’t need you guys to protect me,” Kara says staunchly. “And definitely not when it seriously increases the chances of everyone getting hurt or worse!” Frustration and anxiety are roiling off her frame, and Lena isn’t quite sure what to do other than touch Kara, to make Kara feel how permanent Lena is.

This time, when Lena runs her hand down Kara’s arm, she pushes down on the small lump of Kara’s bracelet around her wrist. Somehow, this is what gets Kara to uncoil, her arms uncrossing as Lena encircles Kara’s wrist, the indestructible metal hard against her hand.

“If I can protect you, I will,” Lena says. “Always. That’s what this thing is about, right?”

There’s a moment of quiet as Kara closes her eyes and slowly deflates, letting Lena touch her. When she opens her eyes again, she just looks tired, watching Lena carefully.

“I know we were supposed to have dinner,” Kara says, trailing off a little at the end and looking away.
Lena’s not sure how to read her general demeanor at the moment, but she imagines much of it has to do with the stress of the day and she reaches out to put a comforting hand against Kara’s biceps. “It’s fine. We can reschedule. I think that’s kind of becoming our thing.”

Kara smiles at that, but the expression doesn’t quite meet her eyes.

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Lena gets escorted back to L Corp shortly thereafter, as the DEO rushes into motion over news that Livewire has actually been kidnapped and they’ve been dealing with an even larger mess than anticipated. It’s a strange turn to a strange, confusing day, and sitting in her office chair for the last few hours of the workday is a centering force, even though she can’t stop thinking about the anger on Kara’s face.

As she’s heading home much later that night she gets a text from Alex. *We found her.*

It’s comforting for a moment, but there’s still a stab of worry from the knowledge that that means Kara is headed towards a dangerous confrontation.

She distracts herself by ordering food and sorting through some work she brought home with her.

Lena’s halfway through throwing out the leftovers of her dinner, the bag poised over her trash can when she hears the familiar sound of Kara landing on her balcony.

“Hey!” Lena greets, wiping her hands on a dishtowel and walking into the living room just as Kara’s stepping over the threshold of her balcony door. “Everything go okay?”

“Yeah,” Kara says, but she doesn’t look victorious as she steps farther into Lena’s apartment. “I guess. Livewire escaped, but we got her kidnappers.”

“What happened?” Lena asks, tracking Kara’s motions as she idles halfway across the living room floor.

“I let her go,” Kara says, shrugging. “She was going to kill the man who abducted her and I - let her escape so she wouldn’t do it. Plus James and Mon-El were captured and I had to rescue them.”

“So it didn’t really go okay,” Lena ventures, watching as Kara crosses her arms and stares at something over Lena’s shoulder. All the anxiety Lena had managed to drain out of Kara’s shoulders has crawled back tenfold.

“No,” Kara says. “Mon-El told me he likes me, too. I just finished rejecting him at my apartment.”

“I’m sorry, darling,” Lena says. Kara shakes her head, looking at Lena and blinking her bright blue eyes.

“It’s okay,” Kara breathes out, squaring herself up. She looks like a superhero, then, like Supergirl, standing tall in Lena’s apartment and looking imperious. “I’m sorry about missing our date again.”

“Who would have thought a Luthor and a Super would have a problem finding enough free time for a date,” Lena jokes, but Kara doesn’t laugh. The silent response twists in Lena’s gut ominously and she watches as Kara sets her hands on her hips and takes an uncharacteristically deep breath.

“I think that,” Kara shakes her head, looks away for a moment before taking a visibly deep breath and lifting her chin to look at Lena. “I think that maybe that’s a good thing.”
“What’s a good thing?”

“I think we shouldn’t,” Kara says vaguely.

Lena blinks. “Shouldn’t what?”

Kara’s jaw is tight, her whole body posture looking like she’s bracing for some kind of impact and Lena feels lost for a moment. “I think we should forget about dinner.”

“What are you-” Lena barely gets half the question out before Kara is talking again.

“I don’t think we should try again. Us. I’m too dangerous to be around.”

It takes a good few seconds for Lena to fully compute what’s happening. She runs the words over in her mind a few times while Kara watches. At first, Lena feels like laughing. Her jaw drops into an incredulous smile and she looks around a little like maybe this is some kind of very elaborate and misguided prank. “You can’t be serious,” she says, crossing her arms over her chest.

“It’s not a joke,” Kara replies and Lena does laugh at that. It sure as shit better not be a joke because it’s not a funny one in the least.

Pinching the bridge of her nose, Lena turns and walks away for a bit trying to decide how to reply. “You’re saying that you don’t want to-” she trails off, not knowing how to classify what they’re talking about. Don’t want to date me seems juvenile compared to the way she feels about their relationship, but she can’t think of any other way to phrase it.

“The stuff with Livewire made me realize the kind of threat I now pose to us. To you. Now that I’m Supergirl...I’ve made some enemies. She’s a big one.” Kara’s voice wavers over the words, her body looking like it’s one second away from crumbling. “I can’t knowingly put you in that kind of danger. I wasn’t thinking before, but I am now.”

“I can’t believe I’m hearing this,” Lena says, mostly to herself.

“I couldn’t live with myself if something happened to you because of me.”

“Nothing happened, Kara.” Lena says. “In fact, Livewire wasn’t even the one behind any of this and she had zero interest in me.”

“And yet she’s out there with no better feelings about me than before and if she comes back you’re in danger.”

“Again,” Lena replies feeling like they’re back to running around in endless circles. “Nothing. Happened. Furthermore, last I checked it’s usually pretty dangerous for a Super to be around a Luthor, but that hasn’t seemed to matter in the last however many months.”

“That’s entirely different.”

“So you haven’t been the one constantly assuring me that the danger I bring to this relationship isn’t something that should stop us from trying?”

“You don’t bring danger to this, Lena,” Kara argues. “You mother wants me dead whether or not we even know each other. It wouldn’t make a difference.”

“I’m a public figure, Kara. I don’t need to know you to be in some crazy person’s crosshairs.”

“This wasn’t just some crazy person. This was someone with a vendetta against me that could
come after you just because you know me.”

“How many times do I have to remind you that nothing happened? You were worried over nothing.”

“Nothing happened, but something could have.”

Lena throws up her hands in frustration. “So you want to just throw in the towel on mere speculation?”

Kara’s jaw clenches visibly and she just looks at Lena for a moment. “Isn’t that what you did?”

It cuts into Lena unexpectedly, but she sees it for what it is and forces the guilt and the hurt to subside for the moment. “Don’t do that,” Lena warns, her voice feeling uneven despite her efforts. Lena doesn’t need to explain what that means because Kara’s shoulders sag suddenly and she looks away. “I’m not trying to do anything. I’m just-”

“You’re trying to push me away,” Lena points out.

“For your own good,” Kara argues and Lena bristles.

“You don’t get to make those kinds of decisions.”

“Lena,” Kara sighs, pinching at the bridge of her nose.

“You don’t, Kara,” Lena insists. “No matter what we are to each other, you don’t get to make those kinds of decisions for the both of us. If you don’t want to be with me than so be it, but don’t do it because you think it’s what’s best for me.”

“What I want,” Kara says, chin lifting. “Is for you to be safe. And I need to accept that maybe you’re the safest without me.”

“That’s a ridiculous notion,” Lena dismisses, still not entirely believing how severely their roles have reversed in this moment.

Kara’s eyes harden suddenly with determination and fear. “I have lost so much,” she says in a dark, shaky voice. “I am not going to be the reason I lose you. If I can protect you, I will. Always.”

The words Lena had said earlier at the DEO sound heavy and dark in Lena’s apartment, falling out of Kara’s mouth.

“Kara,” Lena says, and she tries to keep her voice from sounding suddenly shrill, but doesn’t entirely succeed. “Listen to yourself. You can’t let this kind of fear rule your life.”

“Lena, we can’t do this. I won’t,” Kara says with a resigned, final tone that Lena finds herself responding to, her chest lifting and gaze narrowing. Kara spent months fighting for them. Maybe it’s finally Lena’s turn.

“You’re having a hysterical reaction to the situation with Livewire. You’re not thinking clearly.”

“Maybe I’m finally thinking clearly,” Kara argues and Lena can’t help but let out a loud sigh. “I love you. You know that.”

“Then stay here and work on this with me,” Lena says, a hot feeling rising up in the back of her eyes as Kara stands there like a statue, watching her. The space between them feels massive and
even in the tense atmosphere, Lena still feels the pull of Kara.

“I just can’t,” Kara whispers, and with that, she turns on her heel and makes it to the balcony, and is gone, into the night air.

Lena blinks at the space Kara just occupied for a long moment. Her hand fiddles with her watch and she pops the face open, briefly considering pressing the button just to send Kara flying back as soon as possible before thinking better of it.

“That did not just happen,” Lena mutters to the empty air of living room. The wind ripples through the curtains of her balcony, and she watches them flutter for a moment before a surge of anger rushes through her. She reaches for her phone, dialing Kara’s number.

Kara picks up, answering with a half-hearted Lena that makes Lena’s chest feel like it’s bursting open with pain, but she’s so angry - she hasn’t been this angry at Kara since she had willfully flown into a fireworks display in college - and Kara’s being so childish, not willing to talk about this -

“You do not just get to fly away from this conversation like a child. Get back here and talk to me,” Lena says, and Kara makes a small noise that has Lena adjusting her tone to something imitative of calm, but her voice is still dark when she adds, “Now.”

And she hangs up, drops her phone on her counter perhaps a little too harshly, and waits.
Chapter 12

Kara takes an uncharacteristically long time to return to the apartment and Lena spends the time pacing around her kitchen as she tries to stop feeling so incredibly infuriated that Kara would just walk - fly - out of a conversation like that.

By the time Kara lands on her balcony for the second time that night, she looks caught somewhere between sheepish and just as angry as Lena’s been feeling.

“I didn’t come back to fight with you about this,” is the first thing Kara says as she steps back inside and Lena has to take a deep breath and count to ten to stop from snapping. She props her hands up on her kitchen counter and waits for Kara to step more fully into the room.

“We’re not fighting,” Lena says, trying to relay a calm she does not feel at all.

Kara looks skeptical of that. “Feels like we might start,” she says in a slow articulation of the words.

Lena’s lips thin. “Why would you say that?”

“The look on your face?” Kara ventures and Lena takes another deep breath.

“I would just like to discuss a few things with you. Like how you do not just get to fly out of my apartment in the middle of a discussion, Kara,” Lena says, just barely restraining herself from pointing an accusatory finger at Kara’s face. “Of all the childish things-”

“Don’t call me a child,” Kara retorts, her expression shadowing.

“I’m not calling you a child,” Lena denies. “I’m calling your behavior childish.”

“I’m the only one being an adult about this.”

Lena startles, lets out an incredulous laugh and Kara’s face darkens further. “I honestly can’t believe you right now.”

“This is the right thing, Lena,” Kara says lowly, stepping forward.

“You are so far off base at this point-,” Lena starts, but Kara takes another step forward, her jaw tight in anger.

“Of all the people to say that to me, as if you weren’t the one four years ago breaking up with me for my own good,” Kara counters and it shuts Lena up suddenly, eyes going a little wide.

At the sudden silence, Kara relaxes just a bit as Lena feels her own shoulders go tense in indignation.

“Is that what you think happened?” Lena asks, surprised and incredulous. “We broke up for a variety of reasons, but not because I was making some sort of ridiculous self sacrifice to protect you!”

“This isn’t ridiculous,” Kara argues.

“This is the very definition of ridiculous,” Lena counters. “I understand that you’re scared and that’s fine, but you can’t let that kind of feeling make decisions like this one. And you certainly
“don’t get to make decisions for me when you-”

“It’s not about fear,” Kara denies, hands propping up on her hips. “It’s about realizing a threat exists and taking steps to eliminate it. I refuse to be the reason you get hurt and I-”

“You’re hurting me right now,” Lena says.

“I am trying to-”

“Oh get off it, Kara,” Lena snaps, feeling her anger get the best of her.

“Stop dismissing this, Lena,” Kara says heatedly, pointing a finger accusatorily in Lena’s direction. “This is real. This is the best thing for both of us.”

“If I were the one saying this...If I were telling you that I didn’t want to be with you because my mother is apparently some kind of evil supervillain and my brother tried very hard to kill your cousin, what would you say?”

“I told you earlier-”

“What would you say, Kara? If that’s why I didn’t want to be with you. If I said that I’m a Luthor, and I’m constantly in the public eye, and am just in general a threat to your secret identity and wellbeing as Supergirl. That’s all true. I’m far more dangerous to you than you are to me.”

Kara’s chin lifts a moment and she lets out a noisy exhale through her nose. “I would say that I can protect you from Lex and your mother. And I can handle myself. I can protect both of us. You’re not-”

“Exactly,” Lena says.

“This is different.”

“It’s not.”

“Lena,” Kara says, cutting her hand in front of her in what Lena’s sure is meant to be a gesture of finality. “It is.”

“No,” Lena counters. “This is-”

“We stood at an airport four years ago and you told me we couldn’t be together anymore and then you got on a plane and literally flew away. And now I do it and I’m the bad guy? I’m the one being ridiculous? All because I care about what happens-”

“I don’t know how many times I have to apologize for-”

“You haven’t,” Kara interrupts forcefully.

Lena’s brow pulls down. “Haven’t what?”

“Apologized,” Kara answers. “In fact all you’ve said is that you don’t regret it. And that you’re sorry you had to make the decisions you made. The decision to abandon me.”

Abandon. That’s what Kara feels Lena did to her, when there’s hardly been a day since that one where she hadn’t thought about Kara.

A tense silence stretches out between them and Lena feels transported for a moment back to that
small airport, an answering spike of heat blooming behind her eyes at the thought of it. Her anger ebbs away a bit and she looks at Kara dead on. “I don’t owe you an apology for that,” she says and a flash of hurt spikes across Kara’s face.

“I’m sorry I hurt you,” Lena continues, softer this time and with less ire than before. “That was never my intention, and I wasn’t trying to - I didn’t - I wasn’t abandoning you. I’m not going to apologize for making a hard decision all those years ago. I thought it was the right one for me at the time.”

“Then why can’t you understand what I’m doing here? That this isn’t any easier for me than it was for you.”

“That decision was about me and my life and all the reasons why our relationship was about to become logistically difficult to manage-”

“Logistically difficult to manage? We weren’t a business deal, Lena.”

Lena pinches the bridge of her nose in irritation. “I am not going to sit here and argue about something that happened four years ago, Kara. If we can’t get past that now then this is going nowhere.”

“We are past it,” Kara says. “I’m just trying to get you to see that what you did then and what I am trying to do now are-”

“Completely different things,” Lena interrupts, unable to keep her voice from going shrill.

“Stop interrupting me.”

“Stop saying the same ridiculous thing!”

Kara’s jawline is a sharp, angry line as she takes a deep breath and continues. “Four years ago. You made a decision for the both of us.”

“I made a decision for me that happened to affect both of us.”

“Well, that’s what I’m doing,” Kara says with a lift of her chin.

“So you don’t want to be with me?” Lena asks, propping her hands on her hips. “Is that what you’re saying?”

“Are you implying that you didn’t want to be with me four years ago because-”

“For the love of God, Kara. I am not going to run around in circles with you about what happened in college.”

“You brought it up!”

“You brought it up!” Lena all but yells. A second of silence stretches between them and Lena takes a deep, calming breath. “We have to calm down.”

“I’m perfectly calm,” Kara replies with a pointed look that immediately flushes away when Lena cuts a glare her direction.

“Look,” Lena says in a more even tone. “We’re not college students anymore, Kara. There’s no need for this kind of dramatism.”
Kara’s shoulders sag and she looks away for a bit. “I’m just trying to do the right thing.”

Stepping forward until she’s inches away from Kara, Lena manages a small smile. “I want to get back together,” she says without any pretense and an unexpected look of shock startles for a second on Kara’s face. “Do you?”

“Do I?”

“Do you want to get back together with me?” Lena asks. “Simple question.”

“It’s not that simple.”

“Forget everything else. Pretend we’re on Earth-1. Do you want to be with me?”

Kara just stares at her for a long moment, eyes darting around Lena’s face before she answers. “I told you before,” she says in a soft voice. “In any and every universe.”

The memory makes Lena smile. “And I told you years ago that I didn’t want to look back and think I had wasted a moment of my life with you.”

The tense lines in Kara’s face relax a little at the memory and Kara manages a half smile that Lena returns. “You did.”

“I did,” Lena agrees. “And then I went and spent four years making all kinds of mistakes and wasting considerable time not being with you.”

There’s a wave of surprise on Kara’s face that shows her just how much Kara doesn’t realize that Lena does regret the time that she kept them apart, even if she’s not sure she’d go back and make a different choice. It’s a paradox of feelings that Lena’s not sure how to unpack, but she forces herself to focus on the here and now, on the possibility of moving forward.

Lena reaches up to cup Kara’s cheeks. “I want to figure us out and I don’t want things like fear and paranoia to get in the way. Not anymore. We have enough obstacles without adding things like that.”

Kara doesn’t respond other than nodding and Lena’s throat feels a little achy at the restraint it takes to keep from crying.

“Okay,” Kara says, her voice croaking.

“I love you, you know,” she whispers, swiping a thumb over Kara’s cheekbone.

Silence passes for a beat before Kara moves forward just a bit until their foreheads are touching. “I love you too,” she says quietly.

“We can figure this out,” Lena says. “But we have to do it together. Neither of us can run away just because it gets hard.”

“I just - feel crazy at the idea that I could lose you again. Especially if it was because of me. Or what I am.”

“Pushing me away so that you don’t have to lose me again is just blatantly counter intuitive,” Lena says with a quirk of her lips. “Surely someone as smart as you can see that.”

The last bit makes Kara laugh, an unbidden noise that relaxes the tension in her face. “I did have better SAT scores than you.”
Lena makes a noise caught between a scoff and a groan and rolls her eyes. “I should have never told you that.”

The atmosphere noticeably eases, but there’s still a shaky feeling to the way Kara’s standing and Lena aches to take care of it, the anger from earlier slowly being replaced by exhaustion.

“I hate feeling like this,” Kara confesses. “I know I’m supposed to - I shouldn’t be this -”

“Hey,” Lena interrupts with a soft shushing sound. “It’s okay to be scared, but let’s be scared together instead of apart for a change. No more dramatic reactions to fear or unilateral decisions about things that affect both of us.”

“That wasn’t a dramatic reaction,” Kara argues and Lena laughs.

“Kara, you flew out my window after attempting to break up with me.”

Kara arches a brow. “We’d have to be together for us to break up.”

Lena’s chest squeezes abruptly. “That’s a fair point,” she says, but her voice goes thicker than she intends it to and she’s suddenly much more aware of how close she’s standing to Kara. “Have you rethought your position on rescheduling our date?”

A moment passes with Kara just looking at Lena silently before she answers. “I don’t think dinner would make us any more together than we already have been.”

The truth of that is far too apparent to ignore. Lena hasn’t thought of Kara as an ex in some time now and ever since they got back from Earth-1 it’s felt like they were just circling the obvious.

“So, that’s a yes about dinner? My schedule is a finely tuned instrument, and if you want to get pencilled in, you need to be assertive.”

Kara laughs a little, reaching out to wrap an arm around Lena’s waist. “I’m sorry I left the way I did,” she says sincerely.

“It’s okay,” Lena replies. “I’m sorry we haven’t talked about some of this before now.”

“Are we done fighting now?”

“We weren’t fighting,” Lena says with a roll of her eyes.

“You called me a child.”

“Oh, for the last time,” Lena groans and Kara chuckles.

“Kidding.”

“Kara?”

“Yes?”

Lena thinks to say shut up. It’s what she wants to say. Instead she just moves forward until her lips are pressed up against Kara’s with solid and sure pressure.

It feels overwhelmingly good when Kara kisses her back, tightens her hold around Lena’s waist to keep their bodies pressed together. Lena’s fingers twist in the fabric of Kara’s suit, tug insistently enough that Kara obeys and pushes in closer, backs them up. It hurts a little when the small of her back gets shoved against the kitchen counter top, but the pain barely registers, because Kara’s hips
have pressed up against Lena’s and all she can think about is the pool of hot and unstoppable pressure building at the base of her spine.

Kara’s lips taste familiar and warm and she smiles into the kiss, laughs a little when Kara picks her up to slide her onto the counter and step between her legs. The skirt she’s wearing bunches up her legs and the feel of Kara sliding against the bare skin of her inner thighs makes Lena inhale sharply, the sound swallowed by the insistent press of Kara’s mouth against her own.

All the adrenaline of the past few days, the emotion of Kara disappearing, the tension since Livewire broke out of jail, it all comes pouring out of both of them and Lena feels a spike of desperation throb low in her gut. Kara makes a noise she hasn’t heard in years and Lena just reacts to it, her legs wrapping around Kara’s body to pull her in closer and her fingers sliding up to tangle in Kara’s hair.

This part of their relationship never took much maneuvering or figuring it out. After they finally discovered a way to come together without Kara constantly worrying about controlling her strength, this physical connection was the easiest part of their relationship. This kind of conversation always said things far deeper than Lena ever knew how to say in words.

It feels like she’s shaking, and Kara doesn’t feel much better considering the tremble Lena can detect in the fingers that are currently sliding up her thighs. “You okay?” Lena murmurs between kisses, the words barely detectable with how little she wants to pull away from the taste of Kara’s mouth.

Kara doesn’t respond, just nods and presses back in, nips at Lena’s lips in a way that shoots feeling down Lena’s spine, makes her hips jolt a little into Kara’s.

Her heart is beating so fast and hard she’s sure it must be deafening Kara but she can’t think about it. Not when Kara is suddenly kissing down her jawline, fingers clenching against the skin of Lena’s thighs in a way that radiates need.

Her fingers are scrambling over the fabric across Kara’s back, desperate to feel bare skin when suddenly Kara’s lips pull away from her neck and her entire body sags heavily against Lena’s. The hands that were once climbing dangerously high up her legs leave their purchase to prop up against the counter on each side of Lena’s hips and Kara lets out a noisy exhale. They just sit there for a moment, Lena swallowing against the insistent taste of arousal in the back of her throat.

“What’s wrong?” Lena asks when she feels like her voice won’t come out hoarse. It’s still throaty and thick sounding, but she’s able to articulate her words and focuses on trying to get her body to calm down. She should be used to this by now. Used to Kara abruptly stopping them whenever anything gets too heated. It’s happened the last two times they’ve gotten close again and it happened so often in college that it’s a wonder Lena doesn’t just expect it.

Kara’s forehead sits heavily against Lena’s shoulders and she shakes her head a little until Lena runs a soothing hand down Kara’s spine, presses a kiss into blonde hair.

“I feel like I might break something,” Kara confesses in a voice so soft Lena strains to pick it all up. When she does, it’s like being in college all over again, like if she closes her eyes she’ll be in
her small dorm room bed, its headboard in pieces.

“Do you want to stop?” Lena asks, still running soothing fingers over Kara’s back, her neck, scratching against her scalp. It’s so thrilling to be able to touch her openly, to not have to worry about what it means for them.

“Want to?” Kara jokes with a laugh that does nothing to stem the tide of arousal that’s still thrumming across her skin. Finally picking her head up, she looks at Lena with sad disappointed eyes.

“We can,” Lena tells her and she cups Kara’s cheeks, presses another kiss to her lips, swift but reassuring. “It’s been a long day.”

“I don’t want to stop,” Kara says and her eyes dart down to Lena’s mouth.

“Me neither,” Lena admits, licking her lips against the lingering taste of Kara there. There’s nothing Lena wants more than to stay pressed into Kara, to divest them of their clothing and retreat to her bedroom. She wants to know if Kara still makes the same noises she made in college, wants to know if her knowledge of Kara’s body has held up over the years.

But the exhaustion of the day, a mixture of physical and emotional, is starting to catch up to her and Kara doesn’t look that much better either. Despite the low thrum of need across her skin, Lena knows they should probably table this activity for another day, save it for a time when she’s not worried about passing out at any moment.

Kara pulls back a little then, and her eyes flick down further than Lena’s mouth this time to where she knows her chest is still heaving, her blouse all kinds of askew. Kara swallows visibly, blinks. “I am definitely going to break something,” she say but it’s with a teasing lilt to her voice and it makes Lena laugh.

They smile at each other for a long moment, Lena’s hands moving to settle over Kara’s where they’re still pressing against the counter top.

“Okay. Then you need to step away from me,” Lena says forcing the rational part of her brain to overpower the side of it drowning in want. Kara doesn’t move for a few seconds and Lena laughs a little. “There are a lot of very expensive things in this apartment, Kara.”

“Right, sorry,” Kara says with an amused exhale as she pushes away from Lena.

Sliding down from the counter, Lena straightens her clothing and runs her fingers through her hair. “Are you hungry? I can order pizza or something.”

“Honestly?” Kara says, rubbing her face a little. “I think I’m too tired to eat.”

Lena puts on a show of surprised and puts the back of her hand up against Kara’s forehead. “Are you sick?”

Halfheartedly swatting at Lena’s hand, Kara laughs. “Stop. It’s been a long day. You said so yourself.”

“It has, you’re right.” They regard each for a silent moment before Lena makes a decision. “Do you want to stay?”

Kara’s answer is soft, but immediate. “Yes.”
It pulls a smile across Lena’s lips and she reaches out to tangle her fingers with Kara’s. As she pulls them both in the direction of the bedroom, Lena starts to feel the exhaustion of the day creep up. Stifling a yawn, she leads them further into the apartment and goes about finding Kara something to change into.

It only takes a few seconds before Kara’s out of her supersuit and idling around Lena’s bedroom in worn sweatpants and a t-shirt.

“So, tell me about what happened with Mon-El,” Lena says as she goes about changing. “It sounded fun.”

Kara sighs dramatically, drops down onto a chair in the corner of the room and lets her head fall backwards. “Nice choice of mood killers.”

Lena laughs as she pulls her earrings out and sets them on her dresser. “So he finally confessed all his feelings?”

Kara picks her head up, manages some kind of glare towards Lena. “You know, he did mention that you encouraged him to do that.”

“I did not,” Lena denies, but she can’t stop from laughing. “He just kept coming to me to talk about it because apparently Winn told him that we’re…” she pauses, makes an air quote gesture. “BFFs?”

“Great,” Kara laughs. “So it’s Winn that I need to hit in the face?”

Lena walks over to fall into Kara’s lap, stroking a reassuring hand over Kara’s forehead. Kara’s hands wrap around her, one landing on her back and the other just above her knee, instinctual. “So how did he take the rejection?”

“Awful,” Kara answers, blowing out a low breath. “I hate doing that.”

“Have you had to do it a lot?” Lena asks with an arch of her brow.

“All the time,” Kara says with an exaggerated amount of seriousness in her tone. “I mean, people just throw themselves at me.”

“Must be tough.”

“Exhausting,” Kara says with a smirk.

“I wouldn’t want to add to your burden.”

“You did literally throw yourself at me in college.”

Lena’s eyes go wide with indignation and she shoves Kara’s shoulder. “Running into you because you’re built like a damn truck does not constitute throwing myself,” Lena says, but Kara just laughs enough that Lena has to shelve at her again.

“I’m glad you did though,” Kara says softly, still smiling and Lena feels her cheeks warm just a bit.

“Me too,” Lena murmurs, leaning forward to press her lips solidly against Kara’s.

They stay tangled together for a long moment before Kara stands up from the chair and floats them both into bed. She falls asleep with Kara’s arm slung across her body, holding onto her. Making
For the second time in a week, Lena wakes up to the sound of Supergirl clanging around in her kitchen. Except this time when she shuffles into her kitchen to the smell of cooking and the sight of Kara dancing around her stove, she just laughs and allows herself the pleasure of imagining what it would be like if this was her everyday morning.

“You know, in college you slept in until at least ten,” Lena comments, reaching out to grab the cup of coffee Kara is extending towards her.

“I didn’t have to fight early morning crime in college,” Kara replies, leaning forward to kiss Lena good morning.

“It’s Saturday,” Lena points out with just a hint of complaint in her tone. “Surely criminals take weekends.”

Kara laughs, kisses Lena again with a smile. “Criminals in National City are overachievers apparently.”

“Apparently,” Lena parrots, taking a sip of her coffee and moving to sit at her kitchen counter. “Does Supergirl have other responsibilities today?”

“Nope,” Kara answers with a grin, returning to whatever it is she’s cooking. Eggs of some kind from the looks of it. “And neither does Kara Danvers.”

Lena laughs a little. “Well unfortunately Lena Luthor does.”

Kara frowns a little, turning slightly from the stove. “It’s Saturday,” she says with considerably more whine in her voice than when Lena had said it.

“My mother’s trial begins this week,” she says, her tone conveying just how enthused she feels over the event.

“Fun,” Kara deadpans.

“Yup,” Lena agrees with a little pop of the word. She takes a long sip of her coffee and enjoys the sight of Kara cooking, bouncing slightly to some music Lena can’t hear.

“Well, I can leave you be once we eat,” Kara says, smiling down at Lena as she slides an omelette onto Lena’s plate.

“First pancakes and now this? When did you learn to cook?” Lena asks, eying the perfectly made omelette in front of her. In college, there was a reason Kara had been a frequent purveyor of any restaurant that offered delivery or takeout. The memory of one particular fight with the community oven comes to mind suddenly and Lena’s lips quirk.

Kara shrugs, leaning forward on the counter. “I had a lot of free time before I was Supergirl.”

Lena laughs a little and picks up her fork to take a bite. “It’s good.” she says and tries to keep the surprise out of her voice. Kara chuckles, standing up and turning back to the stove.

“I should probably admit that this is the extent of my skills.”

“Pancakes and eggs?” Lena asks, swallowing her food and reaching for her coffee.
“Breakfast foods,” Kara clarifies. “So I guess, yeah. Pancakes and eggs.”

“People eat other things for breakfast.”

Kara pours liquid egg into a pan and laughs. “I tried cinnamon rolls once and I almost burnt Alex’s apartment down.”

“Should I be worried?” Lena jokes.

“I think it’s just ovens I have a problem with,” Kara says with a quick glance over her shoulder.

Lena’s about to respond when Kara’s phone lights up from its place on the counter and Kara abandons her pan in favor of the device, picking it up and swiping the screen open.

Whatever is there must be important because Kara’s eyes go wide immediately and seconds later she’s furiously typing away at your screen.

“Everything okay?” Lena asks, spearing another piece of her breakfast and watching Kara’s face remain intent on her screen.

“Yeah. M’gann woke up,” Kara answers absently and Lena tries to remember if she’s suppose to recognize that name.

“M’gann…”

At that, Kara looks over, a little startled. “Oh, sorry. Yeah. Our friend M’gann. She’s the other Martian. Like J’onn,” Kara answers, but then she shrugs a little. “Well I guess not exactly like J’onn. She’s a White Martian. Sort of. She’s also…a green one?”

“There are different colors of Martians?” Lena asks, because it seems like the easiest thing to tackle first.

“It’s a long story,” Kara says with a dismissive wave of her hand. “But the point is, M’gann was totally in this life threatening coma or something and now she’s awake. J’onn must have found a way to help her.”

“That’s…good,” Lena offers because she’s not sure she’s totally following any of this conversation.

“Super good,” Kara murmurs, typing again on her screen.

“So M’gann was the other Martian we helped at Veronica’s little pop-up?”

“Yeah,” Kara answers, seeming to become satisfied with her conversation and setting her phone back down. “J’onn thought he was the last of his kind and then he found M’gann and it was this whole thing and they’ve had their ups and downs you know being from like two rival groups of their own species intent on killing each other and all that.”

“What?” Lena asks trying to follow along with Kara’s rambling.

“White Martians basically exterminated all the Green Martians on Mars. Except J’onn obviously.”

“Right.”

“I should probably let J’onn explain it. It’s his story, after all.”

“Doesn’t sound like something he’d be eager to speak about,” Lena comments and Kara shrugs.
“Maybe.”

It’s only then that Lena notices the smoke rising out of the pan over Kara’s shoulder and her eyes go wide. “Kara,” she says slowly and Kara’s brow crinkles.

“What?”

Lena points behind her and tries not to laugh when Kara turns and startles, quickly blowing out a cold breath of frozen air in the direction of the burning food.

It’s silent for a moment and Lena eyes her now frozen over kitchen, icicles dripping from the hood over the stove. A laugh bursts out of her when Kara turns sheepish eyes back at her.

“I guess some things really don’t change,” Lena says, still laughing when Kara throws a dishtowel at her.

“I guess I’ll...fix this,” Kara mutters, her hands arriving on her hips as she surveys the situation. “How did Eliza and Alex put up with me doing this kind of stuff all the time?”

“Don’t use your heat vision,” Lena says, interrupting the glow of Kara’s eyes. Kara makes a disappointed noise, reaching for one of the icicles and snapping it free, then tossing it in Lena’s sink. “They love you. It’s why I could put up with you breaking my bed at least seven separate times.”

“Those were all your fault,” Kara says, snapping more icicles free and wiping the stove counter free of the dripping water. “Every single one.”

“Sure,” Lena says, watching the bright red of Kara’s cape move around in the light of her kitchen, the icicles glittering in her hands, her smile as she bounces around. It’s so nice, to have Kara in her space and being carefree, and she can’t help herself.

“When you’re done with that and you’ve managed to get your own food made, why don’t you change into some real clothes? We can hang out,” Lena says. Kara turns her head to look at Lena, a small smile playing on her face. “As long as you promise to let me get some work done.”

“When have I ever not?” Kara says, and Lena rolls her eyes just before Kara presses a kiss to her forehead.

--

They spend the majority of the day lounging around Lena’s living room. Kara sprawls at one end of the couch and marvels at how many channels Lena has in her cable package. But you don’t even watch TV. Lena sits on the other end, her feet tucked up under her as she reads through her testimony.

Midway through a RoboCop marathon that Kara’s managed to find, Kara’s phone rings loudly from where it’s perched on the coffee table.

Whoever is calling must be a surprise because Kara’s eyes go immediately wide when she looks at the screen and she fumbles around a little trying to answer it.

“Ms Grant!” Kara greets when she gets her phone to her ear, standing up from the couch. “Hi.”

Lena watches with a bemused smile as Kara starts pacing a little and she can just barely make out the tinny sound of Cat Grant’s voice on the other line.
“Yes, Supergirl let her go. Yes, I know she probably should have informed you, I’ll tell her. Are you okay?”

Whatever Cat is saying must appease Kara because the tension seems to slowly creep back out of her and after a few seconds of just listening she sits back down on the couch.

“No of course, I wasn’t implying otherwise,” Kara says quickly. “Look I just want you to know that if you ever need anything -” Kara pauses, her brow contracting. “Ms. Grant?”

Silence must be the only answer Kara gets because she just sighs and pulls her phone away. “Okay, bye,” Kara says to no one.

“Everything okay with Cat?” Lena asks, flipping a page over and making a note.

Kara throws her phone back down on the coffee table and sags back into the couch. “Yeah,” she says, leaning to the side until she’s horizontal and her head is bumping up against Lena’s thigh. “I can’t believe I forgot to call her.”

“You were understandably distracted,” Lena replies, reaching out to run her fingers along Kara’s forehead soothingly. Kara’s eyes flutter closed and she hums in contentment as Lena continues to track her fingers over Kara’s head. “I didn’t know you and Cat were so close.”

“I was her assistant for a long time,” Kara answers, craning her head towards Lena’s touch.

“I didn’t know former assistants still call-”

“Lena,” Kara interrupts with a laugh, her eyes popping open. “Is this another joke about how I have a crush on Cat Grant?”

“Well, now it is,” Lena replies with a teasing smile and Kara rolls her eyes before sitting back up and arranging her body next to Lena’s.

“Livewire kind of hates Cat,” Kara tells her, and Lena puts her papers down on the table next to the couch in favor of pressing against Kara’s side. “Like wants to murder her in the middle of downtown kind of hate.”

“From what you told me, she feels that way about most people.”

Kara hums agreement. “Yeah, sure. But with Cat it’s just...extra personal I guess,” Kara explains, her head falling back on the couch. “And now she’s out in the wind and Cat’s...wherever Cat is.”

“You don’t know where she is?”

Kara gives her a look. “It’s Cat Grant.”

That makes Lena laugh as she remembers her few encounters with the woman in question. “She had always mastered that elusive millionaire quality I could never quite get.”

“Aww,” Kara says with a teasing smile. “You’re totally elusive.”

“Thank you, darling,” Lena replies with an amused grin.

“I mean, you’ve got the whole look down, for sure,” Kara muses, knocking her head sideways onto Lena’s shoulder. “The lipstick, the skirts, the pale skin, the glare thing you do at people that annoy you. Plus your mysterious ability to always get into trouble.”
“Well, thankfully I’ve got you to get me out of it,” Lena says.

Kara laughs a little, pushing in closer and smiling. “What would you do without me?”

Lena presses a soft kiss to the crown of Kara’s head and declines replying to a question she’d already answered years ago. Instead she smiles at the feeling of Kara so close at hand and the comfortable way their bodies fit together.

--

Somewhere in the middle of RoboCop 3, Lena sets down her papers for half a second and finds Kara watching her intently. It’s a familiar look, in the sense that she’s seen it a million times before, usually followed by a specific set of actions.

“How is the movie?” Kara asks just to fill the silence. Kara’s eyes feel hot and intent on her face.

“I haven’t really been watching it,” Kara answers, the sound low and close to Lena’s ear.

“I have a lot of work to do,” Lena protests, but it comes out weak sounding and Kara smiles a little at it before reaching down to scoop up Lena’s legs and pull them into her lap until Lena’s falling back against the arm of the couch.

“You need a break,” Kara states definitively.

“When I said you could stay for the day, I didn’t say you could distract me,” Lena teases, but she’s already giving in to the feeling of Kara’s strong hands against her legs, sliding up under her soft sweatpants and tracing the skin of her calf.

“You didn’t say I couldn’t distract you.”

“It was heavily implied,” Lena says with a short laugh.

“English is my second language,” Kara points out, shifting until she’s sliding between Lena’s legs and hovering over her. “I’m not good with the implicit stuff.”

With a small smirk, Lena repeats the words in Kryptonian. Tells Kara, “Stop distracting me. I have work to do.”

Kara’s eyes narrow a bit and she just drops farther down against Lena’s body. “That’s really not going to achieve what you want it to achieve,” she warns and Lena can already feel how behind
she’s about to get on all the work she wanted to get done.

She reaches up and hooks her arms around Kara’s neck, her knee bending until she’s cradling Kara’s hips and the pressure of their bodies pushing against each other feels sinfully good. “Maybe it’s achieving exactly what I want it to achieve.”

Kara’s nostrils flare, her hips canting against Lena and the whole room feels thick with tension suddenly. Lena’s heart starts to thud steady and sure against her chest as if it’s struggling to reach Kara.

Dropping her mouth to Lena’s collarbone, Kara presses a kiss there, then another, and another, trailing upward until her lips are near Lena’s ear. Soft words are whispered there, familiar Kryptonian phrases that make Lena sigh.

“I love you too,” Lena whispers back just before Kara reaches her mouth and presses their lips together.

It’s a quick escalation of welcome feeling. Heat starts to pool low in her body and Kara presses her against the couch cushions, one hand hooking under her thigh to bring their bodies in even closer contact.

It feels exactly like it did in college when Kara would push Lena’s homework out of her hands and tangle their limbs together on her tiny couch in her dorm room. But it’s not all the same. Kara’s body somehow feels even more defined than it did when they were teenagers though Lena’s not sure if that’s even possible or just a figment of her imagination - a product of not having been able to touch Kara in years.

The leather couch she had taken with her when she left Metropolis is infinitely more comfortable than the couch in her dorm and wider too, allowing them both more room to maneuver. They no longer have to rely on Kara’s inhuman strength to keep them balanced against the furniture and Lena can’t decide if that’s an improvement or if she misses the display of power.

“Is this okay?” Kara asks softly, a hand trailing up Lena’s shirt to sit hotly against her rib cage, fingers teasing the underside of her chest. It’s an old question she’s heard thousands of times before in the exact same context and she sinks into the familiarity of it.

“Yes,” she answers easily, nodding and clenching her fingers against Kara’s hair.

Lena’s seconds away from abandoning the endeavor of getting work done for the rest of the day, seconds away from biting against Kara’s lower lip and asking her to move this to the bedroom, seconds away from not caring if they don’t leave the apartment all weekend. Which is of course when the grandfather clock down the hall chimes out and Kara drops down against her body with a low groan.

“Is that the clock from the Manor?” Kara asks in what sounds like a whine and Lena laughs when she realizes what happened. Kara had once visited Luthor Manor over summer break while Lillian was away only to be woken up every hour by what was apparently a persistently and uncommonly loud chime.

Her hands travel up Kara’s shirt to soothe down her back, fingers trailing up and down her spine until Kara seems to relax. “It is.”

“Why do you have that here? It’s so loud,” Kara complains, shifting until she’s resting her cheek against Lena’s chest in a familiar position. Her ear sits over Lena’s heart and presses down solidly
while the clock finishes tolling the hour.

Lena kisses the top of Kara’s head, continues to run her hand up and down Kara’s back. “I’m sure that’s why my mother gave it to me,” Lena answers.

“To annoy me in the middle of distracting you?”

Lena laughs. “I was thinking more to annoy me, but I’m sure she wouldn’t be upset with the side benefit.”

“Your mother always hated me,” Kara says and she shifts again until her back is against the back of the couch, her knee hooking over Lena’s thigh and her hand resting high on Lena’s stomach. “I guess that hasn’t changed much.”

“I doubt my mother paid much mind to my college fling,” Lena tells her in a teasing voice, but a memory strikes her then.

“College fling,” Kara scoffs and it makes Lena smile.

“Kara,” she says softly, maneuvering a little to better face the other woman.

Kara makes a humming noise, her body leaning in to the touch Lena’s delivering to her side and then up into her hair, scratching at her scalp.

“Do you think my mother knows you’re Supergirl?”

Kara’s eyes pop open wide, her body tensing for a moment. “Why?”

Lena sighs, her fingers twisting in a tendril of Kara’s hair. “Just a gut feeling I guess.”

“You think she knows about you and me?”

Lena considers that. Adds it together with what she had talked to Alex about regarding Hank Henshaw and shrugs a shoulder. “No. Not necessarily. I don’t think she ever even bothered to really learn your name back then.”

“But you think she knows about Kara Danvers being Supergirl?”

Lena feels herself move closer to Kara in an attempt for reassurance. For which of them, Lena’s not sure, but she obeys the pull of Kara’s body and pushes close to kiss her quickly. “I wouldn’t put much past my mother these days.”

Kara’s lips form a small frown, concern etched into the wrinkles around her eyes. “Then I guess I should stop distracting you and let you keep working on that whole sending your mother to jail thing.”

“Nice choice of mood killers,” Lena jokes, mimicking Kara’s words from the night before. Kara laughs, sitting up on the couch and pulling Lena with her.

Adjusting her now completely askew clothing and watching Kara do the same, Lena reaches out to grab the stack of papers from earlier, settling back against the couch and sighing.

“I hate that you have to do this,” Kara murmurs softly after a few seconds, her feet curled up under her and her elbow propping her head up on the back of the couch.

“Do what?” Lena asks, glancing over.
“This stuff with your mom,” Kara says with a soft smile. “I know it’s hard.”

Lena’s throat feels thick and tight suddenly, but she manages a small smile anyway. “It’s not that hard. She tried to kill hundreds of people. The lines are pretty black and white at this point.”

Kara’s face is full of understanding that Lena is only recently getting reacquainted with. “It’s okay to be conflicted about it,” Kara tells her.

Lena has to look away, focus on the documents in her hands. “I don’t want to be conflicted about it.”

“I know,” Kara says. “I felt the same way when I realized my parents designed Medusa. Your mother was going to use it, but my parents were the ones that created it.”

Lena hadn’t really thought about that and they hadn’t talked about it much, but when she looks back up at Kara the understanding there feels like a tether between both of them, grounding her and making her feel stable and sure.

“I really do love you, you know,” Lena whispers and Kara takes the statement for what it is, flopping back against the couch and stretching her legs out until they’re resting against the coffee table.

“I really do love you too,” Kara says, refocusing on the television with a sincere smile.

--

That evening, after Kara convinces Lena that pizza is a suitable option for dinner, they sit on the floor of the living room and Kara teaches Lena Imperiex chess. It only takes a half hour of explaining and a few trial rounds for Lena to grasp the mechanics. It’s not all that different from the chess she knows. Just new pieces to understand, movesets to memorize and objectives to obtain.

“You made this game sound much harder than it is,” Lena says after beating Kara twice in a row. Kara had handily won the first game, but once Lena had gotten a better grip on the strategy of it all, it was no problem for her to start winning.

“I’m rusty,” Kara complains, squinting at the holographic board and hovering her fingers over the pieces. “And you have beginner’s luck.”

“There’s no such thing as beginner’s luck.”

“Clearly there is.”

“Maybe you’re just not as good as this as you think you are,” Lena teases and Kara turns a glare her way.

“Maybe I’m letting you win.”

Lena quirks a brow, lips thinning. “Are you?”

“You’ll never know,” Kara says with a suddenly evil looking grin spreading out over her lips.

With an indignant scoff, Lena reaches behind her for a small pillow on a nearby chair and smacks Kara in the face with it. It lands on the board, the hologram fritzing for a moment at the intrusion until Kara swipes it away with a laugh.
“Do you want to play something else?”

“Tired of losing?” Lena jokes and Kara falls backward until she’s lying on the ground with an exaggerated groan.

“You were much more humble in college,” Kara says, an arm coming to rest over her eyes.

Lena flips a switch to turn the chess board off and scoots closer to where Kara is lying. “I told you, we’re different people now,” she says with a smirk, pulling Kara’s arm off her eyes.

“That’s a terrible joke,” Kara says, but she’s smiling up at Lena and Lena can’t help herself. Not when everything feels so good again and Kara looks so pretty. She kisses her then, swiftly but with significance and Kara keeps smiling against her lips, reaching up to tug Lena down until they’re both tumbling on the floor and Kara’s perched on top of her.

“I feel like I should inform you that I had a really good day today,” Kara says softly and Lena feels her chest go tight and warm.

“Me too,” she says.

--

Kara leaves somewhere around eleven with a, “If I stay I feel like I won’t be able to stop kissing you.”

Lena fights a smile at that, leaned up against the doorway to her balcony. Kara’s hair is glowing in the lights of the city, and she looks beautiful in Lena’s clothes, her hands in her pockets and a grin on her face.

“Yes, what a terrible thought.”

Kara laughs softly. “I have work to get done and so do you and as much as I’d like to think we could both do that together…”

“Today proved that you’re entirely too distracting for that,” Lena finishes and Kara puts on a face of indignation.

“Me?! You’re the one with the-”

Lena laughs, steps forward to put a hand against Kara’s chest before reaching up to kiss her soundly. “I love you,” she murmurs.

“I love you too,” Kara replies, relaxing into the kiss and reaching around Lena’s waist to pull them together, lifting her up a little in the air. It’s warm and inviting and Lena wants to forgo all the words they’ve just exchanged, to pull Kara into her apartment and test out whatever control Kara could have gained today. But Kara’s right; they’ve never been great at getting things done in the same room.

“Dinner this week?” Kara asks when the break apart.

Lena nods. “Call me.”

--

“You’re staring,” Lena comments, jotting a note down on her project design. Kara’s eyes are hot on the side of her face, and have been for the past few minutes. Her girlfriend had asked to come
over hours ago, and though she wouldn’t classify it as a regret, she’s certainly second-guessing telling Kara that she wouldn’t distract Lena if she stopped by.

“I’m bored,” Kara complains as she hangs upside down off Lena’s bed. Lena doesn’t turn her eyes toward her, but she imagines Kara’s utilizing some of her powers to remain stable in her position.

“Do your homework. Study or something,” Lena replies dismissively, focused on the design specs spread out over her desk.

“I already did it,” Kara says, rolling over and peering at Lena. “Do you want me to do yours?”

“You can’t do mine,” Lena says.

“I could help,” Kara offers, propping her chin in her hand and adjusting her glasses.

“It’s supposed to be an original design,” Lena points out. “You can’t help.”

“No one has to know.”

Lena laughs and looks over at Kara. “Some of us have integrity.”

With an offended snort, Kara rolls her eyes. “Boring. It isn’t due for another week anyway.”

“Kara,” Lena says, returning to her work. “I told you when you said you wanted to come over that I had work to do. Why don’t you go and do something and I’ll call you when I’m done.”

Kara sighs, falls back against the pillows on Lena’s bed. “I’ll be quiet.”

“Honestly, darling,” Lena insists, flipping a page over in her notebook. “You don’t need to sit here being bored. Go call Max or something.”

Shrugging, Kara twiddles her thumbs, blowing a breath out towards the ceiling. “I’d rather be bored here with you than with someone else.”

It makes Lena pause, her eyes jumping back to Kara’s form, stretched out on her bed. She’s wearing jeans and a t-shirt emblazoned with the university mascot, her hands pressed into her defined stomach, and when Lena looks back down at her project, well - she knows which option is more appealing.

Kara squeaks in confusion when Lena clambers up onto the bed, but she accepts the kiss Lena offers happily.

--

Monday morning, Kara calls her.

“We’re going to have drinks this afternoon at the bar to celebrate M’gann waking up and everything. Do you want to come?”

“I’ve never met M’gann,” Lena says cautiously.

“All the more reason,” Kara says brightly. “She’s great, you’ll like her. She’s working, but we’re going to go and celebrate her anyway.”

“I have a lot of work to do.”
“You work too much. Come to the bar for a drink. L Corp will survive.”

“It’s not just L Corp, Kara,” Lena says with a touch of exasperation, but she can feel herself already giving in. “You seem to keep forgetting that my mother’s trial begins soon and I have about a million things—”

“I’m not forgetting, Lena. But your big brain needs a break sometimes. You can handle a drink with friends,” Kara insists. “And I haven’t seen you in like... an entire day.”

It charms Lena to hear the sincerity behind the tease in the tone and she laughs a little. They had spent Sunday apart and Lena had gotten through the majority of the work she needed to get done. It was a miracle with how often Kara spent the day texting her random things and selfies taken around Kara’s apartment. “With all the updates I got yesterday it feels like we were together the entire time.”

There’s a pause before Kara sheepishly says, “Sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Lena says with a warm laugh. “I’m always pleased to see your face.”

“Well, if you come to the bar you can see lots of my face. In person!”

“I’ll see how my day goes. I have a conference call that could run late,” Lena says, shuffling papers around her desk and chancing a glance out the window. “How’d the big pile-up go on the highway? I saw you rescue a school bus on the news this morning.”

“Did I look good?” Kara asks with a cheerful laugh.

“Your suit was on backwards,” Lena deadpans and Kara lets out a surprised yelping sound.

“What?! Really?!”

Laughing, Lena shakes her head. “Of course not. Is that even possible?”

“You’d be surprised,” Kara replies and it makes Lena laugh harder.

“Well I can assure you that you looked impeccable this morning. The camera did you justice.”

Kara hums. “All part of the job,” Kara says cheerfully. “Some dude tried to give me his phone number and was really insistent that he wanted to thank me, but he made it sound...gross.”

Lena makes a face, but laughs a little. “Sounds charming.”

“I told you,” Kara says with a haughty lilt to her voice. “People throw themselves at me.”

“Well, far be it from me to stand in their way,” Lena teases, watching as an email reminder for a meeting pops up on her screen, she reaches out to dismiss it with a quick tap of her fingers. “Come to the bar tonight,” Kara entreats. “If only to protect me from...you know...”

“Would be suitors?” Lena jokes, leaning back in her desk chair and trying to imagine what Kara looks like in her own office over at CatCo.

“You’re way better at glaring than I am.”

“What a skill,” Lena laughs. “My mother would be so proud.”
Kara makes an annoyed sound that makes Lena grin. “Will I see you tonight?”

“I’ll text you when I’m done with my conference call,” Lena says, and when she finally gets off
the phone, she finds it hard to not grin her way through her next meeting.

--

Kara is already sitting at the bar when Lena arrives, with a glass of club soda in front of her and a
serious look on her face. Mon-El is behind the counter and he catches Lena’s eye immediately,
giving her a short wave before reaching behind him and holding up a bottle of her whiskey with a
questioning look. “Dry Manhattan, right?”

Kara looks up at that, turning to spot Lena’s approach. Her eyes are wide and she mouths help me
as Lena sits down. Stifling a laugh, Lena just nods at Mon-el. “That would be great, thanks.”

Mon-El turns to make the drink but not before hesitating on Kara’s face and giving her a soft but
awkward looking smile. “Talk later?”

“Yeah, sure,” Kara says, but the look on her face conveys how uninterested she is in that
proposition.

“That looked fun,” Lena says softly, glancing over to where Mon-El has moved away to grab a
clean glass for her drink.

“I’m the worst,” Kara grumbles, sagging onto the bar top a little.

Lena laughs and runs a hand down her spine, but before she can say anything else, Alex is striding
up to them with a bright and uncharacteristically happy, “Hey.”

“Hi,” Lena greets, but Kara just kind of groans into her drink from where she’s slumping over the
counter.

“What’s wrong with you?” Alex asks.

“I’m the worst,” Kara repeats and Lena tsks softly.

“You’re not the worst,” she tells her. “Stop saying that.”

“What am I missing?” Alex asks and she slides into the stool on the other side of Kara.

Mon-El suddenly appears in front of them and Kara straightens so abruptly that all three of them
jump a little.

“Oh, hey,” Mon-El says, eying Kara but clearly directing the words at Alex. He sets a drink down
in front of Lena. “Do you want your usual?”

“Please,” Alex replies and Mon-El reaches behind him for a bottle of beer, uncapping it and sliding
it next to Alex followed by a shot glass he promptly fills with whiskey before leaving them be.
Not, of course, without one last wary look at Kara who is pointedly looking anywhere except his
direction.

Alex takes a long sip of her beer and arches an eyebrow at her sister. “Well that seems fun,” she
comments. “Did he finally confess his undying love for you or something?”

Lena laughs, but Kara glares at Alex. “You knew?”
“Knew what?” Alex asks, sending Lena an amused smile. “That Mon-El is into you?”

Kara nods and Alex just arches an eyebrow at her with an expression that must communicate *duh* because Kara groans again. “How was it so obvious to everyone else?”

“Well, he told me,” Lena says. Kara frowns unhappily as Alex barks out a laugh. “Not that he had to.”

“He didn’t tell me,” Alex says. “And you’re right. It’s not like he would have needed to. Though now I’m really wishing I could have witnessed the two of you talking.” Alex smirks a little at Lena and it makes her roll her eyes.

“I assure you it wasn’t that interesting.”

“So what happened?” Alex asks Kara, picking up her shot and throwing it back. “I’m guessing it didn’t go well?”

Kara grimaces at her sister. “See mouth. Insert foot.”

“I’m sure it wasn’t that bad,” Alex says, patting Kara on the shoulder comfortingly, but Kara just shakes her head.

“Oh, I guarantee you it was. He told me, and I sort of stared at him for like - too long, and then I just was like - *no, thank you, I would not like to do dating with you.* And then I left my own apartment and went to-” Her words cease abruptly and a faint blush dusts her cheeks as she glances at Lena.

It occurs to her quickly exactly where Kara went after she finished rejecting Mon-El and her memory of the night and their fight makes her have to swallow a laugh. She strokes her hand down Kara’s other arm. “At least it’s over with now. Better than allowing him to pine away in silence.”

“Can we talk about something more interesting?” Kara perks up suddenly and whips her head at both of them. “Like Earth Birthday tomorrow!”

Alex catches Lena’s eye suddenly with an expression Lena doesn’t know how to read, but Kara is still talking. “I know it’s usually just you and me,” she’s saying to Alex. “But I figured since it’s the first time the three of us are in the same place we could maybe do something all together. I heard about this-”

“Actually,” Alex interrupts, and Lena feels a wave of foreboding at the slightly anxious look to Alex’s eyes. “I was thinking that since, you know,” she gestures at Lena, “Since Lena is here and you guys are...whatever you guys are...that maybe you’d want to do something together.”

Kara’s brow pulls down. “But we always celebrate it, you and me.”

“Yeah, I know, but,” Alex starts slowly and Lena reaches out to settle her hand on Kara’s thigh when it suddenly starts bouncing up and down rapidly. “Maggie sort of got us concert tickets that night. Barenaked Ladies. VIP, actually, because she knows a guy who knows a guy.”

“Of course she does,” Kara says with an accompanying eyeroll.

“So you and Maggie worked things out?” Lena asks, if only to distract from the sudden glower deepening on Kara’s face.

Alex eyes manage to go even wider than before, but she nods quickly. “Uh, yeah. We did. Sort of.”
Lena arches a brow. “Sort of?”

“I apologized for my freak out,” Alex says with a shrug, picking her beer bottle up and taking a sip. “And she sort of told me she knows about Kara. So it was all fine.”

“She what?!” Kara and Lena blurt out simultaneously, so loudly that a table nearby all turn to look.

Alex’s look changes completely from chagrined big sister to DEO agent and the glare she directs at their spectators turns their eyes away immediately. “She already knew, I didn’t tell her,” Alex says quietly, leaning in towards Kara.

“How did she know?!” Kara asks with indignation and a narrowing of her eyes.

“I don’t think you can get mad at me considering you’ve basically told anyone you’ve ever gotten close to,” Alex says defensively, glaring back at her sister. “Present company as a clear example.”

Lena shoots Alex a look, but Kara scoffs. “That’s because it’s my secret to tell,” she argues.

“I didn’t tell her anything. She already knew!”

“I thought you broke up with her,” Kara adds with a narrowing of her eyes.

Alex laughs and looks at both of them. “Like either of you are in position to lecture me over that.”

Lena just holds her hands up defensively and turns to face the bar with a short chuckle. “Hey, I didn’t say anything.”

Before anything else can be said, a woman Lena vaguely recognizes walks up to them from behind the bar and Kara sits up a little straighter and puts on a genuine smile. “M’gann,” she nearly yells, looking thrilled.

“Hey, Kara. Alex.” M’gann’s gaze moves to Lena. “Lena, right?”

“That’s right,” Lena answers, extending her hand to shake M’gann’s. “It’s nice to officially meet you.”

M’gann’s gaze seems critical, but not malicious as it lingers on Lena’s face for a second longer than normal. “You as well. I heard you had a hand in taking down Roulette’s fight club. I owe you a thank you.”

“Not at all,” Lena dismisses with a polite smile. “All I did was give Kara some information.”

M’gann smiles, glances at Kara. “I’m sure it was a lot more than that.”

Kara’s lips thin for a moment before she smiles again. “I’m glad to see you’re doing better, M’gann.”

“Thanks, Kara.”

“Slow enough in here to have a drink with us?” Alex asks, gesturing around the mostly empty bar. “I’m sure Mon-El can handle it alone for a few minutes.”

M’gann smiles and glances at the man in question, where he’s making what Lena supposes is meant to be some cocktail. “I wouldn’t be so sure.”

“He’ll be fine,” Kara insists, reaching out to place her hand over M’gann’s. “Have a celebratory
drink with us.”

With a conceding nod, M’gann smiles. “Sure. Let me just take this trash out first and let Mon-El know.”

“Great!” Kara replies, perking up.

They move to a booth against the wall while M’gann walks over to Mon-El to speak with him. Alex slips into one side of the booth, centering herself on the bench, letting Kara and Lena take the opposite side.

“Where is everyone else?” Lena asks as they slide into their seats.

“James and Winn are doing their,” she gestures around and Lena laughs at the movements, her thigh pressing warmly against Kara’s.

Alex takes a sip of her beer and looks at her sister pointedly. “Was that supposed to mean Guardian stuff?”

“Yes,” Kara says with an irritated set to her mouth. “Guardian-ing or whatever is they do.”

“What was this supposed to be?” Alex asks, exaggeratedly mocking one of the gestures Kara made.

Kara swats at her sister’s hand movements and Lena laughs. “You should go easier on them,” Lena says. Kara groans, tossing her head back against the vinyl of the booth and lolling her head to the side to glare at Lena. Under the table, a hand settles on Lena’s leg easily as if it’s natural and Lena feels the touch burn across her.

“Of course you would say that,” Kara says, and Lena laughs even more at the look of frustration on Kara’s face. “You love danger, or whatever.”

“So true. I’m thinking of taking up freediving,” Lena says, and Kara’s eyes go wide as Alex starts laughing.

“Don’t even joke,” Kara insists, an adorable crinkling to her brow. “I don’t want to rescue you from some deep ocean trench somewhere. Have you seen the fish down there?”

“Yes, because you’ve made me watch Deep Sea far too many times than any human should have to,” Lena says dryly, smiling as she takes a sip of her drink. Kara makes a petulant looking face, but laughs after a moment and takes a gulp of her own drink. When she glances over at Alex the other woman is observing them critically, eyes darting between them.

“Anything you guys want to tell me?” Alex asks suspiciously and Lena’s brow furrows as to what she could mean by that.

“What is it?” Lena asks, watching as Kara’s eyebrows pull together in concentration. Across from
them Alex is reaching behind her back and watching her sister avidly.

“I’m not sure,” Kara says, but after a few more seconds her eyes go wide. “Gotta go,” is all she adds before she’s jumping up from the booth and walking briskly towards the entryway.

“I hate when she does that,” Alex grumbles, sliding out of the booth and following Kara. Lena stands as well just as Mon-El comes up to her.

“Everything okay?”

Lena watches Alex’s retreating back and seconds later hears a loud crash resonating from outside of the bar that startles both she and Mon-El. “I’m going to guess no,” she says softly before moving quickly towards the front door with Mon-El hot on her heels.

When they get outside, Lena nearly runs straight into Alex’s back.

“What happened?” Lena asks, looking around and seeing Kara nowhere. Two Green Martians stand a few feet away. Lena recognizes J’onn, so the other must be M’gann.

“A White Martian,” J’onn says as he steps forward and transforms back into his human form.

“Where’s Kara?” Mon-El asks, stepping around them.

“She went after it,” Alex answers, but seconds later, Kara is flying back towards them in her supersuit and touching down in the alley.

“It got away,” she grumbles stalking forward. She stops next to J’onn, looks over to where M’gann has transformed back into her human form as well. “You guys okay?”

“We should get to the DEO, see if we can track it,” Alex says, holstering her gun in the back of her pants.

“Good idea,” Kara says and Mon-El steps forward with a quick, “I can help.”

“No,” Kara replies immediately, holding her hand out. “You stay here, watch the bar and let us know if anything else happens.”

He seems generally displeased with the idea, but obeys, his shoulders deflating a bit as he turns to walk back into the bar. Lena tries for an encouraging smile, but he doesn’t look at her.

“I’ll call Winn,” Alex says, “See if he can come in and work on a tracking program.”

“Don’t bother him,” Kara says, gesturing towards Lena. “Lena can do it.”

Alex glances at Lena, her lips pushing together. “Lena doesn’t work for the DEO.”

“Not officially,” Kara replies, hands on her hips.

“Not in any way,” Alex corrects, mimicking her sister’s posture. She spares a glance over her shoulder at Lena. “No offense.”

“I don’t know why that would be offensive,” Lena replies, going for levity. There’s a tension in the air between the two sisters. “My real job isn’t too bad.”

“We can argue about that later,” J’onn says, stepping forward next to the girls. “For now we need to get to the DEO and find this thing as soon as possible.”
“It’s here for me, J’onn,” M’gann speaks up. “The White Martians want me to pay for my war crimes. They’ve been telling me psychically for the past few days.”

Psychically? Lena wants to interject just to ask after that, but there’s too much tension in the air around them, and Kara’s coming closer to her as J’onn turns to focus on M’gann.

“All the more reason to get you to the DEO as soon as possible,” J’onn replies, but M’gann shakes her head.

“I’m not going to put you all in any more danger.”

“We can protect you, M’gann,” Kara says. “That’s what we do.”

“I won’t have any of you get hurt because of me.”

“M’gann, be reasonable,” J’onn adds, but M’gann is pushing past him back towards the bar.

“It’s not up for discussion,” she says and J’onn sighs audibly.

“Go talk to her,” Kara tells him. “I’ll get everyone over to base.”

--

The DEO is the quietest Lena’s ever seen it. When they walk into the central room, Winn is already there, sitting at one of the computers and leaning casually in his chair. Apart from two other agents hunched over a different station, they’re seemingly the only ones in the base.

At their approach, he turns suddenly, a look of surprise crossing his face. “Hey, what’s up?”

Kara stalks forward, eying him warily. “I didn’t think you’d be here.”

“Why wouldn’t I be here?”

Kara makes the same gesture she made earlier at the bar and says, “I thought you’d be out with James doing...you know.”

He squints a little at her hands. “Dancing?”

“Guardian-ing,” she corrects with a narrowing of her eyes.

“We were,” Winn says, turning back towards his computer with an irritated roll of his eyes. “But we called it a night early. James had a date.”

“A date?” Alex asks, suddenly interested in the conversation, an amused smile playing over her lips. “With whom?”

Winn makes a show of zipping his lips. “I’m sworn to secrecy.”

In a sudden movement, Alex reaches out to pinch at an area between Winn’s shoulder and neck and he immediately yelps in pain, trying to cower away from the touch. “Okay, okay, okay,” he says until Alex releases him. “It’s with Lucy. Chill.”

Winn rubs at his neck with a disgruntled look at Alex and Lena steps up to Kara. “If Winn is here, I should probably go home.”

At that, Winn turns towards them. “Why? Something happen?”
“A White Martian attacked M’gann and J’onn at the bar. We need to see if we can track it,” Kara answers.

Winn’s eyes go wide. “Why didn’t you lead with that?”


“Yeah, yeah,” he says, reaching out to type in a few commands. “And you guys wanted to hear about dates when a White Martian is running around.”

Kara turns towards Lena and swipes a hand down her arm until their fingers are twisting together. “Seeing as there’s now a crazy White Martian on the loose... why don’t you stay here?”

Lena gives her a look. “I’ll be fine, Kara. I’ll call you if I need you,” she says, tapping at her watch so Kara can see. “I mean, if anything that’d help you guys find it, right?”

“Hilarious,” Kara says, but she smiles a little. “If you hang out for a bit, I can fly you home. We can grab something to eat.”

Lena considers that a moment, doesn’t feel a pressing need to be too far from Kara anyway and concedes.

“Okay,” she says with a nod and a smile, squeezing Kara’s fingers. “I’ll see if I can help Winn at all while I wait.”

“Thanks,” Kara murmurs, leaning forward to press a warm kiss to her cheek.

Just as she’s sliding into a chair next to Winn, J’onn is marching up to them with a frown on his face. “No luck?” Alex asks.

He shakes his head. “We’ll see,” he says. “The decision is up to M’gann, but I’m hoping she’ll let us help her. Where are we on finding that thing?”

“So I’m not sure about tracking it,” Winn says, eyes focused on his monitor as he types something into a command terminal. “But we can compile a list of likely places it will attack and monitor them. That way we’ll know the minute it pops back up.”

J’onn nods, looking over Winn’s shoulder. “Good. I’ll prep our strike teams.”

“You should stay here, J’onn,” Kara says. “Where it’s safe.”

“This is my fight, Supergirl,” he replies heatedly, his tone leaving little room for argument. “I will not stand on the sidelines.”

Something in his expression seems to convince Kara and she offers him a conceding nod. “We’ll get to work on finding it.”

Lena and Winn spend the next twenty or so minutes fiddling with different algorithms while Kara leans up against the center table behind them and watches their progress. Alex stands next to her, but both sisters seem to mostly ignore each other in favor of keeping their eyes on the monitors at the far wall.

Eventually a voice resounds from behind them all and Alex turns to spot their visitor. “M’gann!”

Lena stands up, feeling Kara come closer to her as Alex walks over to M’gann. Kara’s hand comes up to rest on her lower back, spreading warmth up her spine that momentarily distracts her.
J’onn, who was just walking into the room himself spots her and smiles. “M’gann,” he parrots. “You came.”

“I can help,” she says. “I **want** to help. In any way that I can.”

“What changed your mind?” J’onn asks, but from the pleased look on his face Lena imagines he’s not too invested in the *why*.

M’gann shrugs a little and looks at him with a half smile. “I hate them even more than you do.”

Alex steps forward. “We’ll do everything we can to keep you safe.”

“Agent Schott,” J’onn says. “Let’s brief M’gann on what we know so far.”

“Yeah, of course,” Winn replies, jumping up and taking J’onn and M’gann towards another desk to pick up a tablet.

Something catches in Lena’s peripheral and she glances towards the stairs where...M’gann...is entering the room. Her eyes widen in realization and her hand darts out to grab Kara’s wrist. “Guys,” she says slowly.

“J’onn,” the new M’gann is saying as she walks closer and Lena’s gaze darts between the two identical copies of the same woman. “I’ve been thinking about what you said-”

Everyone seems to figure out what’s happening at once and it feels as though the room stills. Kara pulls Lena behind her quickly and steps closer to the situation just as Winn is halfway out of his seat with a, “Wait, if she’s here and she - *oh God.*”

Alex immediately draws her weapon and the first M’gann, the one standing closest to J’onn scowls. “You **Greens**. Never learn, do you?” She says before moving forward. She only gets a few feet before J’onn is grabbing her forcefully and pulling her back, throwing her into a nearby desk while Kara shoves Lena behind Alex and moves to grab the real M’gann.

They all watch as J’onn engages with the fake M’gann in the front of the room, equipment breaking as they grapple each other. Sparks of electricity begin to fly out the broken bank of monitors on the far wall and Lena shields her eyes. It’s not long before the power in the facility seems to stutter a few moments before completely shutting off and shrouding them all in darkness.

Winn scrambles past Lena to an unharmed computer and types in a quick command that brings on auxiliary power. The lights turn back on to reveal J’onn standing by himself at the front of the room and M’gann’s worried, “He’s gone.”

J’onn stalks forward to the same computer Winn just used and pulls up the controls for the base. Lena watches with wide eyes as he types in the command to put the building on lockdown and a second later the security doors are sliding shut on the far end of the room.

“Why did you put us on lockdown?” Kara asks, backing up towards Lena and grabbing for her hand. Lena takes it, feels the spare lighting of the building close in a little bit.

“The only way to catch that thing is to trap it in here.”

“With us?” Winn hisses, looking from Lena to Kara to Alex in confusion, as if any of them could provide him with answers

“We don’t even know where it went,” Alex adds. Kara’s hand grips tighter at Lena’s, and Lena
watches as Kara’s eyes dart around the room distrustfully.

“It could still be in here,” Winn says in a hurried whisper. Lena is unsure of what he means for a moment, until Kara speaks.

“It could be any of us,” Kara breathes out in realization and Lena feels a cold choke of anxiety at the thought.

“If one of us could be the White Martian, how do we tell which one of us is really themselves?” Alex asks, folding in towards Kara and Lena, her gun still in her hand. It looks like Alex, in the way that her eyes always go first to her sister.

Lena feels isolated in that moment. Distrustful of pretty much everything. It’s not a new feeling entirely, but to look at Kara and consider that it might not be Kara but just someone wearing her face is a terrifying thought.

“That’s easy,” Winn offers with a gesture so casual it seems out of place in the tension of the moment. “We just ask personal questions. Like things only we would know.” He points directly at Kara. “What’s that candle scent I hate.”

“Teakwood and tobacco,” Kara replies promptly.

J’onn shakes his head. “They’re psychic. They know all of our personalities, our quirks, everything about us we think is secret. That won’t work.”

The unease among the group feels palpable and they all eye each other for an uncomfortable moment before an agent Lena doesn’t know accusatorily asks the other agent, Vasquez, Lena remembers, “What are you looking at?”

“Nothing,” Vasquez answers, but the two of them stare at each other warily for a second until they’re simultaneously pulling out their weapons and aiming them at each other.

Alex aim her gun as well. “Holster your sidearms,” she orders just as Kara centers in a defensive stance, her arms spreading wide to block Lena from view.

“She’s the White Martian,” the agent accuses, narrowing his eyes and keeping his weapon trained on Vasquez.

“Everyone needs to calm down,” Kara says, eyes darting between all the guns.

“Put your guns down.” Alex tries again in an authoritative voice, but all it does is cause the agent to turn his weapon on her. Kara moves immediately in front of her sister.

“Okay now you really need to put your gun down,” Kara says in a dark tone. “Now, Demos.”

“It could be any of us,” he insists, moving his weapon away from Alex, but tracking it amongst all of them. Kara moves with the motion, stepping again in front of Lena.

“J’onn,” Kara says. “You can read minds. Can’t you scan us to see who is who?”

Lena startles for a moment, thinks to ask further about the revelation that apparently J’onn’s been reading her mind this entire time, but J’onn’s face goes taut in concentration. Lena considers commenting that J’onn could actually be the White Martian himself and this exercise would therefore be futile, but he’s speaking before she can say anything.
“There’s some kind of psychic interference,” he says.

“He’s after me,” M’gann says. “Maybe if I turn myself in he’ll let the rest of you go.”

“Great idea,” Demos says. “Mission accomplished.”


“It’s all my fault,” M’gann says. “You don’t understand. This isn’t just any White Martian.”

“What do you mean?” Kara asks, still half-shielding Lena’s body.

“Armek was my...mate,” she explains seeming entirely uncomfortable with the word.

Kara straightens, her fingers moving to clasp around Lena’s hand as Alex’s gun lowers slightly.

“He’s your husband?” Alex asks a tad incredulously.

“It’s not the same for White Martians,” M’gann answers. “It wasn’t a choice, more like an arranged marriage. But yes. We were bonded. And you should know that he is the worst of my kind.”

“Oh, well, that makes me feel better,” Winn comments with an inappropriate amount of sarcasm.

“It doesn’t matter who he is,” J’onn says.

“J’onn’s right,” Kara says and there’s command in her voice that Lena finds herself responding to.

“We’ll find him.”

“First things first,” Alex says. “I’m going to collect everybody’s weapons.”

“Are you crazy?” Demos replies, immediately raising his gun up again. Vasquez and Alex both respond by putting their own guns back up and Kara takes an angry step forward.

“Enough,” J’onn interrupts forcefully and they all fall silent. “There’s another way to figure out which one of is the White Martian.”

--

“I’m not playing if they’re on the same team,” Max protests from his perch on a nearby couch. Josie laughs loudly, but agrees with a, “Yeah me neither.”

Kara startles from where she’s sitting curled up next to Lena, sipping on a drink. “What, why?”

Lena can imagine exactly why Max doesn’t want to play with them, but she stays silent behind a bemused smile and watches their friends all make matching exasperated faces towards Kara.

“Because you guys win every time and it’s boring,” Aaron answers.

“She’s my friend,” Kara argues. “So I get her on my team.”

Josie quirks an eyebrow at Kara. “She’s our friend too, Danvers.”

“I think she’s a lot more than a friend,” Max adds with a smirk on his lips that Lena rolls her eyes at.

“I don’t get it,” Kara says, looking at Lena in confusion. Lena takes a sip of her drink and shrugs,
trying to ignore the hot feeling rushing through her when Kara shuffles closer, throwing her arm around Lena’s shoulders.

“Of course you don’t,” Josie says, laughing. “Point still stands. No charades unless you two break up your unholy alliance.”

“I can’t believe this. What about a, uh, a - what’s the word?” Kara asks, her eyes turning to Lena’s in more abject confusion. She makes a motion with her hands that Lena interprets easily to mean golfing and realizes what Kara’s trying to say.

“Handicap,” she offers, and Aaron rolls his eyes so hard that Lena’s surprised they don’t get stuck in his head.

“I think that’s proof enough of why we don’t wanna play against you two, Kara,” he says, laughing. “You guys have freaky mind reading skills.”

“No I don’t,” Kara says abruptly, back straightening until Lena puts a comforting hand on her leg. Her mouth hidden behind the rim of her cup she smiles. “He doesn’t mean literally,” she whispers and Kara relaxes.

“Seriously,” Aaron continues. “I don’t know how two people who met like two months ago know so much about each other.”

“Sounds like you’re jealous,” Kara huffs, her hand tracking up Lena’s neck and up to the hairline at the base of her neck.

“Who wouldn’t be?” Max says, and even though he laughs, he still sounds the littlest bit sincere.

--

They follow J’onn to a nearby lab and watch as he lights a bunsen burner on the table. Lena watches it nervously; she’s been a thousand labs in her life, but never with a murderous, shape-changing alien amongst her midst.

“What does the fire do?” Kara asks, arms crossing.

“This,” M’gann says, stepping forward and putting her palm up towards the flame. Her flesh seems to burn away, revealing the Martian skin underneath.

“Okay, okay,” Winn says, stepping away from her. “That’s not creepy at all.”

J’onn moves up next and takes a deep breath, his eyes focused on the flame. M’gann reaches out to him, wraps her fingers around his wrist and whispers something in Martian that Lena can’t understand. After a moment he extends his palm out and reveals his own green skin before exhaling in relief.

Vasquez and Demos go after him, both of them eying the other suspiciously until they’re cleared as their human selves. Demos turns his suspicion towards Lena then with a narrowed gaze. “She goes next,” he orders and Lena can sense Kara bristling in front of her.

Both Danvers sisters are standing like a guard before her, so she reaches between them to extend her palm towards the flame. Demos looks almost apologetic when nothing happens.

“Winn,” Kara says, and he startles.
“What?”

“You’re next,” she says, gesturing towards the fire.

He laughs a little. “What? It’s - it’s me.”

“Everyone has to do it,” Kara says and she extends her own palm quickly towards the flame, holding it there unmoving for a moment. “Now you.”

“Okay, jeez, fine,” he says and he steps slowly towards the device.

Lena tracks the motion with her eyes, a tendril of fear starting to work its way up her spine when Winn’s eyes flicker over to her, an almost sinister smile inching over his lips.

She thinks to say something, but Winn’s picking up the burner, holding it to his palm, which immediately transforms into the hand of White Martian and he smirks at Kara.

“You got me,” he says before he’s flinging the fire in an arc around him and Kara’s turning, grabbing Lena and throwing them to the ground.

They hit the wall with a crash and Kara shelters Lena from the impact with her body, before shoving her behind an upturned table and jumping up after the Martian wearing Winn’s skin. Lena flinches away from the sounds of more crashing and the spray of electric discharge from equipment breaking.

The Martian manages to throw Kara into a wall before racing out of the room and vaulting over the railing to the first floor. Seconds later Kara is following and the rest of the group races after her, but the Martian is suddenly nowhere to be seen.

Kara hisses out a low curse word in Kryptonian and punches a dent into a nearby wall.

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They regroup back at the central platform and take stock of what they have.

“I can’t believe it was Winn and I didn’t know,” Kara grumbles angrily, and Lena wraps her hand around Kara’s forearm until the other girl relaxes a bit.

“None of us knew,” she says softly, while J’onn and Vasquez pass around weapons. Alex slides into a nearby chair and pulls up a status terminal of the base.

“The motion sensors are offline,” Alex says, reading from her display. “Thank God the containment cells are still locked. As Winn he had access to the whole system.”

Suddenly an alarm bursts out through the room and a red light starts to flash. “Reactor temperature nearing critical,” a robotic voice announces and Kara looks at Lena.

“That can’t be good,” she says as Vasquez rushes to a station, sliding into the chair and opening up a command terminal.

“It’s the reactor that powers the building,” she says and Lena comes up behind her to read the alert coming up on the monitor. “It’s going into overload.”

“How is that possible?” Kara asks, coming up next to Lena and looking at the same information.

“He must have sabotaged it,” J’onn answers.
“That amount of power,” Lena says slowly, her eyes wide as they track to Kara’s. “It’ll take ten city blocks with it. At least.”

“Why would he want to blow the building up?” Kara asks. “That doesn’t make sense. He’s here too.”

“I imagine he doesn’t care,” Lena responds, sliding into a chair next to Vasquez and logging into a terminal.

“She’s right,” M’gann says. “Armek will do anything to carry out his mission. Even sacrifice himself. He’d do it proudly.”

“There’s got to be a way to shut it down,” Alex says, coming up behind Lena and eying the reactor status window she has pulled up.

“The White Martian didn’t just take Winn’s form. He took his intelligence too,” J’onn replies. “He’s re-encoded the entire system.”

“So what?” Alex asks. “We need the real Winn to unlock it?”

“Let me see,” Lena says as she types in a few commands to verify what J’onn is saying. They continue talking but she only half listens as she tries to get into the system. It’s something to focus on, something to help her hands feel less shaky.

“We don’t even know if Winn is still in the building,” Kara says, her hand settling on Lena’s shoulder as Lena gets denied access to the reactor override.

“He has to be,” M’gann replies. “In order for Armek to shapeshift so exactly into Winn he’d have to be close by to keep the telepathic link.”

“Okay, so he’s still in the building,” Alex says. “That’s good.”

“How do you know Winn’s access codes?” Demos asks, his body suddenly appearing in Lena’s peripheral vision. His voice is dripping with suspicion.

Lena turns to answer, but before she can he’s raising his rifle straight at her and Kara’s moving between them. “Put the gun down,” she orders in a dark tone.

Alex has raised her own weapon towards him. “She has access to the system,” Alex explains. “Because I gave it to her. And she’s close to Winn.” Alex glances at Lena. “I assume.”

Lena nods and allows a small smile to cross her face despite the situation.

“You gave Lena Luthor access to the DEO?” Demos asks incredulously.

“Watch your tone,” Kara snaps immediately, and Lena feels the air crackle with tension just enough to tell her Kara’s a moment away from zapping Demos in the face. Standing out of her chair, Lena moves closer to Kara and puts a comforting hand against her back in an attempt to ease the tension.

“Lena’s trustworthy,” J’onn says with a dismissive look at Demos. “We don’t have to time to argue about this.”

“How do you know?” Demos asks, keeping his gun trained towards Lena.
“He can read her mind? Put your gun down, you moron,” Vasquez says in an annoyed voice and after a moment’s hesitation, Demos does as he’s told, warily eying the look on Kara’s face.

“There’s a White Martian roaming about this building and the last thing we need is for all of us to start turning on each other,” Alex says.

“Alex is right,” J’onn says. “We need to find him. And fast.”

“Can’t you just x-ray the building?” M’gann asks, and when Lena gets a look at Kara’s face, she’s pulling an annoyed frown.

“Nope,” she answers with a pointed look at J’onn. “Someone lined all the walls with lead.”

“We’ll have to search the building on foot,” J’onn says and Vasquez gets up from her seat to retrieve her weapon, joining J’onn on the far side of the room.

“How long do we have?” Kara asks, and Lena drops back down into her chair, keystroking through what she can to get an answer.

“About fifteen minutes,” she says. “I can try to see if I can work around the new code, but it’ll take time.”

“Okay,” Kara says. “I’ll stay here with you then.”

“No,” J’onn interrupts. “Vasquez and Demos will take the north wing. You and Alex will take the basement.”

“I’m not leaving Lena here alone,” Kara responds incredulously.

“I’ll be fine,” Lena says, turning back to focus on getting into the system. “Just leave me a gun.”

“I’m not going to just leave you a gun,” Kara practically hisses and Lena pauses her typing a moment to focus on Kara.

“This building is going to blow,” she says seriously. “And there’s a White Martian on the loose trying to kill us.”

“Exactly,” Kara says and she steps close enough that they’re shielded from the rest of the group who are busy gathering weapons.

“Kara,” Lena says softly, reaching out to encircle Kara’s wrist, the small bump of fabric over her bracelet warming under Lena’s palm. “We need to find Winn or I need to find a way to override the reactor. Either way you’re needed out there and I’m needed here.”

“Lena,” Kara warns darkly, feeling a little shaky under Lena’s hand.

“We’ve talked about this,” Lena interrupts and she stands until they’re face to face.

“Yeah, we did,” Kara agrees. “We talked about taking unnecessary ris-”

“I’ll be fine,” Lena says and she reaches up to put her free hand against Kara’s cheek, pressing in close to keep her voice quiet. “If anything happens, I have the watch.”

“Kara,” Alex says from behind Kara. “I’ll stay here. With Lena.”

“That’s not necessary, Alex,” Lena says just as Kara adds, “I’ll be the one staying.”
"Need I remind you that we are on a clock here," Alex says pointedly, glancing at both of them. "My sister isn’t going to let you stay here alone," she directs towards Lena before looking at Kara. "And we need Supergirl out there when we find Armek."

Kara looks about ready to argue, but Alex beats her to it with, "You trust me, right?"

They stare at each other for a significant moment before Kara deflates a bit. "Of course."

Turning to Lena, Kara reaches out to grip her chin and presses a quick, solid kiss to her lips. "Be careful," she murmurs.

"You too," Lena says.

"Always," Kara replies with a quirk of her lips.

Kara steps away and Alex takes her place with a comforting smile for Lena, and Lena’s a little shocked when Alex doesn’t take the opportunity to tease Kara for kissing Lena in full view of them all.

The group leaves then and Lena drops back down into her chair. Alex paces around behind her, gun drawn.

"You really don’t have to stay here," Lena comments, focused on her screen as she types away into a terminal.

Alex laughs a little. "Yeah, I do. I’m not going to be the one to tell Kara that I left her—" Alex cuts off for a second and Lena glances over her shoulder until she continues. "Left you here defenseless."

"Kara’s overprotective," Lena says, returning to her work. Alex makes a noise that sounds something like agreement, but doesn’t bother responding.

It only takes a few minutes of trying to get access to the reactor before Lena comes to a realization. She can’t override it remotely. She’s going to have to make her way to the reactor room.

"I can’t override it from here," she says, standing. "Do you know how to get to the reactor room?"

Alex eyes her for a moment. "You’re sure you can’t do it from here?"

"Positive," Lena answers, grabbing a tablet from the table.

Alex doesn’t seem thrilled with the idea of heading out, but she relents with a nod of her head. "Fine. Just stay behind me."

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"My mother certainly likes you," Lena comments as she sets her purse on her kitchen counter and moves to the cabinet to grab a glass.

Jack laughs and slides into a stool. "You say that as if it’s not something I should consider in my favor."

"It’s not," Lena replies dryly, bending over to inspect her wine chiller and pulling a bottle out.

It makes Jack laugh again. A warm, comforting sound that makes Lena smile and he stands to move around the counter and pluck the bottle of wine out of her hands, ushering her away as she
moves to open it. “Who knew my natural charm would be such a hinderance in courtship?”

Lena rolls her eyes and takes the glass of wine Jack pours when he offers it to her. “If my mother likes you then there must be something,” she gestures around with her free hand at his body. “Off about you that I’m just not seeing.”

“You have quite the high opinion of your mother,” Jack says, pouring his own glass and arching his brow at her.

“You’ve met her,” Lena says simply, taking a sip of her drink. “That should speak for itself.”

“I’ve met worse,” Jack answers and they move into her living room. Jack falls onto the couch and Lena follows with an exaggerated expression of horror.

“Worse than my mother?! Surely you jest.”

Jack’s arm rests on the back of the couch, comfortably above Lena’s shoulders and he clinks his glass against hers before taking another sip. “Are you saying your mother has never liked anyone you’ve introduced to her?”

It makes her think instantly of Kara. The memories don’t come as often these days, but when they do they still squeeze at her heart as if it were just yesterday she was standing in a small regional airport crying. Thankfully, years of practice allow her face to remain unchanged, a small smile still playing across her lips. “My mother isn’t exactly the warmest of people.”

“What about the ex?” Jack asks simply and Lena fights the urge to look away.

“The ex?” She asks even though she knows exactly whom he’s referring to.

“The one we don’t speak about,” Jack says knowingly and he’s not meaning to be unkind, but Lena hates the way just thinking about Kara still spikes pain in her chest. It’s hard to remember the one time Lillian and Kara met; harder to remember all the times after that when Lillian pointedly referred to Kara as that girl you’ve been cavorting with.

“No my mother wasn’t very-” she falters for a moment, considers what to say. “My mother has never warmed up to anyone I’ve been fond of and the...ex...as you put it, was no exception.”

“Ah,” Jack says sagely, nodding his head in a slow motion. “I must imagine that made them all the more attractive to you.”

When it registers, Lena laughs abruptly, the pain in her chest easing just the slightest and she shoves at Jack’s chest. The motion is just a little too forceful and he sways to the side, jumping forward to catch his wine before it sloshes out of the glass.

“Don’t be rude,” she warns him playfully and he grins at her.

“I’m just shocked you didn’t marry the ex purely out of spite,” Jack comments and this time he scoots a little away from her on the couch as if in anticipation of another shove. Rolling her eyes, Lena merely scoffs.

“Marriage,” she says, the word feeling strange as it comes out. “As if that’s something in my future.”

That seems to sober Jack. His smile stutters into a slight frown and he quirks his head at her. “You don’t want to be married?”
It’s then that Lena realizes who’s she’s talking to and the context of the question and tries to scramble for some kind of appropriate response that doesn’t provoke an emotional conversation she’s unprepared for. “It’s just never been something I’ve…considered,” she says and it’s such a lie that she can’t help but think of Kara again, of the way it felt to fall into routine with her, to fall asleep at night together, to companionably share quiet meals together. She goes for levity with a casual smile. “I’ve always been a more married to my job type.”

Jack’s face is thoughtful. “I love my job,” he says slowly. “But I’d always hoped I’d be married one day.”

Lena looks away for a moment, studies the night sky outside the windows of her apartment. “Marriage is just a contract,” she says softly before turning back to Jack. “It doesn’t mean you love someone more or less. It just makes you responsible for them legally.”

He laughs, but it doesn’t sound entirely amused and his lips thin at the end of it. “I’ve always considered it more about…” He shrugs. “Making it public, official, permanent.”

“Love can be permanent without marriage,” Lena says quietly, her throat going thick. There’s a burn in her eyes suddenly and she forces herself not to think of the obvious.

Jack looks at her dead on, a sadness crinkling around his eyes that wasn’t there before. “I suppose it can,” he replies and there’s something so final about the moment that Lena has to take a deep sip of her wine just to keep from crying.

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The walk through the DEO is eerie to say the least. It’s relatively silent and the hallways glow with a strobing red alarm light as they make their way to the reactor room. It doesn’t take long. Alex leads them efficiently through the base and Lena monitors the reactor on her tablet.

They step inside the correct room and Lena sets her tablet down at a small table just inside, and reaches to pull a wall panel off, trying to find the correct wire to connect straight into the system. Just as she’s fumbling through them she hears the sound of a gun clicking from behind her.

“I’m going to need you to step away from the console,” Alex says. Or at least it seems like Alex, but when Lena turns to her there’s a look on her face that’s nothing like the Alex Danvers she knows.

“Alex?” Lena asks slowly, turning around to face her completely.

It occurs to her what’s happening in a matter of moments, confirmed when the Alex in front of her trains her weapon straight on Lena. For a second, it feels like she can’t breathe. She’s certainly seen her fair share of danger in her life, but it’s another thing entirely to see an alien wearing her friend’s face aim a gun at her chest.

“You’re the White Martian,” Lena says. Nothing about Alex’s face blinks. "There's two of you.”

“Step away from the console.”

“You really don’t want to do this,” Lena says drawing the words out, but she steps away from the console, her hands up.

“Do what?”

“Kill me,” Lena answer, trying to stall for time.
“I’m not going to kill you,” the Martian says and it’s an uncomfortable feeling to see such a sinister look on Alex’s face. “The reactor will take care of that for me. I just have to delay you. Give Armek a little time. Maybe use you to toy with Supergirl a bit. You know...just for fun.”

Lena drops her hands down and her fingers are immediately drawn to her watch. She runs her thumb over the side button, considering for a moment. “Give him time for what?”

The Martian ignores her question, focuses instead on where her hand is playing with her watch. “Thinking of calling your mate?”

Her hand flinches away from her wrist and she eyes the Martian skeptically, her mind racing for a plan while the Alex lookalike smirks.

“Yeah, I know what that watch is and what it does...what it means. Alex here knows a lot of things,” the Martian says, tilting its head to the side entreatingly. “Would you like to hear any of them?”

“Where’s Alex?” Lena asks. “The real one?”

“I’m just as real as she is,” the Martian says. “I feel everything she feels, I have all her memories, her thoughts, everything.”

Lena tries to ignore the obvious ploy to distract her and looks around the room to catalog her positioning and see if there’s anything she can use to her advantage. Her heart feels like it’s racing and if not for the lead permeating the entire base she’s sure Kara would be bursting into the room to see what was wrong. For the first time in a long time she wishes her heartbeat was broadcasting loud enough to reach Kara.

“You’re going to die here, human. There’s no point avoiding the inevitable.”

“We’ll see,” Lena says, moving her stance a little.

Just as Lena’s thinking of making another move, diving for a storage crate to her right that she’s hoping has something useful inside of it, Kara comes bursting around the corner.

Lena can’t imagine what this looks like - Alex with her weapon aimed straight at Lena’s head. But Kara must know already that it’s not her sister, because she drops into a fighting stance. “Get away from her,” Kara commands.

“Come to rescue your wife, Supergirl?” The Martian says with a smirk, lowering her weapon and turning to face Kara. Lena’s brow pulls down at the words, but Kara’s eyes start to glow in response, her face dark and severe.

“I said step away from her.”

“Maybe heat vision isn’t such a great idea in a room with an unstable nuclear reactor,” the Martian says, gesturing around the room and Lena’s inclined to agree with that. Her eyes go a little wide and she looks at Kara, grateful to see her eyes fade back to normal.

“Then I guess we’re going to have to do this the old fashioned way,” Kara says before throwing herself at the Martian with a cocked back fist. The slam together forcefully and the Martian gets thrown back a few feet before standing back up and laughing a little.

“I can’t believe you’d hit your sister.”
“You’re not my sister,” Kara growls.

“You’re right,” the Martian, says throwing the gun to the ground. “I’m not.”

With a sickening sound the vision of Alex fades and is replaced by a gigantic White Martian. They’re nothing like the Green Martians, Lena notes. The Martian lets out a loud roaring sound before jumping back towards Kara and engaging.

Lena ducks quickly away from the fight and finds her way back towards the console. Just as she’s about to try again to get access to the system a familiar yelp bursts out across the sound of fighting and she turns to see Winn skidding into the room next to J’onn.

Winn’s eyes go wide at the sight of what’s happening in front of him, but before he can say anything, a man Lena doesn’t recognize comes barreling in from the side straight into J’onn.

“Winn!” Lena calls out as J’onn starts to grapple with the newcomer - the other White Martian Lena thinks, Armek. Winn turns towards her voice and flinches away from where Kara is throwing her own Martian into a wall.

“Hey, hi, hello, how are you?” Winn says breathlessly as he scrambles closer to Lena and surveys the screen. “Little reactor problem, huh?”

“Yeah,” Lena replies, feeling her own sense of urgency start to overtake her better senses as she watches Kara struggle to get the upperhand in her fight. “I’m locked out of the system,” she tells him, shoving the keyboard towards him.

Winn reaches out and quickly types in a few commands, the same commands Lena’s tried about a hundred times in the last ten minutes. “Whoever encoded this is a genius,” Winn comments and Lena would roll her eyes if the robotic reminder that they have two minutes until a complete reactor meltdown wasn’t putting her on edge.

“We have to reroute it,” Lena says, grabbing at his forearm.

“Good call,” he replies, his eyes going wide with a sense of purpose as he quickly moves past her and pulls a panel off a nearby wall.

“What can I do?” Lena asks, trying to ignore the sight of J’onn getting tossed around and Kara sliding across the floor and into the wall.

“Stay by the terminal. I’ll tell you when to try again,” Winn says, plugging his tablet into the array of wires.

Lena hovers shaky fingers over the keyboard and glances over her shoulder to where Kara is seeming to get a few well placed punches in. On the monitor, a clock counts down the seconds until the core breaches and she can’t decide which sight - Kara or the time - makes her more nervous.

J’onn’s seemed to finally take control of his own struggle with Armek and M’gann has joined the fight, the two of them managing to beat the White Martian back and Lena glances to where Kara is standing up from having been knocked into an array of storage crates on the far side of the room.

“Lena, now!” Winn yells over his shoulder and she turns quickly back to the monitor, reaching out to type in her access codes and feeling a sense of relief when she’s not denied entry into the system.
Winn is moving quickly over to her and all but skids to a stop over her shoulder, bouncing as he watches her work. “You got it? You got it?”

“Shush,” she hisses, never taking her eyes of the screen as she works. It only takes a few more seconds until she’s finally getting a **CORE STABILIZED** message and she and Winn let out matching sighs of relief.

Kara is suddenly behind both of them and when Lena turns she’s dropping her head back on her shoulders and blowing out a low breath. “That was a close one.”

J’onn and M’gann are a few feet away standing over the body of a lifeless Armek and the other White Martian is out of sight.

“What are you talking about?” Winn says with an exaggeratedly dismissive shrug. “We had like, what, twelve whole seconds.”

Kara laughs and Lena finds herself joining as Winn grins widely at her. The feeling of triumph buzzes across her skin and when her eyes connect with Kara’s the sensation intensifies.

“Good job,” Kara says, glancing at both of them. She reaches out to squeeze Winn’s bicep. “Glad you’re okay.”

“I was on the ceiling,” he tells her, both of his eyebrows raising and Kara laughs again.

“Everyone okay?” J’onn asks as he walks over, his arm slung over M’gann’s shoulders as he leans slightly into her.

“Where’s Alex?” Kara asks immediately even as she moves over to stand by Lena.

Before anyone can answer the previously lifeless White Martian suddenly awakens, rising up off the floor and towering over them for mere seconds before the sound of a blaster rings out. As quickly as it rose, the White Martian falls back to the ground to reveal Alex standing in the doorway, weapon raised and a smug smile on her face.

“Have I mentioned how much I love my new gun?” Alex asks.

Kara seems to relax fully at that, her shoulders sagging as she grips Lena’s hand and offers a exasperated smile directed at her sister.

“Nice of you to join us,” she calls out with a teasing quirk to her lips.

A round of soft laughter echoes across the room and Lena lets herself all but fall against Kara’s side. Adrenaline hums through her, but there’s still a sense of victory among the group and she can’t stop the almost contented exhale that drops out of her lips.

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The minute J’onn takes the base off of lockdown an irate looking Lucy Lane is marching towards them with James only steps behind her. Both of their faces are a mixture of concern and irritation.

“What the hell happened?” Lucy asks as soon as she gets near them.

J’onn steps forward. “Director Lane. I didn’t realize you were in town.”

James idles behind her, locks eyes with Kara for a moment, before nodding a greeting to Alex and smiling at Winn.
“Well now you do,” Lucy replies shortly, hands on her hips. “I got the alert that the base went on lockdown in the middle of dinner.”

“We had a White Martian situation,” Kara explains, stepping forward. “Hi, Lucy,” she says with a grin before wrapping Lucy up in a brief hug.

“Hi,” Lucy says with a touch of exasperation, but she returns the hug and manages a smile. “A White Martian situation?”

Alex paces forward, gives Lucy her own hug and squeezes her shoulder. “It’s taken care of.”

“Everyone okay?” James asks. Winn ambles over with a grin and he and James engage in some sort of ritualistic looking handshake that Kara rolls her eyes at.

“Yeah, of course,” Kara answers, moving back next to Lena. “Sorry to interrupt your date.”

“It wasn’t a date,” Lucy and James both reply immediately before whipping their heads to look at each other briefly. Lena laughs quietly and exchanges an amused grin with Kara.

“I’m going to go check on the rest of the base,” J’onn says with a touch of side-eye for James and Lucy. “Good to see you, Director.”

Lucy nods at him. “Director.”

Winn makes an exaggerated saluting gesture. “Director,” he mocks until James smacks him in the arm.

“I’ve gotta go,” Alex says, walking away from the group, her phone already out. “Maggie and I were supposed to have dinner.”

James shoots Alex a quizzical look and Winn’s eyebrows pull down as he looks over at Kara and Lena. “Maggie?” He asks in a quiet voice as Alex strides out of earshot.

Kara just shrugs and turns towards Lena. “Hungry?”

As if on cue, her stomach answers the question for her and she nods a little. “I could eat,” she answers as Kara grins.

“I know a place,” Kara says, reaching out to grab at Lena’s hand.

They say goodbye to the rest of their friends and Lena lets Kara lead her away.

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The place Kara knows ends up being the rooftop of an old dinner theater on the south part of town. Kara drops Lena off there before racing away and not ten minutes later is back, changed out of her suit and holding two huge bags of takeout.

“Did anyone just see you leap up an entire building in jeans?” Lena asks as Kara approaches.

“Of course not,” Kara tells her with a grin. “I told you. I’m stealthy. Like a cat.”

Lena laughs.

“When you said you knew a place I was thinking of...you know...actual tables or walls,” Lena teases and Kara rolls her eyes a little, walking to a corner of the roof where she sets the bags down
and reaches around an old fuse box to pull out a duffel bag.

“I don’t have a table, but I’m not going to make you sit on the dirty floor,” Kara says with a look for Lena. “Don’t worry, Princess.”

Lena laughs, but shoves at Kara’s side and laughs harder when Kara flails at the touch and makes a big show of falling over onto the ground.

“Be nice!” Kara protests, but she’s smiling. “I fought a Martian today.”

Lena rolls her eyes and grabs for the blanket that’s sticking halfway out of the duffel. “Why do you have a bag here already packed and ready?”

Standing back up, Kara shrugs. “I like to come here,” she says, helping Lena spread the blanket out and moving the food around so they can sit, their backs up against the outer ledge of the roof.

Lena presses in close to Kara, taking an offered box of Chinese food and chopsticks. “Why here?”

Kara points with her chopsticks and Lena follows the direction towards the horizon, the sun setting slowly in a hazy glow of red and orange. “Awesome sunset views,” Kara explains. “And there’s not a ton of artificial light here which means-”

“More stars,” Lena fills in for her with a smile at Kara.

“More stars,” Kara confirms with an answering smile of her own.

They stay smiling at each other for a long moment before Kara leans across the space and kisses Lena quickly on the lips. “I’m glad you’re here.”

Lena reaches up to cup at Kara’s chin, kisses her again. “Me too,” she says.

“Oh, and I brought wine,” Kara says suddenly, pulling away and setting her food down so she can reach into the duffel bag and pull out a bottle.

“You had wine in that bag?” Lena asks.

“Yeah,” Kara answers and Lena quirks an eyebrow.

“You don’t drink wine,” Lena points out and Kara freezes as if caught doing something she wasn’t supposed to be.

“You do,” she says slowly, turning her gaze on Lena.

Lena narrows her eyes. “Did you plan this?”

Kara seems to consider her answer for a moment and Lena struggles not to laugh at the expression on her face. “Would it be bad if I did?”

“I don’t know,” Lena says, shrugging a shoulder. “Are you planning on getting me drunk and taking advantage of me?”

“What?” Kara exclaims so loudly Lena’s sure someone on street level could hear it. “Of course not.”

“It’s a joke, darling,” Lena laughs, reaching out to tweak a strand of Kara’s hair.
“I knew that,” Kara says, scoffing, but there’s a faint blush in her cheeks just barely detectable. “I meant to say that I don’t need to get you drunk to take advantage of you.”

It takes a second for that to register, but when it does Lena yelps out an indignant sound and shoves at Kara for the second time, laughing when she fumbles with the wine and sways to the side.

“Stop pushing me,” Kara jokingly protests.

Lena rolls her eyes, but smiles when Kara hands her a glass of wine. As she does it, the sun glints off the bracelet on Kara’s wrist, visible now that she’s changed out of her suit. It triggers a memory - a sequence of memories actually - and Lena debates for a moment if she’s ready to have that conversation.

After a heavy sip of wine, she takes a breath. “Kara,” she starts slowly, waiting for Kara to acknowledge her. “Can I ask you something?”

“Yeah of course,” Kara says, stabbing her chopsticks into the box in her hands and stuffing a huge portion of chicken in her mouth. “What’s up?”

Lena sets her wine down next to her own box of food and fiddles a little with her watch, trying to figure out how to start this conversation. “Kryptonian mating,” she begins, articulating the words out in a drawl. Kara’s eyes go noticeably wider and she swallows the food in her mouth. “What’s up?”

“Kara,” she starts slowly, waiting for Kara to acknowledge her. “Can I ask you something?”

“Yeah of course,” Kara says, stabbing her chopsticks into the box in her hands and stuffing a huge portion of chicken in her mouth. “What’s up?”

Lena sets her wine down next to her own box of food and fiddles a little with her watch, trying to figure out how to start this conversation. “Kryptonian mating,” she begins, articulating the words out in a drawl. Kara’s eyes go noticeably wider and she swallows the food in her mouth.

“What about it?”

“How does it work?”

“Why?” Kara asks with a level of suspicion that Lena doesn’t understand. It makes her laugh just a bit even though her heart feels like it’s seconds away from racing out of her chest.

“Well I know you said that mates were chosen at a certain age, but I was curious if there was some sort of...I don’t know...ritual to it?”

“Ritual?”

“Like here on Earth,” Lena explains, thinking that maybe she’d be better off just blurting out the question she really wants to ask. “We have weddings and often the couple exchanges rings.”

Kara’s silent for a moment and slowly lowers her food away from where it was hovering near her mouth. “Are you asking because you want to get married?” Kara asks and Lena barely holds back from reacting to that.

Instead she thins her lips into a faint smile and shrugs a shoulder. “I guess I’m asking because I’m getting the feeling there’s something I’m not understanding,” Lena says. “About us.”

“About us?” Kara repeats and Lena sighs, drags her eyes up to the sky for a moment.

“The White Martian...when it was Alex it called me-”

“It was trying to mess with you,” Kara interrupts.

“I know,” she says, “but it was still Alex.”

“It wasn’t Alex.”

“It had all her memories and her thoughts,” Lena insists. “And it referred to me as your mate and
then later...your wife.”

“What?”

“Why would Alex consider me your...why would Alex consider us married?”

“She doesn’t,” Kara denies hastily, shaking her head so rapidly Lena almost loses track of the motion.

“The Martian wouldn’t have just made that up. From what I understand about their telepathy that’s not how it works. Which - a conversation for another time, but thank you for telling me about J’onn being able to read my mind this whole time.”

Kara laughs in this quick burst of repeating sound that comes out so forced that Lena almost startles. “I think you would know if we got married,” Kara says still forcing laughter out of her mouth. “I mean, that’s like generally a thing people are aware of happening.”

Lena quirks a brow. “Generally,” Lena replies dryly.

Kara’s eyes are wide and the smile on her face is strained. Lena sighs, considers a different approach.

Unclasping her watch, she turns it over so the inscription is visible. “What does this mean? The last part of the engraving.”

Kara eyes the watch with a hint of wariness. “I told you—”

“Tell me what it actually means,” Lena interrupts sounding perhaps a bit sterner than she intends.

Kara’s fingers have drifted to her own bracelet and they tug at it absently as she looks over at Lena. “Lena,” Kara sighs out, biting lightly at her lip.

“Just tell me,” Lena says softly, trying to sound relaxed and reassuring. “It’s okay.”

Silence stretches for a few seconds as Kara looks down at her bracelet and then the watch. On a deep breath she finally looks back at Lena, her eyes blue and soft as she searches Lena’s face.

“There’s a ritual,” she says so softly that Lena barely hears it. “On Krypton, I mean.”

“Okay,” Lena replies slowly, her thumb swiping over the letters on her watch.

“After you’re matched with your...mate...you both stand on the Jewel of Truth and you...say the vows and then,” Kara pauses, brow crinkling just a bit. “Then you exchange bracelets.”

“Bracelets,” Lena repeats, eyes drawn to where Kara’s twisting her own bracelet around her wrist.

“Yeah,” Kara says slowly.

“And the inscription,” Lena says. “On my watch? The part you told me was some kind of version of girlfriend.”

Kara nods, her bottom lip pulled into her mouth for a second. “It’s possible that the words I used might mimic those of the Kryptonian wedding vows, so it - loosely translates to mate.”

Though she had been expecting this explanation Lena feels her eyes go wide anyway. “What?!”
“I told you we don’t have a word for girlfriend,” Kara replies defensively her eyes going wide.

Lena shakes her head, looks away for a second. “I’m sorry, I’m just...are you saying that you basically married me in college and I had no idea?”

“No,” Kara denies hastily. “Of course not.”

“So when Mon-El kept commenting about your mating bracelet, he was right.”

“I can’t believe Mon-El thought I had a mate and still asked me out,” Kara interrupts with a pinched expression.

Lena’s brain feels like it’s all over the place and another thing occurs to her quickly. “Alex told him you had a mate. I mean Alex-”

“Alex is...that’s just complicated,” Kara says with a shake of her head. “Alex thinks she knows more than she does.”

“I’m getting the feeling that everyone seems to know more than I do,” Lena says and Kara looks sheepish at that.

“It’s not-”

“So when I gave you that bracelet that was basically a...I mean that was....we…”

“Lena, it wasn’t like that,” Kara says, soft but serious.

“Then explain it to me,” Lena says, and she doesn’t mean to sound so angry, but so much of their relationship suddenly has new and alarming context that Lena doesn’t know how to process.

She isn’t sure how she would handle knowing that Kara thought of them as married and let Lena walk away from her.

“I’ve told you that we didn’t date on Krypton,” Kara says slowly. “That wasn’t really a concept I understood when I first came to Earth.”

“I remember,” Lena replies quietly.

“Kryptonians just have one mate,” Kara continues. “And it’s for life.”

“So,” Lena holds up the watch in her hand, eyes it as her heart starts to thud heavy and quick against her rib cage. “This was about making me-”

“No,” Kara interrupts. “It wasn’t about...marriage or mating. More like...intention.”

“Intention?” Lena asks, her fingers tightening on the watch in question.

“I guess there are just some Kryptonian customs that stuck with me,” Kara says and she reaches out to take Lena’s watch, turning it over in her hands and inspecting it. “I never really got accustomed to the idea of dating. I just knew that I wanted to be with you...forever.”

“Kara,” Lena replies, the name coming out thickly through the restraint of sudden emotion.

“It was supposed to be a symbol of how I felt about you,” Kara continues, handing the watch back softly. “It still is, to me. It doesn’t have to stand for anything more than that.”
Memory swirls between them and Lena feels like something heavy is sitting on her chest, pushing so hard that her heart feels like it might burst at any moment. All those years where they weren’t speaking, that one moment in the airport - Kara thought Lena was it for her.

“The bracelet that I gave you,” Lena says, eying the metal in question. “Even if I didn’t mean to…you know, accidentally fulfill a Kryptonian mating ritual at the time…it’s a symbol of how I feel about us too.”

Kara’s fingers tug softly at the bracelet and Lena’s lips thin upward into a slight smile. “Unbreakable?”

“Yeah,” Lena answers quietly, reaching out to run her hands over the bracelet, over Kara’s hand. “It bends, but it doesn’t break.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you,” Kara says. “I know it sounds like I was trying to trick you, but I swear I wasn’t. I would have told you eventually, if we hadn’t - you know.”

Lena nods, blinks against the heat in her eyes. “I don’t think you were trying to trick me.”

“I’ve been meaning to tell you the last few months. Alex has been bothering me about it forever. I’m - I just - I’m really sorry.”

“It’s okay. I think I get it,” Lena says, offering out her hand for Kara to latch the watch back on her wrist. Kara eyes her outstretched arm for a moment before she slowly slips it on, her fingers soft on Lena’s skin as she presses the clasp closed, and it feels significant. And it’s terrifying, heady, and Lena can’t help but feel thrilled by it.

They finish their dinner in companionable silence for the most part and watch the sun set on the day. The night cools considerably, but Lena stays warm pressed up against Kara’s side while Kara points out constellations as they appear in the night sky, Kara’s hand pressing against the metal of her watch. They tangle together on the rooftop until it grows too late to reasonably stay out, and Kara flies Lena home after that.

When they land, Kara lingers, her hands playing up and down Lena’s arms, her eyes unblinking and focused on Lena’s face. The air outside is cool, but the thing building there between them is warm and Lena can’t help but step the slightest bit closer.

“Are you tired?” Lena asks, and with the throaty way it comes out she’s sure there’s no mistaking the suggestion in her tone. Kara’s smile is indicative enough, but she speaks anyway.

“No,” Kara replies and when she steps closer in to Lena’s body, she radiates warmth that seeps through Lena’s clothes and buzzes across her skin. “Are you?”

Lena’s chest feels tight with anticipation as her throat goes a little dry. “Not at all,” she answers, and Kara doesn’t seem to need more clarification other than that because she steps forward quickly and picks Lena up around the waist, kissing her firmly.

The show of strength does absolutely nothing to stem the tide of arousal pooling in Lena’s stomach. She feels drunk on the adrenaline from earlier in the night and the way Kara’s eyes look as the sun set, the certainty with which Kara spoke about loving Lena forever. It certainly doesn’t help that Kara’s kissing her like this is going somewhere, stepping into Lena’s apartment and pulling the balcony door closed behind her.

It’s been an age since she’s engaged in anything physical with another person and her body makes that known pretty quickly. Everything feels hyper sensitive to Kara’s presence, her legs wrapping
around Kara’s waist and her arms around her shoulders. Kara’s hands have already slipped up under Lena’s shirt, pressing tightly into the skin of her back, and their kisses are warm and insistent, and Lena feels like she can’t breathe, but she has to keep kissing Kara.

Whatever this is leading to...Lena’s fairly confident she’s not going to last very long. Not with the way Kara feels so good after so long, not with how she feels on edge just kissing Kara in the middle of her living room. It’s clear that four years of separation hasn’t evaporated Kara’s knowledge of Lena’s body. There’s a hand holding firm at her back, and another settled on her thigh, above her knee, playing with the fabric of her pants.

“Kara,” Lena murmurs, threading her fingers into Kara’s hair and enjoying the strong feeling of Kara’s fingers gripping at her thigh, letting Kara kiss down her throat.

“Yeah?” Kara answers distractedly as they walk through the apartment, somewhere past the infernal grandfather clock in the hall. Kara’s voice is in her ear, her teeth on Lena’s earlobe, and she nearly loses all functioning thought at the feel of it.

Lena’s back hits a wall a little harder than it normally would had Kara been paying full attention and air whooshes out of her.

“Sorry,” Kara mumbles with a laugh against Lena’s cheek. “What were you saying?”

Lena laughs in kind, her lips near Kara’s temple. “I was going to say try not to break anything.”

Steering them away from the wall and through the bedroom door next to them, Kara deposits them on the bed with a grin. “No promises,” she says before ducking her head back down to Lena’s neck and working downward.

In the wake of Kara’s lips against her skin and the way every second feels thick with intention Lena finds she doesn’t really care if she wakes up and the entire apartment is destroyed in the morning. That’s a problem for another day.

When Kara encounters the fabric of Lena’s dress shirt, she hums in annoyance, her fingers reaching between them to tug the buttons free from their holes, and that’s all fine and good, but Lena wants Kara’s shirt off nearly as much. She shoves at Kara until she pulls away to pull it off, and then she flops onto her back, and when Lena straddles her hips, Kara’s smile is almost too much for her.

“Your heartbeat’s going crazy,” Kara says, her hands resting on Lena’s thighs and rushing up her body as Lena manages to get her own shirt off. Lena laughs, a warm feeling filling up her chest. It’s probably true, but Kara’s statement is a direct reminder of their first time, and memory swirls around them.

“That’s a good thing,” Lena returns, and Kara’s smile is wide and inviting and good, and when Lena leans down to kiss her, her hands running over Kara’s body, she feels it all the way down to her soul.

And when Kara manages to tear her bedsheets twenty minutes later, she loves her enough to forgive her.
Chapter 13

It’s sunlight streaming in through her bedroom windows that finally pulls Lena out of sleep.

Her body feels drained, limp and heavy against the mattress, but it’s a sated feeling, the kind that makes her smile as she blinks her eyes open and stretches a bit.

The other occupant of her bed has already beaten her to consciousness and blue eyes are staring happily back at her.

“Morning,” Lena whispers, afraid that if she speaks too loudly their perfect cocoon will be broken. Her hand shifts onto the pillow next to her head and finds Kara’s, twisting around it warmly. The cool metal of Kara’s bracelet hits her forearm and she feels tethered to the bed in a significant way.

“Morning,” Kara whispers back in soft Kryptonian. It makes Lena smile.

“Sleep well?”

Kara nods, shifting closer on the bed and moving her hand to run down Lena’s side, settling at her hip. “How do you feel?”

A smile squirms on Lena’s lips and she laughs a bit. “A little bit like I ran back to back marathons and then worked out afterwards,” she answers, stroking a tangled strand of hair off Kara’s cheek.

Kara shrugs a shoulder, a playful look on her face. “Sex with a superhero will do that to you,” she says in a conspiratorial tone.

Lena laughs loudly and shoves at Kara’s shoulder, laughing harder when Kara makes a show of falling back to the bed with an indignant sound escaping her lips. She follows the motion, slinging her leg over Kara’s hips until she’s straddling the other girl and playfully pulls her pillow over to smother Kara in the face.

Kara’s laughter is muffled by the move, but it doesn’t stop and Lena keeps pressing the pillow down until Kara’s fingers creep up her thigh and press into the one spot that makes her squirm and lose her grip on the pillow.

“Dammit, Kara,” Lena says through a gasp and a laugh as she tries to evade Kara’s knowledgeable fingers. “You know I hate being tickled.”

“You’re trying to smother me with a pillow,” Kara argues, but she’s laughing too as she flings the pillow back to the side and pulls her torso up off the bed. Her hands remain on Lena’s hips, though her fingers have stilled, and Lena’s own hands land on the now tense muscles of Kara’s abdomen.

“That’s no excuse,” Lena manages to reply, but her focus has suddenly been pulled towards the way Kara is curled up off the bed and the feel of the strong solid body between her thighs.

The change of feeling must show on her face because Kara sits up entirely, her hand sliding to wrap around Lena’s waist and keep them pressed together. It puts her a head above Kara, but she bends slightly to meet Kara’s offered lips in a sweet, solid kiss.

When Kara attempts to deepen the kiss, Lena pulls back with a soft laugh and a slight cringe, her nose curling up. “Morning breath,” she murmurs as an excuse, but Kara just tightens her arm around Lena’s waist and twists to the side until Lena’s falling on her back with Kara pressing down
on top of her.

“Don’t care,” Kara replies before pressing her lips to Lena’s jawline and beginning a journey south. When Kara’s mouth hits her collarbone and continues downward, Lena finds she doesn’t care all that much either.

“Kara,” Lena says, the name coming out more like a gasp by the time Kara gets to her hipbones. Lena’s fingers press into Kara’s hair, twisting a little there and tugging to get her attention.

“Yes?” Kara asks in a low confident tone. Lena can feel a smile start to spread out where Kara’s mouth is against her skin and she takes a deep breath, her eyes drifting for a moment to the ceiling of her bedroom.

“Careful,” she tells her and Kara picks her head up to quirk a brow at Lena. “I’m a little…” Kara seems to understand even though a proud little smile crosses her face that makes Lena tug harder at Kara’s hair and roll her eyes. Kara just laughs and presses a warm soothing kiss low on Lena’s abdomen.

It pools liquid heat between her legs and despite the ache in her muscles her body feels desperate for Kara to do something.

“You’ll be okay,” is all Kara offers before ducking her head and making Lena’s back arch off the bed.

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It takes them far too long to leave the bed after that. Lena gets lost in a haze of reacquainting herself with a body she hasn’t been able to really touch in nearly four years. Kara seems just as determined to keep them naked and pressed together and she only relents when Lena mentions that they’re both going to be late to work.

At first, that knowledge doesn’t seem to deter Kara until Lena adds, “Do you really want Alex to come looking for you?”

It makes Kara laugh, but nod in concession and she pries herself away from Lena’s body with a wistful sigh.

“I need at least a pot of coffee,” Lena comments as she closes her eyes and stretches out the now even more sore muscles of her legs and back.

“I can do something about that,” Kara says cheerfully and she rolls over to press a quick kiss to Lena’s cheek before bouncing out of bed.

When she finally finds the strength to follow, Lena surveys the damage of her bedroom. Nothing is too badly broken. Her sheets are definitely a disaster and there’s a crack in her headboard that she doesn’t entirely remember doing. The wall by her closet has a slight dent in it and a few books have fallen off their shelves.

All of it is fixable and she’s glad, frankly, that it isn’t worse. She still remembers having to explain to her RA how exactly she kept breaking university provided furniture at such an alarming pace. Eventually she just stopped reporting it and had it fixed herself.

A glance at the grandfather clock in the hallway tells Lena she’s about to be very late to work, but
when Kara comes from around the corner with two coffee cups she can’t find it in her to care.

“You owe me new sheets,” Lena says dryly and an attractive blush takes shape on Kara’s cheeks.

“I think that was more mutual responsibility,” Kara says handing over a mug of coffee and all but smirking as she leans her shoulder into a nearby wall.

“You look smug,” Lena comments, taking a sip of her coffee and arching a brow at Kara.

“Not without reason,” Kara says and her eyes flicker up and down suggestively enough that Lena reaches out and smacks her on the arm. It only makes Kara laugh even though she attempts to feign pain for a few seconds. Lena just rolls her eyes.

“I’m going to be late to work and that is definitely your fault,” Lena replies, moving around Kara and heading into the kitchen.

“Again,” Kara says, trailing behind her. “I argue that’s totally mutual.”

Lena hums a noncommittal sound and sets her mug on her kitchen counter, reaching out to grab at a small remote sitting there and turning on a monitor on the far side of her kitchen. The news flashes on the screen and Lena sighs when she sees they’re covering the lead up to her mother’s trial. Kara sets her mug down next to Lena’s and wraps an arm around her waist.

“Don’t watch that,” Kara says quietly, reaching around to grab at the remote and change the station.

“I can handle it,” she snaps but when she goes to snatch the remote back, Kara throws it out of reach. It clatters across the far counter and Lena narrows her eyes. “That wasn’t necessary.”

“Just because you can handle it doesn’t mean you should do it.”

“That feels hypocritical,” Lena murmurs with a roll of her eyes.

“Why ruin a perfectly good morning with all that gross stuff?” Kara asks, her arms wrapping completely around Lena’s waist and her lips pressing against the skin of Lena’s neck.

“Because reality still exists, regardless of how nice our night was,” Lena says, but she’s already sinking into Kara’s embrace, her head tilting to allow Kara more access to her neck and she can’t help the smile that crosses her lips when Kara’s mouth trails upward towards her ear.

“Reality doesn’t have to exist for like...at least five more minutes,” Kara argues and Lena laughs.

“I feel like only five minutes was the reason I was late to my eight o’clock mechanical engineering class five times,” Lena says.

“How long could it possibly take you to get ready?” Kara asks. “In college-”

“I’m afraid I can’t just throw on jeans and a baseball hat anymore and get away with it,” Lena interrupts with a chuckle and she twists in Kara’s arms until they’re face to face. Kara’s face is bright and a grin is widening out across her lips.

“Aren’t you the boss? You could start a new dress code. Casual...what day is it?”

Lena rolls her eyes a little, but lets Kara tug their hips in together and loops her arms around Kara’s neck. “I at the very least need a shower. I can’t imagine what I must smell like.”
“You smell great to me,” Kara says, her face tucking into Lena’s shoulder with an exaggerated sniff that makes Lena laugh and squirm away.

They break apart and Lena grabs for her coffee again, moving to slide into a stool and reach for her laptop sitting there. With a quick stroke of her fingers she opens up her calendar and her email checking it with a quick skim of her eyes. Kara plops down onto the stool next to her and leans back precariously, her legs lifting up to balance on the counter top while she somehow manages to balance in midair and sip at her coffee, watching Lena. Her bracelet catches the sunlight as she tilts the mug back, and Lena can’t help but smile.

“Do I have any sugar left, or did you dump it all in that cup of coffee?” Lena asks. Kara snorts, tilting forward suddenly and setting her mug on the counter.

“I didn’t put any sugar in this,” she says and Lena arches a disbelieving eyebrow that makes Kara add, “Splenda isn’t sugar, Lena.”

Lena laughs and rolls her eyes, shaking her head at Kara. “It’s better for you,” she says, turning back to her computer and evaluating if any of her emails require immediate responses.

“I’m invulnerable to the effects of sugar,” Kara boasts and Lena turns to see the smirk on her face as she rocks back on the stool, clearly half-floating.

“Then what does it matter?” Lena challenges and Kara’s smirk thins along with her eyes.

“It tastes good.”

“Splenda tastes the same.”

“It doesn’t.”

“It does,” Lena insists with a laugh and Kara exhales noisily before taking a sip of her coffee again.

“If this relationship is going anywhere you need to buy real sugar,” Kara says with a teasing smile that makes Lena laugh.

“You survived just fine in college.”

“Because I kept a secret sugar stash in your dorm,” Kara tells her and Lena makes an exaggerated sound of indignation.

“You what?”

Kara laughs and the sound gets louder when Lena kicks out a foot to tip Kara’s stool over. It’s unsuccessful and Kara just remains balanced on one leg of the stool, her own foot against the counter as she sips her coffee.

“Don’t you remember those shots we made for your birthday?” Kara asks. “Where do you think I got the sugar for the rims?”

“Josie brought over all the liquor supplies,” Lena answers as she remembers how excited Kara had been to invent weird and overly sugary shots for the party.

“Nope,” Kara says with a little pop of the word and a proud smirk.

Lena rolls her eyes. “What a weird thing to be sneaky about.”
“So you admit I’m totally sneaky?”

This time when Lena kicks her foot she’s successful in toppling the stool over, but Kara just floats in midair, coffee poised in front of her as she shoots Lena an affronted look.

“Speaking of birthdays, what do you want to do for Earth Birthday?” Lena asks, glancing over to see Kara manage to brighten and frown at the same time as she reaches down to reposition her chair.

“Well, since Alex is ditching me...” Kara grumbles, repositioning her ankles on the counter and continuing to rock backwards.

“Alex isn’t ditching you,” Lena corrects, with a hint of admonishment. Kara tilts her head back and forth, humming unhappily.

“She’d rather go to some stupid concert with her girlfriend than-”

“This is your sister’s first significant relationship. Certainly you remember what that was like,” Lena says.

“I never ditched her to hang out with you on her birthday,” Kara says with a pointed look that Lena returns.

“You’ve been weird about Alex ever since she started dating Maggie. Why? Do you not like Maggie or something?”

“I haven’t been weird,” Kara denies, but she turns away from Lena and slides her feet off the counter, standing up to dump the rest of her coffee in the sink.

Closing her laptop, Lena just shoots her a look. “Kara,” she says knowingly.

With a heavy sigh, Kara turns and leans back against the counter looking at Lena with a petulant expression. “I just feel like-” Kara blows out a breath, her head dropping back on her shoulders as her eyes dart around the room at a clear loss for words. “I don’t know what I feel.”

“You should talk to Alex,” Lena says, taking a final sip of her coffee and moving to set the mug in the sink next to Kara’s.

“Yeah, sure, if she ever had any free time to actually hang out with me,” Kara says with obvious disdain.

Lena reaches out and tangles her fingers with Kara’s. “Talk to your sister.”

Kara’s lips thin, but she squeezes Lena’s hands and tugs until they’re pressed against each other again. “She’s busy tonight remember?”

The conversation has reached a level of circular that Lena no longer feels the desire to navigate so she just sighs and reaches up to press a quick kiss to Kara’s lips.

“How about I see if I can get out of the office early tonight and we can have dinner. Wherever you want?”

“Wherever wherever?”

“Is there another meaning to that word I’m unaware of?” Lena jokes with a quirk of her brow.
“Just making sure there aren’t some kind of implicit parameters or something.”

“Wherever wherever,” Lena answers and Kara’s lips curl up into a grin.

Without another response, Kara just bends a bit and scoops Lena up under her knees. The suddenness of the action pulls a surprised little yelp out of Lena who laughs as she grasps Kara around the neck. “What are you doing?”

“Didn’t you say something about a shower?” Kara asks with a quirk of her lips that coils warmth in Lena’s chest.

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There’s a horde of reporters camped outside of L Corp Tower, not that Lena had expected anything less. Jess had texted her earlier that morning telling her to use the garage entrance, minutes before Kara had pressed a kiss to her cheek and sprinted out the door. The memory provides a balm, even when she spots protestors with signs mixed into the crowd in the front plaza.

To make matters worse, a team of her lawyers are waiting in the entryway of her office when she gets there and Lena realizes it’s finally time to really face the reality of her part in putting her mother in jail. The morning is spent reviewing her deposition and notes on trial strategy. Far too much of the meeting is spent discussing what she should wear to court and Lena struggles not to snap completely and just fire the entire team.

After they file out of her office, she’s buried in a deluge of paperwork over various real estate initiatives, things she has to read through carefully before signing on every conceivable page. A not-so-small headache is beginning to develop behind her eyes even before the clock strikes twelve.

Just as she’s about to ask Jess to order her something for lunch, her personal phone starts to ring and she has to stare at a set of familiar numbers for a long few seconds before she answers it gingerly.

“Hello?”

“Lena,” a familiar voice greets across the line. “Long time.”

“Jack?”

“Hi.” His voice spikes a wash of memory across her and she finds her throat going a little dry. The last she heard Jack speak was at an airport months ago, but it feels more like a lifetime. So much of her life has changed since then, and so little. And though she hasn’t had much time to think on it, she misses Jack - doesn’t realize how much until she hears the lilting tone of his accent.

“How are you?”

He laughs and she can’t help but smile. “Actually, I called to see how you were doing? So, you answer first.”

“I’m fine,” she answers immediately, and this time his laugh is sad and knowing.

“I’ve followed the news about your mother,” he says. “That can’t be easy.”

“It’s my mother,” Lena says dryly. “What else is new?”
His laughter warms something in her chest. “I just wanted to call and see if you needed anything. I know we’re not-” He falters a moment and Lena has to swallow against the lump in her throat. “I still care about you Lena. And if you ever need anything…”

“Thank you, Jack. That - means a lot.”

There’s a small stretch of silence, somewhere between uncomfortable and not. She can picture him sitting in his tiny office at Spheerical, the shades drawn so the gleam of the Daily Planet building across the street doesn’t hit his computer screen. He’s probably not wearing a tie. He might even be in jeans. It’s comforting.

“I heard you were testifying.”

“I am,” she replies, eyeing the stack of files the lawyers left behind on the corner of her desk. It’s easily a foot high.

“The news here in Metropolis has been reporting that you were instrumental in having her arrested.”

The memory of that night comes to her then, the way her mother looked in the back of a cop car and later what Kara looked like - shaky and unsure, frightened. “I’m not really supposed to talk about it,” she says quietly.

Silence stretches for a beat. “Of course, my apologies.”

“It’s not you, Jack,” she says. “I just don’t want to jeopardize any chance of putting that woman away.”

“I understand. I called to let you know that I’m here for you. As a friend. Always,” he says and it’s so sincere that Lena feels an ache spread out across her ribcage. It’s more than she deserves from a man she all but strung along for years.

“You’re too kind.”

“Still haven’t learned there’s no such thing, eh?” He teases and she smiles.

“I heard a rumor Spheerical recently registered a new IP,” she comments in an attempt to change the subject.

“Ah, you know, I’m really not supposed to talk about it,” he says, turning her words back. She can hear the smile in his voice, the light laughter and teasing tone.

“Just tell me it’s not what I think it is,” she says with a grin.

“What do you think it is?” Jack counters. “Have you forgotten I can’t read your mind? I still can’t, no matter how many microscopes you throw at me.”

“Considering I’m a major shareholder in Spheerical, you have an interest in telling me this information,” she says and she can practically hear the smile on his face.

“As a shareholder, I think you’ll be pleased,” is all he says before changing the subject with it. “And speaking of, the papers have been linking you with a local reporter recently.”

The comment freezes in her chest and she blinks, surprised. “That’s an interesting segway,” she says slowly, as her brain catches up.
He’s quiet for a moment. “I don’t take to reading the gossip column, but my news alert notified me that my name had been coming up.”

Unseen, she arches a brow and turns to her computer terminal. “I’m not sure I follow.”

“You really should pay attention to your public image, Lena,” he says and sure enough as soon as she googles Jack’s name, there’s a picture of the two of them from a tech conference years ago that shows up, their heads tilted together and wearing twin smiles as they hovered over a small demo device.

It’s part of a recent article speculating on Lena’s dating life and her heart rate increases to see Kara’s name mentioned further down the screen, complete with anonymous quotes about how Kara’s always hanging around L Corp Tower. It’s nothing romantic, not explicitly, but it’s still there, staring back at Lena.

“You can’t believe everything you read on the internet. I believe this website reported Lex was in love with Superman a few times,” she manages to respond, her eyes scanning the article.

Silent again for a stretch of seconds, Jack laughs softly. “I just want to make sure you’re happy, Lena. That reporter they mentioned,” he says, pausing for a moment. “There was an anecdote that you both went to the same university for a bit.”

The implication is so heavy in that moment that Lena has to take a deep breath against emotions she wasn’t at all prepared to confront. “What are you trying to ask, Jack?”

“Nothing,” he says a touch defensively. “I’m just...catching up. Making sure you’re doing okay.”

Biting back a sharp response, she closes out of the article on her screen and spins her chair until she’s facing the bright blue sky of National City outside her window. “I assure you, apart from everything with my criminal mastermind mother, I’m more than okay,” she replies and pumps a certain amount of mirth in her tone if only to lighten the conversation.

He laughs and it seems to work. “And are you happy?”

The memory of Kara’s laughing face as she had scooped Lena up that morning and walked them to the shower pops up in her head and an unstoppable smile spreads over her face. “I am,” she says softly and with conviction.

The sigh that comes over the line sounds more content than anything else and a wave of affection blooms across her chest. “I’m glad,” he says and then after a short clearing of his throat he adds, “You know, I’ll be in town soon, actually.”

“Really? In National City?”

“Yes, we’ve registered a new IP, perhaps you’ve heard,” he jokes.

“A thing or two,” she replies with a chuckle.

“There’ll be a whole thing, you know, a big deal. I’d love to properly catch up,” he says. She feels a flutter at the idea of seeing him again. “Possibly over some overpriced bottle of wine and food we can’t pronounce. Maybe...I could finally meet the oh so mysterious college lover I’ve heard so little about.”

She laughs warmly, the strangeness of the conversation leaking out of her. “That would be great, Jack. The food and wine. Revealing my secrets - I don’t know about that.”
“I suppose a woman must keep some mysteries,” he says, laughing, and another bit of silence stretches between them, comfortable and soft, and the image of him settled in his enormous office chair, leaning over a prototype and grinning when Lena walks through the door makes her feel warm.

“Listen,” he says, suddenly, sounding noticeably more serious. “This stuff with your mom.”

“I can handle it,” she interrupts, straightening.

“I know you can. But I just want to remind you that you don’t have to do it alone.” It makes her think of Kara, this morning saying the exact same thing, and she wonders if she’ll ever be able to have a serious conversation with this man and not think of Kara. “I do love you, Lena,” he says quietly but with such sincerity that Lena thinks she might actually cry.

The truth sits on her tongue for a long moment before she replies. “I love you too, Jack. Thank you for calling.”

“Anytime,” he says before the call ends and Lena’s left to the silence of her office.

--

Her afternoon drags on. She meets with far too many lawyers for her taste, and the rest of her meetings involve handling the press surrounding her mother’s trial, along with a brief phone call with a regional VP who claims Superman is intentionally trying to break all of their buildings. By the time Kara shows up at her office door she’s beyond ready for a break.

“I thought I told Jess not to let in any members of the press,” Lena teases, dropping her pen down on her desk and leaning back in her chair. It’s been hours since she’s seen Kara, but it still feels like far too long.

Kara smirks a little as she paces forward. “Jess likes me,” she says. “Also, she looks really stressed. Is it L Corp company policy to overwork or something?”

“She needs a vacation,” Lena agrees with a sigh. “The whole company does.”

“We could send her to Earth-1 as a gift,” Kara offers and Lena laughs, rolling her head around on her neck to stretch out her shoulders.

“Once this trial is over I’ll give her some paid time off,” Lena says, enjoying the sight of Kara standing in front of her in fresh colorful clothing. “How was your day?”

Kara shrugs, dropping into the chair in front of Lena’s desk. “Long,” she answers. “Snapper rejected like ten of my article proposals today.”

Lena arches a brow. “So did you come here to write a story about the famous Luthor daughter set to publicly betray her mother?”

Kara stills, just blinks at her as if otherwise frozen. “Tell me that was a joke,” she says softly. It hadn’t entirely been a joke, but Lena can tell from Kara’s expression there’s little humor to be found in the remark. Her chest tightens in discomfort and she goes for a casual smile. “It was, I’m sorry,” she says with a little sigh. Her fingers rub absently at her temple. “I’ve had a long day too.”

With a speed Lena knows is not entirely human, Kara is up out of her chair and next to Lena, propping up against her desk and reaching out pull Lena’s hand away from her head. “Why don’t
we just forget about dinner and go home and watch stupid television or something?”

The thought makes Lena smile and she leans back in her chair, her fingers still tangled with Kara’s. “But it’s Earth birthday,” she says with a teasing grin.

“And that sounds like a great way to spend it,” Kara replies cheerfully. “I’m happy to be with you. I think I would have felt more positively about Earth when I landed if I had known I would eventually meet you.”

Lena laughs, already feeling more invigorated just from having been in Kara’s presence for a few minutes. “You’re a sweet talker. We can do both,” Lena says and Kara gets an excited glint to her eyes.

--

They eat dinner at some Thai fusion place Kara wants to go to because they have an unlimited cream cheese wonton deal, Lena.

Kara spends most of the night looking at her phone uncharacteristically often - quick glances between bites of food and a growing look of frustration on her face.

“Hoping Alex will call?” Lena ventures, abandoning her bowl of drunken noodles to focus on Kara.

“I don’t know why,” Kara says, locking her phone and throwing it in the bag hanging off her chair. “She’s with Maggie.”

“Have you not talked to her yet?” Lena asks and Kara’s lips thin in displeasure.

“You told me to talk to her like...twelve hours ago. There hasn’t exactly been time,” Kara says.

“There hasn’t been time or you’ve been avoiding it?” Lena prods with a knowing arch of her brow. Kara sighs. “I’m not avoiding it,” she says but at Lena’s stare she relents a little. “Not totally.”

“It’s not like you to avoid emotional confrontation,” Lena comments, reaching out to pick up her glass of wine and take a sip. Kara avoids her eyes for a moment, her hands fiddling with the bracelet around her wrist, tugging outward on it, testing its strength. There’s a small measure of pride when it barely bends under Kara’s grip.

“I think I just feel...I feel stupid for feeling how I feel,” Kara says with a sigh. Lena hums encouragingly and goes back to her food.

“Your feelings aren’t stupid.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure,” Kara says, still tugging at her bracelet and looking uncharacteristically small.

“Try me,” she replies before taking another bite of her dinner and offering Kara an open encouraging look.

Kara chews softly at her lower lip for a moment. “I guess I just feel like Alex has found Maggie and that’s great,” she starts with an overly exaggerated emphasis on the word. “But I think I’m just used to being…”

“The most important person in Alex’s life,” Lena ventures, dunking her chopsticks into her bowl.
Kara blows out a heavy breath and pulls a face that let’s Lena know she’s hit the mark. “I mean we just figure out everything with us, right, and then I turn around and Alex is...I don’t know,” Kara finishes with a defeated kind of sigh as her elbow props on the table and her face drops sullenly into her palm.

“That doesn’t sound stupid,” Lena says, reaching out to grip Kara’s free hand lightly for a moment.

“I just hate it,” Kara groans with a twist of her lips.

“Hate what?”

“That we figure everything out and then stuff with Alex goes...” Sitting up, Kara mimes an explosion with her hands, complete with sound effects that make Lena laugh.

“Alex loves you and no romantic relationship she has with anybody is going to change that. You’ll figure this out,” Lena tells her. “But not if you don’t actually talk to her about it.”

“I know, I know,” Kara groans, stabbing at her food with a disgruntled expression.

Lena watches her attack the dinner in front of her for a few moments before deciding to change the subject. “I’m concerned that you haven’t asked me what I got you for your birthday,” Lena says.

Kara’s head shoots up, her eyes cutting into Lena’s. “You got me something?”

With a laugh, Lena takes another sip of her drink and smiles at Kara. “Of course. It’s Earth Birthday.”

Kara’s eyes zoom straight in on Lena’s purse, but before she can bring her hand up to tug her glasses down, Lena shoves the purse out of sight and laughs. “Kara, don’t cheat.”

The pout that forms on Kara’s face only makes Lena roll her eyes and laugh again, shaking her head at Kara’s expression.

When they walk out of the restaurant after dinner, there’s a small group of reporters standing outside the door and the flash that goes off the minute Lena steps outside nearly blinds her. Kara reacts much quicker, pulling Lena into her side and stepping in front of the camera to shield her.

They make it to the black car waiting for them by the curb, but not before Lena hears a series of questions get volleyed towards them. The first about her mother, the second asking the nature of her relationship with Kara.

Kara looks ready to turn back and answer until Lena sighs and tugs her further into the car. “Ignore them,” she says as the door shuts and the car starts to pull away.

“They’re extra attentive lately,” Kara grumbles, looking out the rear view window for a moment before sulking back in the seat.

“With my mother’s trial this week I’ve become hot gossip,” Lena says. “I’m sorry.”

Kara’s brow furrows. “Don’t apologize for something that’s not your fault.”

The privacy partition between the driver and the back seat starts to lower and her driver, George, looks over his shoulder. “Home, Miss Luthor?”

She sends a questioning look to Kara.
“You wanna come back to my place?” Kara asks with a playful move of her eyebrows that makes Lena laugh.

She gives George the address and Kara wraps an arm around her shoulders, pulling them close together with a soft kiss to her temple. “Thank you for dinner,” Kara murmurs and Lena takes a deep breath, relaxing against the solid feel of Kara’s body. There’s silence as they drive for a few blocks, and then Kara’s chest is rumbling with laughter, suddenly.

“Can you imagine if the press had somehow made its way into one of our astronomy club parties?” Kara asks, her lips pressed up against Lena’s hair as she speaks. “Remember that time you got drunk and tried to climb a tree with warpaint on? I’m pretty sure I still have a picture of you falling out of the tree.”

“You put that warpaint on my face,” Lena mutters, digging her face into Kara’s collarbone. “And I don’t know why it’s always amused you that I fell out of the tree. We aren’t all superheroes. What if I had broken something?”

“I would have never let that happen,” Kara says, and she says it as amusedly as she related the story, but the truth of it is strong between them. Not for the first time, she sends up a thank you to Rao or God or whoever that Kara Zor-El managed to crash land onto Earth and find her way into Lena’s life.

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“I thought you might be hiding in here,” Jack says, approaching her slowly as he strides across the basement lab at Luthor Tower. He looks cautious; most likely because the last time he had come into the lab unannounced she had nearly tased him.

“I’m not hiding,” Lena counters, her eyes focused on the motherboard on the table in front of her, blinking away the ache hiding behind her eyes. “I’m working.”

“So the fact that you’re still here at nearly half ten has nothing to do with the gaggle of reporters waiting for you out front?”

Lena sighs, dropping a pair of pliers onto the table and finally looking at Jack. “They’re still there?”

“Afraid so,” he answers, pulling a stool up to sit next to her.

“Do you think it would be bad form to have them executed?” Lena asks with a joking, but tired smile.

Jack laughs. “Do you have that kind of power?”

Lena quirks an eyebrow and chuckles a little bitterly. “Apparently this whole company has all kinds of destructive powers I was unaware of,” she says.

Looking at her sympathetically, he runs a hand down her back and scoots a bit closer. “They know that you’re not your brother,” he tells her and her fists clench involuntarily just thinking about everything that’s happened with Lex.

“It’s been a month since he was sent to prison and-”

“Lena,” Jack interrupts, reaching down to swivel her stool until they’re facing each other, knees brushing. Her shoulders sag and she rubs some of the exhaustion out of her eyes. “Overworking
“Yourself isn’t going to make any of this go away. It’s just going to make you sick.”

It’s not Jack’s fault that it reminds her of what Lex had said to her after she broke up with Kara and spent the next months running away from dealing with it. Her eyes feel hot and her chest tight and she doesn’t know how to explain that she’s not trying to overwork herself. The lab is just the only place she feels something even approaching calm at the moment, safe, normal.

She tries not to think of Kara when she sits here in the lab, alone. Knowing she could pick up the phone and Kara would answer. Worrying that she shouldn’t be so sure, especially now; it drives her crazy, when she thinks about Kara. So she focuses on the little projects she’s been accumulating.

“I think I just need a vacation,” Lena admits with a soft laugh and she leans a little towards Jack.

He smiles at her, standing. “Well, we’re both disgustingly well off,” he says. “We can take a vacation if you want.”

A permanent vacation had been more what she was thinking, but she doesn’t say that to Jack. Instead, she smiles indulgently and stands with him. “I think I’ll settle for a glass of wine and that enormous leather couch you have.”

“Happy to be good for something,” he jokes, holding out his arm for her to take. He leans over and grabs the bag leaning up against her desk and shoulders it as she hooks her arm through his.

“You’re good for many things, Jack,” she murmurs, pressing into his side.

“I’ve barely seen you these days,” he says as they walk towards the exit. “I was starting to think I was disposable.”

“I’m just not good company at the moment,” Lena replies, feeling guilty for avoiding Jack - for avoiding everything and everyone really. After everything went down with Lex, Lena felt the need to retreat and reboot and part of that had included Jack.

He presses a kiss to the crown of her head. “I want to be around you for the good and the bad, Lena,” he says softly and she loves him just a little bit more for that.

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“Hey,” Lena says later, when they’ve abandoned the television in favor of pressing together horizontally on Kara’s couch. “Happy Earth birthday.”

Kara grins, wide and happy. “Happy Earth birthday,” she parrots and Lena laughs, rolling her eyes.

“I hate when you do that,” Lena says, but she’s still laughing and Kara returns the sound, ducking her head until her lips are back against Lena’s neck.

“No, you don’t,” she murmurs against her skin, moving upward and pressing her hips down in a suggestive movement that cuts the mirth out of Lena’s throat.

Her hands are sliding up Kara’s shirt and her knee is bending to wrap around Kara’s hip when a loud knock at the door startles both of them and Kara falls heavily into Lena’s body. The knocking sounds again after neither of them make a move and Kara picks her head up and turns to look at the door, her entire body tensing at whatever she must see.

“Who is it?” Lena asks in a whisper, tugging her dress back down when Kara scrambles upright off
“Alex,” Kara says and she paces forward towards the door before Lena hisses out her name and stops her.

“Your shirt,” Lena says quietly, pointing at where Kara’s sweater is all kinds of askew, the collar of her button down half in and half out of the neckline.

Kara flushes and shoots Lena a sheepish smile, tugging at the fabric until it’s back to normal.

Another knock this time and Lena can practically hear the impatience. “I can hear you guys,” Alex’s voice shouts out through the door and Lena bites against a smile.

Kara moves to pull the door open and Lena runs her fingers through her hair in an attempt to untangle it. In the hallway, Alex is standing there with an annoyed expression, but she’s holding out a cupcake with a candle lit stuck in the middle and Kara seems only concerned with that, her eyes honing straight on it.

“What’s this?” Kara asks and Lena props a hip up against the kitchen counter, crossing her arms and watching the exchange.

The annoyance on Alex’s face seems to shift into something closer to guilt. “Happy Earth birthday,” she tells her sister and Kara’s eyes drift back up to Alex.

“I thought you had plans.”

Alex shrugs a shoulder and just holds the cupcake out. “There’s a K,” she says and Lena can just make out the small design on the cupcake. The urge to laugh bubbles up in her throat, but Alex cuts a hard glance her way and she swallows it. “Blow it out,” Alex instructs and when Kara goes to do so she pulls back a little with a quick, “Gently.”

Kara laughs and does as instructed, blowing the candle out and taking it from her sister’s hands. “Thank you,” she says, turning to walk in. She shoots Lena a little excited look and sets the cupcake down on the kitchen counter.

Alex follows behind, throwing her bag on a stool and giving a nod to Lena.

“Have you talked to J’onn since,” Kara gestures with her hand and Alex’s lips thin into a smile.

“Not all that much. Apparently he had to spend all night convincing M’gann not to go back to Mars.”

“She wanted to go back to Mars?!” Kara exclaims, suddenly distracted away from the cupcake she had been unpeeling.

“So J’onn said. Something about trying to start some kind of underground revolution. I’m not quite sure.”

“You’d think she’d be put off considering two White Martians just came all the way to Earth to kill her,” Lena points out and Alex makes an expression of agreement.

“M’gann’s brave like that,” Kara comments, focused back on the cupcake and reaching blindly into a drawer for a knife to cut it in pieces.

“Speaking of the White Martian,” Alex says slowly, glancing down at her hands and fiddling with
a bracelet on her wrist. “When it was me…”

“Totally freaky,” Kara adds and Lena quirks her head at the memory of her time with the White Martian version of Alex.

“Yeah,” Alex says and she laughs a little before looking at Lena. “But...did you have a conversation with it?”

“We didn’t talk much while it had a gun pointed at me,” Lena says with a curious smile.

“It’s just,” Alex looks away for a second with a shake of her head. “It’s like having memories that feel kind of like a dream, but also...just real.”

Kara looks between them, her brows pulled down and her hands hovered over the cupcake on the table. “What do you mean?”

Alex shrugs. “I can remember walking Lena to the reactor,” Alex says slowly. “I can even remember pointing my gun at her. As if I was the one that did those things.”

Lena stares at her for a moment. “I suppose if the link is strong enough, the telepathy could go both ways,” she says softly and Alex makes an expression not unlike a grimace.

“So we did have a conversation?”

“Not really,” Lena answers and Kara is still staring at them warily. “Kara showed up pretty soon after it drew the gun on me.”

Alex nods, lips pursed. “It didn’t...possibly...say anything about, I don’t know, you and Kara?”

At that, Lena laughs, finally realizing what has Alex looking so sheepish. “You mean indicating to me that I’m mated? To Kara?”

Kara’s eyes go ridiculously wide and she drops the knife in her hand to the counter with a clang. “Alex,” she hisses with an amount of incredulity in her tone that feels totally inappropriate to Lena considering their conversation just the other night. It’s not as if any of this is in the dark any longer.

“I didn’t do it,” Alex replies, immediately defensive. “And it’s not my fault you didn’t tell your mate-”

“She’s not my-”

“I’m not responsible for the fact that you two are idio-”

“We’re not-”

“Hey!” Lena interrupts in an abrupt snap of the word. “Calm down. Both of you.”

Both sisters snap their mouths shut at the command and turn to look at her. Alex’s wide eyes turn immediately back into more of a neutral expression, but Kara remains looking sheepish.

“It’s fine, Alex,” Lena reassures her even though Kara still has a hint of a glare on her face. “It was clearly a conversation Kara and I should have had years ago.”

Alex makes an amused noise and smiles a bit. “We can agree there.”
Alex shoots her a look somewhere between affection and exasperation that Lena imagines is Alex’s default emotion toward her sister.

“I should leave you two to talk,” Lena says, when silence starts to stretch uncomfortably long.

“No, don’t,” both sisters manage to say simultaneously and Lena sighs into a soft laugh.

“You two need to talk. Just the two of you,” Lena says and she reaches for her purse where it’s leaning on the counter.

“Don’t leave,” Kara says softly, reaching out to lightly circle her wrist.

Lena steps in close and presses a quick but solid kiss to Kara’s lips. “Talk to your sister,” she instructs in a whisper. “Happy Earth Birthday.”

Kara’s mouth pulls down in a show of upset, but Lena just smiles, moves around the counter and offers Alex a quick hug. “Good to see you, Alex.”

“You too, Lena.”

With that, she leaves, ignoring the plea in Kara’s eyes that she stay.

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There are a few reporters that catch her leaving Kara’s building and a few flashes that go off when she arrives at her own. Both instances serve to remind her - as if she could forget - that her mother is on trial and she’s being watched like a hawk to see how she’ll perform. She spends the rest of her night with a glass of wine and and some last minute notes her lawyers had emailed her earlier, trying to ignore how much she misses Kara’s presence to calm her.

As if she had known, Kara calls her much later, just as she’s considering crawling into her empty bed.

“Hello, darling,” Lena says softly, sinking back into her couch cushions and closing her eyes at the sound of Kara’s voice.

“Hey.”

“Did you settle things with Alex?”

“Yeah, she-” Kara makes a noise. “Yeah. We settled stuff.”

“Good.”

“So what are you doing?” Kara asks, a little too eagerly, and Lena fights a smile.

“Nothing of importance,” she answers, tossing the tablet on her lap onto the table beside her. “Why?”

Kara is silent for a moment before asking, “Can I come over?”

Lena suddenly feels more awake than she did a few seconds ago. “It’s late,” she murmurs.

“I know,” Kara replies, her voice lower than before.

Lena swallows, her throat feeling thick and an anticipation in her gut that reminds her of college all
over again. “How quickly can you be here?”

The answer is a soft thud on her balcony and the image of Kara standing there with a smile, phone held to her ear.

“Sorry, Kara, but Supergirl just stopped by,” she teases. “I’m afraid I’m going to be busy.”

Kara laughs and disconnects the call, opening the unlocked door of Lena’s balcony and walking towards her.

“Hello, Supergirl,” Lena greets and Kara smirks a little, closing the distance between them as Lena stands.

“Miss Luthor,” she teases and Lena scrunches her nose as the name, but doesn’t comment as Kara approaches and kisses her, strong arms wrapping around her waist to pick her up.

“Tired?” Kara asks against Lena’s lips even as she’s already all but floating towards Lena’s bedroom.

“Exhausted,” Lena lies, her hands twisting in Kara’s loose hair.

The answer makes Kara pause just inside the bedroom, her expression serious as she looks at Lena. “You are?” Kara asks, suddenly concerned as she sets Lena back on her feet.

Lena laughs. “I’m teasing, darling,” she says, stepping back into Kara’s personal space until their fronts are pressed entirely together.

“Well, I care about you,” Kara replies with feigned exasperation as she walks her backwards towards the bed. “I want to make sure you’re well rested.”

Lena arches a brow. “That was never a concern of yours in college,” she comments, enjoying the way Kara picks her up and places her on the bed so easily, settling on top of her.

“I totally made sure you got sleep in college,” Kara says, even as her hand slides up and under Lena’s shirt.

“You made sure I got in bed, maybe,” Lena teases and she can’t stop the way her body arches at the feel of Kara’s fingers creeping up her side. Her own hands spread over Kara’s collarbone.

“You never complained,” Kara mutters, but she laughs and the sound hits Lena in the skin of her neck as Kara presses a warm kiss there, her hips dropping down into Lena’s.

“Take your suit off,” Lena commands in a low voice that Kara reacts to immediately.

In the blink of an eye Kara is off of Lena’s body and undressed, grinning at Lena before she crawls back on top of her. “Bossy,” she murmurs, pulling Lena’s shirt up and placing her lips low on Lena’s stomach before moving upwards. It pulls a soft noise out of Lena’s throat and she presses her head back into the mattress.

“Sorry,” she says softly, but with a smirk and Kara laughs a puff of air against her ribcage until she’s pulling Lena’s shirt off entirely.

“Are you though?” Kara asks, before pinning Lena’s wrists above her head in a move that makes Lena’s hips jump. A wash of heat spreads across her lower body.

Her response is muffled by Kara’s lips suddenly pressing against her own.
“What are you wearing, Lena?” Her mother asks with disdain dripping heavily off her tone.

“It’s a Monarchs jersey, Mother,” Lex says companionably as he steps up and slings an arm around Lena’s shoulders. Lena leans into his body, adjusting her sunglasses as her mother makes another series of faces at her outfit.

“I’m aware of what it is,” her mother replies archly, but she smiles indulgently at her favorite son and Lena barely restrains the roll of her eyes. “I was more curious as to whether it’s an appropriate outfit to wear at an event attended by some of our shareholders, not to mention old friends of your father’s that it would be in her interest to impress.”

Lena declines to comment on the fact that Lex is sporting a matching jersey and instead slips out of Lex’s embrace and walks towards the car waiting for them.

“It’s got our logo on it,” Lex insists, offering his elbow to their mother and walking her to the car. “Big and silver, on the front. With Lena’s face, that’s great publicity.”

This time, Lena does roll her eyes, but out of sight from her family as she slides into the back seat of the car and waits for them to accompany her.

Lex slides in next to her as they take the backwards-facing seat, their mother across from them. He slides an arm on the back of the seat over her shoulders and crosses his legs, giving their mother his normal unaffected grin.

It does what it always does. Their mother melts under his expression, rolling her eyes affectionately and laughing. “I just want Lena to be aware of her position. It’s one thing for you to act boyish, Lex, but for Lena, a young girl, to show up in a sports uniform of all things—”

“Mom,” Lex says. “Leave her be.”

“Lex, this is just as important to you as it is to me. Once Lena joins the company, she’ll be on the fast track to become your CIO. You have shareholders to be concerned about and a position on the board to fill and—”

“Mom,” Lex tries again with a laugh and his hand extended outward. “Let her have a normal college life.”

“Luthors don’t need normal college lives, Lex,” their mother says and Lena decides now is good a time as any to join the conversation, pulling her eyes from the window at her right.

“I’ll change before we leave for dinner. You needn’t worry, Mother,” Lena says with a challenging quirk of her brow. “I just felt it would be good to show support for a team that’s done nothing but brought good publicity for the company. A few photographs may do us well.”

Her mother doesn’t have an immediate response to that other than a prim, “Very well.”

They arrive at the field where a large banners reading LuthorCorp Day at the Park are littered across the entrances. Their mother detours from them to head straight to the suite and Lex pulls Lena over to a vendor to buy them matching baseball caps. He puts one on her head with an exaggerated tug and they both laugh.

“Oh, mother will just love this,” Lena says, adjusting the cap on her head.
“As if that’s not reason to buy it,” Lex replies with a grin that Lena returns.

“Thanks for defending me back there.”

He shrugs her off, wrapping his arm back around her shoulder and steering them towards a food and drink vendor. “Don’t thank me for doing something like that,” he says. “You’re my baby sister. What else would I do?”

She sighs a bit and leans into him as they approach the concession stand, where they both spend time eyeing the menu.

“I also may or may not have a surprise for you,” he adds with a smirk, after they order hot dogs.

“A surprise?” Lena asks, quirking her brow at her brother when the concession worker hands over the two hot dogs. They move to the side of the window, and he begins slathering his hot dog in mustard, a suspicious look on his face.

He’s grinning mischievously in a way that seems almost ominous - like that time he reprogrammed her phone to send her random facts about cats every hour - but then his eye catches something over Lena’s shoulder and his smile turns wide. “Actually, the surprise is already here.”

Confused, Lena follows his gaze with a curious expression until she spots an oasis in the desert. Kara in a Monarchs baseball tee, cuffed lightwash jeans and a bright purple cap, smiling brightly as she idles near the ice cream vendor, scarfing down an enormous cone. Her eyes are latched onto Lena, and Lena can tell by the tilt of her head that she’s listening with perfect clarity.

“Lex,” Lena breathes.

“I’ll distract Mom with all the pinot grigio in the suite and the fact that I’m pretty sure Morgan Edge is coming to the game,” Lex whispers conspiratorially and Lena hears most of it, but she’s blinking distractedly at where Kara is still standing. “You go hang with your girlfriend for nine innings. Destress.”

“How did you -“ Lena cuts off, turns bewildered eyes back to her older brother. “Why did you?”

“Summers are supposed to be fun,” he says and with the hand not holding his hot dog he pulls her into a half hug, kissing her temple. “Luthors are allowed normal college lives at least some of the time.”

Her chest feels overflowing with love for her brother in that moment as he shoots her one last affectionate smile before turning and heading towards an elevator that leads to the club level. When Lena turns, Kara is pacing forward and Lena doesn’t hesitate before stepping towards her.

Kara scoops her up immediately and Lena barely avoids dropping her hot dog as they embrace. Not that she’d care honestly - it’s only been two weeks since she last touched Kara and Lena feels starved for it, like her entire body is calling out. Mindful of how public they are, Lena pulls Kara around a nearby corner that’s blissfully more private and presses up into Kara’s space until they’re kissing solidly.

“Hi,” Lena says softly.

“Hey,” Kara parrots, pulling away and eying the hot dog still held in Lena’s hand. “You going to eat that?”

Lena laughs and feels better than she has in weeks, with her hands and eyes on Kara.
“All yours,” Lena offers and Kara gleefully takes it off her hands and bites into it, finishing it in two massive bites that have Lena cringing.

“Miss me?” Kara asks with a teasing wiggle of her eyebrows and food stuffed into her cheek.

Lena uses her thumb to swipe a crumb off the corner of Kara’s mouth and smiles. “Desperately,” she admits and Kara kisses her again after swallowing.

“How’s today been? Sorry I didn’t answer your text earlier today. I was super nervous about not ruining the surprise,” Kara’s hands find her hips and they hover in close, Lena’s back up against the cement wall behind her.

“It’s better now that you’re here,” Lena says softly, and she quirks the brim of Kara’s baseball hat, enjoying the way Kara’s eyes sparkle playfully. “This is cute.”

“Yeah?” Kara asks, looking down at her outfit and then at Lena’s. “When Lex sent me the tickets he said I had to dress appropriately.”

“This isn’t appropriate,” Lena teases, clenching her fingers in the fabric of Kara’s shirt over her abdomen. Her knuckles brush against hard muscle that she hasn’t gotten to feel in person for far too long.

“It’s not?” Kara asks, concern spreading on her face.

“No,” Lena confirms with a smirk. “If only because it makes me want to do decidedly inappropriate things with you.”

Color blooms over Kara’s cheeks, but she smiles as she registers what Lena’s saying and steps in somehow closer to Lena with a laugh. “Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Lena breathes out, heat coiling in her gut when Kara presses a kiss behind her ear and down her jawline.

“Tell me,” Kara whispers, but the sound of the crowd starting to cheer loudly pulls them both out of their little cocoon and Lena clears her throat as they glance back out towards the field. Kara mutters something that sounds suspiciously like a curse word in Kryptonian, but her hand threads its way into Lena’s anyway, pulling them down the concourse and toward their seats.

She destresses for nine innings, just as Lex had suggested, mostly by whispering in Kara’s ear and enjoying Kara’s face heating up, her grip on the armrest tightening so much that she leaves a handprint in the metal.

After a boring and sedate dinner with a thoroughly pinot grigio’d mother, Lena arrives to her room only to find Kara Danvers lounging on her bed, a smile on her face that makes Lena’s knees go weak.

The week moves quickly. She imagines that’s largely because of how much she’s dreading Friday’s arrival.

“Do you want me to be there?” Kara asks Thursday night as they’re finishing the last of the Indian takeout Kara had brought over. “I can come as a reporter if you want. Or as...just me.”

Charmed by the concerned look in Kara’s eyes, Lena reaches a hand out to stroke against her
cheek. “I’ll be fine. This is something I have to do by myself.”

“You are doing it by yourself,” Kara says, pulling Lena’s hand down and tangling their fingers together. “That doesn’t mean I can’t linger in the background for moral support.”

It makes Lena laugh. “I don’t think we need to give the press any more fodder about our relationship.”

Kara frowns. “They know we’re friends. The rest is just speculation.”

“Speculation about the truth,” Lena says wryly.

“Is-,” Kara pauses, her brows coming together. “Are you trying to keep us a secret?”

“No,” Lena denies immediately, squeezing Kara’s fingers. “But if the story is about us then it’s not about my mother. And we need the press on our side for this. L Corp needs it as well.”

“Okay,” Kara replies, deflating. “I just want to be there for you.”

“I know, darling,” Lena murmurs. “But if you’re there, I imagine I’ll just be distracted.”

Kara sighs. “Whatever you need.”

“I love you very much, you know,” Lena tells her softly and Kara’s frown turns immediately upward.

“I love you too very much.”

--

She puts on a brand new pair of heels the morning of her mother’s trial. It pumps an extra boost of confidence into her walk as she ascends the courtroom steps. There’s something almost comforting about the easy way she holds her head up high, her skirt pulling against her legs as she moves through the flashes of cameras.

It’s surprisingly easy to testify against her mother. Even with Lillian sitting a few feet away with a familiar expression of disapproval etched on her features.

Lena hasn’t seen her mother since she was arrested the night she tried to unleash Medusa. It’s odd to see her now in the calm of the courtroom. Not that Lillian can meet her eyes. Instead she sits there like a statue in a steel grey suit as she stares straight ahead.

“Please state your name for the record,” her lawyer is beginning as she sits on the witness stand.

“Lena,” she answers before clearing her throat and running a shaky hand down the fabric of her skirt at her thigh. “Lena Luthor.”

Her lawyer smiles at her in encouragement and nods. “And your relation to the defendant?”

Lena glances to the defense table just in time to see her mother looking her direction, eyebrow arched an a move so familiar that it tugs in Lena’s chest. “Daughter,” she says and then with a lift of her chin she amends, “Adopted daughter.”

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It shouldn’t be a surprise that Kara is waiting outside the courtroom, but Lena has to look twice just
to notice her. No one seems to be paying Kara much attention as she leans up against a far wall and adjusts her glasses, shooting Lena a soft smile. The group of journalists congregated there swarm her, spewing out question after question. She summons an appropriate expression for someone that just testified against her own mother and answers as politely and evasively as she can, her eyes perpetually glancing at where Kara is standing.

Eventually her lawyer steps in with a hand at her back and another one protectively between her and the horde of reporters. “Miss Luthor has answered enough questions for the day. Anything else can be directed at me,” he says with authority in his tone.

With that, she’s dismissed and two L Corp employed security guards guide her through the crowd towards a back entrance. Just as she turning the corner she locks eyes with Kara and cocks her head in invitation. An invitation Kara readily agrees to, pushing off the wall and striding quickly towards Lena.

Her security guards go to stop Kara’s progress before Lena puts a hand on one of their arms. “It’s okay,” she murmurs and they step aside to allow Kara access.

They’re hiding enough from view now and Kara goes immediately to wrap her arm around Lena’s waist, guiding them further down the hallway. “You did great,” Kara says softly.

“I thought I told you not to come,” Lena says, but she’s already leaning heavily against Kara’s body, grateful for the solid, strong feel of it.

“I didn’t go in the room,” Kara says as they walk towards Lena’s car.

“Then how do you know how it went?” Lena asks and Kara just smirks a little, tapping the side of her glasses in a way that makes Lena smile and hazard a glance towards their two escorts.

They manage to avoid any more press and slide into the back of Lena’s sleek black car. The driver turns to look at them through the partition with a questioning arch of his brow.

“The penthouse please,” Lena says softly and he turns in obedience, closing the privacy partition and leaving Kara and Lena to the silence of the back seat.

“How are you?” Kara asks and she wraps an arm across the top of the car seat over Lena’s shoulders. “I mean, really?”

“Fine,” Lena says and finds that it’s mostly the truth. Her body sags a little into the black leather and she doesn’t resist Kara’s tug to bring their bodies together. “A little tired, but fine.”

“Why don’t we go get changed and then go to the bar,” Kara suggests, stroking soft fingers against Lena’s head near her temple. “We’ll hang out with our friends and drink really disgusting beer and forget about all this gross for a night.”

“I’m not drinking disgusting beer,” Lena protests with a slight laugh, her eyes fluttering at the feeling of Kara’s fingers. “Or beer at all.”

“I think Alex is bringing Maggie and like, introducing her to the group.”

Lena arches a brow. “They’ve all met Maggie.”

“Yeah, but not in a gay way,” Kara replies and Lena laughs with a roll of her eyes.

Lena stretches her legs out, toes off her heels and falls further into Kara’s embrace. “Okay, that
doesn't sound completely awful.”

Kara makes an exaggerated scoffing sound, but Lena can hear the smile in it. Lips press warmly to the crown of Lena’s head. “It’ll be over soon,” Kara murmurs and Lena sighs.

“Not soon enough.”

They’re silent the rest of the ride.

--

Lena changes out of her courtroom outfit quickly, pulls her hair out of its tight bun and runs her fingers through it until it looks presentable enough. Kara lingers around the apartment until she’s ready and then extends her hand with a smile. A silent invitation.

They land in the back alley outside the alien bar, hidden behind two large dumpsters and Kara sets her down delicately, gripping her hand and tugging her towards the entrance.

The rest of their small group is all congregated at a table in the back and they wear matching sympathetic smiles when they see Lena.

“Hey,” Winn says, jumping up from his seat and walking over to wrap her in a hug. “I saw you on TV. You looked great.”

Lena laughs a little, hugs him back. “Thanks.”

James gives her a little nod as if in solidarity and J’onn pulls out a chair for her just as M’gann comes up to the table and puts a warm hand on her shoulder. “I have to imagine you’re due a drink,” she says and Lena laughs again.

“I wouldn’t refuse one,” Lena says with a polite smile as she sits down.

“Another round?” M’gann asks to the rest of the group and a chorus of affirmative responses resound.

Kara falls into the chair next to Lena as M’gann paces towards the bar. Winn leans forward and picks at the label of his beer bottle. “So, did you hear Alex is bringing some new mystery guy to meet us?”

Lena makes a confused face and glances at Kara who has a noticeably forced neutral expression. James laughs where he’s leaned back in his chair. “Yeah, any inside deets on Alex’s new guy?”

The question is directed at Kara, but he glances at Lena too and she startles for a moment at the implication she might have insider information about Alex Danvers. J’onn has a smile playing on his lips and they exchange glances. Her brow quirks until she remembers that J’onn is telepathic and almost bursts out laughing.

Winn and James are still focused on Kara, ping-pong-ing questions back and forth. “Is he tall and buff? I can see Alex with a brute dude,” is Winn’s addition.

“What does he do for work?” James adds.

“Cop,” Kara answers succinctly and she shoots Lena a look.

“Figures,” Winn says with a laugh. “No way Alex Danvers dates someone that doesn’t own a
Just as James looks ready to ask a follow up question, Alex strides up to the table with Maggie trailing behind her. “Hey guys,” Alex greets, hands shuffling immediately into the pockets of her leather jacket.

“Heyyy,” Winn draws out exaggeratedly with a suggestive waggle of his eyebrows. Kara shoves him and Lena offers an encouraging smile towards Alex.

“You all remember Maggie, right?” Alex asks, stepping aside a bit for Maggie to move forward. A collective silence falls over the table for a moment as realization seems to dawn on the only two people at the table left in the dark.

Winn seems to choke on air suddenly and James just manages a wide surprised smile. “Uh, yeah - yeah, of course,” he says.

“Wait so,” Winn looks around the table at all of them before back to Alex, his hands gesturing in the air between the two women. “So you two are like, I mean you’re…” he trails off, looks at Kara and Lena a moment and then back to Alex. “You’re-”

“Yeah,” Alex says lowly, bending just slightly to look him in the eye and he leans back a little defensively, hands in the air.

“Hey, that’s awesome, totally awesome. I am all for this. Hi, Maggie,” he says and Kara rolls her eyes, but laughs a little when she looks at Lena.

“Good for you, Alex,” J’onn says with a proud smile.

Alex looks at him for a moment, something passing between them. “You knew?”

“I’m psychic,” he answers and Alex’s shoulders sag as she shakes her head.

“Why didn’t you ever say anything?”

He shrugs casually. “It wasn’t my secret to tell.”

“Hey,” Maggie interrupts, stepping further up next to Alex and addressing the table. “Anyone here play pool?”

Winn affects a confident expression. “Yeah, definitely.”

James and Kara both look at him and provide simultaneous, “No, you don’t.”

“It’s geometry with sticks, people,” Winn answers, standing. Maggie has an amused smile on her lips and Alex just rolls her eyes, trading exasperated looks with Lena. “How hard could it be?”

“This will go terribly,” Kara comments as Winn stands and follows Maggie over to the pool table.

J’onn stands as well, walks over to Alex and scoops her into a solid hug. James follows behind him and does the same.

Lena watches the exchanges, Kara’s arm draping over the back of her chair, fingers teasing over the line of her spine in a warm absent motion.

Mon-El saunters over then and eyes the hugging with a confused furrow to his brow before Alex turns to him and states, without any preamble, clearly riding on the high of the whole situation,
“Maggie and I are dating.”

His expression remains unaffected and he looks around the group for a moment before realization dawns. “Oh! Was that the…,” he gestures around and Alex nods.

“Yeah.”

“So that’s like a thing here?” Mon-el asks with a look of genuine innocence.

Alex makes a face and Lena rolls her eyes a little, but smiles when M’gann steps up and hands her a drink, setting one in front of Kara too. They share a look of fond exasperation for their Daxamite friend.

“Earth isn’t always so welcoming of ladies loving ladies,” Alex responds and Mon-El shrugs it off.

“Love is love, right?” He says with a casual smile, but his eyes flit towards Kara immediately and Lena watches as Kara looks away, picking her drink up and taking a long sip.

“Right,” Alex says before moving around the table to drop into a seat next to Lena. Mon-El retreats back to the bar and greets a new customer there.

“That went well,” Kara says and she reaches across Lena to pat her sister on the leg with a friendly smile.

Lena glances to where Winn is lining up a shot at the pool table. He misses the ball wildly and nearly falls over.

“How did it go today?” Alex asks and Lena’s attention gets drawn back to the Danvers sisters.

“Fine,” Lena says with a shrug.

Alex raises a brow, an amused smile on her face that Lena reads as disbelieving. Especially after she adds a, “Fine?”

Lena shrugs again. “I suppose the best part is that it’s over and I’m here with you guys now,” she says.

Alex smiles with a genuine expression Lena finds herself responding to, warmth blooming over chest. “Cheers,” Alex says, lifting her drink to clink against Lena’s. “But if you need me to make anyone disappear for you, I happen to know people.”

Kara laughs at that and Lena joins in. “What a sweet offer, Alex,” Lena teases and Alex grins at both of them clearly on some kind of emotional high that Lena’s never seen before.

Suddenly and without warning Kara’s hand darts out in front of Lena’s face and she jerks back violently, her heart leaping in her chest as Alex reacts as well, jumping away.

“What the hell, Winn?!” Kara shouts out and Lena blinks at Kara’s closed fist that’s hovered in front of her eyes. It’s a pool ball, Lena realizes, when Kara brings her hand down and opens it up.

They all look over to where Winn is leaning over the pool table, his stick extended and a sheepish look on his face. Maggie is wide eyed next to him and she looks at Alex with a bewildered blink.

When they leave the bar that night, Lena pulls her phone out of her purse only to find she’s missed
at least twelve calls and nearly as many text messages. She stops abruptly and peers down at her phone in confusion. Kara halts a few steps away and peers over at her phone.

“You okay?”

“I think my mother’s lawyers have been trying to reach me,” she says with a grim tone and Kara cringes a little.

“Aren’t they not supposed to talk to you?” Kara says. “At least not without your own lawyer?”

Lena’s lips thin and she arches a brow. “My mother has never been one for rules following and neither have the people she’s employed.”

“What do they want?”

“Nothing good I’m sure,” Lena says just as she unlocks her phone and opens her voicemail.

There are three messages there, all the same content. Her mother wants to see her.

“She wants to talk to me,” Lena says dryly, dropping her phone back into her purse and slinging it onto her shoulder.

Kara pulls a face of distaste and holds her hand out for Lena to take. “What for?”

“Who knows?” Lena says with a bitter laugh. “Probably to tell me my outfit in court today was horrible.”

“Lena,” Kara says with a soft sigh. She lets go of Lena’s hand to sling an arm around her shoulder and continue their walk down the street.

“What?” Lena says with a shrug, but she leans into Kara’s side and just barely resists the urge to ask Kara to pick her up and fly her home. She’s done with today. “It’s probably true. You know how she is.”

“She’s still your mom,” Kara replies and Lena can’t help the way she wants to snap at that.

“I don’t think it’s wrong that I don’t want to talk to her. That woman has been manipulative and vindictive since the day we met. I can’t think as to why this would be any different.”

“I respect whatever you choose to do,” Kara says, tightening her hold. “I just know what it’s like to wish I could talk to people that aren’t here anymore. If it were Lex-”

“It’s not Lex,” Lena says immediately.

“Hey,” Kara says softly, pressing a warm kiss to Lena’s temple. “I’m on your side.”

“I just want this all to be over,” Lena sighs, deflating at the feel of Kara’s lips against her skin.

“I know,” Kara says. “Me too. But I also don’t want you to have any regrets when it is.”

“I might regret talking to her just as much as not,” Lena says as they walk down the sidewalk.

“You never know until you do,” Kara says and Lena laughs.

“How wise.”
Kara shrugs with a playful grin on her lips. “I’m full of all kinds of wisdom.”

--

It’s not the first time she’s visited a family member in jail. Lena nearly laughs at how familiar the experience is. The only difference is that Kara accompanied her and only begrudgingly agreed to remain outside for the visit.

The memory of seeing Lex like this, of not knowing what to say to him, how to reach him, of the way his eyes looked - hollow and distant - comes back to her as she passes through the doorway. Her mother’s back is to her and for that she’s grateful. It gives her a second to compose herself, drawing a deep breath and lifting her chin, her hand resting on her watch for one solid moment before she steps further into the room.

“You really did a number on me in court,” her mother says, turning just slightly over her shoulder.

Lena stands frozen behind her, unsure of why she’s even here. “I can call the guard back,” she says softly.

“No,” her mother says sharply, turning even more to glimpse Lena out of the corner of her eye. The motion prompts Lena to move herself, pacing around the table to take a seat across from her mother. “I’m sorry,” her mother says and it puts Lena on edge. “I promised myself I’d do better.”

“I won’t hold my breath,” Lena replies, crossing her arms on the cool metal of the table and taking a breath.

Her mother’s face remains impassive for a moment before she smiles a bit. “I don’t want to fight,” Lillian says.

Lena smirks, laughs derisively. “Then what is it you wanted to talk to me about?”

“I asked to see you because I wanted you to know that I forgive you.”

With an incredulous smile and quirk of her brow, Lena laughs again. “Forgive me,” she repeats in a deadpan.

“I still love you, Lena,” her mother continues and Lena runs a thumb over the clasp of her watch, unsure of how to respond.

“The only time you tell me you love me is when you need something from me.”

“I may not have been the best mother, but I do love you, Lena,” Lillian says, leaning forward towards her. Lena pulls back in reaction. “I still do.”

“Funny way of showing it,” Lena replies darkly. The room feels small, suffocating, and the way her mother holds her gaze is making her heart start to beat faster, heavier against her chest.

“You may not understand it,” her mother says. “I wouldn’t expect you to. Not until you have children of your own.”

Lena’s eyes feel hot and she hates the hold this woman seems to always have on her emotions. “I won’t do to them what you did to me,” she says softly and Lillian’s lips turn upward.

“All I did was try to protect you.”
“How exactly?” Lena asks, sitting up and forcing her expressions to stay hard. “By making me feel unwanted? Like I couldn’t measure up? Like I was an outsider?”

“I did the best I could, Lena,” Lillian says in a watery voice that Lena is sure is forced. “And look at what you’ve accomplished.”

Lena laughs bitterly. “If Dad could hear you now,” she says with a shake of her head.

This time it’s Lillian that laughs. “You hold Lionel on such a pedestal, but you were young when he died. You have a child’s knowledge of who he was as a man.”

“Don’t disparage him,” Lena says, anger bubbling up in her chest. “He was a good-”

“If he was such a great man he would have told you the truth when you were young instead of allowing you to live a lie.”

Lena pauses, the air feeling tense in the room as she realizes that this is why her mother wanted to talk to her. “What lie?”

Lillian looks down for a moment and when she twists her fingers a bit the chains on her handcuffs rattle against the table. Lena braces herself, keeps her fingers against her watch to keep her heart steady.

“I loved your father,” Lillian starts and it sounds almost genuine. “The first few years of our marriage were pure bliss.”

Lena stays still, tries to track where her mother could possibly be going with this.

“And then Lex was born,” her mother says with a short laugh. “And Lionel...well...Lionel begin having an affair.”

A scathing remark sits on the tip of her tongue, but she bites against it. Best to let her mother tell the whole story so Lena can put it all behind her.

“I had no idea. Completely clueless,” Lillian continues, locking eyes with Lena. “Until I went to surprise him on a business trip and I found him with another woman.”

A pause stretches between them and Lena knows the hit is coming, can see it in the corners of her mother’s eyes.

“Another woman who happened to be your mother. Your birth mother.”

It takes a moment for the words to register with their full gravity. For Lena to realize exactly what Lillian is saying.

“My mother,” she repeats in a disbelieving tone, her eyes blinking against the information.

Lilian nods. “She was already pregnant with you back then. We paid her off, of course, and worked on rebuilding our marriage.”

Lena hears the words but can’t get past the conclusion that’s screaming in the back of her head, the rewriting of her entire worldview that’s beating across her chest.

“Then when you were four we got word your mother had died. The state was going to put you in foster care until your father brought you home and we adopted you,” her mother says, almost casually like she’s not completely destroying Lena’s world with a few words. “But he didn’t like
my spending time with you. I think it made him feel guilty to see us together.”

Her mother’s eyes are open, trusting in a way that Lena’s never seen them. “So I stayed away. Gravitated towards Lex. To protect myself. And you.”

“Mom,” Lena says softly, tears threatening to fill the bottom of her eyes, her throat feeling thick and achy.

“You look so much like her,” Lillian says in a broken voice, tone full of emotion. “Seeing you was like ripping a band-aid off every single time.”

The significance of this information feels like it’s going to burst out of her chest, but instead it just drops softly out of her mouth around the urgent press of tears. “So I really am a Luthor,” she whispers, blinking against heat.

Her mother’s eyes lock solidly with her own and her palms turn upward where they’re still chained to the table. “We are the only two Luthors left,” she says. “We need to be there for each other.”

“The things you’ve done,” Lena says softly, struggling against the swarm of emotion threatening to engulf her. She’s sure her heartbeat is going to thud straight out of her ribcage and if she’s not careful, a concerned Kara Danvers will likely come bursting through the walls of the prison at any second. “The things I said about you today. They-”

“I want a second chance with you,” Lillian entreats, pushing her hands in offering towards Lena. “I want to make things right. Put this behind us. Please, honey.”

It’s not at all what she had expected when she had come to the prison that day and her head is swimming with everything that’s happened in the last few seconds.

“Lena,” her mother says softly and the sound of it calls out to the young girl she once was constantly yearning for her mother’s approval and affection. “Please, sweetheart. I love you. You’re my daughter and nothing will ever change that.”

Lena reaches her palms out to connect with her mother’s and they slide against each other warmly, spreading feeling up Lena’s arms in a way that does nothing to stem the tide of tears in her eyes.

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Kara is pacing nervously outside the prison gates with one of Lena’s cars parked a few feet away.

“Are you okay?” Kara asks immediately upon seeing Lena. She rushes over to meet her, hands at Lena’s arms and eyes scraping over Lena’s form as if checking for injury. “Your heartbeat has been going crazy, I’ve been so worried, but I wasn’t sure if it was just-”

“Kara,” Lena interrupts and Kara stops quickly.

“Yeah, sorry,” Kara replies softly, wrapping her arm over Lena’s waist and turning them to the waiting car. “How did it go?”

“You weren’t listening?” Lena asks, not accusing, but just curious.

Kara shakes her head. “I respect your privacy. I just...it’s hard not to listen to your heartbeat,” Kara admits in a soft voice that makes Lena smile.

They slide into the backseat of the sedan and Lena slumps down low, kicking her heels off and
pressing her hands against her eyes, feeling herself start to curl up. She feels raw with emotion and drained of all energy. Kara makes a noise, coming closer and setting her hands on Lena’s knees.

“Have you been crying?” Kara asks, lightly tugging Lena’s arms away from her face. “I swear I’ll punt that woman into space.”

Lena laughs, but she can’t stop it from sounding watery and hoarse. “No, it’s fine.”

“It’s not fine,” Kara insists and she’s swiping a thumb over Lena’s cheek where she’s sure her makeup is ruined and her eyes red. “What did she say to you?”

Lena doesn’t know where to begin so she starts with what feels like the most important takeaway. “I’m a Luthor,” she says simply and Kara’s brows pull down.

“I know that.”

“No,” Lena says emphatically. “Biologically. My father is...actually my father.”

Kara blinks, her fingers pressing into Lena’s wrists, her eyes widening as the statement sinks in.

“Lena,” she whispers, and that’s when Lena starts crying in earnest. She lets Kara wrap her up, lets Kara take her home and hold her.

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The only thing keeping Lena warm at the present moment is the beat of the bonfire against her front and Kara’s solid form against her back. The chill of autumn has descended upon campus, but that hasn’t deterred the Astronomy Club from heading out to their favorite woods to stargaze.

Lena had only reluctantly agreed to come along after Kara promised she was bringing extra wool blankets and a thermos of coffee.

“Okay, Kara,” Aaron is saying from across the fire, a bottle of beer dangling between his fingers. “Your turn. Truth or dare.”

“Truth,” Lena answers for her and Josie makes an indignant sound.

“You can’t answer for your girlfriend, Lena.”

“She’s not allowed to answer dare,” Lena replies. “She’s my personal body warmer right now.”

Kara laughs, her chin propping up on Lena’s shoulder and her warm cheek bumps against Lena’s chilled one. “It’s a very important position,” Kara agrees and Lena presses back tighter against her.


The group looks around as if silently conferring before Aaron stares back at Kara with narrowed eyes. “If you could date anyone other than Lena who would it be?”

Kara tenses at the question even as Lena laughs a little, leaning her head back against Kara’s shoulder and tightening the hands Kara has wrapped around her stomach. “I wouldn’t,” Kara answers.

“You have to answer,” Max says, chewing on a stick of jerky and leaning up against a log. “That’s the rules.”
“That question is dumb,” Kara argues and Lena pats her thigh lightly.

“You can answer it, darling,” she murmurs, turning her head a little to catch Kara’s eye.

Kara has a discontent crinkle between her brow and a slight pout forming on her mouth that Lena reaches up to run her thumb against.

“You could pick anyone,” Josie says with a chuckle. “Come on. There has to be someone.”

“I’d just pick Lena again,” Kara says with a lift of her chin in defiance and the group groans.

“Come on, Kara,” Aaron complains. “You’re no fun. Just because you two are gonna get married one day doesn’t mean you can’t just pick a hot celebrity.”

Lena feels her cheeks warm at the assertion of marriage. Kara doesn’t seem to react too much, her fingers reaching around Lena’s wrist and fiddling with her watch band.

“If you’re that serious,” Max adds with a smirk. “Just stay in the family. Pick Lex.”

“Ew,” Lena exclaims, turning a disgusted face towards Max. “That’s my brother.”

“Sorry, Lena,” Josie says. “He’s hot. I don’t make the rules.”

“You’re not even blood related,” Aaron adds and Lena rolls her eyes even as the urge to snap at that bubbles up in her throat.

“Blood doesn’t make family,” Kara answers for her and her tone is dark, serious in a way at odds with the casual laughter of the group.

“They’re teasing,” Lena whispers, threading her fingers in between Kara’s where they’re still resting against Lena’s stomach.

“Chill, Danvers,” Max says with a laugh, his hands up defensively.

“You know sometimes I forget you’re both adopted,” Josie says with a contemplative look on her face. “I mean you and Lex look so much alike,” she adds to Lena.

Lena laughs softly. She’s heard that before. “I’ll take that as a compliment considering you think my brother is hot.”

“You should,” Josie replies with a grin, tipping her bottle in Lena’s direction. “I think I’d pick Superman. Have you seen his butt?”

Kara makes a noise of disgust, but she buries it in Lena’s neck, pressing a kiss there while Lena snorts in amusement. Max offers agreement, noting that he has, in fact, seen Superman’s butt, and it’s a good one. It spirals outward into a discussion on the best superhero costumes, but Lena is content to keep resting in Kara’s arms, letting their warmth bleed together.

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It takes four cups of coffee before Lena feels like she shakes some of the emotional exhaustion off the next morning. Another long day of testimony lies ahead of her and she feels tired just thinking about it. It doesn’t help that her mind is still reeling from her conversation with her mother and the prospect of confronting her again makes Lena’s stomach turn over.

So she takes an extra long shower, puts on her tallest heels and pulls her hair back from her face in
a tight bun. Kara watches her from her position against the bathroom wall, arms crossed and a worried expression on her face.

“You going to be okay?”

“Of course,” Lena responds easily, leaning towards the mirror over her sink to apply her eyeliner.

“You don’t have to go, Lena,” Kara says, pushing off the wall and stepping closer. Her hand settles warmly against Lena’s hip and grounds her, makes her feel just the slightest bit better, less alone.

“I know that,” she sighs and allows Kara to press in closer, leaning back against Kara’s front and taking a last moment of comfort. “But I don’t want to run away from this. I can handle it.”

“I’ll be right there next to you,” Kara murmurs before pressing a kiss to Lena’s temple.

Lena breathes in the feeling and smiles. “And that makes all the difference, darling.”

Kara dresses in relative silence, allowing Lena time to sit at her kitchen counter and eye the morning paper, studiously avoiding the front few pages that remark on her mother’s trial. By the time they’re ready to go, Lena’s hands have settled from all the coffee, and Kara presses a kiss to her lips before they step out of the penthouse.

There are, of course, photographers outside the building who burst into a frenzy when they see Kara heading out of the building first, Lena trailing close behind. They shout questions, but Kara moves them quickly through the crowd, popping open the door to the car and allowing Lena to slide in first.

She’s so focused on looking out the open door, waiting for Kara to maneuver her way in, that she doesn’t notice she’s sat down next to someone.

“So, I got you a coffee,” Alex says, a small smile on her face while Kara drops into the remaining seat and pulls the door closed. “Kara said you’ve had way too much, but I put a shot of whisky in this one.”

“What are you doing here?” Lena asks, hesitantly taking the coffee cup Alex is extending towards her and feeling Kara’s arm drop around her shoulders as the car slowly pulls away from the curb.

“I also brought donuts,” Alex says, and she barely pulls the bag off the floor before Kara has her hands on it with a noise of disgusting glee. “I figured you needed some support. You are my sister-in-law, technically.”

“Alex,” Kara says, through a mouthful of donut. “Please stop.”

“I’m never stopping,” Alex says conspiratorially, and Lena feels a small smile, the first in hours, build on her face.

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Just seeing Metallo again makes Lena remember what it was like to shoot him. It feels like a lifetime ago, yet the memories come back so viscerally that it might as well have been just yesterday. It’s only Kara’s grip on her hand that keeps her steady. Alex’s presence to her left doesn’t hurt either, and the Danvers sisters flank her protectively as they sit in the full courtroom.

She imagines the papers will have something to say about it in the morning, but crosses her fingers that her mother’s trial is enough of a story that frivolous gossip about her social life will be vastly
overshadowed.

Metallo takes the stand and speaks to his relationship with her mother. The hate speech that spews out of his mouth makes Lena stiffen until Kara is wrapping her hand in both of her own and playing lightly with her watch.

“I believe aliens should be wiped from the earth,” Corben says with a spiteful look in his eye. “Starting with Supergirl and her cousin.”

It makes her think of Lex’s trial for a moment until Alex leans into her side. “I hate him,” she whispers. “Like, want to punch him down the throat and tear out his intestines hate.”

Smothering a sudden laugh at the look on Alex’s face, she nods encouragingly and Kara leans over her to look at her sister. “He literally has no heart.”

“Kara,” Lena chastises under her breath, but she laughs silently and feels something ease a bit in her chest.

It happens so quickly that Lena doesn’t respond for a second. A massive burst of green energy comes out of Metallo’s chest and streaks across the courtroom to the sound of sudden screams and the scrambling of bodies.

Kara bodily tackles her to the side, throwing them under the cover of the gallery benches and Alex is right there next to them, pulling a gun out from under her jacket and keeping a protective hand on Lena’s back. The room descends into chaos as everyone clears out as quickly as possible.

Metallo takes out the two courtroom bailiffs with a jet of green energy that Lena realizes quite abruptly is kryptonite.

“Kara,” she gasps, clasping her hand around Kara’s wrist as another explosion rings out and Kara shields her against the wall.

Alex is peeking out around her cover and Lena looks as well to see Corben stalk straight towards her mother, breaking her handcuffs and leading her towards the exit.

Kara pushes Lena behind a table to hide her and stays low as they pass.

“It’s kryptonite,” Lena hisses as soon as they’re out of sight and Alex and Kara exchange looks.

“Go,” Alex says and Kara hesitates for a moment as she looks at Lena.

“Kara, you can’t. He could kill you.”

“I can’t let them escape,” Kara says and she kisses Lena swiftly, but with significant pressure before nodding to Alex. “Watch her,” she tells her sister with a nod.

Swiping her glasses off her face and pressing them into Lena’s hands, Kara is up and gone before Lena can protest further.

Lena scrambles up off the floor to follow, but Alex is quick to grab at her clothing and haul her to a stop. “Lena, no,” Alex says lowly and with authority.

“Alex,” Lena practically growls, turning incredulous eyes towards her. “That was kryptonite in his chest. If he hits Kara, it could seriously injure her or worse.”

“And what are you going to do?” Alex asks, but she lets go of her hold on Lena. “If you’re out
there you’ll just distract Kara into making a mistake and *that* could seriously injure her or worse.”

Before they can argue further a massive crash reverberates through the room and a cacophony of screams burst forth. They look at each other for a moment before Alex just makes a relenting expression and takes off towards the exit, Lena hot on her heels.

When they make it out to the front of the courthouse, Kara is standing in front of a crowd of now cheering people, a broken construction crane on the ground in front of her. Lena barely restrains herself from running straight for Kara in an attempt to check on her, but Alex isn’t as successful.

Kara glances at both of them with a look of pure frustration on her face and Lena looks around in realization that her mother and Metallo are nowhere to be seen.

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They regroup back at the DEO and Kara paces around while Winn fiddles with the tracking program on his computer and Alex speaks lowly to Maggie in the corner.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Lena tells Kara for the fifteenth time since they got back to base. “My mother gave you an impossible choice between stopping her and saving those people. You made the right call.”

“I should go search the city again, see if I can pick up a trail.”

Lena stops Kara from walking away by stepping in front of her and placing a hand on her chest above the crest there. “What part of *he shoots kryptonite out of his chest* do you not understand?”

“The longer I do nothing the farther away they get,” Kara argues, her jawline tense with anger. Lena runs her fingertips along it until it relaxes.

“Kryptonite, Kara,” she repeats and Kara blows out an exasperated breath.

“How are you so calm?”

Lena shrugs. “I’m not,” she admits, the turmoil churning in her stomach making itself known. “But you’re being crazy enough for the both of us.”

It makes Kara laugh and she relaxes further, shaking her head at Lena and Lena watches as she crosses her arms over her chest, the fingers of her right hand wrapping around her left wrist, where her bracelet is hiding beneath her suit.

Alex walks over, hands on her hips and Lena glances to where Maggie is stepping away to take a phone call. “Where did he even get the kryptonite?” Alex asks and Kara puts her hands up in a shrug.

“Kal was supposed to have destroyed it all,” Kara says looking as confused as Alex.

“He was in prison,” Alex adds. “And so was Lillian. I mean, how did they pull something like this off?”

It runs a chill down Lena’s spine and Kara shakes her head. “I don’t know, but I’m going to go do another sweep.”

“Be careful,” Alex says and Lena sighs, trying to shake the insistent feeling of fear out of her head. Kara turns to Lena and puts a hand at her back. “I’ll take you home,” she says.
“To the office,” Lena corrects and Kara gives her a look. “It’s the middle of the day, Kara. I have to
go to work.”

“I think you’ve got a pretty good excuse,” Kara insists and Alex just gives them a wide eyed look
and walks back to where Maggie is still talking on the phone.

Lena puts her hand up against Kara’s stomach and steps in close, using proximity to her advantage.
“I’d feel safer at my office,” Lena tells her softly. “Please.”

“Fine,” Kara sighs with a brief smile. Her hand comes up to encircle Lena’s wrist, her thumb
swiping over the face of Lena’s watch. “But only because you said please.”

Lena laughs and lets Kara scoop her up and walk them towards the exit platform.

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Ten minutes after settling back in her office and saying goodbye to Kara, Lana Lang walks into her
office with wide, concerned eyes.

“Oh my God, Lena, are you okay?” Lana asks, stalking towards Lena’s desk quickly.

Lena stands in reaction. “Of course,” she answers and she can’t deny she’s a bit startled when Lana
circles the desk and wraps her up in a friendly hug.

“I saw it all on the news, it looked awful. I can’t imagine.”

Lena laughs as they step out of the embrace. “It wasn’t exactly my favorite day,” she says, trying to
joke.

“They’ve been saying he has kryptonite in his heart, is that true?”

Lena nods grimly. “It is. Though I haven’t a clue as to where he could have got it.”

A shadow grosses Lana’s face that has Lena’s stomach turning over. “That’s actually part of why I
wanted to see you. I might have some insight into that,” Lana tells her in a small voice.

Lena feels her eyes grow wide and suspicious before Lana hastily shakes her head. “That sounded
like it was me,” she says quickly, “It wasn’t me. I just-”

Lana stops, worries her lip between her teeth for a moment.

“Lana, spit it out,” Lena snaps and Lana looks at her.

“Are you aware of all of your brother’s projects?”

“You’re the one that’s been helping me go through them,” Lena says lowly and Lana’s face
pinches. Lena sees the dots connect in her own brain and understands the obvious, but she waits
for Lana to say something further even as her heartbeat picks up and the memory of her brother
destroying buildings in Metropolis floats over her.

“Sorry, I guess what I mean is, are you aware that Lex worked quite vigorously on creating
synthetic kryptonites?”

It’s like a cold bucket of ice dropping over her head. “Lana, what are you saying?”

“I’m saying I think that Metallo somehow got his kryptonite from L Corp.”
Lena digests that for a moment. “We’re not the only company that’s done that. Lord Technologies—”

“Lena, this was green. Not red. Because it was close to the real thing,” Lana swallows noticeably. “I know your brother’s work when I see it.”

“My brother is in prison,” Lena says slowly, annunciating the words with emphasis that makes Lana’s nostrils flare.

“I was in Metropolis when Lex and Superman had their showdown,” Lana says softly. “I work—”

“There’s no kryptonite in this building,” Lena interrupts with conviction, thinking of how often Kara’s been here. “It’s impossible.”

“Not as impossible as you think it is.”

“Supergirl has been in this building remember? She would have known.”

“That’s not the point, Lena.”

“Then what is the point?” Lena spits out, incapable of masking the frustration in her voice.

“After Lex went to prison, the majority of his things were destroyed. Superman made sure they tracked down his work on the suit and where he had stored the kryptonite he put in the blade.”

“I remember,” Lena replies, with a nod, thinking of the constant stream of agents that combed through Lex’s things.

“They destroyed all the kryptonite he had made then. Superman was very adamant that it was obliterated for obvious reasons.”

“Lana, get to the point.”

“If this kryptonite is the same that your brother worked on then that means…”

The conclusion rears its head. “That means they didn’t destroy it all. Lex still has a stockpile somewhere.”

Lana nods, looking grim. “Yeah.”

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Lena spends the rest of her afternoon combing through all of the company’s properties and digging up some of Lex’s old files. The idea that Lex has secret warehouses around the city isn’t new to her, but the idea that there’s a pile of material deadly to Kara pumps a sense of urgency through her veins.

Lana taps out somewhere around hour three, and Lena sends Jess home somewhere after that, and she loses herself in the work of it, trying to figure out the puzzle before it comes around to hurt Kara. She throws on the television for background noise, but stops when she hears her name.

“Lena Luthor is the definition of a two-timer,” a man booms. He’s angry. “She didn’t say a word when her brother was actually killing people - human beings - and all of a sudden she cares when her mom almost kills a couple aliens?”

“Are you saying that Miss Luthor shouldn’t care about alien rights?”
“Of course not, Jake, I’m just saying - does she really care? Or is she scared of losing her multibillion dollar company if she doesn’t come out swinging? It’s just inauthentic. And now her mom’s broken out of jail with a kryptonite-powered man? What a shock.”

“Don’t listen to them,” Kara’s voice calls out from behind her. Lena turns to see her standing in the doorway of her office, a sad look on her face.

With a forced laugh, Lena turns the television off and paces towards her desk, dropping the remote there. “Everyone’s got an opinion about me, it seems.”

“They’re morons,” Kara says, stepping forward and dropping her bag onto a chair. “How are you doing?”

“Fine. Have you heard anything?”

Kara’s lips twist a little, her arms crossing over her chest in a telltale move that has Lena sitting up a little straighter. “Nothing worth repeating.”

Lena observes her for a moment, the tight angle of her jaw, the clenching of her fingers against the fabric of her blazer. “They think I’ve had something to do with her escape don’t they?”

The dark look that crosses Kara’s face is answer enough. Lena scoffs, leans back again in her chair. “Of course they do,” she adds.

Uncrossing her arms, Kara all but marches forward, her hands leaning on the desk as she hovers over it. “The people who do are idiots,” she says. “I know you didn’t have anything to do with it. So do Alex, and J’onn, and Winn.”

The conviction in Kara’s tone is something Lena didn’t know she needed until this moment. It wraps snugly around her chest and for a moment she allows herself to feel safe. “I’m not sure how far that will go in the court of public opinion,” she says quietly and Kara looks ready to fight someone, judging by the way her fists clench on the desk.

Before anything else can be said the doors to her office are abruptly swinging open and Maggie Sawyer is striding in. Lena stands and Kara straightens immediately with a surprised, “Maggie!”

“Detective,” Lena greets warily when she notices the uniform pacing in after her.

“Kara,” Maggie says with a professional nod. “Miss Luthor.”

It’s a strange demeanor for someone who Lena had just been out at the bar with last night, but it’s clear then exactly what a NCPD detective is doing in her office at this hour of night. Apparently Kara hasn’t clued in yet because she’s looking at Maggie with innocent confusion. “What are you doing here? Did you find Lillian?”

“Actually,” Maggie says, her shoulders braced tensely as if in anticipation of battle. “I’m here on official business. With Miss Luthor.”

“Miss Luthor?” Kara turns more squarely towards Maggie, shifting until she’s almost shielding Lena from view and crosses her arms. “What kind of business?”

“Police business,” Maggie grits out in clear warning and Kara’s stance widens in reaction.

Lena comes around the desk until she’s next to Kara, her hand settling on the small of Kara’s back until the other girl relaxes just a bit. “What can I do for you, Detective?”
Maggie glances between them, eyes wary. “Perhaps you should wait outside, Kara.”

“Absolutely not,” Kara answers immediately and Lena sighs quietly. Maggie has no idea how close she’s coming to getting thrown into the National City Marina, clearly.

“I’d like her to say if that’s quite alright,” Lena adds, trying to remain polite in the face of Kara’s growing tension.

Maggie looks ready to protest, but something in Kara’s face must put her off because she relents, stepping forward and pulling a tablet into view.

“Fine. I was hoping you could explain what I’m seeing here,” Maggie says, pushing play on the screen. Lena watches as security footage of her office starts to play. Her heartbeat picks up when she realizes the contents. There she is, kneeling at a cabinet in her own office and pulling something out. She remembers this moment. Remembers when she had to retrieve a small box of some new prototype Lana had brought up a couple mornings ago.

Except that’s not what the video shows. Instead the footage has her pulling out a glowing green object. *Kryptonite*.

“This isn’t right,” she says, shaking her head and pointing at the tablet. She looks at Maggie but doesn’t find understanding like she half expects. Maggie doesn’t know her well enough, she supposes, doesn’t realize the full weight of Kara and Lena’s history - doesn’t know that Lena wouldn’t touch kryptonite with a ten foot pole. “That’s not me. Well, it may very well be, but I don’t store-”

“Are you implying Lena had something to do with Metallo?” Kara says, edging forward slightly and Maggie’s spine straightens.

“What I see is Miss Luthor retrieving synthetic kryptonite from her office. The same kryptonite that aided Metallo in his attack on the courtroom and Lillian Luthor’s escape.”

“It’s been doctored somehow,” Lena says urgently, pleading with Maggie to believe her. She looks to Kara, who is wearing a tight expression of barely controlled rage.

"Maggie I think I’d know if Lena had *kryptonite* in that cabinet," Kara says pointing its direction and all of three of them spare a glance at the uniformed detective watching the scene with a neutral expression.

"Clearly you didn't," Maggie answers with a gesture towards the tablet still playing the video of Lena holding the green element.

"Lena wouldn’t do what you're accusing her of," Kara bites out and Maggie snaps at that.

“Kara, as charming as your belief in your girlfriend is, I’m a police detective,” she grits out at Kara, passing the tablet off to the uniformed officer nearby. “I follow the evidence where it leads me, and right now it’s pointing straight at Lena. Maybe you’ve misplaced your trust.”

“The evidence is *wrong* and so obviously fake that-”

“Evidence is evidence,” Maggie interrupts. "We received this video from an anonymous source and now I have no choice but to arrest her until we can get to the bottom of it.”

“Arrest her?!” Kara all but yells and Lena takes a reflexive step back as Maggie reaches for the handcuffs at her back. “Over my dead body.”
“Kara,” Maggie warns and Lena sees this situation escalating far out of anyone’s control. In an effort to mitigate the damage she steps back in to touch Kara, tugging at the fabric near her elbow. “Don’t make a scene. We need to question Lena down at the station. By the book.”

“You don’t have a—”

“I don’t need a warrant,” Maggie interrupts, with frustration in her jawline. “We have probable cause to detain her and we can hold her legally for at least 24 hours until a judge can sign a warrant.”

“Don’t touch her,” Kara warns lowly. “Or I’ll swear you’ll regret it.”

“Are you threatening an officer of the law?” Maggie asks, the warning clear in her tone. Lena feels the air around them go thick, heat pouring off Kara. It prompts her into action.

“Stop,” she says softly, reaching out to grip at Kara’s arm, pressing into her bracelet heavily. “She’s right. Don’t cause a scene.”

“Lena,” Kara says, even as she stands down.

“I’ll go with you, Detective,” she says quietly and cuts a glare towards Kara when she looks ready to interrupt. “But I’d request not to be led out of my building in handcuffs. L Corp doesn’t need that kind of press right now.”

Maggie concedes, dropping her hands from where they were reaching behind her. “Fine,” she says, eyes still on Kara.

“And I’d request a moment alone with Kara before we go,” Lena adds, struggling to keep the pounding of her heart under control.

Maggie eyes them for a moment, clearly debating before she nods. “You’ve got ten minutes. We’ll be right outside.”

With that, Maggie and the uniform exit Lena’s office and the thud of the door shutting leaves Kara and Lena alone.

Kara turns immediately towards Lena.

“Good call,” she says in a whisper, her eyes darting around the room. “I’ll fly us out of here and we’ll go to the DEO or something, talk to Alex. Or maybe we should go to my place first—”

“Kara,” Lena interrupts forcefully, putting her hand on Kara’s forearm to stop the flow of words. “I’m going with them, darling.”

Kara goes almost comically still, her eyes widening and jaw dropping in disbelief. “Are you crazy?”

Lena shoots her an unimpressed look and walks over around her desk, opening her laptop there and sending an email to Jess as quickly as she can. “I did nothing wrong,” Lena says. “Surely you have faith in the justice system.”

Kara scoffs at that, her arms crossing over her chest. “There’s no way in Rao’s light I’m letting them put you in a cell for the night,” she says vehemently.

“Last I checked,” Lena says dryly, clicking send on her email and closing the laptop with a
decisive thud. “You don’t _let me_ do anything.”

“They have video of you, Lena. Video of you taking that Kryptonite-”

“Fake video, clearly,” Lena adds, hands on her hips as she rounds the desk again to stand near Kara. “It won’t hold up. Have Winn look at it.”

“They still suspect-”

“I’ve been through this before. After Lex went on his rampage who do you think they came to first?” Lena asks and Kara’s jaw clenches. “I can handle the finger pointing for a day.”

“That’s not the point,” Kara bites out. “I know that video is fake, but all that means is that someone is trying to frame you. Someone _wants you_ in that jail cell.”

Lena hadn’t thought of that. And she startles at bit at the realization. Shaking her head, she throws the thought away. “Nonetheless-”

“Lena,” Kara tries again, but Lena moves in close and puts a finger to Kara’s lips.

“We don’t have a lot of time,” she says. “I’m going with Maggie. It’s my decision. I refuse to be a fugitive of the law when I’ve done nothing wrong.”

Kara’s face is tight with restraint and Lena moves her fingers up to rub at the crinkle between Kara’s brows. “I don’t like this.”

“Yeah, I know,” Lena says softly and she presses forward until she can kiss Kara, pumping reassurance into the movement. “It will be fine.”

“With your mother’s escape today and now this. It’s not coincidence, Lena.”

“If something happens I give you full permission to bust the walls down of the jail and break me out,” Lena tells her with a slight quirk of her lips.

“That’s not funny,” Kara says. “If you think I won’t burn this place-”

“Kara,” Lena says with a laughing sigh. “I know you would. Which is why I need you to let me do this.”

Lena’s fingers play with her watch for a moment until she makes a decision - unclasping it and holding it out to Kara. “Hold onto this for me,” she says softly and Kara looks like she's’ going to flinch away from it, her eyes wide.

“What are you doing?”

“If they really are going to put me in a cell for the evening then they’ll inventory my possessions,” Lena explains, grabbing Kara’s hand and turning it over so she can place the watch there. “I’d rather you have this than have to deal with explaining why I have a direct line to Supergirl on my wrist.”

“Then hide it somewhere so you can keep it with you.”

Lena’s brow arches. “Where exactly do you suggest I hide it?”

“You’re supposed to be the genius,” Kara says, trying to thrust the watch back towards Lena.
“Kara,” Lena says lowly as she grabs the hand holding her watch with both of her own hands.

“I don’t like that you took it off,” Kara tells her, looking almost desperate. “I didn’t like it the first time and I definitely don’t like it now.”

“Just think about this logically for two seconds,” Lena says and she keeps her words slow and emphatic. The almost crazy look growing in Kara’s eyes is affecting her own heartbeat and she swallows to calm it down. “If this is some sort of elaborate trap then we have an opportunity to turn it around on whoever set it.”

“Your mother. Who seems to always be two steps ahead of us.”

“Sometimes you just have to play the cards you’re dealt,” Lena replies and she steps in close to Kara, runs her hands up her biceps in an attempt to soothe. Kara deflates just the slightest and their foreheads connect softly. “I’ll be okay.”

“The second I think something’s wrong I’m coming to get you,” Kara murmurs, bringing her arms around Lena’s waist in a light hug. Lena sinks into the embrace, trying to steel herself against the fear swirling through her, especially now that her bare wrist feels too light without the familiar weight of the watch.

“I love you,” Lena whispers, and she hears Kara whisper it back, her arms tightening around her. And then Maggie is coming back in the room, her eyes sharp and her jaw lined with tension as she regards Kara and Lena. Kara is agitated all over again, her spine straightening.

“Time’s up,” Maggie says. “Let’s go.”

Kara almost doesn’t let her go. But eventually, Lena is able to drift out of Kara’s arms, letting Maggie place a hand on her shoulder, and the last look she gets of Kara is the vague orange glow of her eyes, the anger in her jaw, as the gold watch with the vows of Krypton hangs from Kara’s hand.

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They get to the downtown NCPD station with relative ease and Maggie is understanding enough to walk her in through the back entrance, away from prying eyes.

After giving a brief statement - I’d like my lawyer present - Lena’s booked into the system and shown to a holding cell.

“Court opens bright and early,” Maggie assures her and when she turns away Lena catches sight of her phone ringing - Alex Danvers shining on the screen. “Goodnight, Lena,” Maggie says as she brings the phone to her ear and walks away. She can hear the barest hint of a very loud voice greeting Maggie from the other side.

Left to the isolation of the small cement cell, Lena blows out a low breath and observes the room with an unimpressed arch of her brow. It’s a cell. The blue prison uniform she’s changed into is a bit scratchy, but that’s fine. She sits down on the bed, as uncomfortable as it is, and tries to think backwards to her work on finding Lex’s stockpiles, trying to calm and center herself, knowing Kara is most likely losing her mind somewhere out there.

She wishes, now, that she would have been able to keep her watch. Knowing Kara would be there in seconds if she needed her was a comforting weight, and now it was gone. So she loses herself in her thoughts, crossing off location after location in her mind.
The sound of a crash pulls her out of her thoughts and she stands up off the hard cement bed and looks out into the dimly lit hallway. Her first thought is that maybe Kara let her emotions get the best of her and has busted her way in to retrieve Lena. She sincerely hopes not; it would only make Supergirl look like she was somehow complicit in a Luthor’s schemes.

That thought is dispelled the second Metallo comes into view, a sardonic smile on his face. Lena steps back in reaction, but she realizes quite quickly that there’s nowhere to go. Metallo’s hands are quickly on the metal bars of her cell, prying them apart and Lena’s cursing the part of her that not a few hours ago was convincing Kara that everything would be okay.

A second crashing sound interrupts Metallo’s progress and he turns his head to look at something out of Lena’s line of sight.

“You shouldn’t have come here.” Lena can hear Kara’s voice from around the corner, and she breathes a small sigh of relief until Metallo’s chest starts to glow an ominous green. “Get away from her.”

Metallo glances back at her. “Just a moment, Miss Luthor,” he says with a casual smile before he stalks away, presumably in Kara’s direction.

The sound of a scuffle ensues. Lena can make out the distinctive sound of Kara’s heat vision cutting through cement and no more than a few seconds later a body she recognizes as James in full Guardian armor goes flying in front of her cell and skidding across the ground.

When he stands back up he nods briefly to Lena before jumping right back into the fight.

It’s torture not to be able to see what’s happening, but Lena doesn’t feel it would be wise to poke her head through the small hole Metallo had created in the bars of her cell. There’s a security mirror in the corner of the hallway and she can just make out the sight of Kara and James flanking Metallo and trading blows.

James gets a few good hits in before Metallo gets an opening to blast him with a green beam of kryptonite out of his chest and send him careening back down the hallway. Kara tackles Metallo almost immediately, throwing them both into the ground so hard it dents the concrete. Lena watches, fingers clenched around the iron bars of her cell as Kara punches him in the face repeatedly, his body going still under her legs.

Kara doesn’t relent even as Metallo remains unmoving until Lena calls out to her, “Supergirl!”

It picks Kara’s head up from Metallo and towards the direction of Lena’s voice until she’s jumping up and speeding in front of the cell.

“Hey,” Kara says, looking breathless and worn out.

Lena sags forward against the metal bars and looks her over. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” Kara answers, her eyes following a similar path on Lena’s body. “You?”

Lena nods, an eye still on the security mirror that’s showing Metallo’s still body.

Grumbling something low under her breath in Kryptonian, Kara puts both hands on the slightly bent bars of Lena’s cell and nods. “Stand back,” she tells her and Lena sees the intention immediately.

“Kara,” she warns in a whisper, but Kara’s eyes are sharp when she looks back up.
“Leaving you here is no longer up for discussion,” Kara says and Lena can see the shaky way she’s barely keeping it together, her hands already warping the bars of the cell.

She takes a step backwards and Kara’s grip tenses on the bar for a moment before she’s ripping it entirely away from the wall and throwing it to the side.

Just as Kara’s reaching out a hand towards Lena, her eye catches movement in the security mirror and her stomach drops.

It happens in a flash - Kara’s name gets caught halfway out of her throat and she has to turn away from the bright green flash of kryptonite that blindsides Kara and sends her flying down the hall.

Metallo stalks forward into view, green light still bursting out of his chest for a long moment that spurs Lena into action. Her intention to tackle him is stopped by his hand darting out and gripping her throat immediately, picking her up off the ground and choking the air out of her lungs.

Her fingers scratch at his hand uselessly and he just smiles at her. “It’s useless, Miss Luthor,” he tells her and just as she’s sure she’s going to go unconscious from lack of oxygen he sets her back down and releases her.

She coughs violently, sucking air into her lungs and when she recovers enough she spots Kara’s body slumped on the ground a few feet away. James is next to her and they both look lifeless.

There’s blood. Actual, real blood, coming out of somewhere on Kara’s head and her cape looks ripped from where they’re standing.

Lena’s eyes go wide in fear and realization but before she can bolt towards Kara’s body, Metallo is grabbing her around the waist and picking her back up off the floor.

“No!” Her voice is hoarse and sore, but the protests rip out of her lungs as Metallo tries to carry her away from Kara’s body.

It feels like tunnel vision. Like Kara is all she can see in that moment and she can’t think to care about anything else apart from screaming Kara’s name, begging her to get up. She struggles against Metallo’s hold, but is no match for his strength. He kicks out against a nearby wall and it blasts a gigantic hole in it that leads to the outside.

Just as they’re exiting, Lena still yelling out for Kara, she sees the slightest bit of motion in Kara’s body, her head twitching as if swimming back to consciousness and Lena feels the smallest part of her sigh in relief that Kara’s not dead.

It’s the last thing she sees before Metallo’s throwing her into the back of a waiting black van and slamming the door. She immediately scrabbles upward towards the doors and tries to open them back up, pulling and kicking out against it for a few seconds until a voice halts all her movements.

“Save your energy, honey.”

The sound of her mother behind her makes Lena’s heart twist violently in her chest and she almost doesn’t want to turn around. It takes her a second of processing before she feels like she can do it and when she does her mother is sitting calmly on a seat in the back of the van, smiling at her as if none of the violence from moments before has happened.

Lena feels a kind of overwhelming rage grip at her chest and her fists clench with the urge to strangle the woman in front of her. She for once understands what it feels like to be Kara when she’s upset. She can hardly get her mind in order to do anything.
The van starts to move and Lillian remains smiling, clearly waiting for Lena to make a move.

“What the hell?” Lena says darkly, her hand darting out to keep her balance as the van makes a sharp turn.

Lillian’s head tilts curiously. “You’re my daughter, Lena,” she says. “I wasn’t going to let you sit in a cell all night.”

Lena wants to laugh, but can’t find the energy to do anything but blink incredulously at her mother. “You won’t get away with this.”

Her mother laughs, a sound so out of odds with the moment and shakes her head at Lena. “I already have,” she says with a casual shrug that has Lena’s blood boiling. “Or are you under the impression your little friend Supergirl will come and save you?”

Lena’s nostrils flare, but she forces herself not to react. Lillian’s smile spikes pain in Lena’s chest that has her rubbing the bare skin of her wrist where her watch usually sits.

“Kara’s not coming, dear,” Lillian tells her and all the air drops out of Lena’s lungs at the confirmation of something she had suspected, but desperately hoped wouldn’t be true. “I think Metallo might have done quite the number on her. And she won’t be able to find you, either.”

Lillian lifts a hand and knocks a knuckle against the side of the van, the sound ringing hollowly throughout the car. “Lead,” her mother says simply and Lena’s stomach drops so violently that she nearly passes out.

The van lurches again and Lena barely catches herself before she’s thrown against the side, her hands catching against the back doors.

“To think, all this time, you were gallivanting around with Superman’s cousin and never told anyone. Not even Lex,” Lillian says. She’s sitting calmly, even as the van shifts constantly and Lena glares at her. Her eyes feel hot, her chest tight, and she’s no longer sure this is a situation she can escape. “I thought you at least knew that your family was more important than some girl.”

Lena wants to scream, wants to yell that Kara has given her the kind of family Lillian had never even offered, but she feels like a caged animal, hovering in the corner of the van, realizing slowly that the Luthor family’s vendetta against the Supers has now become something personal. That the target on Kara’s back has only grown heavier, because of her.

“But I think I have a way you can make it up to me,” Lillian says with an ominous smile on her face.
Chapter 14

The back of the van is cold and uncomfortable. After their initial conversation, her mother leaves her there alone, retreating to the front seat. Lena spends a few minutes surveying her surroundings and trying to see if she can escape. At the very least, she looks for some kind of opening in the armored side of the vehicle, something to expose the sound of her location to Kara.

It spikes a pang of worry in her heart for a moment. The last she saw of Kara, she was moving, but barely. There’s a high probability Kara is in no shape to be hearing Lena’s heartbeat or anything else. Her mother’s words echo ominously in her head Kara’s not coming, dear. And she won’t be able to find you either.

Kara’s fine, Lena tries to assure herself. She’d know if she weren’t. She would know. She repeats the mantra for a few silent moments before she can breathe evenly again and tries to focus on getting herself out of her current situation. Kara might be fine, but Lena can’t just sit back and expect a rescue.

It’s dark outside the front of the van, so dark that Lena can’t see where they’re headed. The headlights are only barely lighting up the road and Lena wonders just how much of Metallo is cybernetically enhanced. He drives the car in silent acquiescence to Lillian’s quiet instructions as they travel, but Lena can’t piece them together with any sort of coherence.

Eventually, her mother rejoins her in the back and pulls a soft-looking sweater out of a duffel bag sitting there.

“You must be cold,” her mother says, handing it over with a soft smile. It makes Lena’s stomach turn over.

“I’m fine,” she bites out, crossing her arms over her chest to still a shiver that runs through her body.

“Don’t be petty, dear. Take the sweater.”

The next shiver she tries to suppress prompts her to swipe at the sweater and tear it out of her mother’s hands. Lillian merely arches a brow at her in reaction, but doesn’t say anything as Lena wraps the fabric around her shoulders, grateful for its warmth.

“I don’t know why you’re so angry,” her mother says after another few seconds of silence and Lena scoffs, unsure how a woman as smart as her mother could possibly be so blind to how Lena’s feeling.

“I’m not sure. Maybe because you kidnapped me-”

“I liberated you from that prison,” Lillian corrects. “I wasn’t going to let my daughter rot in there. Especially not when she did nothing wrong.”

The last bit is delivered with a self-aggrandizing sort of smirk that makes Lena’s eyes narrow immediately. “So you did frame me,” she says even though it’s only confirming something that’s been obvious to her from the moment Kara suggested the doctored security footage was made with the intent of putting her in that cell.

“I gave the public what they expected of you,” Lillian says, crossing her legs and straightening. She paints an imposing picture just like always. “And they ate it up.”
Lena’s brow pulls down. “What’s in it for you?”

“To show you reality, Lena. Look at how they treated you,” her mother says. “It’s high time you see the truth of the world and join the cause. We could certainly benefit from your help.”

Lena scoffs, can’t believe what her mother’s saying. “If you wanted my help you could have just asked, instead of concocting some ridiculous scheme to have me arrested and then kidnapped.”

“Yes,” Lillian says with hard eyes at dissonance with the smile on her lips. “Because asking for your help worked out so well the last time.”

Lips thin, Lena can’t deny that point. “If you were trying to get me on your side, you’ve failed. All you’ve done is make me look guilty when I’m not.”

“Your last name makes you look guilty on its own. Just as you made me look guilty in court a few days ago,” her mother replies with a soft, condescending smile. “You’re a Luthor, Lena. The public has already deemed you guilty, regardless of the facts. Luthors will always be evil. Just look at how Lex is viewed.”

“Lex hurt people,” Lena says and she hates the ache in her chest at the memory of her brother’s descent into madness. She’s sure that part of that pain will never go away. “He killed people. He tried to kill Superman.”

“He tried to save the world, Lena,” her mother argues, her eyes going hot in a flash.

Lena keeps her mouth shut, but shakes her head. There’s no arguing with blind insanity.

“I told you we have to stick together,” Lillian adds. “You’ll come to understand that in due time.”

“Don’t hold your breath,” Lena grumbles, looking back out towards the front of the van. She lets silence stretch out between them for a moment before curiosity pulls a question out of her. “Where are we going?”

“We’ll be there soon enough,” is the only answer she gets and Lillian just stares at her, small smile playing across her lips until Lena feels compelled to ask the question that’s been nagging in the back of her mind.

“How did you find out?”

“Find out what?” her mother asks, her eyebrow raising as though she knows exactly what Lena is talking about.

“About Supergirl.”

“Ah,” her mother responds with a short laugh. “Yes, Miss Danvers.”

“When did you know?”

Her mother regards her for a few seconds, the rattle of the van travelling over slightly rough terrain the only sound in the small space. “Only recently,” she answers. “Had I known you were gallivanting around with some alien in college I would have pulled you out of there far sooner. It was bad enough that she distracted you so much in the first place.”

Lena bristles, has to take a deep breath through her nose to stay calm. “How did you find out?”

“When we had her in custody a few months ago,” her mother answers. “I saw recognition in her
eyes when she saw me. At first I’d just assumed she knew me the way most people do.” Her mother smiles, self-assured. “I am a Luthor, after all.”

It takes everything in Lena not to snap at that, but she wants to hear the entirety of this answer.

“But when I asked her what you were to her, well…” Her mother laughs softly. “Your Kryptonian isn’t very good at hiding her feelings, is she? And she’s quite protective of you at that. It reminded me of your little fling. I’d only seen that kind of reaction once before.”

The memory comes to Lena then of the time Kara and her mother met and she can imagine Kara making the same annoyed, defensive expression in present day.

“How everyone else hasn’t seen it, I can’t fathom,” her mother says, and it’s almost funny if it wasn’t so entirely terrifying. “I can’t help but think of how disappointed Lex would be in you, if he knew about her, who she is. How you kept it from him.”

It’s a low blow, and Lena can’t help but direct a heavy glare at her mother for the words. But it at least quells some fear; Lex doesn’t know about Kara. That’s something. That’s important.

“It’s unbecoming to look so pouty, Lena. Relax your face,” Lillian says, and her smirk is something so sharp and cruel that Lena wants to lash out, scream and yell. But she settles for digging her fingers into the skin at her wrist, knowing it won’t help her now.

They don’t say anything else to each other, then, as her mother moves back to the front of the van and takes her place next to Metallo. Lena watches the steady glow of the headlights on the road outside and wonders if her and Kara will ever be able to be together without something in her life getting in the way.

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They stop after another ten minutes of driving and Lena eyes the door handle in the back of the van while Metallo jumps out of the car and her mother follows. When the door opens, she’s suddenly faced with the image of the man she knows to be Hank Henshaw - or Cyborg Superman apparently - but it still startles her to see a face she would usually think is J’onn’s plated over with metallic, robotic parts. Metallo appears next to him and offers a hand to Lena, as if to assist her in stepping down from the vehicle, but she just sneers at him and jumps down herself.

When she looks up, she realizes they’re in a massive warehouse. There are shipping crates, cars, helicopters, and heavy concrete walls that give no indication to where they are.

“What is this place?” Lena asks, as she brushes past Metallo and Henshaw coming closer to her mother as they make their way towards the center of the warehouse.

“One of Lex’s old storehouses,” her mother answers simply as she approaches a solitary panel in the middle of the room. Lena eyes it even as her mother turns to look at her expectantly. It’s not an unfamiliar look, but Lena isn’t sure what Lillian wants.

“What are we doing here?”

A quick press of a few buttons from her mother’s fingers opens up what looks like a security program and Lena sees a handprint-scan come up on the small screen. Lillian looks at her, “Well, go ahead.”

“Go ahead what?” Lena asks with a furrow in her brow. She’s hyper aware of the way both Metallo and Henshaw are moving to flank her, suddenly.
“Open it.”

“Open it?” Lena parrots, her confusion obvious in her tone. “It’s a biometric lock.”

An exasperated look covers her mother’s face for a moment. “Yes, and it will only open for you.”

Lena’s eyes zone immediately in on the screen now. “What do you mean it only opens for me?”

“Lex designed it to only open for…” Her mother’s lips thin with clear displeasure. “You. Your DNA.”

“Me?” Lena feels a bit dumbstruck by the information. If Lex had sought to lock something up so carefully that only she could open it, she isn’t sure it’s something that needs to be opened ever.

“Yes, you,” her mother answers with an impatient exhale. “Can we get on with it?”

“What is it?” If her mother is desperate for her to unlock - whatever this is - and it belonged to Lex, well...it could be anything. A number of destructive things.

“It’s just the door, Lena. To the storehouse. Now be a good daughter, and put your hand on the panel.”

The mere fact that her mother wants her to do it makes Lena convinced she shouldn’t, even if she feels like a rebellious teenager all over again for thinking so. She takes a step backwards, but Henshaw stops her progress with a strong grip against her bicep. It becomes clear pretty quickly that her mother isn’t so much as asking her to do it more than making it clear she will.

“So this is why you,” Lena pauses, a snarl on her lips. “Liberated me from prison. Because Lex didn’t trust you enough to give you a key.”

“I retrieved you from prison to set you free and because I want my daughter with me,” Lillian says with a smile that Lena wants to slap. “We’re going to save the world. Whether you like it or not.”

The choice is ripped away from her when Henshaw and Metallo both grab her by the arm, Henshaw’s strong grip pulling Lena’s wrist until her hand is pressing against the scanner and the device registers her DNA. It twists her wrist painfully, and she tries to reign in her reaction, but her mother smirks the whole way as a small noise comes out of the scanner, recognizing her.

Something in her heart twists painfully when a small hologram of Lex’s face pops up out of the panel with a casual, boyish smile. “Welcome, little sister,” it greets and suddenly the floor shakes violently as a caged storage unit begins rising up out of the ground, packed full.

The room emerges entirely and the doors slide open to the inside. Lena feels like her heart seizes when she sees the centerpiece of the small room - Lex’s warsuit. Or at least an exact copy of the one he used to attack Superman, the warsuit that Lex had convinced her was for the betterment of the world. The suit Lena had thought, briefly, would prevent Kara from feeling like she needed to follow in her cousin’s footsteps.

The authorities had torn apart Luthor properties around the world to look for more of Lex’s weaponry, and they had somehow missed all of this.

“Your brother, genius that he was, has these sorts of facilities all across the world,” he mother tells her as they step inside. Lena rips her arm out of Metallo’s grasp and follows the group inside. “His arsenals will sustain the cause for years.”
An atomic axe hangs on a stand next to the warsuit and Lena spots a few boxes with labels she’s never seen before. “Lex didn’t succeed,” Lena says, keeping her voice even though her stomach feels like it’s coiled in untamable knots. “What makes you so sure you will? Even with all of this?”

“Oh, Lena,” her mother says, a smile on her face that makes Lena’s lungs turn to ice. “You are the key to all this, truly. If I have you, I might as well have Supergirl.”

Lena feels like she can’t breathe for a moment. Lillian ignores her, stepping around the room clearly looking for something specific. Lena tries to focus herself, takes the time to observe a case of what look like grenades next to her and tries to decipher what they’re used for.

“A black mercy,” her mother says almost reverently and Lena looks over to a glass case her mother has stepped up, to hosting some kind of plant like creature.

While her mother is mesmerized by whatever the hell a black mercy is, Lena spots something out of the ordinary on a crate of boxes towards the side. A white envelope sitting there innocuously, but Lena can make out the scrawl of her brother’s handwriting on the front of it. Trying not to pull any attention towards her, she wanders that direction and just barely suppresses a sharp inhale when her own name comes into view.

It’s lucky Lillian seems completely taken with whatever she’s finding on the other side of the room. This time it seems to be a small steel box that is likely the object of her mother’s search based on the way she gasps upon seeing it. “Oh, my darling boy,” Lillian says and Lena gets her fingers on the envelope just as Lillian is picking up the device. “You did finish it.”

Before Lena can say anything to that, but after she has time to tuck the envelope inside her sweater, a crashing sound breaks through the room and a huge pile of broken concrete comes raining down through the ceiling as a red and blue blur lands in the warehouse. Her heart seems to calm the moment she recognizes who it is, but picks back up again when her mother just smiles in reaction, reaching for the grenade Lena had been inspecting earlier and walking towards Kara calmly.

“Supergirl!” Lena yells out in warning as she jogs after her mother, Metallo and Henshaw. They all stand in front of Kara, who has adopted a defensive stance. Her eyes hardly leave Lena for a second, and even from a distance, she can see the shake in Kara’s hands.

“You’re not getting away with this, Lillian,” Kara says lowly, but her mother just laughs. “I’m so glad you’re here... Kara,” her mother says and Lena watches Kara’s eyes widen a little in surprise. “You’ll make a perfect test subject. I’d love to see if these work.”

The grenade in her mother’s hand goes arcing in the air towards Kara, who catches it with ease, a furrow in her brow as she looks at the device for a moment. It takes but a second before Kara is lurching forward and a sound of pain escapes her lips as she drops the grenade on the ground and clutches the side of her head. Lena’s heart drops; she can’t hear a thing, but Kara is screaming out, grasping her ears as if she’s hearing something incredibly painful.

“Stop!” She screams at her mother. “Don’t hurt her!”

Kara is still in pain, writhing on the ground, and Lena tries to run to her, only to get lifted straight off the ground by Henshaw. She tries to struggle out of his hold, while Kara claws at her head and gasps for air, but there’s nothing she can do.

“Don’t be silly, Lena,” Lillian says, her eyes still on where Kara is curled up on the floor. “This alien’s family destroyed ours. It’s time someone pay for what Superman did to Lex.”
“Put her in the vault. I’m sure we can find a use for that axe,” her mother orders and Metallo steps forward to pick Kara up by the arm. Lena watches helplessly as Kara goes with the tug, slumping forward, her face pinched in pain and the green on Metallo’s chest glowing ominously.

“Stop!” Lena tries again, but her mother directs a stare at her as though she’s being incomprehensible. “Please, stop!”

“Why do you care so much for someone who ruined our lives?” Lillian asks. Kara’s feet are dragging on the ground as Metallo pulls her along, and Lena tries again to get out of Henshaw’s grip, to get to Kara, but he’s so strong. His fingers press into her skin hard enough that she feels like he might break her arm.

Kara is trying to talk, now, her hands pushing at Metallo’s body, her eyes unsteady and unfocused. Lillian is laughing, and Lena is panicking, trying to break free from Henshaw.

Apparently, he grows tired of her struggling, throwing her to the ground so hard that her head cracks against the concrete and she feels her vision go in and out for a moment. The image of Kara across from her goes blurry around the edges and she foggily realizes she probably just got a concussion. Kara yells something that echoes around in her brain, and she sounds angry, scared, and Lena aches to soothe it, somehow.

Metallo is dragging Kara towards the vault and Lena tries to pick her body up off the ground, but it feels impossible, like she’s dragging upward through molasses.

“Metallo’s heart is going to explode,” she hears Kara yell out, clear as a bell, and through the haze her vision has gone under she can make out the unstable way the kryptonite is glowing in Metallo’s chest, can see how it’s affecting Kara.

She’s not entirely aware of much else as she tries to get her head to clear until suddenly two other figures join the fray and she hears the familiar sound of J’onn’s voice yell out for Kara.

It’s all a chaotic mess after that until two familiar hands are gripping her arms and turning her, sliding over her biceps.

“Lena,” Kara is saying desperately, repeating her name over and over, and Lena tries to blink the image of Kara’s face clear, but before she can respond Kara is scooping her up in her arms and jumping up into the air.

Lena wraps her arms around Kara’s neck as they jolt forward and they burst away from the warehouse. Kara flies much faster than Lena is used to and she has to bury her face in Kara’s neck to avoid the sting of air rushing past her. Moments after they’re airborne she hears the loud sound of an explosion ring out and feels Kara lurch as if impacted by it. It feels like mere seconds before Kara lets out a gasping sound and Lena feels the swoop in her stomach that indicates they’re falling towards the ground.

Their impact lacks any sort of grace. Kara’s flight drops out a full five feet from the ground, and Lena’s head ends up mostly hitting Kara’s chest when they crash. It’s hard enough that her vision blacks again, but Kara just dropped out of the sky. Lena rolls out of Kara’s hold and Kara falls away, the foreign sound of her sucking in air making Lena’s focus go straight towards her, panic cutting swiftly through any kind of fog in her head.

“Kara?” Lena asks, her throat feeling hoarse and overused as she finds some kind of control over her body and scrambles towards Kara. Her knees scrape against the ground painfully, but it doesn’t stop her. “Kara, are you okay?”
Kara doesn’t answer, just stays bent over on the ground, her body vibrating and Lena can see the frightening green glow of her veins across her neck and skin.

“Kara,” Lena tries again and when she gets close enough she puts her hands on Kara’s cheeks and tugs upward until their gazes connect. Kara’s eyes are wide and panicked, the crinkles around them conveying pain that Lena’s not used to seeing.

“Lena,” Kara gasps out with a crazed fear all over her face that Lena reacts to immediately.

“Hey, you’re okay,” Lena says and she manages to find some semblance of calm to cling to, wills her heartbeat to slow and grabs for one of Kara’s hands. It’s easier than usual to pull her arm the direction she wants and Lena knows the kryptonite explosion is affecting Kara, can tell how drained she is.

Kara’s shaking her head as if to say no I’m definitely not okay, but Lena just takes her hand and presses it against her chest right over her heart, keeping Kara’s fingers there in a familiar gesture. “You’re okay,” Lena repeats. “Breathe with me, feel my heart beating.”

It’s unclear how much of Kara’s powers have been affected and Lena isn’t sure if her hearing can pick up the sound of her heart anymore, but she knows Kara has to be able to feel it, can tell that Kara can by the way her hand immediately presses harder against Lena’s sternum.

“The kryptonite,” Kara says in a hoarse sounding whisper and Lena shuffles closer with a shushing sound. Kara’s other hand comes up to Lena’s side, pressing in against her rib cage.

“I know, I know,” she says, bringing her hand up to cup Kara’s cheek. “Just breathe, you’ll be okay. Count them.”

Pain and panic are still mixing on Kara’s face, but her eyes zone in on the hand Lena has pressed against her chest. “I can’t, I can’t hear.”

“Kara,” Lena interrupts and her throat hurts with the force of it. “Just count, focus.”

Kara’s eyes squeeze shut for a moment but her breathing starts to even out just enough for Lena to know it’s working. “Count,” Lena tells her in a softer voice than before and then she starts the numbers for her, hopes it will prompt Kara to follow her lead.

Counting in Kryptonian was one of the first things Kara ever taught her and Lena clings to the memory of warm, relaxed lessons in the comfort of her dorm room while she lets the numbers drop out of her mouth here in present day.

By the time Lena gets to duhv, Kara seems to get some of her control back and she parrots Lena’s words, taking over the counting and letting some of the panicked tension seep out of her.

“That’s it,” Lena says with an encouraging nod and smile. “Relax.”

Kara sags forward into Lena’s touch until she’s falling against Lena’s body and they both go towards the ground, Kara’s hand still pressed against Lena’s chest, her head coming to rest tightly against Lena’s collarbone.

“Everything’s okay,” Lena murmurs and spares a moment to breathe herself, her arm wrapping around Kara’s back and clutching her cape. Pain in her own head starts to make itself known again, but she ignores it in favor of resting her forehead against the crown of Kara’s head and timing their breaths together.
“I’m sorry,” Kara whispers against Lena’s collarbone and Lena has to struggle against the fog still clouding her brain to make the words out. “Sorry I didn’t stop them. I’m sorry I-”

“Shhhh,” Lena commands. “Don’t be sorry. You saved me.”

They stay still like that for long minutes, nothing but the silence of the field around them and the slow feel of Kara’s strength returning bit by bit. Lena feels like the haze in her brain is going to overtake her at any point, but she forces herself to stay awake, focused on Kara.

Eventually, Kara pushes off her, seemingly much more calm and stable than before and looks at Lena’s face. “Are you okay?”

Lena tries to nod, but it just spikes pain in her temple and she winces. This time it’s Kara that clutches her cheeks and keeps their eyes connected. “What’s wrong?” Kara’s hand swipes upward on Lena’s head and brushes some hair away. The fleeting feeling of Kara’s fingers against her skin actually hurts and she realizes that must have been where she smacked against the concrete.

“You’re bleeding,” Kara observes, her voice like steel as she inspects Lena with her eyes.

“Hit my head,” Lena manages to say and her vision goes a little black around the edges. The adrenaline is leaking out of her quickly and it’s leaving her body drained and heavy. Without the pressing need to take care of Kara, Lena can feel the will to stay conscious pass out of her. Kara barely gets an arm around her waist in time before she goes falling to the ground again.

“We need to get you to a hospital,” Kara says with a nervous urgency in her voice.

“M’fine,” Lena mumbles, her hands reaching out to clasp Kara’s biceps. “I’m fine.”

“You’re not fine,” Kara insists and then she looks around them a moment, her jaw clenching in anger. “I can’t fly us. Metallo’s stupid synthetic kryptonite.”

“It’s okay,” Lena says again, but she can feel her fragile grasp on consciousness ebbing away from her and Kara’s eyes are radiating fear when Lena looks up and manages to trace her fingers softly across Kara’s cheekbone. “It’s okay.”

Kara looks like she says something else, but Lena doesn’t hear it as her vision goes completely dark.

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Lena feels drunk.

No. Correction. Lena is drunk.

“Kara, I’m drunk,” she mumbles, and when she trips, Kara’s arm tugs her back upright. It’s easily three in the morning, and the campus is empty. It thrills Lena a little bit, to be so free of people, to just be with Kara, and the world spinning all around them.

“I know, babe,” Kara says with a laugh. “You’ve told me like sixteen times.”

“I’m like - drunk. Big time,” Lena says, wide eyed as she looks at Kara. “We should go out more. Go dancing or something. Food! You love food.”

“I thought you said you weren’t going to ever have another meal with me after the chicken wing incident,” Kara says, mimicking Lena’s words from earlier that day and she’s laughing until Lena
starts to climb up on a nearby bench and the sound stops with a surprised choke of, “Lena, be careful!”

Lena rolls her eyes and manages to get up on the bench with a flourish. “I’ll have you know that I’m extremely dexterous.” It’s autumn, and her girlfriend is smiling at her, and everything feels relaxed and easy. She tries to tug at Kara’s arm, get her to join her on the bench, but she doesn’t budge.

“Says the girl that nearly fell out of a tree two hours ago,” Kara mumbles and Lena scoffs in indignation.

When she reaches out to slap at Kara’s arm she sways forward unsteadily and almost falls off the bench until Kara’s hands latch onto her hips to keep her upright. “Oops,” Lena whispers into another laugh that has Kara smiling in exasperation.

“I told you to be careful.”

“Come up here,” Lena commands with a hint of whine in her voice.

“Why don’t you come down here so you don’t fall?” Kara asks. Lena leans down, her hands wrapping up around Kara’s neck and she presses a quick firm kiss to Kara’s forehead because it’s just too close not to.

“I’m not going to fall,” Lena says a little exasperated. “You’re holding me up.”

Kara’s hands flex against Lena’s hips and she smiles when Lena presses another kiss against one eyebrow and then the other, fluttering kisses across her face. “I might drop you if you keep kissing me.”

Lena laughs a little. “No you won’t, you’re too strong,” she says and she leans forward even further until Kara’s hands slide across her back, arms wrapping around her in a way that cuts through the alcohol straight to her gut. “I like that you’re so strong.”

“Yeah?” Kara asks, and this time she pulls Lena forward a bit until her feet are hovering off the bench for just a second.

With a soft hum of agreement, Lena kisses her again swiftly but with more intention this time. “It definitely does it for me.”

“Does it for you?” Kara’s head tilts a bit in confusion as she tries to understand the phrase and Lena just pushes her hips forward, her fingers threading up into Kara’s hair.

“In a sex way,” Lena clarifies and if it weren’t so dark and if Lena weren’t still so drunk she’s sure she’d be able to see Kara blushing. As it is, Kara makes a soft noise of surprise and just pushes her head forward until it’s pressing into Lena’s chest.

“Lena,” she chastises into the fabric there, but Lena just laughs. It still all feels so good and easy and if she closes her eyes she’s pretty sure she might be able to fall asleep just like this, secure in the way Kara is holding her.

“I’m drunk though,” she says after a moment, head falling forward until her lips are brushing over Kara’s hair. “I don’t know how great I’d be at anything sexy right now.”

“Can we go up to your room now?” Kara asks with a longsuffering sigh that makes Lena want to kiss her again. So she does.
Kara’s lips curl into a smile against Lena’s mouth and she pulls Lena forward into her body and up off the bench. It feels like it always does when she kisses Kara like this. All floaty and warm. Lena’s entirely sure she’ll never get sick of it.

“Take me home,” she murmurs into the kiss and Kara inhales sharply as if in surprise at the order.

“Come here,” Kara replies, and Lena’s whole world tilts a little as she’s lifted further off the bench and settles into Kara’s arms. Kara’s hands come under her back and under her knees, and Lena knocks her head into Kara’s collarbone. Kara’s heartbeat is thumping along under her ear and the stars are so nice and the air is that kind of temperature that warrants snuggling into Kara’s warmth.

“I feel so drunk,” Lena mutters, her lips moving against the skin exposed near Kara’s collarbone.

“Yeah,” Kara sighs, but she’s smiling when Lena tilts her head back to look up at her. “I know.”

“How did I get this drunk?”

“You wouldn’t stop playing Whale’s Tales until you won and Aaron brought out his good whiskey.”

“I won though,” she says pointing a finger at Kara’s face. Or at least she think it’s Kara’s face, but the world looks all fuzzy and wavy around the edges. All she wants to do now that she isn’t tasked with walking is snuggle up against Kara’s body and sleep.

“Lena, stay awake,” Kara says, jostling her a bit as they walk and it does the trick.

“M’not asleep,” she protests even though it feels ridiculously difficult to keep her eyes open.

“Just a little bit longer,” Kara assures her.

“How are you not drunk?” Lena asks with an accusatory glare at her girlfriend’s face.

Kara laughs. “You know how,” she says and Lena feels like she’s forgetting an important detail for a long moment until she remembers, perking up in Kara’s arms.

“Oh, because you’re a-”

“Lena!” Kara exclaims, shushing her with a laugh that Lena returns. Everything feels super funny at that moment though Lena’s not sure why.

The alcohol, she imagines. “Whiskey is great,” she says with a smile that Kara laughs at.

“You might feel differently later.”

“Sleepy,” Lena murmurs after her laughter tapers off into a yawn.

“I know,” Kara says softly and she’s dimly aware of the fact that they’re walking up stairs. How Kara gets the door open to her dorm is sort of a mystery, but she lets Kara pull at her shirt and bra and she nearly falls off the couch when Kara tugs off her jeans, but it feels like only moments later that Lena feels the softness of her sheets at her back as Kara sets her down on the bed.

“Don’t leave,” Lena protests when Kara tries to move away, but Kara just removes the hands Lena has clutched into her sweatshirt and soothes her with a soft kiss to her forehead.

“I’m not leaving, I’m just getting you a glass of water,” she says and Lena falls back against her
pillow, licking against the thick feeling in her mouth. The pillow somehow smells like Kara, which is strange, because it’s definitely her pillow, the designated pillow that is hers.

“I had so much whiskey didn’t I?” She comments as the ceiling above her swims in and out of focus.

Kara’s laugh echoes from the small bathroom adjoined to her room, and it makes her smile for a moment and then suddenly the mattress dips and strong hands are lifting her up into a sitting position. “Drink some water,” Kara orders and Lena obeys.

The water is cold and soothing as it pours down her throat and she squints at Kara’s smiling face as she gulps it down slowly.

“Good job,” Kara says, plucking the empty glass out of her hands.

“You’re a good job,” Lena replies, pointing her finger out to hit against Kara’s nose. Except her motor skills aren’t exactly perfect and she ends up just poking Kara in the cheek and laughing.

“Thanks,” Kara says with a laugh as she sets the glass down and Lena flops down onto the bed, twisting onto her stomach so her cheek can press against the cool side of her pillow.

A pillow that smells so much like Kara it nearly pulls her straight into sleep. “Is this your bed?” Lena asks in a muffle, her mouth half pressed into the bed under her.

“No,” Kara says and she’s sliding down next to Lena onto her side. The warmth of her spreads outward like something grasping at Lena and pulling her closer. She doesn’t fight it, just shifts until she’s all but crawling on top of Kara, finding a comfortable place to slump across.

“This is my bed?”

“Yes,” Kara answers with a chuckle. Her fingers trace down Lena’s spine and it makes her body go completely limp.

“Smells like you though,” Lena observes because it does and she feels like she’s surrounding by everything Kara, her senses nearly overwhelmed by it.

“I sleep here a lot,” Kara tells her in a soft voice, her lips against Lena’s forehead. “Did you forget?”

Lena just squirms in closer, tries to get the room to stop spinning, but it doesn’t change much with her eyes closed or open. “I’m so drunk,” she says for what is probably the twentieth time in the last hour. A twinge of regret for feeling the need to so pointedly outdrink their male friends spikes through her.

“You’re going to be so hungover in the morning,” Kara says with a soft, empathetic laugh.

“You’ll take care of me,” she replies against the skin of Kara’s collarbone. Her neck smells like cool fall rain and peach body wash and it washes contentment over Lena that has nothing to do with the whiskey still swirling in her brain.

“I will,” Kara agrees softly, kissing Lena’s temple and that’s all she remembers as she finally gives into the strong tug of sleep, relaxed and assured by everything Kara.

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When Lena wakes up, it’s to the bright lights of the DEO medical bay and the sound of beeping machinery to her right. Her eyes take a bit longer than normal to focus, but she finally does and is pleased to feel that her head is no longer radiating immense pain. There’s a throbbing headache at the back of her skull, but it’s nothing like what it had felt before.

“Alex, I’m fine!” Kara’s voice angrily rings out from outside the room and Lena turns her head slowly to see Kara stomping towards the door, Alex hot on her heels.

It surprises her just a bit when Alex is able to wrap a hand around Kara’s arm and physically pull her to a stop. A look of pure frustration shadows Kara’s face as she turns to her sister.

“You need some more time under the-”

“I’m fine,” Kara repeats and she pulls her arm out of Alex’s grasp. “I’m going to check on Lena.”

“Lena’s actually fine, but you’re-”

Kara doesn’t wait for the rest of it, already intent on coming into the room and she pulls up immediately when she notices Lena looking at her. “Hey,” Kara breathes out quickly, eyes wide as she rushes towards the bed. “How are you feeling?”

Alex comes in right after her, but the angry expression on her face fades immediately upon noticing that Lena’s awake and she comes up next to her sister. They wear matching concerned expressions as Alex repeats Kara’s question.

Lena would laugh if she wasn’t sure it would hurt her head. “I’m fine,” she answers instead, though it feels like a lie. Physically she feels relatively whole, but emotionally she feels liable to shatter at any second. The memory of Kara bent over on the ground, gasping for air and looking at Lena with wide, panicked eyes threatens to topple any restraint she has on her sanity. Her eyes roam over Kara’s face to assure herself they’re past that. “What about you?”

Kara nods immediately, but a hint of the anger from earlier comes back onto Alex’s face as she glances over. “She needs to be back under the-”

“I’m okay,” Kara says emphatically, sparing her sister a glare.

“You nearly died in a massive kryptonite explosion,” Alex practically hisses, glancing at Lena for support.

Having the idea manifest like that - Kara’s death - makes the breath Lena tries to inhale pained and thick. Her eyes burn a bit and though she doesn’t disagree with Alex’s assessment - would be perfectly happy to keep Kara locked in a safe sun-filled room for a month - she can’t find the words capable of supporting her.

Kara seems to realize what Alex’s words have done to Lena and she pulls her glare off her sister and trades it for a soft expression as she leans closer to Lena and murmurs, “Hey, I’m okay. We’re both okay.”

It seems to clue Alex into where Lena’s thoughts have wandered off to as well and she pushes closer net to Kara, reaches out to put a warm reassuring hand against Lena’s shin. “She’s fine,” she tells Lena, at odds with everything she’s been saying for the past minute. “But her powers are taking longer to come back and it wouldn’t hurt if she stuck around under the sunlamps for a little longer.”

Lena nods, tries to school her heartbeat down to a normal resting pace. She’s sure the sound of it
beating hard against her ribs would be deafening Kara if her ability to hear was at its normal level.

“So Metallo’s kryptonite heart actually exploded?” she asks, if only to focus on something more concrete than the abstract thoughts of Kara dying in her arms.

“Yeah,” Alex says and she props a hip up against the side of Lena’s bed. “Whatever was in the synthetic kryptonite, it was unstable enough that it overloaded.”

A pressing question starts to push against her brain. “My mother? Henshaw?”

The look Kara and Alex share tell her all she needs to know. “M’gann and J’onn tried to follow the trail,” Alex explains with a resigned sigh. “But they’re in the wind again.”

Lena’s eyes go back up to the ceiling and she tries to avoid thinking about all the ramifications of that news, how terrified she feels knowing that her mother knows who Kara is and is hellbent on destroying her. It feels like too much to process right now.

Her mother’s words float across her consciousness nonetheless. *If I have you, I might as well have Supergirl.* The implication that she could be used like that, used to hurt Kara or worse, makes something heavy and suffocating press against her chest. It had always been a fear of hers - Kara being hurt just for having touched a bit of Lena’s life - but this is so much more real, so much more threatening.

“We don’t even really know if they survived the explosion,” Kara tries, interrupting Lena’s dark train of thought. It’s possible that her mother and Henshaw had died, but Lena can hear how thin that excuse is, how much Kara herself doesn’t even believe it. If anyone’s proven themselves able to defeat the odds, it’s seemed to be her mother. “Metallo’s heart combusting sent the whole warehouse up.”

“She survived,” Lena says definitively with an unimpressed thinning of her lips. Kara sighs, but doesn’t disagree.

“We’ll find her,” Kara says with a conviction Lena can’t find it in herself to feel, but when Kara’s hand scrambles over the bed to clasp with hers, a little bit of the tension around her heart eases.

There’s tangible proof of Kara’s powerlessness in the way she grasps at Lena’s fingers, tighter than normal. “So, you’re still…” She has to swallow on the words, glancing at Alex for a moment.

Alex straightens, crosses her arms across her chest and gives Kara a pointed look. “Like I said, she could use some more time in the sunbed. The last thing we need is a powerless-”

“I’m not powerless,” Kara denies, looking exasperated at both of them now. “Some of it has come back.”

“Not all of it and you should be-”

“I’m not going to spend days-”

“-under the sunlamps for at least-”

“-in a medical prison because you-”

“-another day or until we can run more-”

“-are a complete-”
“Guys!” Lena interrupts, pinching the bridge of her nose and trying to fight against the worsening of her headache. Both sisters cut off mid sentence and look at her. “If you’re going to fight can you do it somewhere out of hearing range?”

Kara leans back over the bed immediately, her fingers brushing hair away from Lena’s temple and rubbing soothing circles over her forehead. “Does your head still hurt?”

Falling into the feeling of Kara touching the pained muscles stretched over her skull, Lena closes her eyes a bit and nods. The pain eases a bit under Kara’s touch and Lena feels like she could fall asleep again if she let herself.

Part of her fights against it. Sleep might only bring nightmares. Dreams wrapped around the memories of the previous night when her mother looked at her with a warm smile, but cold unfeeling eyes, and Kara went limp and weak against her body.

The other part is already sinking into the warm sensation of Kara’s fingers, and the close presence of two people she trusts standing near her bedside.

“Sleep,” Kara murmurs. “You need to heal.”

Lena thinks to protest, but Kara’s pressing a kiss to the crown of her head and it makes her brain feel sluggish with the desire to close her eyes.

“We’ll be right outside,” Alex says softly and Kara squeezes her fingers.

“I’ll be right back,” she tells her.

Her eyes open for a moment to see Kara tugging her sister back outside and speaking in a hushed whisper, but she doesn’t try to listen in. Instead, she slumps back down against the bed and wills her body to heal.

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They spend the next two days at the DEO. Kara refuses to spend that time under the sunlamps, claiming they’re not helping at all and that her powers will come back when they feel like coming back. Somehow, Kara gets Alex to agree, because she doesn’t bother Kara with more talk of healing herself. Instead, Kara camps out in a chair next to Lena’s bed, her feet propped up on the mattress as she reads through some of Lena’s emails for her and types out a few responses.

Lena’s grateful for, at the very least, the close reminder that Kara’s alive and recovering. The thought of having Kara out of sight right now or of being alone runs a kind of fear up her spine that she has no defense against.

The anxiety is only eased by the press of Kara’s feet against her legs and the soft sound of her voice as she reads out her e-mails, the clacking of her keyboard making Lena’s heartbeat stay even.

“You have like ten e-mails and a bunch of messages from a Jack…” Kara squints at the laptop. “Jack Spheer. Oh.”

Kara’s faze freezes in realization, her lips still forming a silent oh. Lena isn’t entirely sure what Kara has realized or knows about Jack, but she can take a guess.

“I’m sure he’s seen the news and is worried,” Lena says softly, watching Kara’s face. “Send him a note that I’m okay and that I’ll call him soon.”
“You still talk to Jack?” Kara asks after a moment of silence, finally looking up to lock eyes with Lena.

“Jack is a good friend of mine,” Lena explains carefully, unsure of where Kara’s reaction is coming from. “He called me last week when he heard about my mother’s trial, but we hadn’t spoken since I came to National City before that.”

Kara nods, turning back to the computer and beginning to type again - presumably the message to Jack. Hopefully.

“Kara,” Lena calls out softly. Kara makes a noise of acknowledgement but keeps her eyes trained on the laptop. “Jack and I-”

“Dated,” Kara finishes for her, looking up again. Her expression is fairly neutral, all things considered, and Lena’s not sure she has a grasp on where this conversation is going or what Kara’s thinking. “I know. It was all over the news.”

Lena arches a brow at that information - she knows, intellectually, that her relationship with Jack had been something well publicized, but she hadn’t considered that it would be news that would have reached Kara.

“He was there for me during a very hard time in my life,” Lena says quietly, trying to gauge what Kara’s reaction. “He made me feel less alone.”

“I would have been there for you,” Kara says in a heated tone that makes Lena’s throat ache. “If you had wanted me.”

It takes Lena aback a bit and though she feels completely underprepared for this kind of emotionally charged conversation, she takes a deep breath and calls Kara over to the bed with a crook of her finger. At least this is something easier to navigate than the constant feeling of lingering dread she’s had since the warehouse. “Come here,” she says softly.

Hesitating only a moment, Kara sets the laptop down on a nearby table and moves to sit on Lena’s bed at her hip. Lena reaches out for Kara’s hands and holds them tightly, grasping at the bracelet on Kara’s wrist with her index finger.

“We’ve been over this,” she starts and Kara sighs, looks away.

“I know. I’m sorry.”

“I don’t mean it like that,” Lena says, catching Kara’s eye again. “I just mean that...I always wanted you. Even then, when I thought that...I couldn’t have you, shouldn’t have you. I wish you understood that. I didn’t stop wanting you or loving you just because we were broken up.”

Kara squeezes Lena’s fingers back and her shoulders sag a bit. “I do understand that,” she says and at Lena’s skeptical look she clarifies, “I’m trying really hard to understand that.”

“Jack was my best friend and he cared about me.” Kara watches her with an unreadable expression.

“You’re easy to care about,” Kara says softly and that alone almost breaks Lena’s fragile grip on her emotions. Everything feels so raw right now that the slightest sort of feeling is liable to set her off.

“I’m glad he’s still willing to be my friend, frankly,” she says with an ache in her chest when she thinks about her relationship with Jack. “He’s done nothing but care about me and I used him. I
was so selfish. I don’t know if I’ll ever forgive myself for that.”

Kara’s brow furrows and her tone is almost defensive when she says, “I’m sure you didn’t use him.”

“I did,” Lena insists, looking at Kara with serious eyes. “I was still - so in love with you, and Jack and I dated for years and I lead him on. As if he could ever take your place. I just didn’t want to be alone and he loved me. I knew I couldn’t give him everything that he wanted. Everything he deserved.”

“Because of me?” Kara asks quietly, searching Lena’s eyes.

“The kinds of things he wanted,” Lena explains. “The sorts of things he should have gotten out of a relationship. I had already given those to you. I just didn’t have it in me to be a good girlfriend or anything else.” Lena laughs a little. “I was barely functioning as a good Luthor Corp employee, much less a romantic partner.”

Kara’s face looks a little steely at the explicit mention of her relationship with Jack, but after a moment it softens a bit. “I had a lot of failed first dates for a similar reason,” she admits, and the blush on her face charms Lena.

Lena smiles, her nose scrunching just a little. “I can’t say I’m sorry for that,” she replies with a soft laugh that Kara mimics.

“Kind of hard to top our first date anyway,” Kara says and the smile that spreads over her face is more relaxed now, warm and easy.

Shrugging a shoulder, Lena smiles coyly. “I don’t know. I’m much more a fan of our fifth date.”

It takes a second for the memory to fully get to Kara, but when it does the faint flush in her cheeks deepens and her eyes go wide. “Lena,” she hisses as if to chastise, but Lena just laughs.

“What? Bowling? That’s hardly scandalous,” Lena teases. “What were you thinking about?”

Kara blows out an exasperated breath and rolls her eyes. “Nothing,” she sighs, but she’s still blushing. The memory of finally kissing Kara on the steps outside her dorm and then later, pushing Kara against the couch and exploring her lips more fully, does wonders to soothe the aches in her soul. As does the smile they both share as the memory passes through them.

Letting it sit there for a few comfortable beats, Lena squeezes Lena’s fingers again. “Are you okay about Jack now?”

Kara waits a moment, as if to consider before answering with a sheepish, “I’m not trying to be weird about it.”

“I know you’re not.”

“He’s just so good looking and smart and rich and British and he rescues puppies and makes prosthetics for sick children and I’m sure your mother loved him and-”

Lena laughs a bit. “How do you know all that?”

“Know what?”

“All that about Jack?” Lena clarifies.
Kara shrugs. “I don’t know. He’s been in the news, like I said.” Lena just gives her a look with a skeptical furrow of her brow until Kara adds, “And I saw that TED talk you guys did together about ethics in bioengineering.”

“You did?”

“Yeah,” Kara says looking away. “It was good.”

“Jack is a good man,” Lena says quietly with a soft smile and she tugs Kara’s hand until she’s looking at her again. “But he’s not you.”

Kara’s quiet for a bit, her lips thinly pressed together before she shakes her head and blows out a breath. “I’m not - I mean, I know that…” She pauses, collects herself. “You’re obviously entitled to date whomever you want. Especially when we weren’t even together anymore. I don’t mean to keep going around in circles about this.”

“I know it’s hard,” Lena reassures her and with a self-deprecating chuckle she adds, “I am only just starting to feel normal around James.”

Kara’s brows come together at that. “But James and I…”

“I know you don’t feel like you dated him,” Lena says. “But that doesn’t really make a difference when I think about how you almost did.” Kara makes a face, but Lena continues with a soft, “It’s not rational, but feelings rarely are.”

Silence stretches for a moment. “I really am okay that you’re friends with Jack,” she says. “If he’s important to you, then he’s important to me.”

“It’s really okay if you’re not okay with it,” Lena says and when Kara arches a brow she adds, “It wouldn’t change the fact that I’m friends with him, but I still care about how you feel about the situation. If something’s bothering you like this then we can fix it. Together. I want to know how you feel about things, even if you feel like you shouldn’t feel that way.”

When Kara smiles it’s genuine and warm. “All I feel is happy that someone was there for you when you felt like you were all alone.”

It spreads contentment across Lena’s skin and she reaches out to push Kara’s glasses up her nose from where they’ve started to slip down. Kara follows the motion with her eyes until they cross. “You’re very cute,” Lena observes in a quiet murmur and Kara’s blush intensifies.

“Lena,” she admonishes with a scoff as she stands up from the bed and paces over to pick her laptop back up.

“What?” Lena teases, dropping back against the bed and smiling fondly at Kara. “Can’t handle the truth, Kara Zor-El?”

Kara drops back into her chair with a roll of her eyes and props her feet back on Lena’s bed. “I’m the Girl of Steel,” she says, opening the laptop back up. “I can handle anything.”

“Everything except Corby’s thirty second wing challenge,” Lena says and Kara lets out an indignant sound as she glares at Lena.

“That challenge is rigged,” she insists, sounding just like she had in college, gulping down water cup after water cup and with sauce smeared all over her face.
“Sure,” Lena replies with an indulgent smile.

“Lex agreed with me,” Kara grumbles, eyes going back to the computer.

It flashes memory into Lena’s head and she sits up a bit, her hand brushing against her side. “Kara,” she says slowly, looking around to see if anyone else is in earshot.

Kara makes a hum of attention, but doesn’t look up from her laptop.

“When I was in the vault - or when you brought me back here I suppose...there was an envelope,” Lena tells her and that pulls Kara’s eyes up. “Tucked into my sweater.”

Kara leans over her chair into a small bag sitting there and fishes around for a bit. “This envelope?”

The same white object Lena had taken from the vault is perched between Kara’s fingers. “Yes.”

“It fell out when they were moving you around,” Kara explains, standing up again to hand it over. “Alex picked it up and gave it to me.”

Relief floods through her and she snatches the envelope from Kara’s hands, turning it over.

“What is it?” Kara asks.

Lena arches a brow. “You didn’t look?”

A slight pout forms on Kara’s lips. “I respect your privacy,” she says.

“It’s from Lex,” Lena says softly and Kara’s eyes go hard when they look back at Lena. “It was in the vault, with all the - weapons.”

“You’re sure? That it was from him I mean?”

“Yeah,” Lena breathes, nodding and looking back to the familiar scrawl of her brother’s handwriting.

“What do you think it is?”

Lena shrugs, turns it over again. It’s thin and light and she can’t make anything out through the envelope. It could just be a letter, but it could be something more. Lena’s not sure she’s prepared to know either way. “I’m not sure.”

Silence stretches for a moment before Kara asks, “Are you going to open it?”

Lena takes a deep breath. “I’m not sure,” she repeats with a little self deprecating laugh.

Kara smiles, reaches out to take Lena’s free hand in her own. “Well I’m here for you if you need me.”

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On the morning of the second day, Alex walks into the room with three large paper bags radiating a smell that makes Lena’s mouth water. It occurs to her that she’s barely eaten apart from DEO rationed meals since she got here. A look at Kara tells her that the realization is shared.

Kara jumps up out of her chair and grabs the bags from her sister who just gives her an indulgent smile. “I see that lack of powers doesn’t equate to a lack of appetite.”
Reaching into one of the bags, Kara pulls out a packaged cheeseburger with a gleeful expression as she falls back down into her chair. “You can take away my strength, you can take away my powers, but you can’t take away my love of food,” she announces proudly as she unwraps the item in her hands and takes a huge bite.

Alex and Lena share a laugh before Alex reaches into one of the bags Kara has commandeered and pulls out a small plastic box. “Sushi for you,” she tells Lena, handing it over. Lena feels like she might cry at the mere thoughtfulness of the gesture and she curses the vulnerability of her emotions ever since the vault.

“Thanks, Alex,” she says softly, taking the food and watching as Alex pulls a chair up close to the bed and adopts a more professional expression.

Lena begins to think that the food might not be just a friendly gesture, but could also serve the purpose of softening them up for whatever it is Alex has to say. Something serious from the look on her face.

After a deep breath, Alex glances at where Kara is starting in on her second cheeseburger and says, “We need to debrief everything that happened.”

Kara straightens in her chair, eyes Lena with concerned eyes before narrowing them towards her sister. “Now?”

Alex just nods, undeterred by Kara’s glare. “We’ve put it off long enough,” she says.

“Shouldn’t we have done that right away?” Kara asks. “When everything was fresh?”

“Well, sure. Except Lena had head trauma and wasn’t really in the mood to answer any questions.” Alex sends her sister a pointed look. “Or so you kept reminding everyone that tried to talk to her yesterday.”

That seems to mollify Kara slightly, who slumps back in her chair with a shrug. Lena chuckles, charmed by the unapologetic look on Kara’s face.

“What would you like to know?” Lena asks, directing the question at Alex, but sending Kara a fond smile.

“The warehouse your mother took you to, it was one of your brother’s storehouses?”

“That’s what she told me,” Lena says with a nod.

“I guess we could start with an inventory of the space? Can you remember everything he had in there?”

The question prompts a cascade of memory and she runs a hand subconsciously over her side. She’s so overwhelmed by everything drifting back to her that she’s distracted from answering Alex’s question for long enough that Kara sits forward and sets a hand on Lena’s ankle. “Hey, you okay? You don’t have to do this if you don’t want to.”

It startles her back to the moment and she blinks at Kara for a moment, shaking her head to clear it. “No, sorry,” she says, clearing her throat. “I’m fine. Just trying to remember everything.”

“Take your time,” Alex says kindly.

Lena goes through a list of what she can recall from the vault. Lex’s warsuit - a detail that puts both
Alex and Kara on edge - the atomic axe, a handful of small grenades, some small device her mother seemed fascinated with and -

“Something called a black mercy,” Lena adds casually, but both sisters go eerily still. Alex glances at Kara, who has become stock still, and is staring steadfastly down at the third cheeseburger in her hands.

“A Black Mercy. Okay,” Alex says with a slight clear of her throat that sets Lena on edge.


Her gaze bounces between Alex and Kara who share a significant look between each other.

“Nothing fun. It’s a good thing it was destroyed,” Alex says slowly and Lena’s eyes narrow. “Let’s hope there aren’t more out there.”

“Nothing fun?” Lena says with a skeptical arch to her brow.

“It’s just not something we’d like to deal with,” Alex says, but her voice is hesitant as if she knows that won’t satisfy as a response. Kara is still blinking down at the ground, and she sets the cheeseburger in her hands back in the bag it came from. Kara denying herself food is confirmation enough that whatever the hell a Black Mercy is goes far beyond nothing fun.

“Kara,” Lena says, and Kara blows out a heavy breath as Lena zones in on her.

“It’s an alien parasite,” Kara tells her, fingers twisting together in front of her. Alex watches her sister with a concerned expression that makes Lena even more nervous about this Black Mercy nonsense.

“Kara was attacked by one last year,” Alex adds, finally looking at Lena. “It was used to distract her while...” Alex trails off as if she’s uncomfortable telling this story and Lena tries to think of what she could be missing, tries to remember the stories she remembers hearing about Supergirl and National City last year.

She glances at Kara just in time to catch the wince that crosses her face. “What happened? What does it do?”

“Parasite things,” Kara answers vaguely and this time Lena doesn’t suppress her scoff.

She sits up a little, eyebrows pulled together. “Feel free to clue me in on why you’re both being so evasive at any time. You know how much being kept in the dark thrills me.”

“It attaches to a host and sort of mentally imprisons them,” Alex says, looking at her sister carefully. Kara still hasn’t necessarily met anyone’s eyes.

“Mentally imprisons them?”

“It traps them in a fantasy world, basically. A world that the host desires most, and while it does that, it drains energy from them. Kara was basically comatose,” Alex explains and Lena glances to where Kara is studying the far wall, lips pressed together in a thin line. “Killing the Black Mercy kills the host. The only way to defeat it is if the host rejects the fantasy.”

“So you figured it out and rejected the fantasy?” Lena asks, trying to draw Kara’s attention back to the conversation. It doesn’t sound nearly as dangerous as some of the other things they’ve encountered nor the things Lena knows Kara’s fought before, but from the look on both sister’s
faces a Black Mercy may as well be a nuclear apocalypse.

Kara turns her gaze to Lena, finally, and her blue eyes are dark, shadowed and unhappy, and a beat passes before she answers. “Sort of. Alex came in and got me.”

Lena raises a questioning brow at Alex until the older sister clarifies. “We figured out how to link up with her mentally after we realized she wasn’t coming out of it, and I just...had to convince her it wasn’t real. And then it was over.”

It’s unclear to her what’s threaded the air of unease in the room. “What was the fantasy?”

Kara’s jaw goes tight and Alex straightens, but before either of them can answer, M’gann is poking her head in the room. “Hi, Lena,” she says with a soft smile. She turns to Alex. “J’onn wants to talk to you.”

Alex looks at Kara for a moment, then Lena before deciding something with a nod. “Right, we can finish this later,” she says to Lena and retreats after M’gann.

It leaves her and Kara in the room and the unanswered question sitting between them. Lena waits silently to see if Kara will answer it, but Kara just looks around the room a bit, avoiding Lena’s gaze.

“Kara,” Lena tries slowly. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Kara says, shaking something away with her head and focusing on Lena with a smile that Lena doesn’t quite buy into. “The Black Mercy stuff just isn’t a good memory.”

“Prisons of the mind rarely are, I’d imagine,” Lena comments softly and Kara laughs a little.

“Yeah. Rejecting the fantasy was...hard.”

“Was it Krypton?” Lena ventures. “Your parents?”

Kara’s face pinches a bit and she moves to sit at the foot of Lena’s bed, her hand resting on the shape of Lena’s ankle under the blankets. “Not exactly,” she says, so carefully that realization starts to dawn on Lena.

“Oh.”

When Kara looks up it’s with a hesitant set to her mouth and worry around her eyes. “It’s not what you think,” she says hastily and Lena arches a brow.

“What do I think?”

Kara’s mouth gapes a moment as if she can’t find the words before she presses her lips into a frustrated line. “I just mean that…” Kara shakes her head and scrapes a palm down her face. “I don’t know what I mean.”

Empathy overcomes her at that point and she reaches over until she’s holding Kara’s hand. “Hey, it’s okay,” she says with an encouraging smile that finally gets Kara’s expression to soften. “I know a little bit about how sometimes the good dreams can be worse than the nightmares. Especially waking up from them.”

Kara’s eyes widen at that, her nostrils flaring in reaction before she scoots forward. “Lena,” she says softly and it pricks heat at the backs of Lena’s eyes. They do not need to go back to an
emotional devastating place. Especially not right now when Lena’s just recovering from a head wound and Kara’s still weak from kryptonite poisoning.

“That’s behind us,” she says emphatically, squeezing Kara’s fingers. “Let’s not go back there.”

Kara searches Lena’s eyes for a few seconds. “Okay,” she says slowly.

“Unless you want to talk about it,” Lena offers, but her chest already feels so tight it’s painful and all she wants to do right now is soak in the quiet pleasure of just being with Kara. Alive and whole and safe for the moment.

Kara shakes her head, scoots closer on the bed until she’s close enough to kiss Lena and she leans forward to do just that.

--

Maggie shows up later in the day looking incredibly sheepish as she returns a bag of Lena’s personal effects. “I was wrong. I’m sorry,” she offers with a shrug of her shoulder as Lena fishes her phone out and tosses the bag full of her clothes to the side.

“Don’t be,” Lena dismisses, not willing to get into anything serious with Maggie. They hardly know each other anyway and Lena’s used to the kind of suspicion she saw in Maggie’s eyes that night in her office. “You were doing your job. If anyone understands that, it’s me.”

Maggie glances to where Kara is pacing outside the room, phone at her ear. “I’m not so sure Kara agrees with you.”

It makes Lena laugh a bit, affection and exasperation in the sound. “Kara doesn’t always understand how these things work,” she says and it comes out a little cynical around the edges.

Maggie quirks a brow, her lips pursed a moment. “Yeah, but Alex does and she wasn’t too happy with me either.”

Lena feels her throat go a little thick with emotion, but she plays it off with a soft smile and another chuckle. “The Danvers sisters,” she says sagely.

“Yeah,” Maggie agrees with her own smile.

Lena glances to where Alex is approaching Kara outside the room and remembers something Alex had said years ago. “They should come with a warning,” she adds.

It makes Maggie laugh just as Kara and Alex enter the room, Alex eying them both warily like she’s not sure what she’s walking into. Kara doesn’t come too close to Maggie, but winds her way over to Lena’s bed and plops down on the side of it, effectively blocking Lena from where Maggie’s standing. Lena can’t help but smile at the protective way Kara crosses her arms over her chest and glances at Maggie with a distrustful expression.

“Kara,” Maggie says, and Kara hums, a wary look on her face. “Thanks for not throwing me into space.”

Somehow, Alex finds this hilarious, because she bursts into laughter, and Lena finds herself joining the sound. Kara mostly looks sheepish, but nods anyway, clearly picking up the apology underneath the words.

--
After some amount of negotiating and after Lena starts to feel strong enough to get out of bed without feeling dizzy or faint - the cut on her temple finally healing over - Alex releases Kara and Lena from the DEO. They take a regulation black van to Kara’s apartment only after Lena realizes there’s probably press or worse camped outside her building.

She did break out of jail after all.

Exhaustion is still thrumming across her skin and she can tell Kara isn’t much better. Sleeping at a secret government base for two days will do that to a person. They lean against each other as they make their way as stealthily as possible into Kara’s building and find their way up to her apartment.

“Tired?” Kara asks, her arm around Lena’s waist as they step inside. Kara drops the duffel bag hanging off her shoulder onto the ground inside the doorway and Lena disengages from her hold to head towards the kitchen.

“Tell me you have some kind of wine in here,” Lena says and Kara laughs slightly. There is indeed a bottle of wine on Kara’s kitchen counter, but Kara plucks it out of her hands before she can open it. “You shouldn’t drink,” Kara points out with a light, barely there tap to her head.

Lena sighs, but is grateful for the reminder. “I feel like I could sleep for a week,” she says with a hint of complaint. “How is that even possible when sleeping is all I feel like I’ve been doing?”

“I know what you mean,” Kara says, sagging back against the counter and taking a deep breath. Lena steps in close, traces a finger across Kara’s brow. “How are you feeling? Still…” Lena makes a gesture with her hand that Kara seems to understand. She’s once again reminded of how the astronomy club had made a no charades rule two months into their freshman year for half a second, and it makes her smile, sinking in closer to Kara.


“Yeah?” Lena asks.

Kara shrugs again, reaches out to put two hands on Lena’s hips and lifts until Lena’s feet leave the ground. She lets out a surprised sound, but smiles. It looks easy from Lena’s perspective, but she can tell it’s not as easy for Kara as usual by the way her lips twist in displeasure.

“They’ll come back,” Lena reassures her, falling forward against Kara’s body until their hips are slotting together and her arms wrap around Kara’s neck.

“Not fast enough,” Kara complains and Lena laughs softly, charmed by the pout forming on Kara’s lips.

Instead of responding, Lena just noses forward until their lips connect, drawing strength from the powerful feel of kissing a woman she’s loved for years. Kara feels alive and warm and solid in her arms and it does more to heal any aches and pains than a month in the DEO medical facility ever could.

Kara tugs her in close, still lifted up off the ground and smiles against Lena’s mouth, her fingers sliding from Lena’s hips to the small of her back, up under the soft sweatshirt she’d worn home from the DEO. “We should probably go to bed,” Kara says with an exaggerated amount of
seriousness in her voice, but she doesn’t stop kissing Lena, soft presses between words.

“Is that so?” Lena asks with a teasing quirk of her brow. Kara begins to back them up in the direction of the bedroom.

“We’re recovering,” Kara answers with a nod. “Didn’t Alex say we needed lots of rest?”

Lena laughs. “I can, with some measure of certainty, say that Alex would not approve of what you have in mind.”

Kara’s nose scrunches up, but she smiles. “How do you know what I have in mind?”

Both of Lena’s eyebrows raise this time and she makes a glance over her shoulder to where one of Kara’s hands has left the other to wander below the waistband of Lena’s jeans. “I think I have some idea.”

Kara concedes the point with a half roll of her eyes and a laugh as she walks them into the bedroom. “I know we’re both way too tired for anything,” she admits and Lena feels the truth of that in the back of her eyes. “But I also know that nothing would feel better to me right now than you and me and that bed for at least six hours. Even if it’s just sleeping.”

“It’s the middle of the afternoon,” Lena protests lightly with a short laugh that Kara shrugs off.

“Do you actually care?” Kara asks with a self assured cock of her eyebrow that melts something in Lena’s gut.

“I care about my sleep schedule,” she says half-heartedly. Kara’s hands feel hot and full of intent on her back.

“All I care about right now is you,” Kara says with a sincerity that’s always weakened Lena.

The backs of her legs hit the edge of Kara’s bed and she feels a swell of emotion bubble up in her chest. The memory of the encounter with her mother, of the cold back of the van, the jail, the way Kara looked writhing on the floor in pain and how close both of them came to death comes spiraling back into her brain threatening to take over. She shakes the thoughts out of her head and focuses on the blue of Kara’s eyes, her hands clutching at Kara’s cheeks as she leans forward and kisses her again.

“I love you,” she murmurs against Kara’s mouth and Kara smiles wide and easy.

“I love you too,” Kara says and Lena can’t stop the heat at the back of her eyes.

“I’m so sorry she tried to-”

Kara cuts her off with a quiet shushing and a finger at her lips. “Hey, don’t think about that,” she says softly and she lowers them both onto the mattress. “We’re both here and we’re both okay.”

“Yeah,” Lena says, but she chokes a little on the word, her throat feeling scratchy with the sudden influx of emotion.

“I won’t let her hurt you,” Kara adds with quiet conviction.

Lena shakes her head, her fingers reaching out to tangle with Kara’s. “No, I won’t let her hurt you,” she clarifies and before Kara can say anything else, Lena moves forward and silences her with a kiss.
It’s like all the adrenaline and emotion and despair of the past few days catches up with her all at once now that she’s safe and far from prying eyes and Kara’s kiss swallows a sob that threatens to break through. Her chest feels like it’s cracking and she doesn’t want to cry, but she is nonetheless.

“Hey,” Kara says softly, swiping tears away with her thumb. “You’re okay, everything’s okay.”

Lena knows that, intellectually at least. Everything is as okay as it can be for the moment, but she can’t get the image of her mother’s face out of her mind, the cold way she observed Lena in the back of the van and how no matter how hard she tries she can’t stop that tiny part of her that will always seek affection from a woman that’s been nothing but cold to her all her life.

“I’m sorry,” Lena says, squeezing her eyes shut to try and stop them from leaking.

“Don’t be sorry,” Kara says, hands still at Lena’s checks. “You can cry if you need to.”

“I don’t want to,” Lena replies and she lets out a watery laugh.

“We just went through a lot of stuff,” Kara tells her. “Give yourself a second to break down.”

Lena takes a deep shaky breath. “It might take more than a second,” she admits and Kara smiles, pushing forward until they’re falling onto the bed and Kara’s pulling her closer.

“Take all the seconds you need,” she tells Lena, pressing a warm solid kiss to her forehead. “I’ll be here.”

Lena pushes her face against Kara’s neck and lets herself fall apart.

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It’s Kara’s birthday.

Or at least her Earth Birthday, as she had always referred to it, and Lena’s trying really hard to just forget that fact, but the minute she recognizes the date glaring at her from the calendar on her computer she remembers. She remembers Kara bouncing into her dorm room with a half-bag of marshmallows, smelling like the woods, telling Lena all about how much fun they had, how much Kara had missed her, how she should come next year -

It’s been over two years since she last saw Kara, but as she sits here at her desk and stares at the date on the screen her chest aches just as much as it did the day she left her.

All day, it’s nearly impossible to escape thoughts about what Kara is doing, if she’s with Alex, if they’re having fun, if someone made her a cake, if Kara’s happy. On her lunch break, for an anxious moment she considers searching Kara’s name just to see if anything will come up.

The thoughts bombard her so quickly that her eyes start to sting a little with heat and she nearly slams her laptop shut when the door to her office opens unexpectedly and Jack walks through.

He comes up short at the sound of her slapping a hand on her computer and eyes her with a half-grin on his face and a laugh dropping out of it. “Looking at pornography in the workplace, Lena? How scandalous.”

The levity of the comment helps her regain some kind of composure and she manages an eyeroll and a short chuckle. “Honestly, Jack.”

“You okay?” He asks as he comes forward and drops into one of her office chairs, legs crossing.
There’s still an easy smile on his face, but his eyes narrow a bit as he regards her and she imagines he can see more than most people even if he can’t see it all.

“Of course,” she answers, straightening with a slight clear of her throat and shuffling papers on her desk. “You just surprised me.”

“I came to take you out to lunch,” he tells her, still looking at her as if there’s something to figure out. “I thought maybe we could do some preparation for dinner with your mother tonight. Perhaps tonight is the night I come up with a satisfactory answer about my company’s five year plan.”

The reminder of their evening plans makes her head drop back a little as she lets out an exhausted breath. She had completely forgotten. “Just what my day needs,” she mumbles.

“Long day already? It’s just past noon.”

Her elbow props up on her desk and she lets her head fall onto her palm as she gives Jack a soft tired smile. “I’m beginning to think that my life is just a series of long days, one after the other.”

He laughs at that. “That’s what vodka is for, love,” he says with a grin that eases some of the ache in Lena’s chest, but only some.

“Indeed,” she agrees. “Please point me in the direction of this vodka.”

He stands and rounds her desk to extend his hand. “Gladly.”

They’re nearly done with their three-martini lunch when Jack gets a more serious look on his face and regards her over the rim of his glass. “Are you sure you don’t want to talk about it?”

“Talk about what?” Lena asks, stabbing at her salad with a fork and quirking her brow at him.

“What ever has you so somber today?”

She startles at that and attempts to laugh him off, but his expression doesn’t waver. “I’m not somber today.”

“Lena, I’m here for you if you want to talk about anything or if you want to rant or cry or-”

“Jack, I’m fine,” Lena interrupts a little more forceful than necessary as she drops her silverware onto her plate. The last thing she needs right now is to talk about anything. In fact, being with Jack is proving a perfect distraction that confronting her emotions would only destroy. She doesn’t need to expose that part of her heart right now. Especially when they’re facing dinner with her mother later that evening.

“Is it seeing your mother tonight? Because we can cancel or-”

“What part of I’m fine are you not understanding?” The look on his face seems undeterred by the steel in her voice and she’s a little surprised. Most people cow under one glare from her or a sharp word, but Jack merely continues to stare at her as if his expression alone will convince her to soften.

Little does he know that there’s really only one person in the world that’s capable of doing that and she’s halfway across the country doing who knows what. Hopefully waking up to a bright sun and having a good Earth birthday.

Or maybe Jack does know that and that’s why he’s looking at her like she needs a shoulder to cry
“You can be not fine with me,” he says quietly and she sighs, looking down at her salad for a moment.

Absently, she rubs at the bare skin of her wrist and takes a deep breath. “Can I just be not fine later?” She asks when she finally picks her eyes back up from the table. “Tonight, after I’ve already dealt with whatever I’ve done to disappoint my mother this time and I’ve had at least an entire bottle of overpriced wine?”

Jack looks at her for a moment longer, seems to consider that while taking another sip of his drink. “Of course,” he says quietly but with a kind smile. “We can get ice cream.”

“No,” she says sharply because all ice cream makes her think of is Kara and if three drinks at lunch can make her eyes this watery at just the passing thought of her than she doesn’t need that after an entire dinner with her mother.

Concern etches back into Jack’s expression at that, but he remains quiet as she manages a soft smile.

“I wouldn’t say no to a late night brandy alexander.”

He laughs and Lena loves him for the smile on his face. “Ice cream drinks,” he says. “I think I can make that happen.”

--

Eventually, after Lena feels all her tears have been exhausted and Kara’s held onto her and cried as well, they both fall into a deep sleep, entwined with each other. When Lena wakes up, she feels more rested than the entirety of her stay in the DEO medical bay.

Kara is draped over her side, anchoring her onto the mattress and snoring softly against Lena’s collarbone. It’s still dark outside and a quick glance at the clock on the bedside table tells her it’s late into the evening. Their sleep schedules are entirely ruined, but Lena can’t find it in herself to care. The nap was certainly cathartic, if the relaxed way her chest feels is any indication.

Knowing she won’t be able to move as long as Kara’s passed out on top of her, she wakes her up with soft strokes of Kara’s hair, a light scratching against her scalp until Kara’s shifting and mumbling her way into consciousness.

“Time is it?” Kara murmurs, scooting closer to Lena as she starts to wake up. Her face presses down into Lena’s neck, her lips moving against the skin there.

“Late,” Lena answers quietly, pressing a kiss to the crown of Kara’s head. Kara burrows closer somehow, her arm slinging across Lena’s waist and slipping up under her shirt, tracing the skin of her hip.

“M’hungry,” is the next thing Kara says that’s halfway understandable.

Lena laughs. “You’re always hungry, darling.”

Kara doesn’t deny it, just picks her head up to smile at Lena before moving off of her to roll onto her side, elbow propping her up against the mattress. “How are you doing?”

Lena traces her fingers down Kara’s jaw lightly. “I’m okay,” she tells her and Kara smiles.
“Good,” Kara says with a definitive nod, her palm sliding over Lena’s stomach warmly. “Do you know what would make you even better right now?”

A laugh skips up her throat. “I’m guessing it’s food related.”

Kara’s eyes light up and a teasing grin catches on her face before she presses a quick kiss to Lena’s cheek and then vaults over her out of bed. “It’s food!”

Laughing at Kara’s sudden enthusiasm, Lena can’t do much else but follow Kara towards the kitchen.

--

They find something to cook in Kara’s kitchen quite easily. The cabinets are all stocked to their maximum threshold and Lena makes a mental note to go grocery shopping for her own apartment later that week.

It feels comfortable to lay out the necessary ingredients and find the correct cookware to make their dinner. She and Kara move around each other with the ease of two people used to being in the same space together.

Until Kara cuts herself while chopping an onion and stares at her hand for a few seconds in fascination before yelping so loudly that Lena nearly cuts her own hand. “Kara, what the hell?” Lena says, bringing a hand to her chest.

Suddenly a palm is shoved in front of Lena’s eyeline and after her vision focuses she sees bright red blood pouring out of a small cut there. “Lena, I’m bleeding,” she says and it comes out with a kind of pained wonderment that Lena almost understands.

She’s never actually seen Kara bleed this close up before and it reminds her of the trickle of blood she caught sight of after Metallo blasted Kara with a ray of his kryptonite. It takes her a good few seconds to even register what she’s looking at.

Taking a deep breath, Lena laughs a little and grabs Kara’s wrist, directing her to the sink and flipping the water on. “You’re fine, darling,” Lena says, focused on Kara’s hand.

“I can see that much, bleeding,” Kara says but it’s not and Lena almost laughs. Kara’s barely scratched herself and as soon as she gets most of the blood off her palm, Lena can see that it’s already healing.

“It’s just a cut,” she repeats. “It will heal. Quickly, from the looks of it.”

“I’m dying,” Kara insists with wide eyes though there’s a hint of tease in them that would make Lena laugh if the thought of Kara’s death wasn’t something so visceral and real to her lately.

“Can we not talk about the possibility of you dying?” Lena says, and she means it to sound sort of joking, but her voice cracks in the middle of it. Kara lets out a soft surprised puff of air and when
Lena glances up at her, her gaze is soft and understanding.

“Humans are so fragile,” Kara mutters, waiting while Lena grabs a bandage from a nearby cabinet and affixes it to Kara’s hand. “How do you live like this?”

“We survive,” Lena tells her, rolling her eyes at Kara.

A whiny sound escapes Kara’s lips until Lena manages presses a soft kiss to her palm near the wound and smiles at the way Kara softens. “Better?”

Kara makes a show of looking unimpressed, shrugging. “Not sure. You should probably try again.”

Lena laughs, but she presses up on her toes and kisses Kara’s lips, smiling when Kara moves her uninjured hand to grip around Lena’s waist and pull them together.

--

The next morning, Lena decides she doesn’t need to head into the office just yet and tries to convince herself that the almost inescapable need to be near Kara at all times isn’t what chiefly informs that decision.

It’s still important she check in on L Corp so she makes camp at Kara’s kitchen counter. Her laptop, tablet and a few files she had Kara retrieve from her apartment get spread out over the space and she spends a few hours scanning through her e-mail. A quick call to Jess takes care of the majority of her messages and she calls Lana after that.

“I’m so happy to hear you’re okay,” Lana says with a fondness that’s becoming familiar. Lena takes a moment to appreciate how much her life has changed in the past year.

“I am, but I’d like to meet with you later this week and go through some things if you’re available.”

“Of course, boss. Just tell me when,” Lana replies easily.

The soft thud of Kara’s feet announce her presence as she flies through the open window of the living room and Lena turns to see Supergirl holding two cups of coffee from Noonan’s and wearing a soft smile. Kara had only just that morning realized most of her powers were at some level restored - flying chief among them - and had decided an early morning patrol around the city would be a good way to test them out.

“Sometime this weekend,” Lena says to Lana as she watches Kara’s approach. A warm feeling spreads over her chest at the sight of it. “I’ll buy you lunch.”

“Sounds great.”

Lena hangs the phone up and takes the offered coffee from Kara, arching her neck when Kara bends down to kiss her briefly. They’ve only been separated not more than a half hour, but Lena already feels undeniably more at ease now that Kara’s back in sight.

“Hi,” Kara murmurs into the kiss she’s still pressing to Lena’s back.

“Hi,” Lena laughs back, reaching her free hand out to curl around Kara’s neck and keep them together for a few more pleasurable seconds.
Eventually, they break apart and Kara’s all smiles and flushed cheeks. It’s a sight that reassures Lena in her decision to spend the day at the apartment.

“One sec,” Kara says and in a quick blur of motion that’s only slightly slower than normal Kara is out of her suit and back into the clothes she slept in - soft short shorts and a worn t-shirt that Lena recognizes immediately - *Metropolis Robotics Club* etched across the front. “Who was on the phone?” Kara asks, picking her coffee back up and pulling the lid off the top.

“Lana,” Lena answers, taking a grateful sip of her own coffee and turning back to her computer. “I’m going to have her help me search for the rest of Lex’s vaults.”

Sliding up onto the counter, Kara presses her lips together in consideration. “You trust her that much?”

It’s a relatively odd thing to ask and it reminds Lena of the strange meeting the three of them had months ago in the basement labs at L Corp. She leans back for a moment to observe the casual expression on Kara’s face that she reads through easily. “You know, you never did tell me why you were so strange about Lana.”

Kara scoffs, but it’s too forced to be believable. “I’m not strange about her.”

“I thought maybe it was jealousy-”

“I’m not *jealous*,” Kara denies vehemently and this time it’s more believable.

“But you acted strange when you found out she worked at L Corp.”

Kara just stares at her a moment, lips tight as if debating something. “She dated Clark.”

Lena’s brows pull together. “Clark Kent?”

Kara nods. “Yeah.”

“And?”

Kara looks uncharacteristically nervous now, her eyes flitting away briefly and her fingers tapping against her coffee cup. “There’s something I haven’t told you,” she admits softly and Lena arches a surprised brow.

“Did you date Lana too?” Lena asks with a teasing quirk of her lips, hoping the levity of the question will soothe Kara.

“No,” Kara laughs, but she shoots Lena a look that conveys be serious.

“What is it then?”

Kara’s nose scrunches up for a moment before she blows out a breath. “Clark Kent is my cousin.”

The information startles Lena a bit and she reaches forward to set her coffee down. “He is?”

“Yes,” Kara says and it’s so emphatic that Lena thinks maybe she’s missing something. It takes a moment before it occurs to her and her eyes go wide.

“How many cousins do you have?”

Kara looks at her a moment. “Just the one.”
The pieces come together then and it’s so obvious that Lena doesn’t understand how she didn’t see it before. “Clark Kent is Superman.”

Kara nods. “Kal-El,” she says and Lena just blinks at her for a moment as her brain scrambles around this new knowledge. A thousand memories get recolored in her mind.

“Does Lana know?” Lena asks because that seems like that might be the reason this has come up.

“I think so?” Kara says, but she’s unsure. “Kal and I never talked about it much. I just know they were together and it didn’t end well. Something complicated about it that I can’t remember. I always assumed it was the Superman thing.”

A memory flashes across Lena’s mind suddenly. “When?”

“When what?”

“When were they together?”

Kara’s brows pull together in thought. “Summer after our freshman year, I think. I can’t really remember. Why?”

Lena shakes her head, not wanting to venture out on pure coincidence. She makes a note to see what she can glean from her lunch with Lana. “No reason, just a thought.”

“Looks serious,” Kara observes, poking a finger forward against the crinkle in Lena’s forehead until Lena swats it away. “Are you mad I didn’t tell you?”

“About Clark?” Lena clarifies and waits for Kara to nod. “No, of course not,” she says, reaching a hand out for Kara’s knee. “I understand why that would be a secret you’d protect.”

“It’s not because I don’t trust you,” Kara tells her.

“Darling, you don’t have to defend yourself to me,” Lena says, standing until she’s pushing between Kara’s legs and wrapping her arms around her neck. “I know you trust me.”

Kara abandons her coffee to the counter in favor of sliding her hands over Lena’s hips.

She’s still in what Kara’s always deemed her lazy clothes - yoga pants and a soft sweatshirt from college - and it feels so comfortable that Lena wishes she could spend the rest of the week like this. It’s warm and good, to be close and be together after the awful few days they’ve had.

Lena doesn’t hesitate before kissing Kara, slotting their hips together in a way that radiates intention. It’s only been a few days since she’s touched Kara, really touched her, but it feels like ages after all they’ve been through.

Kara responds immediately, her fingers sliding up under Lena’s sweatshirt to trace across her spine and then dip lower beneath her pants.

After a few moments of just kissing, pressing together and smiling against each other, Kara slides off the counter and moves to pick Lena up off the ground. The ease with which she goes through the motion makes Lena think more and more of her strength is returning and she sighs contentedly at the way Kara holds her.

“We should probably go back to bed,” Kara says with mock seriousness and Lena laughs, scratches her nails against Kara’s scalp.
“Definitely,” she agrees. “We’re still recovering.”

“Definitely,” Kara repeats, and she’s smiling when she walks Lena back to the bedroom.

“You sure you have the strength for it?” Lena teases and it gets the desired response when Kara scoffs, setting Lena gently on the bed and hovering over her.

“I think I can muddle through,” Kara says with a confident smirk as one hand holds Lena’s hands above her head and the other slides suggestively across her abdomen.

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By the time they’re done with each other - recovering as Kara insists on referring to it - their coffee is cold where it’d been abandoned in the kitchen. Kara’s heat vision has only barely returned and it’s not nearly as powerful as it usually is, but it’s enough to zap their coffee back to a normal temperature.

Lena watches Kara do it as she pulls her pants back on and reaches for her shirt where it’d been tossed across the room. It’s an enjoyable sight to see Kara delighting in the return of at least some of her abilities and Lena falls back down onto the messy sheets and pillows of Kara’s bed to accept her now warmed up coffee.

“Thank you, Supergirl,” Lena teases and Kara laughs.

“Flight, heat vision, some strength,” Kara ticks off, her fingers popping into the air. “Almost there.”

It feels good to just lie there and soak up Kara’s energy until she stops feeling so emotionally and physically drained. Kara seems just as happy to have Lena draped over her, her hand running up and down Lena’s spine softly.

Eventually, after they’ve laid there for a while, Kara retrieves Lena’s laptop from the kitchen and pulls her own out from a bag in the living room and they both sit up in bed and get some more work done.

Kara spends the time working on an article and even lets Lena peek at some of the rough draft.

“You’re a good writer, you know?” Lena says as she reads a particular paragraph detailing Metallo’s attack on the jailhouse. “You always have been.”

Kara preens at the praise, all wide smiles and bright eyes. “Thanks, but you’re probably biased.”

Lena laughs, handing Kara her tablet back and picking her coffee back up. “I’m capable of separating emotional attachment from my professional opinions,” she tells her and Kara makes a face.

“Really? Because I’m totally not,” Kara says and it makes Lena laugh harder. Kara shrugs unapologetically. “I may or may not have ranted my way through CatCo after they put your arrest on the cover.”

“Always standing up for me, huh?” Lena asks and the warmth spreading down her chest has nothing to do with the hot coffee she’s sipping.

“Always,” Kara replies with a grin, but the expression fades abruptly and she stiffens.
“What?” Lena asks, confused at Kara’s sudden change in emotion.

“One second,” is all Kara says before she’s setting her coffee on the bedside table and scrambling up off the mattress to bolt across the room. It’s a faster motion than most humans would be capable of, but Lena can tell it’s nowhere near her usual speed.

She watches as Kara reaches into the small duffel bag they’d taken with them from the DEO, packed with the clothes they’d been wearing when they arrived. After a few moments of searching, Kara seems to find what she’s looking for and she races back over to the bed, shuffling across it until she’s sitting next to Lena again and extending something in her hand.

“This is yours,” Kara says softly, and hanging from her finger is Lena’s watch. The watch Kara gave her years ago in college. The watch Lena recently discovered has some sort of marital symbolism to it and her heart starts to pick up its pace as she remembers the soft conversation with Kara barely a week before.

It feels overtly significant now. Her chest feels like it’s stretching outward with emotion and when she reaches out for the watch her eyes go straight towards the engraving on the back of it.

“Thank you,” she says softly, but she can’t bring herself to put it on quite yet. Nerves start to rattle across her skin irrationally and Kara doesn’t look much calmer.

“In hindsight, I suppose I’m glad you took it off when you did,” Kara comments, her own fingers starting to tug at the bracelet on her wrist and Lena watches as the jewelry bends even less than it normally does.

“Why is that?” Lena’s thumb rubs over the lettering on the back as she attempts to steady her heart.

Kara shrugs. “What if your mother had gotten ahold of it?”

The thought makes a vulnerable shiver pass over her. “Good point,” she says and she tries to laugh, but it breaks a little at the thought of her mother. “The last thing Lillian Luthor needs is a direct line to Supergirl.”

Kara looks at her a moment. “That’s not totally what I meant.”

Lena’s brow pulls down. “What did you mean?”

Reaching out, Kara takes the watch back for a moment, her own fingers tracing the Kryptonian lettering on the back before she unclasps the band. “Your mother still thinks I’m just some college fling of yours,” she says and when she looks back up at Lena it’s like a physical tug against her ribcage.

“But you’re not,” Lena says and her throat goes thick when Kara shifts to slide the watch onto Lena’s wrist.

The metal is cool against her skin, but the motion still burns like a brand up her arm. “I’m not,” Kara agrees softly.

The click of the watch re-clasping onto her wrist beats against Lena’s heart and pools an intoxicating sense of belonging across her stomach. Blue eyes regard her for a long moment, fingers still lying against her wrist before Kara presses forward and kisses her.

Suddenly, Lena feels like she could cry again, but it’s not the same kind of tears as before. The emotions of the past few days are still lingering around in her head, but this is something different,
heavier almost, but warm, and Lena doesn’t want to fight it.

A smile spreads over her mouth as Kara continues to press kisses there. Her own fingers blaze a trail down Kara’s arm until she’s circling the metal bracelet at her wrist and everything feels electric when Kara responds by pushing forward until Lena’s falling back against the mattress.

A laugh passes between them, soft puffs of sound against Lena’s lips before Kara is sliding on top of her and her hand shifts until it’s holding Lena’s hip with solid pressure.

It feels ridiculously good when Kara settles fully on top of Lena, their bodies flush against each other. Instinct makes her legs part for Kara to slot their hips together and she bends a knee until she’s bracketing Kara’s hips.

Though her body had felt completely sated less than an hour ago, it comes alive as soon as Kara’s fingers trace under the waistband of her pants and her lips start to trail down Lena’s jaw.

A sigh drops out of her mouth when Kara finds that one spot just under her ear and Lena can feel the self-assured smile on Kara’s lips against the skin of her neck. It’d make her roll her eyes if the feeling of Kara’s hands slowly peeling fabric off her hips wasn’t completely distracting her.

Her own fingers find purchase on Kara’s back and start to tug the fabric there upward when suddenly a loud snapping sound resounds through the bedroom and they both jump so violently that Kara ends up biting down on Lena’s throat in a reaction so unexpected that Lena yelps in surprise.

It only lasts a second though, because Kara jumps off her the next moment, and half off the bed, and the minute Lena realizes there’s a blue orb of energy floating over the bed, she follows suit, letting Kara pull her behind her body.

“What the hell is that?” Lena asks, clutching the back of Kara’s shirt as they both attempt to follow the orb with their eyes as it begins to streak around the room.

It leaves streaks of blue energy in its wake, but it zooms so quickly that Lena has trouble following it and Kara doesn’t seem to be doing much better with the way she’s spinning around, one hand on Lena’s side to keep her behind Kara’s body.

Suddenly the light stream comes to a stop on the far side of the room near one of Kara’s massive windows and with a loud popping sound, a man stands in its place.

They both jolt back in surprise and Kara lets out a confused, “Who the hell are you?!”

“Kara Zor-el,” the man says in a reverent sort of tone as he jumps off his perch and saunters over. He spreads his hands out and looks at Lena. “Lena Luthor.”

Kara glances back at her and backs them up a step, but Lena moves to the side a bit and looks over Kara’s shoulder. “How do you know our names?”

“Whoa, buddy, back up,” Kara says with her hand outstretched as the man keeps moving forward.

“Kara Zor-el,” he says in a reverent sort of tone as he jumps off his perch and saunters over. He spreads his hands out and looks at Lena. “Lena Luthor.”

Kara moves to the side a bit and looks over Kara’s shoulder. “How do you know our names?”

“Whoa, buddy, back up,” Kara says with her hand outstretched as the man keeps moving forward. He just smiles, unaffected by the threatening tone of Kara’s voice and holds onto the lapels of his blazer. “Sorry, ladies,” he says with a wink. “My name is Mr. Mxyzptlk.”

“Mr. what?” Kara asks and Lena’s grateful for the question because she’s pretty sure his name is some form of gibberish.
He repeats himself, but it doesn’t sound any clearer to Lena nor to Kara judging by the way she glances over her shoulder again and asks, “What language is he speaking?”

With a wave of his hand the blue energy from before reappears and form letters in the air - M X Y Z P T L K. It doesn’t make pronouncing it any easier and Lena just sort of squints at the name silently for a few seconds until laughter prompts them both to look back at the strange man.

He’s grinning when he adds, “You can call me Mxy. Easier that way.”

Confusion extends their silence for a few more moments until Kara finally shifts forward slightly and clearly decides to take some sort of initiative.

“Okay, Mxy,” Kara starts. “Why don’t you start with why you’re here.”

Kara’s still in a defensive stance in front of Lena, her eyes intent on where Mxy is standing.

He claps his hands together jovially and takes another step forward with an excited light in his eyes. “I’m so glad you asked. I, Kara Zor-El, am your biggest fan.”

“Excuse me?” Kara replies and Lena’s brows pull together.

“Well, actually,” he says, gesturing at Lena this time. “I’m your biggest fan. The both of you, I mean. Together.”

“I’m not sure I’m following,” Lena says, looking at Kara to confirm that she isn’t hallucinating.

“I have watched the two of you across the dimensions,” he says with a grandiose wave of his hand in the air. “Across space and time itself.”

At their lack of response to that, he makes a quick disgruntled face before waving his hands in the air again - but this time they form a shape, and suddenly they’re watching some kind of video footage.

It takes Lena a few seconds, but she recognizes what she’s looking at eventually, and it pulls a sharp inhale of surprise into her lungs as she steps forward a bit to get a better look. Kara’s restraining hold on her wrist stops her from getting too close, but her eyes widen when the proximity confirms her thoughts.

“That’s-” she points at the screen, where sure enough an image of herself, albeit years younger, appears on the screen in a dark sweater, jeans and a baseball cap.

“Shh,” Mxy interrupts with a wag of his finger. “Wait, this is my favorite part.”

Kara seems to realize what they’re watching too, because she stiffens next to Lena, her grip tightening almost painfully against Lena’s wrist. The video follows Lena as she walks briskly across a familiar college campus and Lena doesn’t need to watch it to know what comes next. It’s a memory that would never leave her no matter the distance her mind travels from it.

Seconds later Kara appears and the three of them watch as Lena barrels into her side. The video plays the whole thing, even past what Lena remembers, showing Kara’s face as she watches Lena run away.

It’s an odd experience to watch a memory from a detached viewpoint and Lena feels like maybe this is some kind of dream or weird result of her concussion. Maybe she’s actually still unconscious in the DEO, or worse, with her mother.
A million possibilities race through her mind, but Mxy clapping his hands together startles her out of it. “What a meet cute,” he exclaims, turning a wide smile at them as the blue orb projecting the video dissipates out of the air. He sighs wistfully. “I could watch that a million times and it would never grow old.”

Releasing Lena’s wrist, Kara steps forward between her and Mxy. “Okay, seriously what the hell is going on right now?”

Mxy seems unaffected by the steel in Kara’s voice. “I just have to have you,” he says emphatically.

“H-have-” Kara starts, but Mxy interrupts her with a snap of his fingers and Lena feels a poof of air around her body. Suddenly, Kara is standing next to her in a strapless white wedding dress and when she looks down she’s wearing a similar one herself.

“They fit perfectly!” Mxy exclaims with a proud little smirk. “This will truly be the wedding of all time and space.”

“Wedding?!” Kara asks, her voice cracking over the word. “What wedding? We’re not getting married.”

Mxy gives her a disbelieving look and his head gestures towards Lena. “I think the boat has sailed on that one, darling.”

Lena bristles at the sound of someone else calling Kara by such a name and she steps forward. “What do you mean when you say wedding?”

“I’m throwing you a wedding!” He says, his arms spreading out as if to say you’re welcome.

“Are you crazy?!” Kara exclaims, clearly flabbergasted by what’s happening. Lena doesn’t feel much better. “You can’t throw us a wedding and you can’t just put us in wedding dresses!”

“Why not?” He asks, gesturing at the dresses. “It’s Vera Wang.”

Lena glances down at her own dress and then at Kara’s to confirm it is in fact designer. The image of Kara standing next to her in a white dress does things to her heart that’s entirely inappropriate for the situation and thankfully Kara’s not nearly as distracted as she is.

“This is not okay,” Kara is telling Mxy, who finally seems to get the picture that his enthusiasm is not being well received.

He takes a step back with conciliatory hands in front of him. “I’m sorry, you’re right. I’m coming on way too strong.”

“To say the least,” Lena adds under her breath.

“How do you even know who we are?” Kara asks and that seems like a totally intelligent question to ask. Lena’d certainly like to know that answer.

“I told you,” he says. “I’ve watched you across the dimensions.”

“But why?” Kara asks.

“There’s no one like you two where I’m from,” he explains. “I live in a world of lovelessness. An eternity of it. Endless and all consuming. You two are like…” He seems at a loss for words, but his eyes go a little misty and Lena is very positive this is all some sort of fever dream she’s having.
Maybe she and Kara are somehow having some kind of shared dreamstate.

“Thanks for the compliment?” Kara says, turning a confused expression to Lena who can only shrug.

“Which is why I’ve come here to Earth to fetch you,” he says with a definitive nod.

“To fetch us,” Lena repeats in an incredulous sort of deadpan.

“Yes,” he replies. “You will come with me and be part of my - I guess you’d call it a collection. Like I said, I have to have you.”

“Okay, look,” Kara says with a disbelieving laugh. “We’re not going anywhere with you.”

“Come on now,” he says with an exaggerated pout. “It’s no fun if I have to kidnap you. Much better if you come along willingly.”

“Not going to happen,” Kara says and Mxy’s face turns a little shadowed. “And you can’t make us.”

“There are a few things I admittedly can’t make you do,” he says, holding his fingers up as if to tick off a list. “I can’t stop you from killing yourself, can’t make you fall in love and can’t make you drink orange juice for some reason.” He smiles as if amused. “But I can make you come with me to your new home in the Fifth Dimension. And I’ll chase you across the stars if I have to.”

Kara’s jaw drops, but this time Lena answers for her. “We’re happy here on Earth, but thank you,” she says slowly.

His eyes narrow a bit as he regards them before they brighten again and he perks up. “I know what you two are doing,” he says. “You’re playing hard to get.”

“Uh, no,” Kara replies, but he seems undeterred.

“That’s okay, we have time,” he says with a dismissive wave of his hand. “I mean I have a wedding to plan after all and you two should probably get your affairs in order. Finalize the guest lists, decide on a first dance, the usual. Anyway, yes, I should be off. So much to do.”

“We’re not going-” Mid-sentence, Kara’s mouth clicks shut as Mxy disappears with a snap of his fingers and a poof of blue energy.

Silence stretches across the room for long moments and they turn to each other with matching expressions of bewilderment. Their wedding dresses have thankfully been traded back to their original outfits in Mxy’s absence.

“What just...who was...I’m sorry, do you understand what just happened?” Lena asks.

Kara just glances at the space Mxy previously occupied. “I’m going to call Alex,” she says after a moment and Lena just blindly reaches for her phone on the bedside table nearby and hands it to Kara, letting Kara attempt to explain what’s just happened to them to her sister, certain she and Kara are never going to have a normal day.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

TW: vague mentions of suicide in the last part of the chapter consistent with the canon plotline of 2.13

It takes ten minutes of Kara trying to explain to her sister what just happened before Alex tells them both to just come into the DEO.

They change quickly and Kara flies them there right away, both of them with hyper aware, eyes flitting around to check their surroundings.

Alex is waiting for them as they walk in and Lena finds herself startled at how familiar the sight of that has become. Kara steps forward a little too quick for Lena to follow closely and she rolls her eyes as she has to almost jog to keep up.

They stop in front of Alex, whose gaze zones in on Lena with a confused crinkle to her brow. Lena looks down self-consciously and Kara looks over as well. “What?” She asks.

Alex squints. “What’s on your neck?”

Her hand shoots up to where she realizes there’s probably a bruising mark from when Kara involuntarily bit her earlier. It draws her eyes to Kara who seems to realize what Alex’s seen at the exact same time because her eyes go wide.

“Oh my God, never mind,” Alex says, throwing her hands up in defeat. “I don’t want to know.”

“Sorry,” Kara says quietly to Lena as Alex sighs.

“Come on,” Alex says, turning away from them. “I told J’onn a little of what you told me and he thinks he knows what’s going on.”

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“A Fifth Dimensional being,” J’onn explains when they finally group together up on the central platform.

“So, you’ve encountered one before?” Lena asks and J’onn shakes his head.

“Not here on Earth,” he says.

“On Mars?” Kara asks and M’gann laughs a bit from where she’s standing next to him. She and J’onn share a smile.

“One of them moved the Xan’Xie Mountains halfway across the planet during the Zook Uprising,” she explains, her voice sounding a bit wistful.

J’onn nods. “They have the ability to warp our reality to their own whims,” he adds “From the outside it looks like...magic.”
Mon-El, who’s lounging in a chair next to Winn, leans back and waves a Red Vine in the air towards them. “Yeah, we had them on Daxam too,” he says. “Those guys know how to party.”

Kara shoots him a bit of a glare for the comment, but he just shrugs. “They totally do,” he insists. “But they’re also dangerous. Like super dangerous. We had a zero tolerance policy for them.”

J’onn turns to Winn who’s been watching the conversation with casual interest. “Agent Schott, scan the archives for anything resembling Fifth Dimensional incursions here on Earth. Let’s see if there’s any information on how to defend against them.”

Winn fake salutes and turns to his computer. “Close encounters of the fifth kind,” he sing-songs, typing away. “On it, boss.”

“So, he wants to collect you?” Alex asks, watching Winn work for a moment before turning back to Kara and Lena.

Kara shrugs. “That’s what he said.”

“He seems oddly obsessed with our relationship,” Lena adds. “Apparently he’s been watching us for years.”

“Yeah, they used to do that on Daxam a lot,” Mon-El adds casually. “I knew some guy who would sell footage of like whoever you wanted. Super expensive and highly illegal.”

“That’s disgusting,” Kara tells him and Lena wholeheartedly agrees. Just the thought of someone sending out even the most benign moments of her life with Kara makes her feel exposed. A shiver runs across her skin just considering it and she has to shake it off, pressing closer to Kara.

“Oh yeah, totally creepy,” Mon-El agrees, but he doesn’t seem that put off by it and Kara sighs. “Makes a lot of money though.”

Alex cuts him a glare before putting a hand on both Kara and Lena’s arms and leading them away into some sort of relative privacy.

“Maybe you guys should try to stay away from each other in the meantime,” Alex posits. “Seeing as he wants you two as a unit.”

A quick reactionary, “No,” rips out of Lena’s mouth loudly enough that Alex glances to the side and shuffles them even further away from the rest of the agents roaming around the base.

The last thing she wants after everything that’s happened in the last few weeks is to be separated from Kara. Especially when a fifth dimensional being is intent on collecting them and her mother is out there somewhere as well.

“It would be harder to collect you if you weren’t together,” Alex points out and Lena can’t really follow the logic of that, but even if it were rational she can already feel her entire being resisting the idea. Her chest starts to ache a bit. She feels a sort of panic start to slip over her, like a phantom Metallo is ripping her away from Kara while she screams her name.

Kara must notice, or at least hear the way Lena’s heart starts to quicken, because she scoots over and wraps an arm around Lena’s waist. “We stay together,” Kara tells her sister with finality in her tone that starts to relax her.

Alex sighs a bit, but doesn’t protest. “Then we need to figure out a way to stop him before he portals you both off to his dimension or whatever.”
Lena nods. “Hopefully Winn finds something in the archives about previous encounters.”

“Maybe there’s some weapon in here that will work on him,” Alex adds and Kara frowns.

“Nothing lethal though,” she says and Alex shrugs.

“Between killing him and having you both carted off to another dimension with a strange man, it’s sort of an easy choice.”

Kara makes a pinched face at that, but Lena spreads her palm out across her lower back until her spine relaxes and she agrees with a sighed, “I guess you’re right.”

“Of course, I’m right,” Alex jokes with a wink for Lena and an exaggerated lift of her chin.

“Anyway, I have to go. I have stuff to do.”

Kara’s brow furrows again. “Stuff?”

Suddenly Alex looks uncharacteristically sheepish and the beginnings of what Lena thinks is a blush starts to creep up her neck. “Yeah, stuff.”

“What kind of stuff?” Kara asks, propping a hand on her hip and shooting her sister a teasing smile. The fingers of her other hand, the one settled over Lena’s hip, strokes softly at her side and pulls her closer into Kara’s embrace.

“Valentine’s Day stuff,” Alex finally answers in a grumble and she turns to walk away then, stalking back towards the central area of the base.

It’s clearly not what Kara had been expecting because her hand drops off Lena’s hip immediately and the smile wipes off her face as her whole body tenses. “Valentine’s Day?!”

Lena mentally counts the days and is startled to realize that it is in fact Valentine’s Day and she hadn’t even noticed. It’s not like it’s a holiday she traditionally celebrates, but she’s also aware that Kara does.

Dropping her arm from Lena’s waist, Kara moves to follow her sister, grabbing Lena’s hand as she passes and pulling her along. “Alex,” Kara calls out as they move towards her. “Valentine’s Day?!”

“Did you forget?” Alex asks and this time she’s the one with a teasing smile directed at Kara as she stops back up on the huge platform and she grabs for a nearby tablet to check something.

“There’s been a lot going on,” Kara protests.

“Didn’t you get mom’s cards?” The question spikes a memory in Lena’s head of Kara receiving a bounty of valentines in college from Eliza.

“There’s been a lot going on!” Kara repeats with a little indignant stomp of her foot that makes Lena and Alex laugh.

“I’d think you guys would be all about the V Day extravaganza this year,” Alex says with a feigned kind of casual tone that makes Lena roll her eyes. Kara, however, seems completely flabbergasted to find out one of her favorite holidays has arrived without her knowing about it.

“It’s not like keeping track of the date was high on our priority list,” Kara insists. “Valentine’s Day doesn’t really take precedence over like-“

“Terrorist mothers,” Lena offers dryly and Kara sighs even as Alex tries to smother a smile.
Out of the corner of her eye, Lena catches Mon-El standing to join the conversation with a small smile. “This Day of Valentine, is that like a thing I’m supposed to-”

“No,” Alex and Kara both say to interrupt him, turning matching expressions his way. He puts his hands up defensively and backs away with a look to Lena that so clearly conveys *oops* that she almost laughs.

Kara looks at Lena with a worried expression. “Did *you* know it was Valentine’s Day?”

Lena keeps a neutral expression on her face until Kara’s eyes start to widen and she laughs. “There’s been a lot going on,” she says, echoing Kara’s own words. “I’d forgotten.”

That seems to assuage Kara’s worry and she gestures at Lena while looking pointedly back at Alex. “See?”

Alex doesn’t look impressed by that, but suddenly an uncharacteristic look of worry spreads over her face. “You know, I maybe could use your help,” she says. “Both of you. Maybe.”

Lena gives her an encouraging smile and Kara steps closer to wrap her arm around Lena’s waist. “What can we do for you?”

“It’s about Maggie,” Alex starts and Kara brightens up swiftly.

“Oh yeah! It’s your first Valentine’s Day!” Kara says with a giddy little smile. “Oh my god that’s so exciting.”

Alex smiles, clearly in reaction to the infectious way Kara’s happiness always is, but it falters a bit. “Yeah, except Maggie kind of hates Valentine’s Day.”

Kara makes a face. “No way, who hates Valentine’s Day?”

Alex’s lip presses together. “She called it a manufactured holiday for patsies.”

That makes Lena laugh abruptly, but the sound cuts off when both sisters turn matching glares at her. “Sorry,” she says with a clearing of her throat. She looks at Alex. “Maybe you just need to show her that it’s not that bad.”

“Oh,” Kara exclaims. “You should go to Il Palazoo. Their bolognese-stuffed calamari is like the greatest human invention ever.”

Lena smiles at the glazed look in Kara’s eyes at the mention of food. “They’re probably booked,” she offers softly, not wanting to dispel the excitement, but trying to remain realistic.

“Sure, but you’re Lena Luthor. You could get Alex a table,” Kara says confidently.

“Guys, I don’t need a reservation,” Alex interjects. “Did you not hear the part where Maggie hates this holiday? She doesn’t even think it’s a real holiday!”

“Maggie’s dumb,” Kara says to that and Lena bumps her hip in admonishment. “Sorry, but anyone that hates Valentine’s Day is a buzzkill.”

Lena shrugs. “I didn’t care much for it until I met you,” Lena says softly and Kara’s features go all melty when she looks over, a small smile spreading across her lips until she surges forward to kiss Lena quickly.

Alex makes a short noise of disgust. “I should have known better than to ask National City’s It
“You think we’re National City’s It Couple?” Kara asks with an exaggeratedly pleased look on her face. Alex rolls her eyes in response.

“Why don’t you just plan a night of stuff Maggie likes,” Lena offers, hoping to ease the death glare Alex is sporting at Kara. “What is she interested in?”

Alex seems to ponder that a moment, her face looking uneasy. “Guns?”

Kara and Lena exchange a look. “Anything else?” Kara asks.

“Scotch?” Alex tries again, looking up at the ceiling as if the answers are painted there. “She loves tiramisu. Like would eat it for every single meal if she could kind of love.”


“So, I should plan a dinner of tiramisu and scotch and guns?” Alex says with a hopelessly skeptical look on her face.

Lena laughs a little. “Just do something you both want to do, you don’t have to make a big deal of it,” she says and Kara nods.

“Yeah, I mean Valentine’s Day is really just about being together,” Kara adds. “And think of it this way: you’ll have plenty of Valentine’s Days to convince her that it’s an awesome holiday.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” Alex says after a few seconds. She looks down as if contemplating something before nodding definitively and taking a deep breath. The smile she gives both of them is genuine. “Thanks, guys.”

“Of course,” Kara says and she lets go of Lena to hug her sister tightly. “Happy Valentine’s Day.”

“Happy Valentine’s Day,” Alex says from over Kara’s shoulder, winking at Lena in a fond gesture.

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Alex has been gone for maybe only a minute - a minute filled with Kara and Winn attempting to explain Valentine’s Day to Mon-El - when J’onn steps up to them with a smile. “Kara, can I speak with you a moment?” He asks and Kara throws a quizzical look towards Lena, but obliges him.

“Yeah of course,” she says, following him off the platform and down a hallway.

Lena wanders closer to where Winn is sitting and pulls up a chair near him as he goes through the DEO archives.

“Hey,” he says, twirling a pen in his fingers as he glances over at her. Mon-El is in a chair on his other side looking down at a Rubik’s Cube with a bewildered expression, having moved on from his confusion regarding the holiday.

“Hi,” Lena greets, smothering a laugh at the way Mon-El is twisting the sides of the cube endlessly, clearly flabbergasted with the toy. “How’s the search?”

Winn sighs, types something on his keyboard. “It’ll take forever,” he tells her. “The archives here aren’t exactly small.”

Lena’s eyes glance over the rest of the screens in the command center and something catches her
attention. “What’s that?”

Winn’s eyes follow where she’s pointing and he sits up a bit. “A tracking program,” he tells her as they both look at the screen to their right.

“That much I can tell,” Lena says dryly. “What’s it tracking?”

“Cadmus,” he answers simply, but Lena knows what he really means.

“My mother,” she says and the memory still feels too fresh, too threatening. She wonders if it will ever feel differently.

“I guess, yeah,” he answers, looking at her with a worried expression.

“Have you had any luck?” Lena asks, not sure what she wants the answer to be.

“Nothing since that night in the warehouse,” he tells her and he reaches out to put a hand on her wrist. “But we’ll find her. No one can hide forever.”

Lena’s not so sure about that, but before she can say as much, Kara and J’onn are returning.

There’s an unreadable expression on Kara’s face as she approaches and Lena’s a bit startled when J’onn looks straight at her and says, “Miss Luthor, a moment of your time?”

It feels a bit like the time she and Kara had to explain to the department of student housing why Lena’s modular dorm furniture kept breaking and they were alternately called into the Dean’s office. But Kara doesn’t look worried this time, just kind of - blank.

Lena squeezes her fingers as she passes and follows J’onn to a small room off a nearby hallway.

“What’s this about?” She asks as J’onn takes a seat at the head of a tablet next to a small stack of papers. He gestures for her to take a seat to his right and she does.

“You’ve been a great help to the DEO in the past few months,” he says matter-of-factly and she smiles just the slightest bit. “I realize some of that is influenced by your relationship with Supergirl.”

It seems so odd when it’s put that way that Lena almost laughs. “I suppose that’s accurate,” she tells him with a half smile.

He sighs as if he doesn’t want to be having this conversation and pulls the stack of papers in front of him. “I think it’s beyond time to properly bring you into the operation.”

“Properly?” Lena inquires and she looks at the forms he’s shuffling through.

“There are a few standard forms that I’d like you to fill out. Non-disclosure, confidentiality, liability waiver and some things from HR.”

Lena does laugh this time. “You have an HR department?”

His face doesn’t react as he answers simply, “Yes.”

Watching for a moment as he sorts out the forms, Lena tries to put it all together. “I’m still not sure I entirely follow.”

“You and Kara are dating,” J’onn states and Lena startles.
“Excuse me?”

It’s a bit ridiculous to feel so shocked by the words or defensive at all, but Lena can’t help it. She hasn’t put much thought into defining her relationship with Kara. It’s just that. A relationship. The same as it has always been. To say they’re dating now or again feels so insignificant against the tonnage of what she feels for Kara.

“You and Kara,” he repeats, unaffected by her reaction. “And beyond that, you’ve been brought in on far too many DEO activities for me to allow this to go on without reading you in.”

“I understand,” she says slowly as he puts the first form in front of her. A seemingly standard NDA. “But I’d like to have my lawyer present before I sign anything.”

J’onn smiles. “I hope you also understand why I can’t have that. Bringing in a civilian like we have without going through the proper channels was a breach of protocol,” he says and then he looks over her shoulder. “But if you’d like to speak to a lawyer we do happen to have one on staff.”

“I suppose that will suffice,” Lena says, eyeing the stack of papers filled with all sorts of government legalese.

“I’ll call them down,” J’onn says, but just as he turns to leave, he turns back and eyes Lena. “Miss Luthor, Kara is something like a daughter to me. I lost my own children on Mars.”

“I’m sorry,” Lena says, unsure where this is heading.

“I was surprised to learn that Kara had told you about her identity years ago,” J’onn says. “Somehow, she and Alex managed to keep it under wraps, even when it would have likely been prudent to tell the DEO that the sister of Lex Luthor knew Supergirl’s alter ego.”

Lena can’t help but wince, fingering the papers in front of her as she waits for J’onn to arrive to his point.

“I don’t distrust you,” J’onn says, a soft look coming over his face. “You love Kara. But I believe it is the duty of the father on this planet to remind you - I hope their faith in you was well-placed. Or else.”

Lena blinks for a moment, before a short laugh escapes her, and J’onn gives a smile in return.

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A few minutes later, Lucy Lane arrives in the doorway in full military dress uniform. She gives a short wave and a smile as she walks in. “Lena,” she greets as she comes in and sits down, followed by J’onn who lingers behind her.

“Good to see you, Lucy.” Lena smiles warmly at her.

“I’m here if you need any clarification,” Lucy says and Lena quirks a brow.

“Quite a conflict of interest I’d imagine.”

Lucy shrugs. “It’s the best we can do under these circumstances. Our organization doesn’t exist, remember?” Lucy says. “Most of this stuff is just confidentiality agreements, NDAs, that kind of thing.”

Calmed by Lucy’s nonchalant presence, Lena reaches for a pen J’onn has sitting there and starts to
fill out the form in front of her, letting Lucy point out various clauses of importance as she goes. J’onn stands then, nods at her. “I’ll leave you to it,” he says before exiting the room.

Lucy twirls back and forth in her chair a bit, watching as Lena scratches her name across the page. “So, you and Kara, huh?”

Lena gives her a dry look that Lucy laughs at.

“It’s just that at Christmas you said-”

“I know what I said,” Lena interrupts, focused on checking boxes on the form in front of her.

“And then when we saw you guys after the whole White Martian thing, James was really close lipped about the situation and I’m just-”

“Yes,” Lena says with a laugh and a warmth dusting her cheeks. “Me and Kara.”

“Again,” Lucy adds and Lena nods with a slight roll of her eyes.

“Again,” she agrees.

Lucy leans forward then, puts a warm hand on Lena’s wrist and it draws her attention away from signing the agreement in front of her. “I’m glad,” Lucy says softly and Lena takes a deep breath.

“Thanks,” she says and even though she and Lucy don’t know each other well, it warms her heart to have that kind of acknowledgement.

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When she’s finished signing the mountain of paperwork J’onn had set out for her – and double checking each point with Lucy – she heads back out into the central room to find Kara again.

“How did it go?” Kara asks, jumping to her feet the moment she spots Lena.

“You could have warned me,” Lena teases, smiling at the way Kara nervously adjusts her glasses and looks away.

“Sorry.”

“I’m teasing, darling,” Lena says, reaching out to grab Kara’s hand away from her eyewear and twist their fingers together. “It was fine. Just a lot of paperwork. I’m sure I could scrounge some up for you as well - Jess is most likely foaming at the mouth that I haven’t yet anyway.”

A noise of triumph erupts from Winn across the way and the three of them turn to see him spinning in his chair.

“Did you find something?” Lena asks, stepping away from Kara and pacing forwards toward him.

“Yes,” he says with a wide smile that only falters a bit as he adds, “Maybe. Possibly. I think so.”

“What is it?” Kara asks, coming up behind them.

“Well I don’t really know,” Winn admits as he turns back to his computer. “It’s one of the relics we have in the storage and from the records here it looks like it has something to do with fifth dimensional energy.”
Mon-El, who abandons the half-done Rubik’s Cube in his hand to stand up and peer at the screen, puts a hand on the back of Winn’s chair and tilts his head. “What will this do to the imp?”

“No idea,” Winn says and Lena sighs.

“I think your victory shout was a bit premature,” she comments and Kara gives her a short laugh.

“As soon as I can get the spectrometer and pull this baby out of storage we’ll know more,” Winn says.

“You know, on Daxam we learned the hard way that the best way to handle these guys is by crushing them,” Mon-El says, making a fist with his hand as if to indicate his meaning.

Kara glowers at him. “We’re not killing him.”

“They’re dangerous, Kara. You might not have a choice,” he says, stepping back only a bit at the look on Kara’s face.

“We don’t kill, Mon-El. This shouldn’t be a hard concept,” Kara bites out.

He puts his hands up defensively. “Hey, I know the no killing rule. I know. I just want to make sure you guys don’t get hurt.”

“Thank you for caring,” Lena says before Kara can snap at him again and Mon-El tilts his head and grins his wide, eager grin. Kara mumbles something under her breath that Lena can’t quite hear.

“Let’s go home,” Kara says, reaching for Lena’s hand. She takes it.

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Realizing she’s in love with Kara is something that comes to Lena in inches, a slow crawl of feeling that is suddenly overwhelming one day, impossible to ignore. When it occurs to her - when the emotion finally has a name - it doesn’t even feel like a revelation. It’s more like accepting something she’s known to be true for ages.

It happens randomly. They’re in the large atrium of their student union where Kara had just dragged her because there are dogs, Lena. The dogs have been brought in by the health center as a stress relief measure for students, and the second Kara had caught wind of it, any hope of actually studying that afternoon had gone out the window.

Which is how she ends up one moment watching Kara get chased by a pack of rambunctious puppies - a chase that ends in Kara collapsing to the ground so they can crawl all over her - and the next moment confronting a variety of emotions bubbling up in her chest.

It strikes her in a quick heartbeat - just as a golden retriever puppy is jumping up Kara’s chest to lick at her face - a single unstoppable thought runs through her brain on repeat: she’s in love with Kara Danvers.

“Lena, Lena, look at this one,” Kara is saying, picking up a small black puppy that’s come to join the fun and holding it in front of her. She’s grinning so prettily from her perch on the ground that Lena can’t stop the expression from mirroring on her own face.

There are other students around, doing much the same as Kara is, but none quite as enthusiastically, and Lena spares them a glance before pacing closer to her girlfriend.
“It’s a dog,” Lena deadpans with an arch of her brow. Kara rolls her eyes before setting the dog down and smiling when it immediately rushes towards Lena’s legs, bumping its nose into her shins and letting out a soft yip.

“It likes you,” Kara says with a happy smile that makes Lena roll her eyes.

Having been tasked with holding both their bags while Kara ran around with the dogs, Lena sets them down on the ground before taking a reluctant seat next to Kara and allowing the small puppy to climb up onto her lap.

“He’s cute,” Lena admits, stroking a hand over his little head.

“His name is Hammond,” Kara says conspiratorially.

“How do you know that?”

Kara reaches over and fingers the small collar around the puppy’s - Hammond’s - neck. The name is carved into a small steel circle hanging from the collar.

“Hello, Hammond,” Lena says, eying the puppy as he tries to chew lightly at Lena’s fingers. “Strange name for a dog.”

“It’s a kind of electric organ,” Kara says with a shrug, laughing when the puppy jumps from Lena’s lap back into Kara’s. “Like the instrument.”

“It’s also a city in Indiana,” Lena counters. “Neither of those things make sense for naming a dog.”

Kara ignores Lena’s statement, just continues to make faces at the puppy as she scruffs its head affectionately. “She didn’t mean it, Hammond. It’s a great name.”

“I did mean it, Hammond,” Lena says, leaning over until her shoulder bumps against Kara’s. “It’s a weird name.” Kara shoots her an unimpressed look, but Lena just shrugs. “What? I don’t want to lie to him,” she tells her with a teasing grin.

“And what would you name a dog, oh master of dog names?” Kara asks.

Lena shrugs, a bemused smile playing on her lips. “Something more appropriate for a dog, like Leo or Lovelace.”

Kara’s eyes bug out just as the puppy attacks her glasses and Lena laughs. “Lovelace? Like Linda Lovelace?”

It takes a second for Lena to register the name, but the blush in Kara’s cheeks helps her and she makes a face, pushing Kara’s shoulder. “No. Like Ada Lovelace. The mathematician.”

“Oh,” Kara says, her eyes going back to a normal size and her smile turning sheepish. “Good.”

“How do you even know who Linda Lovelace is?” Lena asks, charmed at the way Hammond is now attempting to curl up into a ball on Kara’s chest.

Kara watches the puppy with a soft smile. “I know things about American history,” Kara says an exaggerated look of confidence that’s betrayed by the teasing wrinkles around her eyes. “And I know how to use Google.”

“I really don’t want to know what you were searching for that would come up with that,” Lena
says just as Hammond seems to find the perfect position for sleep and snuggles completely up into Kara.

There’s a brilliant smile on Kara’s face and she reaches out to take Lena’s hand. “Yes you do,” she says and it’s teasing and suggestive, but all Lena can think about is: she’s in love with Kara Danvers.

The feeling buzzes and vibrates across her skin, takes a tight hold onto her chest and for a moment her eyes go hot with emotion like it’s going to come bursting out of her at any moment. How it got this intense, Lena’s not sure. It’s as if it happened when she wasn’t paying attention.

Kara’s looking at her as if she can read her mind - as if she can sense the emotional turmoil happening deep within Lena - but it’s more likely that’s she’s tuning into the sudden heavy pounding of Lena’s heart. She’s half sure it’s loud enough for people without superhearing to hear.

“You okay?” Kara asks softly. “Because if you’re not, there’s more puppies over there to help you. I’m not sharing Hammond.”

It makes Lena laugh, but that just makes Kara smile again, and just like that it falls out of her before she can catch it.

“I love you.”

It’s simple and true and even though she hadn’t meant to say it, she’s not upset that she did.

Kara’s expression doesn’t change apart from her head tilting a bit to the side like Lena’s confession isn’t something revelatory. “I love you too.”

The feeling settles, but doesn’t lose its intensity. If anything it feels bigger now, reaching out to Kara and swirling around them.

“Is that why your heart is beating so fast?” Kara asks, eyes flickering down to Lena’s chest and back up.

Her heart is indeed thundering against her ribcage and Lena doesn’t know how to get it to stop. It had occurred to her that Kara could probably hear it, but she was hoping she’d categorize it as some other anxious student’s heart. “Yes,” she admits with a shrug of a shoulder.

Kara shifts, just slightly as to not disturb the puppy sleeping on top of her and studies Lena’s face. “Is that normal?”

“Sometimes,” Lena replies, not really knowing how to answer that. Half her anxiety comes from the all consuming feeling of being in love, but the other half comes from somewhere deeper. She had never intended to fall in love. Not with Kara. Not with anyone. In fact, her mother has warned her away from such inconveniences on more than one occasion.

And yet here she is. Unavoidably in love with her best friend turned girlfriend. It feels a lot like the point of no return, like wading into uncharted territory without a plan.

Seeming to sense Lena’s reluctance to venture further into this conversation, Kara turns her attention back to the sleeping puppy on her chest. “So Lovelace, huh? Figures you’d name it something nerdy.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Lena says with a laugh, grateful for the change in subject. Her heart hasn’t slowed yet, but she lets some of the tension flow off her and focuses on the image of Kara cradling
a small puppy. “What are your brilliant ideas?”

“Pluto,” Kara answers immediately.

“Pluto is a planet, nerd,” Lena says. “And also already the name of a famous dog.”

Kara’s face goes contrite, but it’s so exaggerated that Lena knows it’s insincere. “I hate to break this to you, Lena, but Pluto isn’t really a planet and it’s silly that your scientists ever thought it was one.”

Eyes rolling, Lena shoves at Kara’s shoulder and her girlfriend goes with the motion, clutching the puppy to her chest protectively. “You’re going to wake Hammond up!”

As if on cue, the puppy startles awake with an adorable yipping sound that Lena finds herself grinning indulgently at. That is, until Kara lets go of him and he launches himself at Lena and she yelps, sending Kara into gales of laughter. Somewhere beneath the extremely excited puppy, the warm feeling of being with Kara - of being in love with Kara - washes over her. Makes her feel at home.

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They leave the DEO and Lena insists this time on heading to her own apartment. “I haven’t been home in a few days, Kara. I need clothes. Among other things.”

Kara makes a noise of protest, but flies them there and offers to order something for dinner.

“I would think all you’d want would be Il Palazzo after you mentioned it to Alex.”

Kara’s eyes go wide. “You’re right,” she says before schooling her features into something more neutral. “But it’s Valentine’s Day, so I want whatever you want too.”

Lena laughs and presses a kiss to Kara’s cheek. “Order whatever you want, darling. I’m just happy to be home.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to go out to dinner?” Kara says. “I feel kind of weird spending Valentine’s Day in the apartment.”

“What happened to Valentine’s Day is all about just being together?” Lena asks and Kara’s lips curl up into a warm smile.

“It is,” she says. “But this is also our first Valentine’s Day together since college and I want it to be special.”

“I don’t know what would be more special than eating with you in bed,” Lena answers and Kara’s cheeks flush a little at the implication.

Just as she’s about to respond a buzz of energy wraps around them and Lena gasps as their environment snaps out of existence.

“Ladies!” A voice exclaims from their right and Lena looks around to realize she’s no longer standing in her apartment but instead on some kind of rooftop. When she spots the source of the voice - a well-dressed Mxy standing a few feet away - she sees the Eiffel Tower in the distance and realizes she’s in Paris.

“What the hell?” Kara exclaims, keeping Lena pressed in close to her side as Mxy approaches
“You can’t spend Valentine’s Day in your apartment eating takeout,” he says entreatingly. “What better place to spend this holiday than the city of love?”

“You can’t just teleport us to France,” Kara says, jaw tight. Lena’s still trying to get a grip on what just happened.

“Why not?” Mxy asks, his arms gesturing around him. He sweeps a hand towards a table for two across the rooftop, lit by candles. “I made dinner.”

“Send us back,” Kara orders in an authoritative tone that even Lena reacts to. It’s still a bit jarring to hear Kara’s - *Supergirl voice* - as she’s come to think of it.

“Kara, darling,” Mxy says and Lena has to take a deep breath again just to prevent herself from snapping at the man.

“We’d prefer something a little less opulent,” Lena tries, interrupting whatever he’s about to say and Mxy squints at her as if thinking over what she’s saying.

“You know, you’re right,” he says sagely. “I’ve watched you for a long time, I should know better. This isn’t you.”

He looks at them for a moment, the twinkling lights of the Eiffel Tower as a strange backdrop to the scene. “But I know what is,” he says after a few seconds and with a snap of his fingers they’re suddenly teleported again.

This time, Lena recognizes their surroundings immediately. In front of her is a bench she’s sat at numerous time and she knows that if she looks to her right she’ll see a familiar quad. Farther down from that is a science building that houses a coffee shop where she first met Kara.

They’re back on campus.

“Stop. Teleporting. Us,” Kara growls out, but her face flashes with shock as she takes in where exactly they are.

“I’m just trying to give you a romantic setting,” he says. “Some of my favorite scenes have happened here! You know, the first kiss, the dramatic, harrowing explosion, Lena’s car crash - ”

“Can you just - please leave us alone? We don’t need to be anywhere special for a romantic setting,” Kara says, but she grips Lena’s hand tightly as she looks around and Lena knows that if it weren’t for the Fifth Dimensional Being in front of them that this would be an emotional moment.

“It’s Valentine’s Day,” he says emphatically. “And according to my extensive research on the subject, it’s quite a serious day of love for people on Earth. I still remember that last Valentine’s Day you spent together. Oh the emotions. I feel it as though it was yesterday.”

That creepy, uncomfortable feeling Lena gets every time she thinks about this *creature* watching different moments in their lives spreads over her. That, coupled with the February chill in the air, pushes Lena closer into Kara’s body in an attempt to leech some of her warmth.

Kara’s body is all tension, an angry cut of muscle where Lena’s pressed in and she can tell Kara’s seconds away from attacking Mxy. It’s unclear what Kara’s chances would be against a fifth dimensional being and Lena’s not interested in finding out at the moment.
“If you don’t send us back, right now,” Kara starts to threaten, but Mxy’s ignoring her as he snaps his fingers and a blanket shows up on the bench, followed by a picnic basket and then-

“Mxy!” Kara snaps until he stops fussing with the bench and turns to her.

“Right, yes of course. I’ll leave you to it,” he says with a smile. “I have a wedding to plan, after all.”

“No, wait,” Lena says, but with a wave of his hand he’s gone and they’re alone.

Kara throws her hands up in the air dramatically before letting out a heavy groan of frustration and flopping down onto the bench in front of them. It rattles the items skewed across it, but none of them fall.

Lena watches it all with a soft smile on her face. It very well could be five years ago with the way Kara is slouching on the bench with an unhappy look on her face. A memory of Kara complaining about the way Earth set up their periodic table of elements for an hour after a chem test one year comes to mind.

“Kind of odd,” she comments and when Kara turns a questioning look her way she clarifies, “Being back here.”

At that, Kara looks around them again before connecting back with Lena’s gaze. “Yeah,” she says softly, it barely carries over the chill air between them. “It is.”

Lena paces forward, studies the items Mxy left on the bench and picks up a bottle sticking out of the picnic basket. When she reads the label she laughs. “Wow,” she says, showing it to Kara when she looks over.

“Oh my God,” Kara says, a smile growing on her face as she reaches out and takes the bottle from Lena’s hands.

“Still entirely creepy that he’s been watching us all this time, but I haven’t had Woody’s in forever.”

“You can’t even get it anymore,” Kara says almost reverently. “At least not here, and not unless you-”

“Have ridiculous amounts of money to spend on illegally importing booze?” Lena ventures with a wry twist of her lips that makes Kara laugh.

“Yeah, but you *made* money on it too,” Kara says, referring to the small operation Lena ran under the table in college with their friend Max selling sweet flavored liquor to over eager freshman.

“Wouldn’t my mother have been so proud at my business prowess,” Lena laughs.

“She would have if she realized you were just taking over from Lex,” Kara says and Lena smiles at the memory.

“Some things never change I suppose.”

A sad, contemplative silence drops over them for a bit before Kara stands abruptly and puffs her chest out like she’s decided something.

“Do you want to go to the uh…the…” Kara trails off, looking off to the side for a moment in an
odd contrast to her confident posture.

“Do I want to go where?” Lena asks when no more words are forthcoming and she laughs a little at the blush she can make out on Kara’s cheeks.

“The field,” Kara answers and Lena sucks in a breath involuntarily.

Despite the sudden rattle of emotion that comes with thinking about a field she’d spent hours alone with Kara in, Lena doesn’t hesitate much before responding. “Yes.”

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The field isn’t too far from campus - not with how Kara flies them - but just far enough that they leave the lights and sounds of civilization until all Lena can hear is the wind whipping past them.

They land near the one huge tree Lena used to spend her time leaned up against watching Kara float around the open space and her heart seizes up with the memory of it - sudden and visceral as she stares at the familiar sight.

“Still looks the same,” Kara observes as she sets Lena down on the ground and looks around.

“It does,” Lena agrees in a soft murmur, her body still close to Kara’s. It surprises her a bit that this much undeveloped land has remained untouched since they left college, but it’s exactly as she remembers it.

The lights of their university and the neighboring small town are barely visible in the distance. Nothing else as far as the eye can see apart from wildlife.

It’s a little colder here than on campus and Lena finds herself shifting towards Kara’s warmth. Thankfully, Kara had the presence of mind to bring the blanket Mxy left them and she wraps it around Lena’s shoulders with a soft smile.

Kara’s grabs two bottles of the Woody’s vodka coolers she brought with them and hands one to Lena with a grin.

“When I puke on you, we know who to blame,” Lena says, holding the bottle out for Kara to twist the lid off with a quick flick of her finger.


Lena laughs. “So who should I blame for that time over Easter break when-”

“You were the one that decided to bring those-”

“-because you refused to drink anything else!”

“Why did we even have to be drinking? You could have just enjoyed my company sober,” Kara points out and Lena scoffs into a laugh.

“You clearly don’t remember what you were like in college.”

Kara makes a show of acting hurt, bring her hand to her chest and dropping her jaw open. It makes Lena laugh again and when she shoves at Kara’s arm, Kara goes sprawling backward as if punched.

“Stop it,” Lena admonishes with a chuckle and Kara obeys, sitting down and gesturing for Lena to
follow, their backs to the large tree.

“Do you remember the last time we were here?” Kara asks,

And Lena does. Vividly, in a way so many of her memories of Kara are. It had been late spring, just before the end of the school year, and the field was lush and full of life. So had Kara been – zooming around Lena with a happy smile. “I do.”

Kara smiles. “I missed this place,” she says quietly but with a soft smile that warms Lena’s chest.

Lena takes a sip of her drink and grimaces. “These tasted better when I was nineteen,” she comments and Kara laughs, taking the bottle away from Lena and setting it aside. “Thank you.”

A comfortable silence threads around them as they both take a moment to settle in the field. It’s Kara who breaks the silence first, soft and questioning.

“Lena?”

She quirks a brow at Kara in response. “Hm?”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Of course you can,” Lena answers with a quizzical smile.

“When did you know...?” The question is so hesitant that Lena almost doesn’t pick up on it, but even when she does her brow pulls down in confusion.

“Know what?”

Kara looks away for a second, makes a face Lena can’t quite make out before clarifying, “Know that you were going to break up with me.”

It pulls a sharp inhale of surprise through Lena and she goes still, staring at the tense expression on Kara’s face for a few seconds before responding, “Why would you ask me that?”

Picking at a blade of grass, Kara shrugs a shoulder. “It’s just something I’ve wondered,” she says softly, looking out across the field. A quiet laugh drops out of her. “I guess I’ve just always assumed you didn’t decide to do it when we got in the car for the airport.” There’s a smile on her face that Lena knows is supposed to be casual, but she can see right through it. “I’m a bad driver, but I’m not that bad.”

Lena swallows, her throat aching a bit. “No,” she agrees.

Kara’s eyes lock with hers again. “So, when did you decide?”

“It’s not like there’s a single moment I can point to,” Lena replies.

“But you knew for a while,” Kara insists and Lena’s chest feels like it’s starting to stretch out at the memory of those last few weeks of college.

“Kara,” Lena sighs, sitting up. Kara follows the motion, trying to keep eye contact with Lena. “I thought we were getting past this.”

“We are. I am,” Kara sighs. “I’m trying.” And it’s so defeated, so pleading, that Lena’s eyes get drawn back to Kara. “I just want to know. For the longest time it was all I could think about.”
“I’m not sure what you want me to say,” Lena says and she doesn’t want to have this conversation – doesn’t want to feel like this in a field that’s only ever held happy memories.

“I want to know how long you were planning to break up with me,” Kara says. “And why you didn’t tell me.”

“Is it some kind of custom I’m not aware of to tell people you’re planning on breaking up with them?” Lena says somewhat bitterly as she blinks against heat in her eyes and turns to look away from Kara’s pretty blue eyes.

“I don’t know,” Kara says with a kind of honesty that’s always entranced Lena. “There’s not really a lot of breaking up where I come from.”

Lena makes a noise, gives Kara a dry look. “Don’t play the dumb alien,” she says warningly, but Kara just shrugs again.

“I’m not playing anything. I’m serious.”

With a sigh, Lena stares out over the field for a moment, watches the trees bend in the slight chill breeze. “I didn’t decide,” she starts and when she can tell Kara is going to protest, she puts a hand up. “I didn’t. It was just…” There aren’t really words to describe the feeling, the sad inevitability of their parting. “It was something I knew – thought – would have to happen.”

“But why?” Kara asks, her voice soft and pleading and tugging so hard at Lena’s rib cage it’s painful. “What did I do?”

“Nothing,” Lena answers immediately and emphatically. “When I said it was about me, I wasn’t lying.”

“Why didn’t you just talk to me? I knew something was wrong, but you never wanted to talk about it.”

Lena sighs, feels the sad resignation of those last few months in school as if it were happening all over again. “I knew you would talk me out of it somehow.”

“Talk you out of breaking up with me?!” Kara asks with a scoffing sound. “Yeah, I would have.”

With a sad smile, Lena reaches out and cups Kara’s cheek, runs a thumb over the frown on her lips. “You have to understand. I didn’t think my life and our relationship was compatible outside of college. With my mother and the obligations I had to my family, the company… I wanted to end it when it was still good, when we still loved each other and not when it went bad and got ugly.”

“Why would we have stopped loving each other?” Kara asks as if the idea is unfathomable. It squeezes Lena’s heart the way the depth of Kara’s faith in their love always had. “Even if we hadn’t,” Lena explains, knowing Kara is probably right. Their time apart had certainly proven that Lena doesn’t know how to stop loving Kara. “That somehow seemed worse. To think our relationship just wouldn’t work out, but-“

“You should have talked to me,” Kara interrupts, reaching up to grip Lena’s hand and bring it off her face to tangle their fingers together. “We could have worked that out together.”

The idea takes hold in Lena’s mind – memories warping to an alternate reality where she had been more upfront with Kara, where they had tried to forge a path together instead of apart – and she smiles a little. “You’re right,” she concedes, her eyes feeling tight with emotion. “I should have.”
There’s a soft stretch of silence for a moment before Lena smiles, squeezes Kara’s hand. “I’m sorry,” she says quietly. “For making decisions that affected you without at least involving you.”

“For lying,” Kara adds with a hint of heat around the edges and Lena takes a deep breath before nodding.

“I’m sorry for lying,” she says and blinks against the urge to cry.

It’s like something lifts off Kara’s face and Lena kicks herself for not making this more clear earlier – for holding too tight onto the stubborn idea that what she did was right. “I wish you had given me a chance to fight for us,” Kara says and it rips pain across Lena’s chest.

It takes her a second to respond. “Every moment is a bridge to the next, right?”

Kara’s lips thin into a smile, sad but genuine as she nods. “Right.”

“I am sorry, Kara,” Lena says, searching blue eyes. “For the things I did that hurt you.”

Scooting closer to wrap her arms around Lena’s shoulders, Kara presses a soothing kiss to Lena’s temple and the motion finally breaks through her resistance against crying. “It’s okay. I forgive you,” she murmurs there. “I’m sorry too.”

“For what?” Lena asks with a watery laugh.

“For making you feel like you couldn’t talk to me,” Kara says, pulling back to look at Lena’s face. When she does, her brow furrows and she swipes at the tears that have escaped.

Lena shakes her head. “I told you. It wasn’t anything you did,” she says. “It really was me, not you.”

“Promise you’ll talk to me now,” Kara entreats, pulling Lena’s legs over her lap until they’re as close as they can get for the moment.

After a deep breath, Lena smiles. “I’m not so young and stupid anymore,” she says a bit wryly. “I promise I’ll talk to you.”

“About your feelings,” Kara adds and Lena rolls her eyes a bit, but her smile doesn’t falter.

“About my feelings,” she repeats with a little amusement.

A chill breeze blows by them and Lena shivers until Kara pulls her even closer, sheltering her with the warmth of her body. “If I had known we were spending Valentine’s Day outside in the colder part of the country I would have worn a jacket,” Lena jokes, trying to indicate her desire to move on from the emotional moments of before.

Kara seems to take the hint and laughs as she pulls the blanket around Lena’s shoulders tighter and rearranges her until she’s settled between Kara’s thighs, her back warmed suddenly by the heat of Kara’s chest. “Would you like me to fly us back?”

Lena settles against Kara’s body, observes the field in front of them and the speckling of stars appearing in the sky above. “In a bit,” she murmurs, sinking into the feel of Kara wrapped around her. “You can’t see stars like this in National City.”

Kara hums agreement down into Lena’s shoulder, presses her lips there softly for a moment. “True,” she says, looking up to follow Lena’s gaze. “It’s nice.”
“Yeah,” Lena agrees, letting her head fall back onto Kara’s shoulder and sighing when she gets another kiss to her cheek in return. “It is.”

They end their night back at Lena’s apartment, but not before Kara insists they stop at Tonelli’s – an Italian place near Lena’s building that serves the best cannoli, Lena I swear – and eat their dinner out of takeout boxes on Lena’s couch.

Kara calls Alex later to report their encounter with Mxyzptlk after Lena comments she’s worried he might show up again if he catches wind of their Valentine’s Day dinner plans.

“Alex still thinks we should try to stay apart, just in case,” Kara says, coming into the bedroom just as Lena’s finishing getting ready for bed.

The idea of it sends another icy chill down her spine, but she forces herself to shove that feeling aside. “I still don’t see how that will be of any use considering he can snap his fingers and make us be wherever he wants,” Lena says dryly, pulling pillows off her bed.

In a quick zoom of air that ruffles past her, Kara is gone in a blink and then walking back into the bedroom changed into sweatpants and a soft shirt. “That’s what I told her,” she replies, casually re-entering the conversation as if superspeeding into pajamas is something normal. Lena smothers a smile.

“Has Winn found out anything more from the DEO archives?”

Kara makes a little sound and flops down onto the bed before Lena can even pull the covers back. With a fond exasperation, Lena rolls her eyes at the cheeky grin on Kara’s face. “Nothing super helpful yet, except that my cousin apparently dealt with one a few years ago.”

Lena puts a knee on the mattress as if to get on the bed, but Kara reaches out and tugs her over until she’s straddling Kara’s lap. “That sounds like it’d be helpful.”

With a shrug, Kara runs suggestive hands up Lena’s thighs and the stomach under her tenses as Kara props up a bit off the bed. “Do we have to talk about this right now?”

Even though she knows Kara wouldn’t have to so much as tense a muscle to resist Lena’s push, she still puts a hand on Kara’s chest and makes a show of trying to push her back to the mattress. It never fails to be charming when Kara just goes with the motion – obeys the silent command – and falls back down with a sigh.

“There’s an unknown all-powerful entity trying to kidnap us to another dimension,” Lena points out with a meaningful arch of her brow. “That’s not really something we can ignore.”

“I’m not trying to ignore it,” Kara grumbles, her fingers sliding up the bottom of Lena’s soft shorts and tracing the skin there. “There’s just nothing we can do about it right now and I can think of way more interesting things to do…”

Lena laughs a bit, stops the trail of Kara’s fingers with her own hands. “So Superman’s fought a fifth dimensional being? How did he defeat it?”

“I don’t know,” Kara answers and Lena tries not to get distracted by the hooded look in Kara’s deep blue eyes or the way her hair spreads out over the pillow.

Brow pulling down, Lena quirks her head. “Why don’t you call him and ask?” The question feels
obvious, but there’s something in Kara’s expression she’s not reading.

“I will,” Kara says and she sits up again, this time all the way until her arms are wrapping around Lena’s waist and bringing them closer together. It forces Lena’s hands between them, clutching softly at the fabric of Kara’s shirt.

Before the clear intention on Kara’s face can be realized, Lena pulls back a little and looks at her. “Why do you sound like you don’t want to find out?”

“I do want to find out,” Kara says a bit defensively.

“Why don’t you call Clark then,” Lena says and it still feels weird to remember that Clark Kent is Superman, but she’s getting used to it. Before she can bend to the side and retrieve Kara’s phone, Kara’s pulling her away from it easily.

“I will. Later,” Kara says emphatically and Lena is pretty sure she’s missing something.

“Are you and Clark fighting or something?” Lena ventures and the shift of Kara’s eyes convey discomfort.

“No, that’s not it.”

“But it’s something,” Lena says knowingly, bringing her hands up to stroke the soft skin of Kara’s cheeks and then scratch into her hair in a soothing gesture that does the trick – Kara softens a little, lets out a breath.

“I haven’t exactly told him about…” Kara pulls back a little, a guilty kind of shadow on her face that Lena can’t read right away.

“What?” As soon as the question leaves her lips, the answer pops into her brain and Lena puts the pieces together. “You haven’t told him we got back together?”

Biting softly at her bottom lip for a moment, Kara doesn’t answer, just looks away again, but keeps her hands firmly on Lena’s back.

An irrational thought crosses Lena’s mind and she has trouble fighting against it. It’s a credit to Kara’s respect of Lena’s personal space that she doesn’t stop Lena from shifting backward to put some distance between them. “Superman’s feelings about my brother are no secret,” Lena says lowly and Kara’s face reacts immediately.

“That’s not why,” Kara says insistently, trying to close the distance then, but Lena halts the motion with a hand on her chest.

“I don’t see what else it could be.”

“I never really told him we were together in the first place,” Kara says and she keeps her hands on Lena’s hips, eyes pleading for understanding. “And that was a long time before anything happened between him and Lex, okay?”

Lena lets go of the ugly feeling trying to take control of her heart – the part of her that can’t stop seeing her last name as the reason for all her interpersonal pitfalls. This is Kara. Kara who has only ever seen Lena as Lena and has never once given her a reason not to trust that.

On a deep breath, she tries for a reassuring smile that gets the tension in Kara’s face to relax just enough. “Okay, then why didn’t you ever tell him about us?”
Kara shrugs, but her face is honest. “I just didn’t. The only person I really talk to about stuff like that is Alex.”

Something occurs to her then. “So, the time at my office when I first saw you again…”

“He had no idea,” Kara finishes for her and Lena laughs abruptly, her body relaxing a bit into Kara’s.

“That must have been awkward,” she says, smiling down at Kara until she sees an answering expression in return.

“Oh, totally. He was trying to talk to me about like Metropolis and Lois and the stuff with the Venture explosion, but all I could hear was—” Kara gestures around her ear and warmth blooms across Lena’s chest.

“I can imagine,” she replies, remembering the overwhelming feeling of seeing Kara again for the first time since college.

“I don’t really want to try to explain all that to Kal,” Kara says, her hands returning to the outsides of Lena’s thighs.

“Wasn’t it you that said our relationship wasn’t that complicated to explain?” Lena points out, remembering one of the first few conversations they had together after reuniting.

“It’s not,” Kara replies with a little roll of her eyes that makes Lena laugh. “But this is Kal.”

“And I’m Lena Luthor,” Lena says dryly, but with less of the defensiveness from earlier.

Kara’s lips thin. “More like Clark Kent’s best friend is Jimmy Olsen,” Kara says and that startles Lena a bit out of her thoughts.

“I hadn’t considered that,” Lena says thoughtfully.

“Yeah, and when he was here, James and I were still kind of doing – whatever it was we were doing.”

“Dating,” Lena provides for her with a teasing quirk of her lip.

“Almost dating,” Kara corrects and Lena makes a face, but doesn’t argue. “And I know James talked to Kal about it and we haven’t really talked a lot since then and now I’m—“

“Dating the sister of the guy who almost killed him,” Lena says and when Kara looks like she’s going to protest, Lena puts a finger at her lips. “I know you don’t think that, but I don’t begrudge Clark Kent or Superman for feeling that way about me. He doesn’t know me.”

“Yeah except I don’t think I could get through a conversation with him that maturely,” Kara says before falling backwards onto the bed with a whoosh and a tired breath.

Lena laughs. “You’re probably right.”

With a familiarly feigned gasp of indignation, Kara pokes Lena in the side until she squirms and slaps at her hands. “Rude,” she says. “Are we done with this conversation yet?”

Successfully avoiding Kara’s wandering fingers and trapping them in her own hands, Lena quirks a brow. “Something else you’d like to talk about?”
The start of a blush dusts across Kara’s cheeks that makes Lena smile. “It’s Valentine’s Day,” is Kara’s only answer like that means anything.

The fingers Lena had clasped in her own, worm their way out to settle back on Lena’s hips and the abs underneath her tense as Kara picks her chest back up from the bed. It’s distracting for long enough that Kara’s sheepish expression turns to one much more seductive.

In lieu of acknowledging it, Lena just puts her hands back to Kara’s hair and weaves forward until their lips are pressing together, soft and sure. A smile lingers on Kara’s lips for a moment until Lena pushes in closer and kisses it off her.

Kara responds immediately, slides her palms forward until they’re under Lena’s shirt and hot across her back. It slots Lena’s hips snug against Kara’s body and she lets out a little noise against Kara’s mouth that makes Kara smile again.

With soft fingers, Kara tugs the hem of Lena’s shirt up until they have to disengage from their kiss to pull it off and Lena gives Kara’s shirt the same treatment.

“Do you remember Valentine’s Day sophomore year?” Lena murmurs when they collide back together and Kara’s fingers freeze where they’re dipping in the back of Lena’s shorts.

There’s a flush in Kara’s cheeks that could easily be from their heated kissing, but Lena suspects it might also be from the memory of the day – night – in question. Kara licks out at her lips briefly before answering. “Yes,” she says and it comes out throaty in a way that beats between Lena’s legs.

“Do you want to…” Lena doesn’t voice the rest of the question, suddenly shy just thinking about it – her own cheeks warm up against her own volition.

But Kara seems to understand or so it seems by her vigorous nodding. “Do you…do you have a-“

“Yeah,” Lena interrupts in a breathy whisper before she pushes forward again to put their lips back together. Her teeth bite a little at Kara’s bottom lip and she rolls her hips down a little suggestively and just like that Kara’s rolling them over until Lena’s back hits the mattress.

“Tell me where it is,” Kara says, but she’s already looking around – her eyes squinted like they always are when she’s using her x-ray vision – and Lena laughs a little breathlessly.

“The hall closet in a-“

Abruptly, before she can even finish, Kara is up off the bed and zooming towards the place in question. As fast as she left she’s back in bed, colliding back on top of Lena a little clumsily, but depositing the object of her quest on the bed.

Lena can’t help but laugh and then Kara’s laughing too, but they’re kissing again and it tastes so sweet and hot at the same time that Lena feels it wrapped all around her.

“Happy Valentine’s Day, Lena,” Kara says with a happy smile, peppering soft kisses to her lips.

Fingers tangled in blonde hair and her legs bending to accept Kara’s hips between them, Lena smiles back at her. “I love you, Kara,” she replies in Kryptonian, her voice in a low tone that makes Kara’s eyes go dark.

“I love you too,” Kara says softly before hooking her fingers in the waistband of Lena’s shorts and ceasing all further conversation with a firm tug.
They’re halfway through lunch - Kara, Lena and Josie - when Max and Aaron step into the dining hall and Kara catches sight of them immediately.

Lena’s gaze goes straight to Josie, who hasn’t seen the two boys yet and that’s the only reason she doesn’t successfully stop Kara from calling out to them.

As it is, Kara puts her hand in the air and waves them over with a brief call of their names, undeterred by Lena kicking her shin under the table.

Aaron notices Kara’s motion and actually takes a step towards them before he seems to think better of it and looks warily at Max who is looking straight at Josie. The moment feels frozen for a bit until the boys step away and take a seat at a different table.

Kara frowns, turning confused eyes to Lena and then to Josie, but their friend stands abruptly before Kara can say anything.

“I just forgot I have to finish that thing for philosophy,” Josie says hastily and Lena reads through the thin excuse easily, even as Kara’s frown deepens.

Lena doesn’t stop Josie when she picks her tray up and turns swiftly on her heel to walk away, but she does send an unimpressed look at Max who is watching the interaction from across the room.

“What was that about?” Kara asks so innocently that Lena almost laughs. Instead, she rolls her eyes and sighs.

“Max and Josie broke up,” Lena tells her, reaching over to steal one of Kara’s fries.

“What?!” Kara exclaims, abandoning her fork to lean across the table towards Lena. “They did? I didn’t even know they were dating.”

With a shrug of her shoulder, Lena spares another glance at Max who has now turned his focus onto his lunch, Aaron leaning close to speak in a hushed tone. “Maybe dating is stretching it.”

A familiar look of confusion shadows Kara’s face as she looks at Max and Aaron and then at the door to the dining hall that Josie just exited by. “What do you mean?”

“Do you not remember that Mathlete house party last month?”

“Of course I do,” Kara says with an affronted look. “As if I’d forget our tenth straight beer pong tournament victory.”

Lena laughs softly. “Yes, but I’m talking about Max and Josie.”

“What about them? They lost in the second round.”

“Kara, forget the beer pong,” Lena says with a fond shake of her head. “Max and Josie slept together that night.”

“What?! How do you know that?”

Lena shrugs, picks up her glass of water and takes a sip. “Josie told me. Not that she had to. They both went to the bathroom together and then no one saw them the rest of the night.”

There’s still a hint of confusion in Kara’s face as her eyes dart around as if trying to put all the
“Because they were having sex, darling,” Lena fills in for her with a short chuckle at the disgusted look Kara makes in reaction.

“Gross,” she says, looking over to where Max and Aaron are sitting.

“Sex is gross?” Lena asks with a quirk of her brow that makes Kara blush when she looks back.

“No. It’s gross to think about Max and Josie together,” Kara clarifies, turning back to her food and picking up her sandwich to take a bite.

“Well I’m sure you won’t have reason to think of it any longer considering they’re not even speaking to each other,” Lena muses, her foot hooking absently around Kara’s ankle in a warm motion.

“Why did they…” Kara trails off and her brow furrows for a moment as if searching for the right word. “Break up?”

“I’m not sure,” Lena answers. “But I don’t even know if it really is a break up if they were never really dating in the first place.”

“Well they should un-breakup,” Kara says, turning and glancing again, her fingers plucking mindlessly at her lunch tray.

Lena laughs at the definitive way Kara says it. “It’s not that easy.”

“Why not?” Kara asks, genuine confusion shadowing her face.

An immediate answer to that doesn’t come to mind, but Lena just shakes her head, stabs at the salad on her plate. “It’s just not. People break up for reasons. Usually good ones.”

“What’re their reasons then?” Kara asks, looking over at Max again. “They’re best friends.”

Lena sighs. Isn’t sure how to explain something like this to a person like Kara, who sees things so much more simply and honestly than anyone Lena’s ever met. “Don’t worry about them,” she settles on, reaching over to take Kara’s hand from where it’s pulling apart the plastic of her lunch tray in a nervous motion.

“They’re two of our closest friends and now they’re not speaking,” Kara says, but she lets Lena slot their fingers together. “We should fix it.”

“It’s not our place to fix it,” Lena says.

“But if we don’t-”

“They’ll figure it out,” Lena interrupts. “Sometimes things can’t be fixed. Let them be.”

“Of course things can be fixed,” Kara says. “This is Max and Josie we’re talking about.”

“You didn’t even know they were dating until two minutes ago,” Lena reminds her with a soft laugh.

“Still!” Kara insists. “I’m sure if they practiced they could be just as good at Pictionary as we are.”
“I don’t know how that equates, necessarily,” Lena says, cocking her head to the side and smiling at her girlfriend.

“They love each other,” Kara adds and Lena quirks a brow.

“Sure,” she replies. “As friends maybe.”

“What’s the difference?”

Lena’s eyebrows both raise at that. “Do you feel the same way about me that you do about Aaron?”

A flush dusts Kara’s cheeks and she sits back a little. “No,” she concedes, glancing over at the boy in question.

“That’s the difference.”

“Still,” Kara says again, clearly picking up more steam for her argument and sitting up again. “If they love each other whatever way they do they can fix it. At least so we can all eat lunch together again.”

Lena shrugs. “Sometimes love isn’t enough.”

“What do you mean love isn’t enough?”

“Relationships aren’t sustainable just on love alone,” Lena points out and lets out a deep breath. She can already tell Kara’s not going to accept that truth and isn’t looking forward to the argument that might ensue.

“You really think that?” Kara asks as if the notion is absurd. Her fingers play with Lena’s, reach down to stroke against the watch band on her wrist.

“Think what? That love isn’t always enough?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s not that I - it’s - it’s true,” Lena says with a shrug of her shoulders.

“People that are meant to be together will be together,” Kara states with a kind of conviction that Lena doesn’t entirely understand.

“In my experience that hasn’t always been the case,” Lena says soft and slow at the fiery expression on Kara’s face.

“Have you had a lot of experience with soulmates?” Kara asks with a pointed arch of her brow before she adds, “Apart from us?”

It stills Lena completely as the words register. There’s no reaction on Kara’s face - it’s as if their status as soulmates was a given, something she was supposed to be aware of and not something completely life changing. It takes every ounce of Luthor training not to react to it and keep her expression impassive as she answers.

“You believe in soulmates?” Staying generic feels like the safest bet at the moment.

Kara looks taken aback by the question for a moment. “That’s like asking if I believe in science.”
Thankfully, it makes Lena laugh enough that some of the tension ebbs off of her. “I just - I don’t think - sometimes things happen,” is what she says. “Whether or not two people are - soulmates - doesn’t change the fact that not everything can be fixed. Being...meant...for someone doesn’t mean it’s guaranteed to work out.”

“I don’t believe that,” Kara says simply.

With a sad smile, Lena nods. “I know, but relationships aren’t simple things. They’re complicated. They take work. And sometimes no matter how much you love a person, you just...don’t work out as a couple.”

Kara makes a face at that. “So no matter how much you love me, you think we might not work out...as a couple?”

It stabs pain into Lena’s chest just to think about it, resurfaces an ache she’s been trying to avoid feeling for the past few months. The closer graduation looms, the harder it’s been to ignore it. “Why are we talking about us?” Lena asks, trying to dismiss the serious look on Kara’s face with a laugh. “I thought we were talking about Max and Josie.”

When Lena tries to pull her hand out of Kara’s to return to her lunch, Kara traps her fingers there and keeps her eyes locked on Lena’s. “Because we’re talking about us now.”

Lena sighs, tilting her head back and forth. “Of course I don’t think that. No one goes into a relationship thinking it inevitably won’t work out,” she says which isn’t entirely the truth, but Kara’s expression is starting to turn sad and Lena just wants to go back to playing footsie and talking about other people’s problems.

Kara’s eyes are narrowed in a skeptical kind of look and they stay on Lena’s for a moment before falling to her tray and observing her food. “Okay,” she says, but it’s soft and sad and when she lets go of Lena’s hand it feels cold immediately.

Emotion thickens in the back of Lena’s throat and she sits forward before she can stop herself, chases the retreat of Kara’s hand. “Hey,” she says quietly, urging Kara to look at her. When she does, Lena smiles. “I believe in us.”

The hardness in Kara’s face softens immediately and her shoulders sag a bit as if Lena’s words had some sort of physical effect. “I believe in us too,” Kara says just as quiet.

“I love you and I’m going to keep loving you for as long as I’m able,” she says, trying to get Kara to hear the truth in the words. Because they are true. She can’t imagine a day arriving in which she doesn’t love Kara. That’s about the only guarantee she believes in.

It seems to work, Kara smiles - that same pretty smile that’s had Lena’s stomach fluttering since they first day she saw it. “I love you too,” she replies.

Their gazes hold for a long significant moment and Lena feels the pull of their relationship against her chest. It’s an overwhelming feeling, just like always, and she lets herself get lost in the idea that it never has to end - that everything will work out like Kara believes. It’s an intoxicating feeling, and it blooms warmth into her extremities.

“I still think we should fix Max and Josie,” Kara says, breaking the silence and Lena groans a bit, her head falling forward into a laugh as she sits back and releases Kara’s hand. The seriousness of their conversation flows away just like that.

“Leave it alone,” Lena says with a wag of her finger. “They’ll figure it out themselves.”
“We’re talking about a guy that set his dorm on fire last week trying to microwave popcorn and a girl that thought she could out-eat me at the Sunday pancake buffet,” Kara points out and Lena laughs again.

“You have a point, I suppose,” Lena agrees and Kara brightens.

“So Operation Get Max and Josie To Un-Break Up is a go?”

Lena rolls her eyes, but she smiles. “We’re not calling it that.”

Kara just grins and hooks her foot around Lena’s ankle warmly.

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It shouldn’t be such a comforting feeling to walk back into a place she was just recently arrested, but as soon as Lena stalks into L Corp and follows a familiar path to her top floor office it’s like putting on a suit of armor.

There’s a hot cup of coffee already steaming on her desk in anticipation of her arrival and Jess is waiting with a tablet in her hands just like every morning, prepared to go through the morning schedule and messages.

Rounding her desk, Lena sets her bag on the floor and picks up the cup of coffee to take a grateful sip of it. It tastes like the overpriced import blend they stock in the executive lounge and it pours down her throat with comfortable heat.

“Good to have you back, Miss Luthor,” Jess tells her when she sits in her desk chair and boots up her computer.

“Good to be back, Jess,” Lena replies with a smile for her assistant.

Before Jess can continue with their usual morning routine, she reaches to the side and plucks a manila envelope out of her bag. Jess eyes it quizzically when Lena hands it over.

“Something you need mailed?”

“No,” she says with a short laugh. “It’s for you.”

Confusion is all over Jess’s face, but she’s trained to obey and when Lena tells her to open it she does so immediately.

“It’s a paid leave agreement,” Lena explains as Jess reads over the paper. “Take a month off. On L Corp’s dime.”

It’s obvious her assistant is worried she’s done something wrong. “I don’t understand,” Jess says softly, looking up. “Are you unhappy with the way I’ve-”

“No at all,” Lena interrupts taking another sip of her coffee and reaching over with one hand to key in the passcode to her computer. “In fact, you’ve done everything right and you deserve a vacation.”

“I don’t need time off, Miss Luthor,” Jess protests. “This is such a busy time for the company and I know how much work you-”

“Jess,” Lena interrupts with a hand in the air to halt her secretary’s words. “I’m not asking you to take the time off. I’m telling you.”
It’s clear that Jess still feels like she’s being punished instead of rewarded and Lena sighs before standing to round her desk again until she’s in front of the other woman. “I have a team of assistants for a reason,” Lena says. “And you’re the best of all of them.”

The praise seems to soften some of Jess’s features and she smiles slightly, glancing down briefly. “Thank you.”

“You deserve some time off after everything that’s been happening,” Lena says. “Go be a real person for a few weeks, see a movie, read a book, go on a date, don’t think about work for a bit and then when you come back…” Lena laughs. “I assure you there will be plenty of work for you to do.”

Jess looks down at the agreement in her hands for a few moments before taking a deep breath and nodding. “Thank you, Miss Luthor.”

“No, Jess,” Lena says reaching out to squeeze her assistant’s arm in a friendly gesture. “Thank you.”

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It takes the entire morning just to get through all the fires she wasn’t able to put out remotely.

The fallout of her arrest is surprisingly not that terrible - it seems that Kara’s article detailing her innocence in the matter has done the job of mitigating any sort of damage to L Corp’s reputation. A glance at how they’re trading on the market that morning tells her as much.

It’s a relatively productive day until she’s just about to order something for lunch and her stomach starts to turn over as the walls of her office pop suddenly out of view.

“You haven’t seen each other in hours,” a voice announces as her office is replaced by what looks to be a small restaurant – though devoid of any patrons. “And there’s so much to be done.”

Kara is standing in front of her looking just as confused as Lena feels and they both look to their right to see Mxyzptlk leaning against a far wall and grinning at them.

“What the hell?” Kara says immediately, and that’s becoming a recurring track out of her mouth ever since they’ve encountered the man in front of them.

“Lunch,” he says gesturing to an already set table with two place settings. “Like the old days. You two used to eat together every single day. Surely you remember how it’s done.”

Lena just gapes at him, Kara does much the same and he continues with a grand sweep of his hand. “Sit down. You can discuss your catering options! You need to start taking this wedding seriously, ladies.”

“We’re not-” But before Kara can even finish, he’s vanishing again with a snap of his fingers.

Lena pulls her phone out of her pocket, grateful she wore a dress that has such storage and that she still had her phone when Mxy teleported them. A quick glance at her map application indicates they’re at least still in National City.

“Well, that’s a relief,” Kara says as she looks over Lena’s shoulder and then scans the walls of the restaurant with her glasses slid down her nose just enough.

“He may not be immediately dangerous, but he’s certainly irritating,” Lena comments, sighing as
she pockets her phone again.

Kara laughs. “You know, if you told me a year ago that I’d be annoyed that someone keeps teleporting us together…”

It makes Lena laugh in kind. “Yes, well his ability to teleport us on a whim is alarming.”

“That’s an understatement,” Kara says dryly. “Considering he wants us to live with him in the fifth dimension.”

Lena hums her agreement. “Have you talked to Clark yet?”

The expression that crosses Kara’s face answers that question for her and Lena sighs. “Kara,” she admonishes softly and Kara picks her hands up defensively.

“I’m doing it right now,” she says with a sigh, before pulling her phone out and swiping through to the correct contact.

Sitting down at the small table Mxy prepared for them, Lena listens idly while Kara makes the phone call. “Voicemail,” Kara tells her after a few seconds of holding the phone to her ear.

Kara’s voicemail for her cousin is brief – *call me when you get this, it’s important* – and she follows it up with a quick text message.

As she finishes, she plops down into the chair across from Lena and blows out an exaggerated breath. “You know, I had an entire box of donuts waiting for me before he teleported us,” Kara complains, slouching in her chair.

It makes Lena laugh even as her brows come together. “You were going to have donuts for lunch?”

“Yes,” Kara answers like it’s something that shouldn’t be questioned.

Lena just rolls her eyes and with a shake of her head grabs a breadstick from the basket on the table and throws it at Kara who proudly catches it in her mouth.

--

She’s in the middle of a conference call with an overseas subsidiary when Mr. Mxyzptlk suddenly snaps into existence in the middle of her office. She jolts so hard that it knocks the cup of coffee on her desk and the man talking on her phone stops mid-sentence.

“Miss Luthor? Are you okay?”

Clearing her throat and trying clean up the now spilt coffee on her desk, she manages to get a, “Yes, sorry. But something’s come up. We’ll have to continue this at a later date. I’ll have my assistant contact you.”

Mxy saunters over and with a snap of his fingers her desk is clear of any spill and her coffee cup is refilled, steam rising up out of it lazily as it sits on her desk.

With an unnecessarily forceful push of her finger, she hangs up the phone and looks at him, trying to get her heart to stop racing. She’s sure Kara’s going to come crashing through the window at any moment.

“Sorry, dear,” he says and with another pop he suddenly flashes to her cabinet, sitting there with his legs crossed.
“What are you doing here?” She asks, standing to face him. Her fingers play with the catch on her watch that will open up the face of it and have Kara here in seconds. As if the rapid staccato of her heart wouldn’t do the trick.

“I need your help with the flower arrangements,” he says and as soon as the words are out of her mouth Lena’s office is full of a multitude of different flower arrangements. “I really can’t decide. So many choices.”

“I’m not sure how many times we have to tell you that we’re not -” she stumbles on how she wants to phrase it. “We’re not letting you plan the wedding.”

“Well someone has to do it,” he says with a sound caught between a scoff and a laugh. “If I leave it to you two it could very well take another four years.”

Lena quirk a brow at that, but declines replying. It seems Mxy doesn’t require a response because he just jumps off the cabinet he’s perched on and continues speaking. “I do appreciate the drama of it all - any great romance has it - but I mean honestly, Lena. Four years?” He paces in through the variety of flowers, reaching out to flick a nearby rose. “The pining was fun for a bit, but then it did start to get stale, I must admit.”

Her eyes track his movements through the office and her fingers continue to fiddle with her watch until he seems to notice it and his gaze snaps there as a smile catches on his face. “You’d think Kara would be a bit more eager to make good on her glorified promise ring,” he comments. Realizing what he’s referring to immediately, Lena pulls her hands away from the watch in question and crosses her arms to keep herself from going back to it. “That’s not-” she tries to find some kind of calm inside her, but irritation is mixing with fear in her chest and her heart is reacting accordingly. “We’d really prefer you didn’t interfere with our love life,” is what she ends up settling on, grateful her tone stays even and casual.

A droll look crosses Mxy’s face. “You certainly need someone’s interference,” he says, sounding condescending more than anything. It does nothing to stamp down Lena’s irritation and her fingers twitch where they’re clenched around her bicep. “Had you two not figured it out, I was going to have to do something seriously drastic.”

“Because throwing us an unwanted wedding and threatening to kidnap us to another dimension isn’t drastic,” Lena says before she can stop herself and it makes Mxy pause in his pacing near the large glass windows of her office.

His eyes, usually soft and almost playful, take on a harder appearance and Lena swallows in sudden fear, but keeps her expression impassive. “It’s not a threat, dear,” he says in a darker tone than he’s used so far. It reminds her, ridiculously, of her mother for a brief moment and perhaps that’s the only reason she doesn’t completely cower under the sound of it.

“We don’t need you to-”

“You certainly need something,” he interrupts and with a snap of his fingers the room falls dark.

Alarmed, Lena takes an involuntary step backward. It knocks her desk chair over and her fingers go straight to her watch, popping the face open, but another snap breaks out through the office and her watch vanishes from her wrist.

Mxy tsks at her and even in the darkness of the room she can spot her watch now dangling from one of his fingers. “We’ll call for your mate in due time,” he says to her and a chill passes over her
Before she can think to say anything else, the television hanging off her office wall switches from the interface that tracks the stock market to a still image of Kara.

“It was gripping, truly,” he starts, flicking his finger in the air and the image starts to move - Kara’s in her apartment and Lena can tell it’s not a recent image by the small differences in decor from what she’s watching and what she knows of Kara’s apartment. “Those years you two spent apart. You were a mess, Kara was a mess.”

True to his words the image of Kara’s face is noticeably muted, distraught even. “What are you doing?” Lena asks, the question slow and full of trepidation as she watches Kara slump on her couch. Seconds later Alex is joining her and they huddle together under a warm looking blanket. It’s clear Kara has started to cry with the way Alex brings their heads together and Lena feels an answering emotion squeeze in her chest.

“Showing you the mundanity of your narrative as of late,” he says, as if that means anything, and with another flick of his fingers the image shifts to one of Kara standing out on a balcony that Lena thinks might be at CatCo. There’s a similar expression on her face as before as she stares out at National City.

“Stop,” she says, already feeling fragile at seeing such a broken and forlorn expression on Kara’s face.

“It’s just the same over and over again,” he says, not heeding her command as he flicks to a new image. This one is strangely more recognizable, but only because Lena wouldn’t forget Kara’s outfit no matter how distanced she is from the memory - it’s the one she wore the last time Lena saw Kara before getting on an airplane and ending their relationship. “I mean all the crying got a bit old.”

“I said stop,” she says and her voice cracks on the word as they watch Kara. Lena’s retreating form disappears down the gangway as Kara falls heavily into a chair, her eyes trained out the window - her x-ray vision clearly at work. The image fast forwards, and it’s dark outside suddenly as Kara retreats to her car in the airport’s parking garage. She doesn’t turn it on, just sits in the driver's seat and stares out the windshield looking so lost and confused, with tears falling down her face. Lena aches with the urge to reach back in time and comfort her, tell her everything will work out in the end. Kara’s fingers are tugging endlessly at her bracelet as she seems to think.

“Not that you were much better,” Mxy says with a sigh. “I mean that whole thing in Japan was almost as bad as the week Kara decided to transfer schools.”

At the idea of possibly having to witness such a thing, Lena slams her hand on the desk hard enough of that her coffee cup topples over again and spills tepid liquid across the surface. “Enough,” she shouts in a low, dark tone.

His gaze flicks to hers, but his expression remains still for a moment - the image of Kara sitting in the front seat of her car remains frozen on the screen behind him. “Just trying to get you to see the big picture, Lena,” he says in a slow, smarmy sounding tone that makes Lena want to pick her computer up off her desk and hurl it at him.

Another snap of his fingers erases the image of Kara off her television and the lights come back on.

“Get the hell out of my office,” she says, trying to get her emotions under control. Her fingers rub against the bare skin of her wrist and it pulls a tight, painful feeling across her chest. “And give me
my watch back.”

A smile quirks on his lips. “Of course,” he says, holding up the watch on his finger. In a blink it’s back on Lena’s wrist as if it never left there, but Mxy doesn’t obey her first command. Instead, he paces through the flower arrangements still littered over her office floor to drop onto her couch.

“I said-” But before she can finish, he’s snapping his fingers once again and Kara is poofing into existence right in between them.

It only takes a second for Kara to take stock of where she is and she speeds to put herself closer to Lena even as her eyes seem to stay on Mxy. “You okay?” Kara asks in a soft murmur and the feel of her warm hand spreading across the small of Lena’s back makes the dark feeling buzzing across her skin calm for a second.

“Yeah,” she says, leaning into Kara. “Mr. Mxyzptlk here would like us to pick flower arrangements.”

It likely does very little to explain why her heart is still thumping faster than normal and Lena can tell that Kara can hear it by the small furrow in her brow as blue eyes search her face.

“Indeed!” Mxy exclaims, standing up from the couch with a clap of his hands. He gestures around to the assortment of flowers. “It’s an important wedding detail we must nail down.”

“What did you do?” Kara says with an angry narrowing of her eyes.

Mxy seems unaffected by it. “I mean do you want roses? Traditional, simple, but a variety of colors to choose from. Or maybe more of a personal theme. Red and blue? I just can’t decide.”

“Do you not understand English?” Kara asks and Lena brings her own arm up around Kara’s waist, trying to absorb comfort from her commanding presence.

A smug look crosses Mxy’s face. “I understand far more languages than your tiny Kryptonian brain can even conceive of.”

“Then understand that there is no way in hell you’re throwing us a wedding or having anything to do with planning it, so leave us alone,” Kara says in a low even tone.

Mxy just smiles. “You’re right, I’m not,” he says. “You’re planning it. I’m just the facilitator. So pick a flower arrangement.”

Something crackles in the air that Lena’s come to associate with Kara’s powers and she squeezes the fingers she has settled on Kara’s hip until the sense dissipates.

“We’ll discuss it,” Lena says before Kara can speak again. Her chief concern - the only concern really - is getting the man out of her office and away from the both of them. “Alone.”

With a skeptical narrowing of his eyes, he observes them both for a moment. “Very well,” he says eventually and Lena lets out a grateful exhale when he flicks his wrist and disappears.

The second he’s gone, Kara’s turning towards her and searching her face with worried eyes. “Are you okay? You didn’t sound okay when I got here.”

“Fine,” Lena says, shaking off the residual emotion of Mxy’s visit and disengaging from Kara’s embrace to pick up her tilted office chair.
“Lena,” Kara says and it comes out like a warning - low and even. “What did he do?”

“He filled my entire office with flowers,” Lena says gesturing around at the arrangements still littered across the room. “And not in a fun way.”

Kara makes a noise of disgust as she observes the flowers. “I can clean this up for you,” she offers.

“And yet that’s not the most pressing problem,” Lena says wryly, hands on her hips as she looks at a nearby arrangement of red and white roses.

“Yeah,” Kara sighs. “Kal called me back.”

Lena quirks a brow. “I’m guessing he didn’t have any brilliant secret weapon to use against Mxyzptlk.”

With a defeated looking shrug, Kara shakes her head. “He says he’s never really been able to get rid of a fifth dimensional being. They just kind of leave when they feel like leaving.”

“Great,” Lena deadpans and Kara steps forward to put her hands on Lena’s shoulder in a comforting gesture.

“We’ll figure something out,” she says and Lena tries to focus on the soft smile creeping over Kara’s face and not on the lingering images of Kara crying that keep replaying in her mind.

“Yeah,” Lena says softly, lacking any sort of confidence. Kara must hear it because she pulls Lena into a hug and kisses the crown of her head.

“You sure you’re okay?” Kara asks again, likely tuning into the unsteady drumline of Lena’s heart.

“Just a little shaken,” Lena admits before lightly pulling out of Kara’s hug and taking a step back. “I’ll be fine.”

Kara doesn’t look entirely convinced, but she doesn’t press, just nods a bit and looks around.

“Well, I’ll get these out of here,” she says, hands on her hips as she looks around the office. “And then you can get back to work.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Lena protests, but Kara just arches a brow at her.

“And how are you going to explain why your office is full of flowers to Jess?”

Lena laughs, concedes the point with a tilt of her head. “I gave Jess paid leave so it’s someone else from my team of assistants I’ll have to convince, but I see what you mean.”

With a quick gust of air that ruffles her blouse, Lena watches as the flower arrangements pop out of view one by one as Kara whizzes around the office. Eventually the office is restored to its usual spartan appearance and Kara is standing in the middle of the now empty floor with a smile and fists propped on her hips.

“Well,” Lena says with a quirk of her brow as she retakes her seat at her desk. “Knowing you certainly comes with some perks.”

Kara strides forward, chuckles softly. “Oh, all kinds of perks,” she says in a tone that’s far too suggestive for Lena not to take notice. When she glances up at Kara’s eyes they’re dancing with mirth, a light flush dusting Kara’s cheeks.

“Do you want to have dinner later?” Lena asks, twirling a pen around her fingers as she leans
forward at her desk.

The smile on Kara’s face widens. “What? Like a date?”

Lena shrugs a shoulder. “Do you know what that is?”

With a roll of her eyes as her only reply, Kara turns to walk towards the double doors that lead out of the office before Lena stops her. “Seeing as my assistant didn’t see you arrive in my office and that I’m supposed to be on a conference call with our partners in China, I’d advise you take an alternate route,” Lena says, gesturing towards her balcony door.

“Right,” Kara says, twirling on her heel and walking that direction. “Good call.”

Pulling her laptop towards her and waking it up, Lena keeps her eyes on the screen even as she says, “So I’ll see you for dinner?”

“It’s a date,” Kara answers with a cheeky grin that Lena barely catches before Kara’s propelling off the ground and spinning into her supersuit before taking off into the air.

--

It’s a bit startling how quickly Lena falls back into routine with Kara. Even with the looming threat of an other-dimension trickster liable to interfere with their lives at any moment, Lena’s life starts to become a kind of predictable she hasn’t experienced since college.

They don’t spend every single night together, but it starts to become familiar again to have Kara in bed next to her. There are nights where she’ll wake up randomly and feel her chest start to ache at the sound of Kara’s snoring and the sleepy way she reaches for Lena without opening her eyes.

The telltale sound of Kara’s feet thudding onto the balcony - either at home or her office - starts to become something her hearing reaches out for in the silence of her long days.

What’s not familiar is the sound of Supergirl crashing into a conference room table during a meeting with her PR team. The entire room jumps up as it happens, chairs flying backwards as the table cracks and breaks under Kara’s weight.

Lena’s grateful she’s already standing and against the far wall when it happens.

Clearly just as surprised as everyone else in the room, Kara groans as she gets up from the now completely destroyed table and Lena sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose. How she’s going to explain how Supergirl just manifested into the building she’s not sure, but that feels like a problem for another time.

As it is, Lena’d like to usher Kara out of the room before their trickster friend inevitably shows up.

“Supergirl,” Lena greets formally with a nod of her head and a glance to the rest of the room filled with ten of her employees, all of them gaping as the Girl of Steel brushes debris off her shoulder.

“Miss Luthor,” Kara says, looking about as frustrated as Lena feels. “Sorry for the interruption.”

“Not at all,” she answers with a polite smile, wanting to get Kara out of the room while her employees are still frozen in the shock of the moment. “Let me see you out.”

It’s a bit ridiculous considering Kara could just fly out the windows lining the conference room walls, but Lena walks to the door nonetheless and opens it, gesturing for Kara to take the exit.
Her assistant - Hector - is sitting outside the room, answering e-mails on a tablet and she stops near him. “Could you have a cleaning crew sent up to take care of the office and relocate the meeting down the hall?”

“Right away, Miss Luthor,” he answers promptly, stuttering only a bit when he catches sight of Supergirl standing behind her.

As he leaves to follow her instructions, she shows Kara towards the privacy of her office, smothering a smile at every L Corp employee they pass that can’t help but double take at the Girl of Steel strolling around the hallway.

“That table was expensive,” Lena says as she closes the doors to her office behind them. It’s half teasing, half serious admonishment. The budget L Corp has to account for just to clean up after Kryptonian-caused messes is becoming far larger than Lena’d prefer. “And so was the hologram device on top of it.”

“I’ll pay you back,” Kara says looking mostly apologetic.

“Were you in the middle of a fight?” Lena asks and she tugs a broken piece of desk out of Kara’s hair.

“Trying to stop this gang of car thieves over on the north side of town,” Kara explains. “Do you think I’m safe to leave or am I just going to end up crashing back into your office?”

Lena shrugs. “I’m not sure why our friend hasn’t shown up yet.”

With a soft noise of disgust, Kara surveys the office as if Mxy is hiding somewhere. “I can’t imagine what he wants this time that couldn’t wait until I was done fighting crime,” Kara adds, the last bit a little louder into the room.

At that, a pop of air announces the entrance of Mxyzptlk, who appears perched on the back of Lena’s couch. “Ladies,” he greets with a wide smile.

“What do you want?” Kara bites out, spinning on her heel to face him and keeping Lena slightly behind her.

“I’ve been thinking venue,” he says, crossing his legs and propping an elbow on his knee. He taps at his chin in thought.

“Try to stop this gang of car thieves over on the north side of town,” Kara explains. “Do you think I’m safe to leave or am I just going to end up crashing back into your office?”

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“I’ve been thinking venue,” he says, crossing his legs and propping an elbow on his knee. He taps at his chin in thought.

“We don’t have time for this,” Lena says, frustration bubbling up that Kara can’t just punt this guy back to the fifth dimension. “I was in the middle of a meeting.”

“This is your wedding, Lena,” Mxy says, jumping off the couch to pace towards them. Kara grabs for Lena’s wrist in reaction and keeps them close together. “You only get one of those.” He tilts his head a bit, eyes bouncing around. “Technically.”

“Fine,” Kara says with a calm Lena doesn’t really feel. “We’ll talk about it. But you have got to leave us alone. And stop interrupting our days with this.”

“It’s important,” he says with a bit of heat in the way his eyes narrow.

“We know,” Lena replies, stepping forward a bit even as Kara stops her from going too far. “But we’d prefer to take care of these details on our own schedule. Or at least at a time when we are already together instead of just -”
“Teleporting us,” Kara snaps at him and he rolls his eyes.

“If you’d just start taking this more seriously I wouldn’t have to force you to come together like this,” he says, putting his hands out like what he’s saying is entirely reasonable.

“Do you think we wouldn’t take our own wedding seriously?” Kara says, sounding deeply annoyed. Mxy rolls his eyes again, stepping onto Lena’s couch and down onto the ground, his hands drifting in front of him as he starts manifesting different photographs out of thin air and watching them fall from the a space above their heads to her desk.

“If I left you two to it, you’d go down to City Hall,” Mxy says. “All this too busy and having lives. As if that’s more important than the wedding of the century - nay, the millenia!”

“That’s not the point-” Kara starts, but is interrupted when a photograph hits her in the face and Lena reacts just quickly enough to catch it. The picture is immediately recognizable and she feels her eyes nearly roll up into her head.

“The Metropolis Public Library?” Lena asks in a droll tone, but Mxy just smiles.

“It’s quite the venue, I assure you,” he says with a grin. “You should really consider it.”

“I’m not getting married in Metropolis,” Lena says and Kara snatches the picture out of her hand, looking down at it and flipping it over to reveal a series of details on the size of the venue and its rates.

“Progress! What other destinations are a no-go?” Mxy says, as more pictures start fluttering around them.

“The Rockefeller Center?” Kara asks after plucking another picture out of the air and observing it. Lena snatches another one, mostly out of curiosity, and a barking laugh comes out of her. “We’re certainly not getting married in Westminster Abbey.”

Kara is now back to glaring at Mxy. “You really don’t know us at all,” she says darkly.

“Oh please,” he says, waving her off. With the gesture, another series of pictures fall and Lena catches sight of what looks like the Taj Mahal. “I’ve seen the best and the worst of you.”

“There’s nothing wrong with City Hall,” Kara says, as if that’s the important part of the argument, but Lena doesn’t interrupt. “Maybe that’s what we want. Something quiet and-”

“Kara,” Mxy interrupts with a laugh. “You can’t get married as if it’s an afterthought or something to squeeze in your schedule between lunch and an afternoon meeting.”

“We’ll get married where we want to get married,” Kara bites out, frowning. Mxy’s smile never falters. “Well yes of course, darling. That’s why you’re here. To decide where you want to get married.”

Kara’s frown only deepens and she picks up a photo from where it’s fallen near her. “Like Wayne Manor?”

Lena laughs. “You clearly don’t know Bruce very well,” she comments idly and Kara turns questioning eyes her way, but Mxy interrupts before anything more can be said.

“Look, ladies. You two are a power couple the likes of which the universe won’t see for a long
time. All the other fifth dimensionals will be jealous when they see what a coupe I’ve scored - getting our favorite Earth lovers married and taking you all around. I mean, you’ll be famous.”

Kara takes a protective step forward as if Mxy’s liable to kidnap them right that second and glowers at him. “Leave us alone.”

With a roll of his eyes, Mxy flicks his wrist and the photos organize themselves across Lena’s desk. “All I’m saying is that you need to pick a venue that reflects who you are.”

“Get out,” Kara says, her jaw clenching. “Let us look at our stupid wedding venues in peace.”

“Oh, okay,” Mxy says, putting up his hands. He smiles at Lena. “Lena, be a dear and do your magic thing with your fiancé, okay? She looks like she might tear a hole in the wall.”

He pops out of existence nearly as quickly as he came. Kara does, in fact, look like she might try to take out a portion of the wall, but her shoulders drop when Lena grabs for her hand, gathering her attention.

Her gaze goes to the scattering of photographs across her desk and she picks one up with a short laugh. “How would you like to get married at Luthor Manor?” Lena asks, showing the photo to Kara with a grin when Kara’s face pales like she might throw up.

“You know that place is haunted, right?” Kara says.

“It is not,” Lena tsks, swatting Kara with the picture.

“Yes it is,” Kara insists. “And now you’ve brought that clock into your apartment. Your apartment is probably haunted too. With your ancestors. Who all hate aliens.”

“They must enjoy the show then,” Lena says, grinning, and Kara’s face goes bright red.

“Lena!”

--

The next time Mxy teleports them, she ends up in Kara’s tiny CatCo office and the look on Kara’s face when she arrives puts her immediately on edge.

Mxy is smiling - the same casual grin he always has - but Kara’s jawline is tight and her body posture is that like she’s bracing to get hit.

“What’s going on?” Lena asks slowly and she keeps her eye on Mxy as she rounds Kara’s desk to arrive at her side.

“Just checking in,” Mxy answers and Kara’s arm feels like stone when Lena wraps her fingers around it, tugging slightly on the heavy bracelet against Kara’s wrist.

“Get. Out,” is all Kara says and Lena can almost feel the rolling waves of anger Kara’s putting out.

“Kara, darling,” Mxy says in a placating tone that makes Lena want to smack him. “It’s important to talk about these things before your nuptials. Air out all that dirty laundry and everything.”

“Talk about what?” Lena asks warily, looking between the stony expression on Kara’s face and the calm, entreating one on Mxyzptlk’s.

“Nothing,” Kara says in a way that conveys the exact opposite. Lena glances at Kara’s face again,
notes the way it vibrates with tension and focuses on a problem she might be able to solve - getting Mxy out of there.

“Well, whatever it may be, I’m here now,” she says calmly, trying her best to convince Mxy. “Surely Kara and I are meant to talk about it alone.”

“A mediator never hurts,” Mxy says, falling into one of the plastic chairs in Kara’s office.

“Lena and I don’t need a mediator,” Kara tells him, flinching forward in his direction.

He sighs, lets his head flop back in an exaggerated motion. “You know, you two take all the fun out of wedding planning. I mean, honestly.” When he picks his head back up and looks at them he just makes a little noise of reluctance before adding, “Very well then.” And with a snap of his fingers he poofs out of the room.

As soon as he’s gone, Lena turns to Kara and searches her face - still tight with emotion. “What was that about?”

“Nothing,” Kara says, shaking her head and closing her eyes briefly.

“What did he want us to talk about?” Lena asks but Kara disengages from her grasp and moves away, adjusting her glasses in a fidgety motion and shuffling some papers on her desk in an obviously forced manner.

“Nothing,” Kara repeats and out of sight Lena rolls her eyes. “He’s crazy.”

“Kara,” Lena says, drawing her name out in a knowing tone.

Kara sighs, drops the papers she’s been playing with and looks at Lena with a sad tilt of her lips. “I really don’t want to talk about it.”

The expression tugs hard at Lena’s ribcage and it’s a cold feeling to be isolated from Kara’s emotions like this, but she tries for a smile anyway. “Okay, I respect that,” she says, propping a hip against Kara’s desk.

“It’s nothing bad,” Kara says and this time she takes another step towards Lena, puts a hand at her bicep as if she can convey the truth of it through touch.

“I said it’s okay,” Lena says with quirk of her lips.

The expression on Kara’s face is forlorn - almost lost - and as she takes it in, it occurs to Lena what might have happened.

“You know,” she starts, reaching up to grab for Kara’s hand and twisting their fingers around each other. “When Mxy visited my office that time he wanted us to pick out flowers, he showed me some things.”

Kara’s eyes widen then and Lena knows she’s hit her mark. Her throat goes thick both at the memory of what Mxy had shown her that day and what he could have possibly shown Kara. “He did?” Kara asks, a frown deepening on her lips.

“Yeah,” Lena says softly, clearing her throat against the sudden threat of emotion. “He did. He showed - he showed me -” She doesn’t know how to explain it. The creepy, vulnerable feeling of having been watched buzzes over her again coupled with the unstoppable feeling of guilt at the lingering images of what Kara looked like during their time apart.
“He showed you me,” Kara finishes for her in a soft, broken sounding voice.

Their eyes connect solidly and Lena nods. “Yeah.”

Kara lets out what sounds like a curse, but it’s clearly in Kryptonian and Lena’s never heard it before.

“He showed me you, too,” Kara says, slumping against her desk. Lena steps a little closer, fitting herself up against Kara’s side and fiddling with their entwined fingers. “He showed me you with Jack, and - arguing with Lex.”

“I’m sorry,” Lena says. It was one thing to see Kara sad over her, but she can imagine it’d be quite another to see Kara attempting to get together with James, for instance.

“I don’t like it when you’re sad and I can’t fix it,” Kara admits in a soft broken sounding voice. Lena isn’t sure what to say to that other than express a similar feeling when it comes to Kara. So she sets her head on Kara’s shoulder, sinking into the familiar warmth, and lets Kara wrap her closer in a strong side hug. She blinks her eyes shut when Kara presses a kiss to her temple.

“I’m not sad anymore,” Lena murmurs and she feels Kara’s lips curl into a smile.

“Me neither,” Kara whispers.

--

They decide to have lunch together in the hopes that being in the same place might stave off Mxy’s need to interrupt their daily lives.

It turns out not to do what they intended because halfway through the meal he pops into Lena’s office, right into her office chair which spins around as he appears.

“We have to choose a cake,” Mxy says and with a snap of his fingers the room is filled with various cake samples.

Lena sighs as she drops her salad on the coffee table in front of her in between a piece of chocolate cake and one slice of red velvet. Before she can stand to tell him off, however, Kara reaches out to snag her wrist and keep her seated.

“It wouldn’t hurt to try them,” Kara says out of the side of her mouth and Lena looks at her incredulously until Kara shrugs. “I don’t want to waste cake.”

If the situation with Mxy weren’t so alarming, Lena would laugh.

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In light of her recurring Mxy problem, she cancels on Lana with a carefully worded email about how she’s had to rely on newer assistants, now that Jess is on leave, and how she’s busy trying to put out various fires. Lex and his vaults are another problem for another day.

Lena’s down in the labs tinkering with some new medical device technology they’re working on when she feels the sudden an unexpected feel of pulling in her gut she’s come to associate with being teleported.

Sure enough the lab blinks away and next she knows she’s falling into a pair of familiar arms.
“Hi,” Kara says, almost uneventfully as she just gives Lena a bland expression.

“Hi,” Lena laughs as Kara sets her down and Lena looks around to realize they’re in some part of the DEO. Kara is sweating, the walls of the room glowing a vague green color, and Mon-El isn’t wearing a shirt. Winn looks to be happily enjoying his non-athletic activities, sitting behind a laptop set up at a small desk.

“Hey Lena,” Mon-El says, giving a wave and then kicking haphazardly at one of the cardboard standees around the room. Kara groans, her arms still sort of wrapped around Lena.

“That was a hostage,” Kara says with clear exasperation. “Again.”

Mon-El manages to look slightly sheepish, but he just kind of shrugs, goes to pick the cardboard visage of a small girl up from the ground.

“Winn, turn the Kryptonite off,” Kara says. “I have to fly Lena back to work before our stalker shows up.”

“Bye Lena,” Mon-El says, with a grin and another short wave.

“I can take a car,” Lena says to Kara, but it only earns her a pointed look and she smiles even as she makes a show of rolling her eyes.

“Trickster still tricking?” Winn says, making some small talk as he hits a series of buttons and the green glow drifts away. Kara’s shoulders straighten up and she rolls her head around as the effects of the Kryptonite start to wear off.

“Clearly,” Lena says, walking over to Winn and knocking her fist against his when he offers. She eyes the computer in front of him. “I thought Superman got rid of all the Kryptonite at the DEO.”

Kara comes up next to her. “We kept just enough for the room,” she explains. “It can’t be extracted or anything so it’s safe enough.”

“That’s good,” Lena says, eying the training room with a small amount of interest.

“Come on,” Kara says, taking Lena’s hand in her own. “I think I can manage to fly you back.”

“Your confidence is so comforting,” Lena jokes, winking at Winn as Kara pulls her out of the room.

A couple agents give double takes as she passes by with Supergirl’s hand in hers, but most people seem intimidated by Kara’s presence as they head towards the small platform Kara uses as an entrance and exit.

“What do you think it is this time?” Lena asks, knowing they’re likely seconds away from a visit from Mxy.

“I don’t know,” Kara says with a shrug. “Last night I woke up to a stack of travel books on my bedside table. I think he wants us to pick a honeymoon destination.”

“You too?” Lena asks, thinking of a similar stack of books and brochures on her kitchen counter. “Any favorites? I was thinking Bora Bora.”

Kara rolls her eyes a bit, swings their hands as they step up onto the platform. “You actually looked at them?”
Lena shrugs. “They were there and I was bored this morning,” she admits, having flipped through them over her morning coffee. “Plus, it’s somewhere I’ve never been, and it’d be nice to get a tan in before we have to go be toured around the universe as some sort of gold standard of love and romance.”

Kara laughs. “I think you’re mixing up the words tan and burn,” she says, and Lena pokes at Kara’s ribs in mock indignation. It pulls an exaggerated pained sound out of Kara until Lena shoves her again and they’re both laughing.

“It’s not as if our honeymoon will involve much of going outside,” Lena adds and after a second of confusion at what she meant, Kara’s eyes go a little wide and she flushes.

It’s nice, for a moment, to pretend like this is a conversation they’re having of their own free will, one that’s not steeped in the threat of being carted off to another dimension.

Kara seems to be thinking the same thing because she tugs Lena in close. “As much as I enjoy talking about our fake honeymoon, we really need to do something about Mxyzptlk.”

Lena hums agreement, puts a steadying hand on Kara’s shoulder and smiles when Kara bends to slide an arm under her knees and lift her into the air. “I agree. If only so I can stop living my life waiting for the next moment I’m randomly teleported into your arms.”

Said arms tighten their hold on Lena. “I’ll call another team meeting tonight, see what we can come up with.”

Kara’s body coils, makes as if to jump into the air, but before it happens they’re being pulled through space again and the next thing Lena’s aware of is blue green ocean and bright sunshine.

“Seriously?!” Kara exclaims, looking around as she sets Lena down on what looks to be a wooden deck.

Underneath their feet is a trail of rose petals extending outward towards a solitary hut with a massive white canopy bed in the middle of it. It looks exactly like the brochure Lena had flipped through just that morning and she sighs.

“Bora Bora,” she says, though she imagines it’s obvious to Kara who is observing the sky with an unusual amount of disdain while her cape flutters softly in the breeze.

They walk towards the hut and it’s then that Lena takes notice of the obnoxious sign strung out over the railing of the deck that reads Newlyweds-in-Training.

Kara kicks it and it splinters off its chain into the ocean below as Lena hides a laugh behind her hand.

With a popping sound that’s beginning to sound familiar, they both turn to see Mxyzptlk manifest on in front of them. He’s got a lei around his neck and is sipping out of a pineapple as he winks at them.

“Welcome!” He greets, and simultaneously, Kara and Lena cross their arms over their chest.

“The books weren’t enough?” Lena asks him and he just strides forward with a cheery grin.

“There’s nothing like experiencing it in person,” he says, with a wide gesture to their surroundings. “Books can’t do this justice.”
Knowing no amount of talking is going to convince him otherwise, Lena remains silent and so does Kara even as Mxy takes a circle around them, eying them up and down. “Now, we should probably get you out of those stuffy work clothes.”

A snap of his fingers and suddenly Kara’s out of her supersuit and standing in flip flops, board shorts and a bikini top. Lena’s eyes react to the sudden amount of skin showing, but then Mxy’s snapping his fingers again and her pencil skirt and blouse is suddenly replaced by a black swimsuit and flowy sarong.

“Much better,” he says with a pleased nod even as Kara’s arms tighten around herself in indignation. “Well then, I’ll leave you two to it. Always good to practice for the honeymoon.”

The last is delivered with a tilt of his head towards the bed and a wink that fills Lena with a thread of disgust, but then he’s gone with another popping sound and they’re both left standing half naked on a deck in Bora-Bora.

Kara scrapes a hand down her face and groans softly. “I’m rethinking my position on killing him,” she says and that makes the tension in Lena’s shoulders deflate a little as she laughs.

“I wouldn’t blame you,” she says, hands perching on her hips.

“Tell me you read enough about Bora Bora in those books to tell me which direction I need to fly us,” Kara says and Lena takes the hand Kara offers.

“I think I can get us there,” Lena replies as Kara scoops Lena back up into her arms. It’s a completely different feeling from before with a significantly less amount of clothing between them. Lena’s hands trace over the now bare skin of Kara’s shoulders and Kara’s fingers find perch on the skin of Lena’s thigh.

Despite the circumstances, Lena feels a warmth beat into her cheeks and Kara must notice the slight pickup of her heart because she shoots her an odd look that requires Lena to clear her throat before speaking.

“I can’t help but admit the appeal of a location that requires this kind of apparel,” she manages to say in a slow, steady tone that doesn’t betray the way her stomach is heating up.

A grin slowly spreads across Kara’s lips and her eyes flick down to take in Lena’s own black swimsuit. “I don’t disagree.” A hint of seriousness retakes Kara’s face. “But don’t make any more comments like that while I’m flying. I don’t want to drop you.”

Lena laughs, tugs affectionately at a strand of Kara’s hair. “No promises,” she says. “It’s a long flight, isn’t it?”

Kara doesn’t respond, just bends her knees like she does before launching into the air and Lena presses a quick kiss to her jawline. It makes Kara hop unsteadily for a moment before shooting Lena an exasperated look and finally jumping up into flight.

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“What kind of name is Bora Bora?” Mon-El asks, his words altered by the spoon in his mouth. He’s carried over a pint of ice cream and a bowl to listen in on the meeting they’re having over the fate of Mxy.

“It’s from a longer Tahitian phrase,” Lena says. When Alex looks at her curiously, Lena shrugs. “It was in the book.”
“Let’s focus,” J’onn says, his arms crossing as he looks sternly across the group of people assembled.

“I almost flew us through a typhoon on the way back,” Kara says emphatically, pacing back and forth across the DEO central control platform. The entire team has been gathered after Kara got them a change of clothing and called an emergency meeting. “This is getting out of control. Tell me you have some ideas. Any ideas.”

Winn shrugs from his seat at one of the computers. “There are definitely some things down in the archives that might work on him. This one weapon in particular that-”

“I don’t want to kill him,” Kara interrupts. “If we don’t have to.”

“That might be the only way,” Alex says softly though she doesn’t look entirely pleased with that idea either. “If it comes down to that or to you two going back with him then…”

“There has to be another way,” Kara says forcefully and Lena steps forward to put her hand at the small of Kara’s back until her spine softens just the slightest.

“Well you can always try the get him to say his name backwards thing,” Mon-El adds casually as he scoops ice cream out of a pint in his hands.

They all turn to him with matching incredulous expressions. “Excuse me?” Kara asks and he looks at them with a confused expression.

“The get him to say his name backwards thing? It seals them back into the fifth dimension? Did you not know about that?”

“Uh, no,” Kara answers, hands on her hips as she narrows her eyes at Mon-El. He shrugs. “Well, yeah, if he says his name backwards he gets ported back to the Fifth Dimension. It’s not like a permanent fix, but it gets him out of here.”

“How did you not bring this up before?” Kara asks, irritation leaking through her features. Mon-El blinks, uncertain.

“I assumed you knew that it was too hard. It’s not like his name is even easy to say frontwards, and he knows his weakness, right? He’s not just going to say it for you.”

Lena concedes that point with an arch of her brow and Kara turns to her on a heavy exhale. “It’s something at least,” she says, reaching out to tangle their fingers together.

“It’s something,” Lena agrees.

“Well then,” Kara says, observing the rest of the room. “Operation Get Mxyzptlk To Say His Name Backwards is a go.”

“You’re terrible at naming things,” Lena laughs just as Winn cringes and adds, “Leave the naming to the experts, Kara.”

Kara looks completely offended, but Lena kisses her cheek until the look goes away.

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“These steins are deceiving,” Lena says, bumping into her brother’s side and picking up the heavy glassware. “I’ve only had two of these, but that’s actually - ”
“Like six beers,” Lex says before throwing the rest of his back and pounding the glass back down on the table in a triumphant gesture. “Happy birthday.”

“I can’t believe you got me drunk on beer,” Lena complains, eyes blinking up at the string of lights hanging between the trees that litter the beer garden they’re sitting in. “I hate beer.”

“You’re in Munich,” Lex says. “What else were we going to drink?”

“Literally anything else,” Lena points out and Lex jumps up to move towards the bar behind him selling beers.

“We need more if that’s the way you’re thinking,” he says, and before she can protest he’s pulling cash out of his pocket and striding quickly to acquire them two more beers.

Blowing out a low breath, Lena props her elbow on the wooden table in front of her and lets her head drop into her palm. Across the way there’s a young couple sitting at another table, steins half full and heads close together. They’re smiling and laughing and Lena looks away at the ache that presents in her chest.

Thankfully, Lex returns, two steins dropping loudly on the table, the beer sloshing over the top a bit and splashing on Lena’s arm. It makes her laugh and she swats at her brother who laughs at himself as he drops back down onto the bench.

“Okay,” he says, pushing one of the heavy steins her direction. “Drink up until you stop having that look on your face.”

“What look?”

“It’s your twenty-first birthday, Lena,” he says, as if that’s an answer and he reaches forward to pinch her cheeks until she shoves him off. “You shouldn’t look like someone shot your dog.”

“I do not look like that,” she protests before taking a grumpy sip of her beer.

“I’m just saying...it’s been enough time since...” The silence that follows is significant and Lena doesn’t need him to finish to realize what he’s referring to. It settles something heavy in her gut and her jaw tightens.

“I don’t know what you mean,” she says, turning away from him to observe a group of tourists clanging their steins together in a loud chorus of some kind of cheer.

“You know,” he says and he scoots closer to her on the bench, slings an arm over her shoulder. “I’m sure we could find someone to wipe that look off your face and make you forget for a night.” He gestures towards a woman across the garden that’s stolen glances at them ever so often. Lena had noticed her earlier, but couldn’t decide if the looks were directed at Lex or at her.

“I don’t need to forget anything, Lex,” she says because even though the interest is flattering, the idea of a one night stand for the express reason of forgetting Kara makes her stomach churn a bit.

“It could do you some good,” he insists. “I have some experience in this arena.”

“Oh yes, because you’re the poster child for healthy coping mechanisms,” Lena says dryly and he scoffs.

Pulling away from her he puts his hand to his chest in exaggerated indignation that brings a quirk of a smile to Lena’s lips. “That hurts, Lena.”
“It was meant to, you ape,” she teases. When she shoves him he makes a show of falling over with the push and it spikes a hot piercing memory through her heart of Kara so suddenly she chokes on her laugh.

If Lex notices he doesn’t say anything. Instead, he picks his stein up and clinks it against Lena’s before taking a long impressive sip of it. “Look, if you’re not going to go for some birthday companionship, the least you could do is be a good wingwoman.”

Before she can stop him he’s jumping up from the bench with his beer and reaching for her with his free hand. She barely has time to grab her own drink - as it is she spills it on the way up - before Lex is tugging them towards a group of people about their age congregated around another table.

“It’s my birthday, Lex,” she hisses to him in an attempt to stop his progress but he just laughs.

“Sharing is caring, baby sister,” is his only indecipherable answer before they get in hearing range of the group.

His arm goes back around her shoulders as they approach and his smile goes wide and charming. Lena barely stops herself from rolling her eyes as he greets the group with loud enthusiasm.

He almost mortally insults the group as he introduces himself as Clark Kent, mispronouncing a couple words so atrociously that Lena can’t help but cringe underneath her beer haze. But the group is excited to be making American friends, and they teach them some songs and one of them buys them another round, and the next thing she knows, she and Lex are stumbling through the streets of Munich, back to their hotel.

“I don’t know why you didn’t take that girl - what’s her name - Carina, Carrie, Caroline - what was it?” Lex is practically draped over her as they walk, his arm heavy across her shoulders, but she’s grateful to have him close enough to lean on. “She was blonde and cute and she did biology. The suite has separate bedrooms, you could have-”

“I’m not taking any girl anywhere, no matter what her name is or whether she does biology,” Lena says as they swerve to avoid a late night biker and nearly run into a lamp post.

“Because you’re still all hung-”

“Because I’m drunk,” Lena interrupts and Lex hums in consideration of what is an obvious fact.

“It’s okay that you still miss her,” he says and it drops between them like something casual, like it’s not the reason why sleep still eludes her some nights or why she focuses so single-mindedly on work whenever she can.

“Lex,” she sighs, because she’s drunk and the world looks blurry and the last thing she wants to do is think more about Kara than she has to. That just spells disaster. Tear-filled disaster.

“I’m just saying it’s okay, but it shouldn’t prevent you from living your life,” he continues and she shoves him off her a little bit until he’s pulling her to a halt and wrapping her up in a hug in the middle of the sidewalk. “We don’t have to talk about it. I just want you to be happy.”

Lena lets herself sink into the embrace, comforted slightly by the solid, strong feeling of his hug. “Thanks.”

“I love you,” he says quietly and she laughs if only to stave off the hot prickly feeling in the back of her eyes.
“You’re drunk,” she says, pulling away from him.

He smiles proudly, slings his arm back around her shoulders to continue their walk home. “So very true, Lena. So very true.”

The morning comes along with a raging headache and the kind of nausea that tells her she won’t be doing anything involving movement for the better part of the morning.

Lex orders a ridiculous amount of food to their suite around lunchtime and when they finally wander back out into the city it’s with matching pairs of sunglasses even though it’s overcast and nearly evening.

They walk to a nearby restaurant that had been recommended by the concierge and Lena nearly falls over when Lex orders them both two steins of beer. Just the thought of imbibing again is making her stomach turn over.

Lex dismisses her indignation with a wave and leans across the table towards her. “Time to get back on the horse, baby sister. It’s your birthday trip.”

It’s said with a pointed look over the top of his sunglasses and Lena feels like it might be about more than just drinking. Thankfully, he doesn’t elaborate any further, just slides her one of the menus on the table and asks her what she’s hungry for.

As their beers arrive with an ominous thud on the table, Lena lets herself observe her brother - leaned back in his chair, sunglasses slipping on his face and his hair not as put together as it normally is. She doesn’t want to talk about Kara - wants to think about her even less - but there’s something comforting in having someone else at least be aware of the ever-present elephant in the room.

“Lex,” she says softly, waits until he looks at her. “I love you. Thank you for taking me on this trip.”

He winks at her, smiles casually and clinks his beer against hers. “Anytime. Happy Birthday.”

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In an effort to avoid being randomly teleported to each other, Lena and Kara both decide to work remotely from the DEO.

They find a conference room with which to work from and even Winn sets up shop there to keep them company. Mon-El shows up for a portion of the time, this time toting a larger Rubik’s cube and spinning it around in the silence of the room.

Kara spends the time typing away at her laptop on an article Lena knows is about the sudden mysterious disappearance of Cadmus and her mother. She’s spotted Kara typing evil bitch in place of Lillian Luthor a few times before deleting it.

For her part, Lena works on delegating projects and sending over some information to Lana about an upcoming meeting. She has her new primary assistant – Alana – field the majority of her calls and reschedule any meetings she can’t handle by phone.

Around lunchtime, Alex takes the opportunity of having Lena in the DEO to pull her aside. “I thought with you here we could talk about my dad,” Alex says softly as they walk through the base.
“I haven’t had much luck,” Lena admits. “I’ve gone through a lot of what you’ve given me, but nothing has come up.”

“I know you’ve been busy,” Alex says. “I’m not trying to rush you or anything. It’s not like you don’t have a million other things to worry about with your own family.”

Lena pauses at that, looks at Alex for a moment before reaching out to circle Alex’s forearm. “You’re my family too,” she says softly and Alex’s face goes still.

She doesn’t get a response other than a brief nod and Alex’s jaw going tight with emotion. They both let the moment pass and Lena goes back to the subject at hand.

“I’ll go through some more files while I’m here and let you know if I find anything.”

“Thanks, Lena,” Alex says and she pushes forward to hug her tightly.

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Despite protests from both Alex and Lena, Kara refuses to cancel game night. “I’m not going to let some trickster imp from a fifth dimension ruin the first time Lena can actually come over for games,” she cites as a reason.

“It’s not like he won’t like it,” she tells Lena. “I mean we’ll be together, right? So he should be fine and no one will have to get teleported.”

When Lena gets to Kara’s apartment everyone is already there and Winn is the one who opens the door to greet her, reaching out to pull her into a quick friendly hug. “Tell Kara you want to play Arkham Horror. She’ll listen to you,” he whispers into her ear.

“I can hear you, Winn,” Kara calls out and then she’s up next to them pulling Lena away from him and into her side. “We’re playing Catan. Lena’s never played.”

“How do you know that?” Lena asks with an arch of her brow.

Kara’s head whips over to her. “You played Catan with someone that wasn’t me?!”

“It’s a popular game,” Lena teases, but she relents when Kara looks like she’s actually hurt at the idea that someone else taught her how to play a board game Kara tried for ages to get Lena to play in college. “I’m kidding, darling. I’ve never played.”

James walks over then and hands Lena a glass of wine with a soft smile. “Hey, Lena. Welcome.”

“Thanks, James.” He lingers then, as if he wants to say more, but must seem to think the better of it and just nods at her before moving away.

Lucy is there too and she’s arguing vehemently over something with Alex while Maggie just watches them both with her brows pulled together and a bottle of beer hovered near her mouth. J’onn nods at her with a kind smile from the corner of the couch.

“What’s that about?” Lena asks quietly as Kara walks them towards the living room.

“Trust me, you do not want to know,” Kara says.

They all settle around a table Kara has set up with the game already open and spread out across the surface. Lena reaches for the rulebook sitting near the box but before she can even start to read it, a loud pop makes her jump and the whole group startles as Mxyzptlk announces his presence with a
loud clap.

“Excellent!” He says as he waltzes forward and Mon-El, who is just coming in from the bathroom presumably, points at him and looks at Lena.

“The imp?” He asks and Mxy looks offended at the name but doesn’t say anything.

Lena nods and without any preamble, Mon-El steps forward to take a swing at him. A NO is barely out of Kara’s mouth before Mxy dissipates and Mon-El’s punch just smacks into nothing but air.

“Not worth it,” Kara hisses and she hauls Mon-El backwards. He gives her an unapologetic shrug.

“You’d be surprised by how many problems can be solved with punching,” he says.

Behind them Lena can hear Mxy sigh and she turns to him.

“Anyway,” he says. “Before I was so rudely interrupted by the neanderthal here, shall we get started?”

“Get started with what?” Alex asks and Lena can just spot the way she’s reaching behind her back as if to grab for a weapon. Maggie and Lucy are both flanking her with defensive postures like they’re prepping for battle.

“The wedding!” He exclaims and with a snap of his fingers Kara’s apartment transforms into a chaotic blur of white and red and blue and something resembling an altar takes shape across the room.

Another snap and Lena feels a dress settle over her body like it had the first time they’d met Mxy. Around the room, people’s casual clothing disappears into formalwear.

“Oh hell no,” Lena hears Alex say and in a flurry of motion guns get drawn and a shot of energy goes off. It hits Mxy straight in the chest and for a brief moment Lena thinks maybe Alex actually killed him. He hunches over as if in pain and stills, but seconds later he’s laughing and wagging a chastising finger in Alex’s direction.

Lena spares a moment at how odd it is to see Alex Danvers in a red bridesmaid dress holding a weapon out - or perhaps it’s really not odd at all. In fact - everyone has been transformed into wedding attire it seems.

Winn and Mon-El are both in suits with matching blue ties, while Lucy is in a matching blue dress. James and J’onn are wearing suits with red ties, and Maggie is in a red dress that matches Alex’s.

Just as it looks like Mxy’s about to snap his fingers - likely to pop Alex out of existence - Kara is sliding in between them and holding her hands out, her own wedding dress swinging about her legs. “Wait!”

“She’s standing in the way of your eternal happiness, Kara. Let me take care of her. Think of it as an early wedding gift.”

“They’re not getting married,” Alex snaps out and then seems to think about that for a second. “At least not because you’re forcing them to, you creep.”

“I’m an all-powerful, all-knowing interdimensional being,” Mxyztalk says. “If I don’t get what I want...it could be very bad for your world.”
He makes a move as if to snap his fingers again, but Kara just moves forward quickly, her palms outstretched. “Mxy!”

He keeps his eyes on Alex, but acknowledges Kara with a quirk of his lips. “Yes, Kara?”

“I can’t get married without my sister,” she says with a hesitant smile. “So don’t zap her out of here.”

Narrowed eyes, he seems to consider that a moment before relenting. “Very well,” he says. “So does that mean…”

With a look at Lena, Kara takes a deep breath and nods. “We’ll get married. I mean, you were right. The boat has already sailed on that one.”

Lena feels her eyes go wide, but she bites her tongue, can tell Kara has something planned.

“But not here,” Kara adds. “Not now.”

That seems to reverse any sort of relief that had begun to spread on Mxy’s face and he frowns again, his hands starting to rise into the air. “Kara, I’m running out of patience here.”

“We’d like to do it in the Kryptonian tradition, on Kryptonian soil,” Kara tells him and Lena tries to figure out where this is going, but can’t follow.

Mxy, however, looks entirely pleased. “Kryptonian soil,” he muses and then raises his fingers as if to snap some into existence before Kara darts a hand out to stop him.

“We were thinking the Fortress of Solitude,” she clarifies. “Tomorrow.”

The excited glint in his eyes doesn’t leave and he just claps his hands together. “Tomorrow. I suppose we can postpone until then. Noon, shall we say?”

Kara looks over to Lena who steps forward and decides to go with Kara’s plan - whatever the hell it is. “Noon is perfect,” she says with a forced smile.

“Ah, wonderful. I will snap up the caterer. And - you all,” he says, gesturing around the room at their friends. “Please do not get a speck on your outfits. See you tomorrow for the wedding of the century!”

And he disappears with a snap of his fingers

“Kara, what the hell?” Alex is hissing as she steps forward and while Lena’d like a similar answer, she steps in between the sisters just slightly enough to glare at Alex.

“I thought Kryptonians just had to exchange bracelets and speak the vows to get married,” Mon-El says, tugging at his tie to loosen it. “Why do you need to go to the Fortress?”

“I have an idea,” Kara says, ignoring his comment for the most part. “I think I can get him to say his name. Or at least write it.”

J’onn crosses his arms over his chest, observing them. “In some cultures, writing something down is the truly saying it,” he says and Kara nods. “That should work just as well.”

“What’s the plan then?” Alex asks, stepping forward.

“The plan is to get married,” Kara says simply, holding her hand out for Lena’s. Lena takes the
offered hand, but her brows pull together. Before she can say anything, Kara pulls her in close, lips next to her ear as she subvocally reminds Lena that, “Just follow my lead.”

“You know, I know that no one else wants to be the one to say this, but don’t you think red and blue is a bit on-the-nose for a color scheme?” Winn asks, reaching over and pulling at James’s tie.

“Everyone else is worried about alien trickster villain who wants to kidnap our friends, I think,” Lucy says and then pauses a bit before adding, “But I do agree.”

“I am excited to be chosen for the blue team,” Mon-El says, successfully unknotting his tie until it hangs loose around his neck.

“They’re not teams, bud,” Winn says, patting him gently on the shoulder. It’s a small comfort in the face of an unnerving tomorrow.

--

Lena’d only learned of the Fortress of Solitude after her mother and Cadmus broke into it to retrieve the Medusa virus. Kara hadn’t spoken much of it back then other than her note that it served like a vault of memories - all of Kal and Kara’s possessions that related to Krypton, including a full database of information.

It’s nothing like she expected. Though, to be fair, she hadn’t ever really been sure what to expect.

It takes much longer to fly there than she had anticipated and when Kara sets them down on what looks like an iceberg, Lena looks around in confusion.

“Let me just get the key,” Kara tells her, walking over to the side and kicking some snow away.

It’s nothing short of freezing where they are. Lena pulls the parka around her shoulders tighter and fights a shiver while Kara digs into a nearby pile of snow to pull out a giant golden key that she slots into the side of an ice wall.

The doors open with a grandiose shake and Kara pulls them both inside.

The first thing Lena notices are giant statues holding up a blue orb in the middle of the space.

“Uncle Jor-El and Aunt Lara,” Kara tells her softly as they stare up at the imposing figures. “Kal’s parents.”

Kara pulls her further inside and explains some of the content - the pod that brought Kal to Earth, a pedestal featuring a small ring with a symbol that almost looks like an L on it, and a half-built robot.

Kara cringes a little upon seeing the last bit. “I sort of destroyed Kelex when I was here last,” she says. “Henshaw hacked into him so he registered me as an intruder.”

Lena gingerly picks up a piece of the broken robot and eyes Kara with raised brows. “Seems excessive.”

“I told Kal I’d rebuild him,” Kara grumbles and Lena laughs.

“You’re terrible at robotics,” Lena says knowingly.

Kara scoffs, hands on her hips as she turns an affronted look upon Lena. “Just because you’re like ridiculously good at something doesn’t mean I’m terrible at it. It’s all relative.”
“Sure,” Lena drawls out, trying not to laugh again, but Kara’s struggling against a smile too.

Before they can say more a pop of energy alerts them to Mxy’s sudden presence and they turn to see him leaned up against the center console in the middle of the fortress.

“Ladies!” He greets. “Welcome!”

With a flourish of his hands the fortress around them explodes into color as flowers fill the space and a band appears in the corner playing soft music.

“Mxyzptlk,” Kara tries to interrupt, but he’s undeterred. A bottle of champagne is in his hands now and he pours two glasses with a smile.

“What a day, what a day,” he murmurs to himself and Lena watches as Kara moves over to the console he’s drifted away from. “No guests, but that’s understandable - clearly not the sort of people you’d want ruining wedding photos. Though I will need those suits back. We can talk about that later, of course…”

“We’re not getting married, Mxy,” she tells him and he pauses abruptly midpour.

Lena’s not sure exactly what Kara’s plan is, but she stays close by and keeps an eye on everyone’s movements.

“Kara,” he says with a condescending kind of lilt to his voice. “Must you jerk me around like this?”

“We’re not jerking you around,” Lena says. “We told you that we didn’t want to get married.”

“Is it cold feet? Because we can talk about that,” Mxy says, pressing the tips of his fingers together like he’s about to start spouting psychotherapy.

“No cold feet,” Kara says definitively, her posture tall and frame strong. Mxy considers her for a moment before he deflates a little, looking annoyed.

“It’s in your best interest and, frankly, the best interest of your world that you do what I want.”

“Yeah, that’s the thing,” Kara says, wagging a finger at him in an almost cocky kind of manner that has any nerves inside Lena easing. It’s always quite a sight to watch Kara fully lean into her role as Earth’s protector and throw around the kind of confidence that would come unsurprisingly to someone who is indisputably the most powerful being on Earth.

“What’s the thing?” Mxy asks, confused as he glances between the two of them.

“You can make us do a lot of things, but there’s something you can’t make us do isn’t there?”

Lena looks over at Kara and tries to follow where she’s going. Her memory calls back to when they first met Mxyptlk and he listed off the few things he couldn’t compel them to do. It occurs to her just as Kara begins pressing a series of buttons on the console what the plan might be.

“What are you doing?” Mxy asks with urgency, but Kara’s too fast for him and the computerized voice of the fortress rings out.

Now sealing the Fortress of Solitude, it says and he looks up around them now.

“I’m setting the Atomic Cauldron to self destruct,” Kara tells him and the pieces finally click together for Lena.
“The Atomic whatnow?”

“The Fortress has one of the most powerful fusion furnaces on Earth,” Kara explains, stalking forward with a triumphant smirk on her face. “I’m overloading the sunstones at its core.”

**Atomic Cauldron fusion increased two thousand percent.**

Mxy’s eyes go wide in realization. “Kara, let’s not be hasty,” he says. “You can’t - I mean you don’t want to - Lena’s in here.”

“Yeah,” Kara says and when she puts her back to Mxy and looks at Lena her expression clearly says *trust me*. Lena doesn’t hesitate, just reaches for Kara’s hand and steps forward into Kara’s side. “You can’t stop us from killing ourselves. It’s in the rules.”

It spikes a momentary tendril of fear down Lena’s spine - that’s quite the bluff Kara’s about to play - but she takes comfort in the strength of Kara’s fingers where they intertwine with her own.

He laughs a little, but he nods, wagging a finger at her. “Oh, you’re good. You’re good, aren’t you?”

Lena clears her throat. “When the cauldron finally overloads it will explode with the force of a 400 megaton bomb,” she tells him, venturing a guess really, but saying it with the kind of confidence she knows he’ll believe.

“You two really are made for each other, aren’t you?” he says almost reverently before taking a deep breath. “But I know you, Kara. You’re not going to kill the love of your life. Lena here might have some kind of death wish, but you…you’d never do anything that would hurt her.”

Kara’s grip on Lena’s hand goes a little tighter and her expression looks a little lost in the face of that flawless logic so Lena clears her throat. “It was my idea,” she tells him with a lift of her chin. “As long as we’re together, it doesn’t matter what happens to us.”

Mxy looks at her, a genuine shadow of fear in his eyes. “So you’d rather kill the woman you love than marry her?!”

Lena lifts her chin, trying to seem authoritative even though she feels nothing like it. “You’ve forced our hand.”

“I can’t believe this. You’d kill each other, destroy the last remainder of your beloved planet, all because you don’t want to get married?!” He exclaims, throwing his hands up in the air as he turns to them. “What is the big deal? It’s not as if that’s not where you’re headed anyway!”

“It’s not getting married that we have a problem with,” Kara says and Lena’s fingers play quietly with the bracelet on Kara’s wrist. “It’s the living with you forever part.”

Lena stares him dead on. “We’d rather die here than be forced off this Earth with you.”

Kara’s fingers squeeze her own and Lena smiles.

“Look, let’s not get hasty. Why don’t we just, um, control-alt-delete this? We can talk about it when our deaths aren’t imminent.”

He skips around them and looks down at the console. It’s all in Kryptonian, Lena can see, and it’s clear by the way he just stares at it that Mxyzptlk doesn’t read a lick of it. So much for knowing more languages than Kara’s *tiny Kryptonian brain could conceive of.*
“I’m not telling you the code,” Kara says, and he brightens.

“So there is a code?!” In a flash, there’s a book in his hand and they both watch as he flips through its pages, clearly trying to make sense of the buttons.

“I don’t have time to learn your stupid moon language,” he says in a frustrated growl, throwing the book to the side.

*Atomic Cauldron detonation in one minute.*

“You have got to be kidding me,” Mxy groans and he drops to his knees. “I’m begging you. Don’t do this, please. What if you survive this, Kara? You’re nearly invulnerable. What if you wake up a couple months from now as super as ever and you’ve killed Lena?”

Kara pauses again, real fear playing on her face, and Lena grips her hand tighter.

“You’ve given us no choice,” Lena says, looking down at him.

“I’ll give you anything,” he offers, looking at them. “World peace? You want world peace? I can give it to you. Your brother,” he says this time at Lena, his hand outstretched. “You want your brother back! I can make it happen. I can do anything.”

Lena feels herself freeze and Kara must too because she releases Lena’s hand and steps forward as if to hit Mxyzptlk who scrambles back upward to his feet.

“Please, Kara,” he continues to beg. “The world needs Supergirl. You can’t just abandon this Earth.”

“The world has Superman,” she says and it pulls Lena’s eyes towards Kara for a moment, reading the short crack in Kara’s tone as she says it.

Mxy’s eyes turn towards Lena. “And L Corp. Are you really ready to leave L Corp? What kind of legacy are you abandoning it to?”

It’s all a bluff, Lena reminds herself. There’s no way Kara’s going to let anything happen to either of them, but the thought of it still sends a short shiver across her skin. When Lena doesn’t respond, Mxy lets out a loud groan, turning back to Kara.

“You know how important she is,” he says. “Lena Luthor is going to change the world with science and business and L Corp will be a force for good, and - even with no L Corp! Lena has a hospital, and a billion charities, and millions of people who look up to her! Kara, you can’t take that from the world!”

Kara’s jaw goes nearly so tight that Lena is certain she might break it, but she squeezes at Kara’s hand as hard as she can. Mxy turns to her then, clearly just lashing out wherever he thinks is weakest.

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“The world might have Superman, but Supergirl is about hope and compassion and the Earth needs that, more than ever! And Kara Danvers? You loved her before you ever thought about Supergirl. You know how good she is. Don’t take that away!”

“You were going to take it away anyway,” Lena says, slowly, trying not to let the hot feeling in her chest distract her.

“We can do some negotiations! You love negotiations!”
When he gets no response, he throws his hands up in the air and spins in a circle almost four complete times, clearly unsure what to do. But he centers his gaze back on them.

"And the two of you together! You can change the world. A Luthor, a Super. You could have kids, and a family and a life! You've always wanted that. I know you have! Please. Turn off the stupid Cauldron. Think about your future. Together."

There's a moment of silence as he looks at them pleadingly, until Kara lets out a long sigh.

“Fine,” she says and he puts a triumphant fist in the air. “I’ll tell you the code.”

They both walk up to the console and Kara walks him through it. “That one,” she says pointing and Lena moves forward to see what they’re doing. “That one. That one.”

Lena sees it immediately. It’s in Kryptonian, but it’s spelling out Mxyzptlk’s name backwards. Genius.

When it’s finished the computer indicates their success.

Atomic Cauldron detonation cancelled it says and the code he just inputted appears on the holographic screen in front of them. Kara reaches out to press another button and the code suddenly translates: **K L T P Z Y X M**

A victorious feeling crashes through Lena - a satisfying feeling of pleasure at having bested this all-knowing all-powerful creature takes hold of her and she can’t help but smile as she feels it.

Mxy freezes, his jaw dropping in shock as he slowly straightens up from the console. “You made me write my name backwards,” he accuses, turning incredulous eyes to Kara who steps back and retakes her place next to Lena.

“Yup. On some planets, writing something is truly saying it,” she says and Lena curls her arm through Kara’s, watching as Mxy sputters in indignation.

“You tricked me!”

“Time to go home, Mxy,” Kara tells him and just as he starts to walk towards them his hand begins to disappear in a swirl of blue energy.

“This isn’t over,” he threatens Kara, but she just smiles.

“It is.”

With that, the rest of him dissipates and Kara lets out a long exhausted breath, tension seeping out of her as they’re left in the fortress alone.

They’re silent for a bit in the wake of his absence as if waiting for him to pop back in front of them. Long seconds pass before they both seem to feel satisfied and Lena sags into Kara’s side, laughs a little as she strokes a hand down Kara’s back.

It strikes her that it doesn’t feel that unfamiliar to be standing here next to Kara having just bested some kind of extranormal being or other threat to their lives. She runs her eyes up Kara’s red and blue suit and asks, “Do you think we’ll ever have a normal life?”

Kara laughs, quirks a brow in Lena’s direction. “Do you want one?”

Staring into Kara’s smiling blue eyes, the answer comes easy. “I want any kind of life with you,”
she says seriously and Kara steps forward to kiss her.

“Me too,” Kara murmurs when they separate.

Lena drinks her in for a long moment before pulling back a bit and looking around. “Would you really want to get married here?”

“What?!” Kara asks, choking on the word a little as she stiffens.

“Do you want to get married here?” Lena repeats, amused at the blush that spreads across Kara’s cheeks considering they’ve discussed marriage before - considering apparently Kara’s considered them married for years.

“I - uh - I - what? I’ve never thought about it,” Kara says. “I mean, like, I guess I’ve thought about it. There are like marriage protocols in the archives that you can initiate and-”

Initiating the Jewel of Truth the computerized voice says and Kara’s eyes go comically wide.

“Abort!” Kara yells out looking around as if there’ll be someone physical for her to stop.

Lena laughs at the terrified flush in Kara’s face and reaches out to tangle their fingers together.

“Oh Rao, I don’t even know what it does for that,” Kara mutters, glancing around. “But, uh, no. I don’t need to get married here. Mon-El was right, Kryptonians don’t need anything special for their weddings, just the bracelets and the vows.”

“Oh, so we’re already three fourths of the way there?” Lena asks, teasing, popping the clasp on her watch and flipping it over. The etchings on the back are still there, clear as day, barely even worn down. Kara makes a noise of annoyance.

“Put that back on before some other thing decides to attack us,” Kara says, and Lena does, the watch settling back onto her wrist. Thankfully, nothing else decides to attack them.

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They report their success to the team back at the DEO and it feels like everyone breathes a collective sigh of relief.

Alex looks slightly furious when she hears the details of Kara’s plan, but is mollified by a tight hug from her sister and reassurances that everyone went perfectly. The two of them drift to the side a bit in hushed conversation and Lena lingers near Winn and Mon-El.

“So, you and Kara are like together now, right?” Mon-El asks randomly, swiveling back and forth a bit in his chair.

Lena and Winn both give him matching looks of confusion. “Dude, get there faster,” Winn says and Lena laughs.

Mon-El shrugs. “No, I mean like...it’s something we’re acknowledging now, right? Not something we’re all pretending not to know? You’re mates, you’re the bracelet, all that stuff?”

The urge to roll her eyes and walk away runs through her, but she settles for just nodding politely. “Yes, Kara and I are together.”

The grin that spreads across his features is admittedly unexpected, but it makes Lena smile. “So when’s the party? Do you guys do parades here?”
“What?” Lena and Winn both manage to say at the same time.

His eyes bounce between them, brows pulling together. “Is that not a thing here?”

“My what not a thing?” Lena asks.

“On Daxam, we throw parties when people get together,” he explains, slouching down in his chair. “This planet really needs to loosen up.”

Winn makes a face of agreement that stutters into something more serious when he glances at Lena, but before anything more can be said, Kara and Alex rejoin the group.

“What are we talking about?” Alex asks, hands on her hips and looking far less tense than earlier.

“Mon-El wants to throw us a party,” Lena says vaguely.

Alex’s lips twist in amusement. “An engagement party? Because you’re about five years too late for that,” she jokes and Lena and Kara both shoot her indignant looks as the rest of the group laughs.

“Oh, you guys get exactly fifteen minutes to make all the wedding jokes you want and then it’s done,” Kara says with a commanding finger pointed at all of them.

Mon-El puts a finger in the air, makes as if to stand, but Kara silences him with her hand forward his direction. “Not you,” she says and he freezes - mouth open - before falling back into his chair.

“Should we ceremonially burn all the suits and dresses Mxy left with us?” Winn asks, looking far too excited at the thought of fire.

“Yeah, Kara, the dresses were bad,” Alex says.

“It’s not like I picked them!” Kara says, looking defensive.

“Darling, I think you might have accidentally picked the dresses when he dropped in on our dinner a couple nights ago,” Lena says, smiling when Kara turns to glare at her heavily.

“Good to know. Kara’s not in charge of dresses for the real wedding,” Alex says, smirking at the way Kara blushes even as her eyes stay narrowed.

“So we get to burn them?” Winn asks eagerly, effectively sidestepping the implication of what real wedding might mean.

Lena pokes Kara in the side a little before sliding her arm around her waist. “Why don’t we get something to eat first?” And it’s so clearly an effort to placate the frowning Kryptonian that Winn laughs.

“Totally. Happy wife, happy life,” Winn teases, grinning until Kara throws a nearby pen at him. It hits him in the arm and he winces like it actually hurts, but laughs.

“I hate all of you,” Kara says.
Chapter 16

Life starts to return to some kind of level of normalcy. For the first few weeks, it’s nice.

She and Kara take advantage of being able to live their lives without constant interference from some creepy trickster. They take the time to relearn what it means to be together and the routines they’d started to fall into recently become more and more entrenched.

Some nights, when Lena can get out of the office at a reasonable time and Kara’s done with her nightly patrol, they’ll order food and spend their evening lounging on Lena’s couch. It becomes familiar to see Kara land on her balcony with a long-winded story about some fire she put out earlier or a car crash she averted.

Sometimes Kara gets called away at four in the morning - an urgent call from Alex or Winn or J’onn about whatever’s set off DEO alarms. She’ll press a kiss to Lena’s head as she slides out from under the sheets and wakes Lena up with the chill of her absence.

On those nights, Lena rarely falls back asleep. Instead she’ll wake up and make a pot of coffee, get going on checking her inbox for the day and wait to see if Kara will return before the workday begins. If Kara does, it’s usually with apology donuts and a steaming hot latte from Noonan’s.

By week two, Lena starts to forget what life was like without these kinds of routines. On Tuesday, Kara convinces Lena to try some new Indian place that Lena falls in love with and then Thursday, Lena returns the favor with reservations for an impossible-to-get-into new fusion restaurant on the other side of town.

She had never really given herself a chance to think of what being with Kara would be like, into her twenties and an adult. And even if the world isn’t quite what she probably would have imagined - she’s a CEO, Kara is a superhero - it’s still nice. It feels like normal, or the kind of normal Lena would settle for if it meant having Kara.

On Friday night, just as she’s about to get in the shower she turns back to the kitchen with the intent of reminding Kara to preheat the oven for the pizzas and Kara nearly takes off a chunk of the counter when she turns and sees Lena.

“Lena, where are your - why are you wearing a towel?” Kara asks, looking up at the ceiling for a moment before she directs her eyes back down to the kitchen island.

“I told you I was going to jump in the shower,” Lena says.

“Yes, but why are you in a towel in the kitchen?” Kara asks pointedly.

Lena shrugs a bare shoulder, enjoys the way Kara’s eyes can’t seem to land on anything in particular. “I wanted to remind you to preheat the oven.

“I know I need to preheat the oven,” Kara says with a hint of exasperation but there’s a flush in her cheeks and her eyes continue to dart around distractedly.

It makes Lena laugh. “It’s not as though any of this is new to you,” she says, gesturing down her body.

Kara sighs - an exaggerated, longsuffering sound - and presses a button on the oven to turn it on before looking back at Lena, her eyes flitting up and down. “Just because it isn’t new doesn’t mean
it doesn’t affect me. Or are you forgetting that time I broke a bed and exploded a cup of coffee on Earth-1?”

It hadn’t been her intention to go down this path when she returned to the kitchen in only a towel, but she’s certainly not complaining. Kara’s moving closer to her and the memory of their tiny hotel room on Earth-1 floods her with warmth. “I remember,” Lena says with a smirk she can’t suppress.

She also remembers the feeling of Kara pressing her against a wall, the strong tense line of her forearm when it nearly ripped a hole in the drywall and intent lips against her jawline.

Kara’s eyes narrow even as she reaches forward and picks Lena up by the hips to hoist her onto the kitchen island like Lena weighs nothing. Absently, Lena wonders if casual displays of strength will ever stop affecting her so much. “You’re taking advantage of me,” Kara teases, trying to sound threatening, but not really succeeding.

Lena glances down with a pointed arch of her brow to where Kara’s pressing in between her legs - the white towel creeping up her thighs. “I’m taking advantage of you?”

With a laugh, Kara ignores the implication and just noses at the juncture of Lena’s neck and collarbone, kissing the skin there in a way that floods heat across Lena’s chest.

Between the chill of the countertop beneath her and the warmth of Kara’s body and lips, Lena’s mind starts to go a little hazy.

“You’re the one that came out here in a towel,” Kara says, the words taking a second to break through to Lena’s brain. Kara’s kisses have turned more insistent, her fingers pressing against the bare skin of Lena’s thighs.

“Because you’re not trustworthy in a kitchen alone,” Lena jokes and Kara makes a sound between a scoff and a laugh. It’s right under Lena’s ear - her breath puffing there soft and hot - and they’re about to have sex in this kitchen if Lena has anything to say about it.

“Don’t be mean,” Kara says, but there’s smile in her voice and when she pulls back to glare at Lena the expression falls a little short of serious.

“Half the time you’ve used my stovetop, you’ve burnt something,” Lena points out even as she lets the top of her towel sag a bit and Kara’s gaze flits down immediately.

“One time, Lena,” Kara says with a roll of her eyes.

“One time out of the two times you’ve used my kitchen. That’s a fifty percent fire rate.”

Kara laughs. “Are you trying to give me a stats lesson?”

“Well it sounds like you need one,” Lena replies, but her words kind of trail off breathily when Kara’s fingers slide higher on her thighs, and her lips go back to mouthing down Lena’s neck.

Conversation ceases then and Lena gets lost in the sensation of having Kara so close, of the warm way their bodies fit together and the soft sound of Kara whispering affection in a mixture of English and Kryptonian.

Her towel nearly falls away completely and she’s got the top four buttons of Kara’s workshirt open when she registers the sound of crackling and the smell of something burning.

“Kara!” Lena says with some alarm as she notices the kitchen has gotten noticeably more smoky.
Kara pulls away suddenly and looks over her shoulder to see a not-so-minor flame sprouting from the pan she’d been cooking bacon in - why Kara needed to add bacon to every meal she ate was beyond Lena but at least pizza made more sense than say...a fruit salad.

A curse leaves Kara’s lips in Kryptonian before she’s flashing to the stove and pulling the pan away from it with a quick burst of her frost breath. Seconds later she has the stove off and then the oven and the entire area is frozen from Kara’s solution to the growing flame.

Pulling her towel back up to cover her rapidly chilling body, Lena sighs. “Do you think it would be suspicious if I got some of that superhero insurance for my apartment?”

“I’ll fix it,” Kara says with a sheepish grin, but she doesn’t look that upset about it. It seems now that the flame is taken care of, Kara’s back on track with their previous plans. Her hands go straight back to Lena’s thighs.

When their lips connect, Lena lets out a little sound at the feel. “Your mouth is cold,” she murmurs even as Kara keeps kissing her. The sensation is certainly interesting, and Lena finds herself chasing the feeling after a few kisses.

“It’ll warm up,” Kara says, nudging back into Lena’s body to press her backwards.

“On the counter?” Lena asks, but the question comes out breathless and slightly strangled when chilled lips and tongue make their way down her body.

Kara’s grin is playful when her chin props up on Lena’s sternum, fingers pulling the towel away from her body and Lena shivers. “This is where people eat, right?” Kara says and Lena groans at the joke, but she laughs a little even as she shoves at Kara’s shoulder.

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By week three, Lena starts to question the easy routines her life is falling into. She starts to lose trust in the normalcy, the silence. The newness of having a normal kind of life with Kara starts to fade and in its place comes the paranoia. Instead of comforting, the normalcy starts to feel threatening and she finds herself getting antsy the longer they go without a peep from her mother or Cadmus.

“Maybe – have you thought maybe she didn’t actually make it out of the warehouse?” Kara asks delicately one night when Lena casually mentions her concerns.

It’s a different thing to confront – the idea that maybe her mother died – and she’s nowhere near ready to unpack all that could mean for her so she doesn’t. Instead, she sticks to the stubborn belief that her mother did survive because, frankly, that’s the most likely scenario.

“This is my mother we’re talking about,” Lena says, swiping through digital spec sheets on a new proposal she and Lana had been working on that week. “That woman is like a cockroach.”

They’re perched on opposite ends of Lena’s couch, Kara’s feet in Lena’s lap as she types away on her laptop – some opinion piece on giving aliens the right to vote.

Kara sighs and sets her laptop to the side. Lena can feel her gaze on the side of her face, but refuses to look up, keeps her eyes trained on the tablet in her hand.

“Lena,” Kara says softly and she shifts her feet off Lena’s lap until she’s scooting closer on the couch and plucking the tablet out of her hands pointedly.
“What?” Lena asks and it comes out icy and defensive, but she can’t help the rattle of nerves it causes when she even begins thinking about what her mother has planned.

If Kara’s affected by her tone, it doesn’t show. Her expression stays soft, a small smile playing on her lips as she reaches over and scoops Lena’s legs up so that this time it’s Lena with her feet in Kara’s lap.

“It’s okay to enjoy the quiet,” Kara says, running a strong thumb up the arch of Lena’s foot in a way that actually does melt some of the tension out of her spine.

“I am enjoying it,” Lena says, her eyes fluttering a little at the feel of Kara’s fingers working magic on her feet – the ache from having worn tall heels all day at work starts to ease.

“You’re waiting for your mother to jump out at us from around a dark corner,” Kara corrects with a little arch of her brow.

“Because she probably will,” Lena deadpans, unaffected by the exasperation that takes hold of Kara’s face. “I can enjoy something and still prepare for the worst at the same time.”

“I’m well aware of your multi-tasking skills,” Kara replies with a laugh that makes Lena smile and wiggle her foot where it’s trapped in Kara’s hands. “But you shouldn’t let your cynical –”

“Hey!” Lena protests, but she laughs a bit at the teasing look on Kara’s face.

“Your cynical penchant for constantly worrying get in the way of living your life.”

Lena tsks, kicks a bit at Kara’s thigh even though it’s like trying to push a rock and rolls her eyes. “I’m sorry that my mother is the evil genius behind an anti-alien paramilitary organization bent on murdering you and that makes me worry a little bit.”

At that, Kara sobers and looks at Lena. “Winn has been tracking any Cadmus activity whatsoever since the warehouse. He has you on speed dial. The minute she surfaces, you’ll know.”

“That’s not what I’m worried about,” Lena says, slumping further against the arm of the couch and trying to let Kara’s strong fingers crawling up her shins comfort her.

“What are you worried about?”

“About what will happen after that,” she says and Kara doesn’t really have an answer for that other than shifting on the couch until she’s lying down next to Lena and scooping her up into a solid hold.

Apart from things settling down with Kara, Lena feels like she finally gets a chance to settle into her life in general in National City. It’s a bit ridiculous considering she’s been living here for the better part of a year, but it’s the first time she hasn’t had some pressing issue constantly distracting her.

The threat of her mother and Cadmus is more like an afterthought – an always present fear that becomes so much a part of her every day that it’s practically normal. Other than that, there’s nothing else world changing for her to worry about – no sudden reunion with her ex-girlfriend, no trickster imps from the fifth dimension, no ritual assassination attempts on her life, L Corp starts to find its stride.
It also means Lena starts to find herself settling into a life with an actual social calendar—something she hasn’t really experienced since college.

She and Lana start to have semi-regular happy hours. They never have the lunch Lena originally intended—the one meant to discuss the possibility of more of Lex’s vaults and their whereabouts—but instead they meet for drinks in which business is a prohibited subject. It becomes a nice reprieve from a busy work week.

“So how is Kara?” Lana asks, pouring more pinot noir into Lena’s glass.

“Fine,” Lena answers with a bit of a pointed look in Lana’s direction. It’s still a bit awkward for her to discuss personal matters with an employee— with anyone technically—but she reconciles that Lana’s the closest friend she’s made in National City that isn’t already Kara’s friend and she should probably try to nurture that relationship.

Lana laughs as she pours wine into her own glass and sets the bottle back on the bar. “Come on, Lena. You’re never any fun. This is what girl talk is supposed to be about.”

Lena arches a brow, but she chuckles and takes a sip of her wine. “I wouldn’t know.”

On the small television above the bar the news is covering an ugly car crash on the interstate and predictably Supergirl is there, pulling people out of a burning car and assisting with search and rescue.

It makes Lena smile a bit to see Kara cradling a small child and handing them off to relieved parents.

“Yikes, that looks ugly.” Lana comments and they both watch as Supergirl hovers over the scene, blowing frost breath to eliminate lingering fire.

“Supergirl seems to have it handled,” Lena says, lips pressed together to stop a smile that always threatens to break on her face every time she sees Kara these days.

“You know, you never did say what was going on between you two,” Lana says, turning to face Lena with curious eyes.

“I beg your pardon?” Lena asks, hoping the flush creeping in her cheeks isn’t giving anything away.

“How did you guys become friends?”

Lena takes a careful sip of her wine. “Did I say we are?”

Lana laughs a bit. “I guess not. But she was with you that one day at work, and I’ve seen you guys on the news a few times. Whether you like it or not, a Luthor and a Super fighting crime tends to make headlines.”

She tries not to sour at that description, but she can’t help remembering the front page of the papers the day after her brother was apprehended. “Yes, well. I’m not my brother,” Lena says and Lana’s face softens, her hand coming to rest on Lena’s forearm.

“I didn’t mean it like that, Lena.”

The delivery is genuine enough that Lena believes her, relaxes just a bit. “Supergirl is a friend, I suppose. She’s saved me more times than I can count at this point,” Lena says, thinking of the way
Kara came crashing back into her life. “I’m sure you can relate. Didn’t Superman save you a few times?”

Lana’s face drifts towards something a little more withdrawn, but she has a small smile on her face as she tilts her head back and forth.

“A few,” she admits. “Everyone from Metropolis seems to have a Superman story.”

Lena hums agreement, shrugs a shoulder and looks back to the TV where Supergirl is giving an interview - bright cheery eyes at having saved the day and an easy smile that Lena finds herself mimicking on her own face.

Lana follows her gaze, sighs. “Those Supers and their jawlines. I’m pretty sure you could cut glass with them,” Lana comments and Lena laughs, taking a sip of her wine as Lana affects an exaggerated lovestruck expression.

“Probably literally,” Lena suggests and Lana’s expression warps from teasing to thoughtful consideration.

Thankfully, the scientific implications of a being able to cut glass with a jawline manage to distract Lana thoroughly through the rest of their happy hour. Lena’s content to sip at her wine and let the intelligent sound of Lana working through a problem waft over her.

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A few days later, Winn invites her out for drinks and she agrees easily enough. Kara’s working late at CatCo that night trying to meet a deadline and nothing pressing needs her attention at L Corp so she puts on a casual dress and heels and heads out.

They agree to meet at their usual alien-friendly bar and Lena’s all prepared for a quiet few drinks with Winn discussing improvements to their battlebots or whatever weird tech problem Winn needs help with. Which is why she’s so blindsided when she walks in the bar to see that the whole gang is there. Everyone except Kara.

“Lena!” Winn calls over from where he’s sitting next to Mon-El. Alex and Maggie are at a pool table together – Alex studiously observing the table as she bends over it and Maggie watching her with an amused smile.

She’s never really hung out with everyone without Kara acting as her connection to the group. Not unless there was some kind of world-ending threat to take care of or some other reason. Her stomach flutters nervously, but she lifts her chin and crosses the bar to Winn’s side.

“Hey,” she greets, leaning over to give him a one armed hug and a kiss on his cheek. Mon-El stands to greet her and without preamble, wraps her up in a tight hug, lifting her a bit off the ground in a surprising move that makes her yelp.

The sound draws the attention of Alex and Maggie who give her matching smiles and nods and that’s when James walks over, somehow managing to hold five beers in his hands.

“Hey, Lena,” he says with a warm easy smile. “Sorry, I didn’t get you one.”

“Not at all,” she says, waving him off as he hands the beers around.

M’gann approaches at that with a smile, dusting her hands on a small towel. “Welcome, Lena. Your usual?”
Everything feels oddly overwhelming for a moment before she manages to compose herself and nod at M’gann. “Thanks.”

M’gann retreats then to make her drink and she’s left sliding into a stool Winn pulls out for her and smiling as James sits down.

“Winn here was just telling us about his failure with the ladies,” Mon-El says with a cheery grin. He pats Winn on the back with a loud thud that sends Winn sprawling forward on the table, just barely moving his beer out of the way in time.

“Dude,” Winn complains with a cough and Lena smoothes a smile at Mon-El’s contrite expression.

“My bad, bro,” he says and James laughs.

“And I did not say I failed,” Winn clarifies with a glare for Mon-El.

M’gann returns to slide a perfectly crafted manhattan in front of Lena and she takes a grateful sip, the nerves at being involved in this slightly unfamiliar social situation not entirely calmed.

“I think if the girl cries on the first date it’s not exactly a success,” James says, taking a swig of his beer.

Lena nearly chokes on her drink in surprise and both her eyebrows shoot to her hairline as she looks at Winn who just sighs. “I didn’t say she cried.”

A shadow of confusion crosses Mon-El’s face and he laughs. “You said she cried on the first date,” he says in a slow enunciation of the words.

Winn’s cheeks are a little red, but he rolls his eyes exasperatedly. “Okay, maybe she did.”

“What on earth happened?” Lena asks once she finds her voice and she tries to settle into hanging around these people – her friends she realizes.

“I don’t know!” Winn answers, indignantly. “One second we’re just talking and the next I know she’s sobbing.”

“So, you said something,” James offers and Lena agrees with a nod of her head.

“I’m telling you, it wasn’t anything I said,” Winn insists.

At that, Alex appears at the table, a happy smile on her face and seeming a little out of breath. “Hey, what are we talking about?”

“Winn made a girl cry,” Mon-El offers immediately.

“I did not,” Winn says, shoving at him, though it seems to have no effect on the Daxamite.

Alex ignores both of them with a pinched look before addressing the rest of the group. “Shots? Maggie’s buying because she’s terrible at pool.”

“You cheated, Danvers,” Maggie interjects as she comes over.

The look of innocence on Alex’s face is so obviously fake that Lena nearly laughs, but she hides the sound in her drink as Alex replies, “I’ve never cheated a day in my life.”

“I’m not doing whiskey,” Winn says, looking a little green just at the thought.
“Whatever we’re doing, it’s going to be cheap,” is all Maggie says before Alex slings an arm across her shoulders and gives her a smile.

It sparks an argument over what kind of shots they should do, but Lena sits back as it happens, watches the group interact around her and wonders for the millionth time in the last year how much her life has changed.

In the pocket of the jacket she still has yet to take off, her phone buzzes. It’s a text from Kara - *miss you* accompanied by a grumpy selfie of Kara at work. In the background she can make out Snapper studying what are probably proofs spread out over a table.

Everything about the moment feels too good to be true and Lena drinks it in for a bit, long enough to let it settle around her before adding her two cents into the shot conversation.

“Has anyone ever had a Death By Sex?” Lena asks, remembering a favorite shot of the astronomy club in college.

The group all seem to pause at once, turning to her with matching looks of surprise. No one answers for a long few seconds before Mon-El grins. “We are so getting that one.”

Kara picks her up later – two manhattans and two rounds of shots in – and is appropriately bewildered to find her just tipsy enough to be leaning into James and laughing at Mon-El’s attempt to chug a beer while doing a handstand.

“Did I miss the party?” Kara asks as she approaches slowly. Maggie and Alex had disappeared somewhere about a half hour ago, but she, Winn, James and Mon-El are still congregated around the table.

“Yes,” Lena answers simply, pushing off from James and extending her hand towards Kara. “Hello.”

Kara takes the offered hand quickly and steps up into Lena’s side. It’s much nicer to lean against Kara than James and she does so immediately, slumping into the solid way Kara wraps an arm around her back and keeps her upright.

Winn’s squinting at Kara, one eye closing more than the other as if he’s trying to get his vision to focus. “We may have had shots,” he tells her just as Mon-El falls over from his attempted handstand and cracks a nearby table in half.

James stands, a little unsteadily and glances to where M’gann is glaring at them from behind the bar. “I think that’s our cue to leave.”

Kara laughs, but helps Lena up from the stool and subtly carries her out of the bar. “You’re my favorite,” Lena murmurs sleepily into Kara’s shoulder, happy for her solid, unwavering strength as they make their way home.

A warm kiss presses to the top of her head and Lena feels at peace.

“Everything is so nice right now,” Lena says, barely reacting when Kara gives up trying to get Lena to walk and just scoops her up off the ground. “I don’t want it to end.”

It makes Kara laugh again and Lena opens her eyes to realize they’re already in Kara’s apartment. “Why does it have to?” Kara asks with a pretty smile that Lena can’t stop herself from kissing.
“These protests are getting out of hand,” Lena tells her brother, looking out of his office window to the streets below.

There’s a line of picketers that have been there since that morning. Their signs all contain a similar anti-Luthor Corp sentiment after recent announcements regarding military contracts.

“It will blow over,” Lex dismisses with a wave, his eyes still on the binder of reports Lena had handed him minutes ago.

“And if it doesn’t?” Lena asks, striding over towards Lex’s desk and propping her hip against it to try and draw her brother’s attention. It does the trick and he finally looks up, leaning back in his office chair and running a hand through his hair.

“It will,” he insists with a shrug and a quick glance towards the window.

“Maybe we should make a statement,” Lena suggests. “Hold a press conference.”

“I’m not going to be goaded into responding to the opinions of those sheep,” Lex says with a curl of his lip. “Press conferences are just opportunities for them to scream some more.”

“They just want to feel like they’re being heard, Lex. Maybe if you talked to them, they’d back down.”

A considering look crosses Lex’s face – a testament to how the everyday picketing has worn on him – but he shakes his head. “I’m not giving them a soapbox if I don’t have to.”

Lena sighs, but before she can say anything else a loud sound goes off in the streets below – a car backfiring, fireworks, gunshots – Lena’s not sure.

“What was that?” Lex asks, but before Lena gets a chance to look out the window, another explosive sound shoots out – this time closer and very distinctly in the building. The sound of someone screaming echoes through the door and Lena’s eyes go wide. Lex shoots out of his chair.

“Lex,” she draws out slowly. Lex is halfway to the panic button on the corner of his desk.

The door bursts open suddenly and two men rush in, one of them holding a gun and the other with what looks to be C4 strapped to his chest. Lena gasps in reaction as Lex pulls her behind him and watches the two men.

“This represents the children your technology has killed,” the man holding the gun says before smashing something against his chest that bursts in a bloom of red down his white shirt – paint, Lena thinks.

The other man, with the explosives on his chest holds his hand out where Lena spots a trigger and her brain goes blank with the knowledge that these two men are here to kill them. She’s heard plenty of ill will directed her and her family’s way over her life, but this is certainly the first time a real threat has made its way to her.

“You don’t want to do this,” Lex says, hand outstretched in front of him. “Let’s just talk.”

“We’ve been down there trying to talk to you for days,” the man snarls at him, his gun flickering in aim between Lex and Lena, and Lex takes a reflexive step back, pulling at Lena until she’s more behind him. “You wouldn’t listen.”
“We’re listening now,” Lena says, her fingers gripping into the back of Lex’s starched blue shirt as she tries to project some measure of calm at the attackers.

“Shut up! You deserve this as much as he does,” the man yells, his gun focusing now on Lena. Lex reacts very characteristically to the more obvious threat to Lena, in that he starts to let his anger slip through.

“If you think blowing your way into my building and threatening my sister is the way to get me to listen to you, you are sorely mistaken,” Lex says. Lena grips tighter at the back of his shirt, watching as the man glares heavily at Lex’s ire. She’s considering just pulling them both under his massive desk and hoping for the best when a loud popping noise comes from outside. “I hope you enjoy rotting in a jail cell for the rest of your lives.”

The next thing she’s aware of is the sound of shattering glass as a red and blue form suddenly bursts into the office and in the blink of an eye their two attackers are just…gone.

A rarely spoken expletive drops out of Lex’s mouth and he falls forward, hands catching him on his desk as he heaves in deep breaths. “You okay?” He asks over his shoulder after a few seconds, but Lena’s not sure how to answer him.

Not that she gets a chance, because as quickly as it happened, the red and blue blur is back and standing in Lex’s top floor office. Superman stands at his full height, his chin proud and his hands on his hips as he looks over the room.

“Lex,” Superman is saying – the name sounding comfortable and familiar in Superman’s mouth, somehow. “Are you alright?”

Lex has straightened from his hunched over position, eyeing Superman with what Lena can only read as contempt. “I’m fine, Kryptonian.”

The air feels like it gets sucked out of the room. Either from the tension between Lex and the Man of Steel, or because Lena suddenly realizes with a kind of mind numbing clarity that Superman is Kara’s cousin.

Her brother and Superman exchange a few more words and Lena should probably be paying attention, but she can’t. Her eyes fixate on Superman – on the crest across his chest, the way his hair is perfectly styled, the strong line of his jaw.

It’s there, in the little details. Lena sees Kara clear as day and it’s like something tight and overwhelming takes hold of her throat. God, she wishes Kara were here.

It’s the adrenaline, she tells herself. You’re fine. You’re fine. Like a mantra in her head.

“Lena?” Lex asks, hand at her arm and the hard lines of his face suddenly softened as he looks at her with concern.

Superman is eyeing her curiously as well and she knows her face is probably pale and her hands shaky. She dismisses it with a clearing of her throat and fingers tightening her ponytail. “I’m fine. Just a bit shook up,” she says, glancing at Superman once more. “Thank you for your assistance.”

“Oh course,” he says, chest puffing up a bit. “Happy to see you are both okay.”

“I’m sure,” Lex says dryly, and he turns away from Superman, reaching for his suit jacket and pushing it onto Lena’s shoulders. “We’re leaving now.”
“I’m not sure it’s safe for you to leave, Lex - ” Superman says, still looking kind and so much like Kara that Lena certainly can’t breathe.

“Then make it safe,” Lex snaps, his hand tightening around Lena’s. “Isn’t that what you do?”

A conflicted look crosses Superman’s face - one Lena doesn’t really know how to read. “I’m just trying to help, Lex. Same as you.”

“Except this is my planet and you’re just a visitor.”

“It’s my planet too,” Superman says with considerable heat and Lena glances over to see Lex’s face twist up into a snarl.

“Your planet is dead,” Lex says in an even dark tone that nearly makes Lena gasp. “Isn’t that the angle your little reporter Lois Lane is always trying to push onto the public?”

“Lex,” Lena whispers in soft admonishment, eyes flitting from her brother to Superman.

Lena is sure Lex doesn’t know how many buttons he’s pushed at the same time, and a dark look crosses Superman’s face as he takes in Lex’s countenance. Lena watches his eyes drift over to her, and the blue of his eyes hits her square in her chest. Whatever expression she makes seems to snap Superman out of it, and he nods once to her.

“I’ll clear the way,” he says, and then he’s gone again, out the window. Lex deflates a little, his arm coming up around Lena’s shoulder and pressing his forehead into her temple for a long moment.

“You could have been nicer,” she says when they break apart. “He did just save our lives.”

Lex shakes his head, but a smile plays at his lips. “I’m sorry that my people skills go out the window when someone points a gun at my little sister,” he says and a shiver runs down her spine.

Her brother must notice because he steps back in close to her, brings her into another hug. She grips at his arm, trying to blink the tears gathering in her eyes away, trying not to think about how close she just came to dying, trying not to remember the maniac look in their attackers eyes, but mostly trying not to think of Kara getting a news alert about this ridiculous attack, trying to resist calling her and asking her to come.

“Remind me to put you in a bubble for the rest of your life,” Lex mutters, after a few moments as she slowly starts to lead them out of his office towards the stairs, where a group of Metropolis police are just making it to the top of the building.

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It stops feeling so startling to have a semi-normal kind of life again with a girlfriend and friends and as much as a routine as she’s had in a long time. And almost exactly as that thought crosses her mind is when she gets a text from Winn RED ALERT. DEO.

Not that the text was necessary because the tracking program Winn has been using to track Cadmus sends notifications to her desktop interface and she can already see that they’ve gotten a hit.

Fear grips her throat suddenly and she’s up and out of her office chair, picking her phone up and dialing the first number she thinks to.
The telltale sound of wind whipping past the speaker accompanies Kara’s greeting when she picks up. “We don’t know what it is yet,” Kara is saying and Lena’s standing at her floor to ceiling windows as if she might be able to catch a glimpse of Supergirl.

“What triggered the alarm?” Lena asks, wishing she were at the DEO with Winn, taking advantage of their high powered surveillance technology.

“A convoy leaving one of the suspected weapons facilities,” Kara answers. “J’onn and I are en route.”

“Be careful,” Lena says, heart pounding at the more immediate prospect of having to battle against her mother again.

“Go to the DEO. Winn will fill you in,” Kara instructs and Lena doesn’t even want to protest.

“I’ll see you there after,” she says, already grabbing her coat and bag.

“You will. I love you,” Kara says before disconnecting the line.

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The second she gets into the DEO she waves a badge at security and strides quickly towards the central platform where a video feed is showing Kara and J’onn taking down a few of Cadmus foot soldiers somewhere outside the city.

“What happened?” Lena asks abruptly and Winn jumps in his chair before noticing her.

“Hi, Lena,” he says with a bit of an affronted look at her surprise presence, but she can’t be bothered to care.

“Is it my mother?”

“We don’t know,” Winn says. “We just got an alert that they were moving something big.”

“We haven’t heard a peep out of them in weeks,” Lena says, surveying the video playing on the monitor with narrowed eyes. Kara and J’onn have handily taken care of the Cadmus henchman and are now headed towards the massive trailer they were protecting to check its contents.

“Guess we got lucky,” Winn says with a shrug.

It doesn’t feel like luck to Lena. Everything about the situation is making her heart quicken and her palms clammy.

Kara’s ripping the door off the trailer and stepping inside and the whole room hears an oh my god come across the comms.

“Kara?” Winn asks, tapping into the feed. “What is it?”

It’s J’onn that answers and his voice sounds about as bewildered as Kara’s did. “It’s Jeremiah.”

A sharp gasp behind them alerts Lena to Alex’s presence and she turns to see the eldest Danvers sister staring wide eyed at the monitor, all the blood gone from her face. “What did he just say?” Alex asks, voice like steel as she approaches. “Did he just say Jeremiah?”

The video answers the question for them as Kara’s scene carrying a large body out of the trailer and Alex makes a strangled kind of noise. It’s an involuntary reaction that Lena reaches out to
grasp Alex’s shoulder in sympathy – worry about her mother set aside for the moment at the glossy look in Alex Danvers’s eyes.

J’onn’s voice comes over the line again. “Agent Schott, prepare the med bay.”

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Lena’s never met Jeremiah – he had gone missing long before she met Kara – but she’s seen pictures of him. A few hung up around Kara’s dorm room – family shots and the like – and some in scrapbooks Kara had from when she was first came to Earth. She saw even more when Alex tasked her with searching for him – his soldier files in the DEO archives and various other reports.

When he comes into the DEO, slung over Kara’s shoulder and face swollen with bruises and lacerations – he doesn’t look very recognizable, but Alex goes sprinting across the floor to his side.

“I didn’t believe it,” Alex says as she nearly crashes into him and pulls him into a hug. He makes a sound of pain, but doesn’t push her away, just hugs her back.

Kara’s eyes are noticeably glossy even from where Lena’s lingering behind with Winn and she has a bright disbelieving smile on her face as she glances at Lena quickly before joining Alex in hugging her adoptive father.

The scattering of DEO agents around them must recognize him because a muted round of applause rings out as Alex and Kara help him through the base. Jeremiah smiles and waves, nods humbly like a good soldier and lets his daughters lead him towards the med bay.

Lena stays behind a bit, watches him with careful eyes and doesn’t know what to do.

*Lucky*, Winn had said.

It’s nearly impossible to shake the idea that this wasn’t about luck at all. The voice of her mother swirls through her mind, taunting and menacing: *you’d best to choose the right side before anything has to get too messy.*

She’s spent the past few months helping Alex search for any sign of Jeremiah after Kara reported his reappearance and not a peep, not a word of it. And now here he is, waltzing back into the DEO after fourteen years.

*Lucky.*

“Are you coming?” Winn asks, looking at her strangely as she stares down the hallway the Danvers family just retreated down.

It startles her out of her thoughts, but doesn’t stop the nervous crawl of paranoia twisting in her guts. “Of course,” she says before following him towards the medical room at the end of the corridor.

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The room feels thick with emotion.

Alex tends to her father delicately, tears still welling in her eyes while Kara watches, arms crossed over her chest and a soft smile on her face. J’onn has much the same posture as Kara, but without the smile and he stands nearby.
When Lena enters the room with Winn, Kara turns to her, holds her hand out for her to take. Winn goes immediately to a computer station and logs on — silently keys in a few commands.

Jeremiah watches Lena take Kara’s hand with a strange kind of intensity in his gaze, but the rest of his face remains impassive. Lena’s curious if he recognizes her, knows who she is or her connection to the woman that’s supposedly held him hostage for over a decade.

“Jeremiah,” Kara says with a proud little smile as Lena comes to her side. “This is—”

“Lena Luthor,” Jeremiah finishes for her, satisfying Lena’s curiosity.

Lena arches a brow, but doesn’t say anything, still unsure of this entire situation. Alex is watching them now, hand paused over her father’s arm where she’d be swiping gauze over the blood there.

Shifting just slightly on the bed, Jeremiah appraises her for a second, the tension in the room palpable as Kara clearly doesn’t know what to say.

“You’re Lillian’s daughter,” he adds and her jaw tightens involuntarily just as Kara’s fingers do around her hand.

“Adopted daughter,” she corrects with what she hopes is a polite smile, but she imagines it doesn’t quite succeed.

“Lena and I went to college together,” Kara says with a wary smile for both of them. “We’re dating.”

That flashes a note of surprise across Jeremiah’s face before he chuckles, his body language softening. “Well, that certainly explains a lot.”

At the matching looks of curiosity he gets in response, he adds, “Lillian may have made some not so nice comments about her daughter cavorting with alien ruffians when she took over,” he says with a quirky smile. “In between torturing me for my disloyalty.”

That answers a question Lena had largely avoided thinking about – her mother is alive.

Alex visibly reacts to the mention of her father being tortured and sits back on her stool. “What happened, Dad?”

He shrugs. “I don’t remember a lot of how I got to Cadmus, just that I woke up there after the mission in the Amazon and they kept me alive so that I could keep Henshaw alive and turn him into…whatever it is he is today.”

Jeremiah looks at J’onn who shifts at the mention of Henshaw. “It is strange seeing you in his skin,” he adds.

“But what happened after that?” Kara asks, pulling Jeremiah’s attention back to her. “I mean, you were gone a long time.”

“I guess Cadmus wanted me to stick around for help with other projects. And then Lillian came along - I tried to escape a few times, but,” he lets a wry smile cross his lips and looks himself over before sparing Lena a glance and then back to Kara. “Lillian doesn’t appreciate deserters very much.”

“Dad,” Alex sighs, a tortured look on her face.
“It’s okay, Alex,” he says softly. “What I did was to keep you and your sister safe.”

Alex shakes her head, looks down at the hand she’d been examining. “This arm,” she says softly. “It has extensive nerve damage.”

Jeremiah smiles easily. “It’s okay,” he repeats. “It’s worth it to see you two again.”

Lena squeezes Kara’s hand, but before anyone can speak again, Mon-El is walking into the room at a quick pace.

“I just heard,” he says and Jeremiah sits up again.

“Mon-El of Daxam,” he greets and it’s then Lena remembers they’ve already met – when her mother kidnapped both Kara and Mon-El for information. Everything about the situation is making Lena feel cold and wary.

“Nice to see you again,” Mon-El says as he comes to a stop next to Lena at the foot of Jeremiah’s bed. “Under different and slightly better circumstances.”

“I’d say,” Jeremiah agrees with a wry chuckle.

“I was worried about you after you helped Kara and I escape,” Mon-El says and Lena suppresses the urge to make a face at the unusual words of compassion out of the man.

“I’m just so lucky to be here,” he says, reaching out with his uninjured hand to grab for Alex’s and looking at Kara. “With both of you girls.” Kara releases Lena’s to step forward and put her hand on top of her sister’s and Jeremiah’s.

“I’d say it’s more than luck,” Mon-El says and it’s a casual statement, but the whole room tenses.

Lena looks over to him, curious to hear her own suspicions voiced.

“What do you mean?” J’onn asks and even Winn has spun away from his computer terminal to watch.

“We got an alert from Cadmus,” he says, shrugging. “We only ever get alerts from them if they like…send out a video or we catch them red handed.”

Kara’s gaze is hard when it cuts to him, eyes narrowing. “We did catch them red handed.”

“Did we?” Mon-El asks, looking around with a skeptical smile. “I mean weren’t they kind of waving their red hands around in the air literally like they just didn’t care so…”

Alex’s glaring heavily at Mon-El and Kara looks like she’s about to protest, but Jeremiah speaks up. “He’s right. You need to keep your guard up. Cadmus is planning something.”

A bitter taste builds in the back of Lena’s throat and her stomach turns over. “What is it?” She asks, the first words she’s spoken in long minutes.

“A nuclear fusion bomb,” he answers and Lena’s stomach drops. “They’re going to destroy National City and blame it on hostile aliens.”

As he says the last part he looks dead on at Lena before moving to Kara. “They built it from the radiation Lillian mined from your solar flare when she had you kidnapped.”

“Great,” Winn says inappropriately loudly. The word bursts out of him so abruptly that the room kind of jumps – just seeming to remember he’s there. “Is this place bomb proof?”
J’onn shoots him a look before focusing back on Jeremiah. “So, where is it? How do we stop it?”

“You could trace the radiation signature from Kara’s heat vision,” he suggests.

Winn sticks his hand in the air, spins his chair back around. “That sounds like a job for Schott. Winn Schott,” he says with exaggerated flair before spinning around again and looking at Jeremiah. “That’s me, by the way. I’m Winn. Kara’s friend. And Alex’s too, also a DEO agent and-”

“Winn,” Alex interrupts in a snap with a pointed look at him.

“Right, yes, tracking,” he says before getting to work.

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They find Jeremiah a clean change of clothes and get him fitted with a sling for his injured arm.

Alex takes the task of calling her mother and Kara just stands in the middle of the DEO as if she’s still in shock.

“It feels too good to be true,” she tells Lena, a wondering smile playing at her lips.

Lena doesn’t know how to tell her that’s exactly how she feels too except she’s fairly sure it is too good to be true. There’s something off about everything – it’s too easy, too neat. Jeremiah has too many good answers. Rehearsed answers.

Kara, who had been pacing around a little waiting for Alex and Jeremiah to return, stops and furrows her brow at Lena. “Why do you have that thinky face on?”

“Thinky face?” Lena asks with an arch of her brow.

“What are you thinking so hard about?” Kara asks before her forehead smooths. “Is it because he called you Lillian’s daughter? Because he just doesn’t know you, but I assure you when he does that-”

“It’s not that, Kara,” she says, interrupting that ramble with a laugh and a hand on Kara’s forearm. “I’m just – I’m just thinking.”

“Share with the class,” Kara murmurs, stepping in close.

Lena shakes her head, isn’t ready to break the happy spell around Jeremiah’s return if she doesn’t have to. “It’s just the first we’ve heard of Cadmus – my mother - in a long time,” she says.

“It’s good,” Kara tells her emphatically, reaching out take hold of Lena’s hips. “We know what they’re planning and Jeremiah is like our inside guy now.”

That’s the part that worries her. Just which team is Jeremiah really the inside guy for.

“Definitely,” she says and Kara’s face doesn’t look like she believes Lena’s smile, but Mon-El is stepping up to them suddenly and Kara pulls away to look at him.

“Lena,” he says uncertainly, glancing at Kara. “Can I talk to you for a second?”

Kara looks taken aback by the request, and Lena can’t blame her – she feels that way a little as well – but she doesn’t say anything. “Sure,” Lena says, shrugging at Kara’s questioning look and following Mon-El into the privacy of an empty hallway.
When they get there, he doesn’t say anything right away. Instead he just shifts nervously back and forth on his feet, his hands propped on his hips.

“What’s wrong?” Lena asks, wondering why she was the one chosen for this conversation or what Mon-El could possibly have to tell her. For a brief second she hopes this isn’t some revival of Mon-El’s intentions to mate Kara or something equally absurd, but then he finally speaks.

“I was there,” he says. “When Lillian made Kara solar flare.”

The memory of Kara in her kitchen after that incident rears up in her head. Kara had looked so vulnerable then and their relationship so tentative. It feels like a lifetime ago.

“I know,” Lena replies quizzically.

“It didn’t look like they were trying to farm radiation,” he says emphatically, his voice lowering as he steps closer to her. “It just looked like she wanted Kara to lose her powers.”

A cold shiver runs through Lena. It’s much of what she suspects as well. She isn’t sure what kind of nuclear fusion bomb her mother is building – and even just thinking that makes her chest seize – but mining radiation from Kara’s heat vision seems like an extreme way of planning a power source.

“I’m not a scientist,” Mon-El says. “But you’re like a genius here, right?”

Lena’s brows arch, her lips thin, but she doesn’t deny it. “I know enough to be dangerous,” she says.

“There’s something weird going on,” he says and she sighs. She doesn’t want to betray Kara’s trust or seem to take sides in this scenario, but she can’t help but agree. “I don’t think Jeremiah is what he says he is.”

“I know,” she says, glancing around to make sure they’re still secluded. Not that it’d help much. If Kara wanted to eavesdrop there’s not much Lena nor Mon-El could do.

“What if they’re forcing Jeremiah to-”

“Mon-El,” Lena interrupts with a soft warning in her tone.

“I’m just saying,” he says and she shakes her head.

“There’s nothing we can do about it now. Kara and Alex-”

“Kara will listen to you,” he says and she takes a deep breath.

“We could just be paranoid,” she adds trying to avoid what her brain is screaming at her. Mon-El just gives her a look.

“Just because you’re paranoid doesn’t mean there’s not someone creeping up behind you trying to kill you.”

As if on cue, Kara’s voice booms out from behind them and they both jump in surprise. “Hey,” Kara says, looking around warily as she approaches. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah,” Lena says with a soft clearing of her throat.

Mon-El rocks back and forth on his heels, hands behind his back in a picture of innocence. “Yeah,
“Okay,” Kara draws out, looking entirely confused. “Well, we’re making plans for family dinner tonight, you free?”

The last bit is directed at Lena who tries to calm the startled beating of her heart. “I think so,” she says, nodding.

Kara brightens, bounces forward slightly and kisses Lena on the cheek. “Great, you can get to know Jeremiah and the whole family can be together.”

Kara’s delight is palpable and as she turns to pull Lena back towards the central platform of the DEO, Lena gives Mon-El one last glance. There’s trepidation on his face and his significant look her direction is the last thing she sees before Kara’s asking her if she wants a ride back to L Corp.

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It’s nearly impossible to get any more work done the rest of the day.

All her brain can think about is that her mother is out there possibly building some kind of nuclear fusion bomb and that she might have to tell her girlfriend that she suspects her adoptive father is some kind of Cadmus mole. She imagines, for a moment, telling her younger self that these are the kind of problems she might’ve had if she kept on with Kara, and knows far too well that she would’ve done the same thing.

On top of that, Hector – her usual number two assistant after Jess – is out sick and his replacement – Alana – doesn’t know how to make Lena’s coffee right.

It’s a small thing, but when everything big in her life is all twisted, it’s small comforts that she likes to rely on.

By three o’clock she gives up on trying to actually get any work done and leaves the office. She can handle the rest of her meetings remotely and with a bottle of wine.

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“I can’t believe it,” Kara says, pacing around Lena’s bedroom while Lena gets ready for dinner. “After fourteen years.”

Lena hums to indicate she’s still listening and focuses on picking out a pair of earrings for the evening.

“Sorry,” Kara says, coming up behind Lena just as she’s decided on a pair and winding her arms around Lena’s waist.

“For what?” Lena asks, looking at Kara in the mirror on top of her dresser.

“Here I am freaking out over Jeremiah and we haven’t even talked about the other thing.”

“What other thing?” Lena asks, turning in Kara’s arms just as she gets her earrings on.

“Your mother,” Kara says and a chill runs through the bedroom.

“Ah, that thing,” Lena says wryly.

“Yes, that thing,” Kara parrots with a short smile. “We haven’t talked about finding out Cadmus is all good.”
planning to drop a nuclear bomb on National City.”

Lena arches a brow, moves away from Kara’s hold. “Are you surprised?”

“That’s not the point,” Kara says, clearly a little confused at Lena’s reaction.

Bending over to pick up a pair of heels from where they’re lying next to the bed, Lena glances back over at her. “Then what is?”

“You’ve been worried about your mother and Cadmus ever since the warehouse and—”

“Understandably,” Lena points out. “She wants to kill you.”

“Apparently she wants to kill all of us,” Kara says and Lena’s mouth goes dry just thinking about that.

“My mother was always ambitious,” she deadpans, but it’s not funny and Kara doesn’t laugh.

“I just want to make sure you’re okay.”

“Of course I’m not okay,” Lena says with a barking laugh. “But there’s nothing we can do about that.”

Kara steps a little closer and she looks so young and honest and perfect right now – soft looking pants, oversized sweater and face devoid of glasses. “Lena, we can stop her. We have Jeremiah now and he can help us figure out where this bomb is and how to stop them. It’s going to be fine.”

The mention of Jeremiah again makes a strange kind of guilt build up in her chest and she knows she can’t keep harboring these suspicions without at least trying to talk to Kara about them. Secrets have done nothing but hurt them in the past.

“Kara,” Lena starts, drawing the name out slowly and hesitantly.

Kara’s brow pulls together at the sound of it. “Yeah?”

After another moment’s hesitation, Lena decides to just get it out in the open. “Have you considered the possibility that Jeremiah’s timing is a little…”

“A little what?” Kara asks when Lena doesn’t finish the sentence and she straightens, eyes narrowing as if she knows exactly what Lena’s going to say.

Lifting her chin and willing herself not to be deterred by the possibility of Kara getting defensive. “A little suspect.”

A long pause precedes Kara’s next words. “I’m sorry?”

“We haven’t heard so much as a whisper from Cadmus in weeks and then he just waltzes back into the DEO to tell us about a fusion bomb that we’ve never heard about and only he knows about?”

Kara looks at her for a long moment, jaw slightly dropped before laughing. The sound so surprising that Lena’s eyebrows shoot up in reaction.

“You’re just being paranoid,” Kara dismisses with a roll of her eyes.

Now it’s Lena’s turn to feel defensive. “I’m not being paranoid.” Mon-El’s words ring in the back of her head and she almost repeats them to Kara. Just because she’s paranoid doesn’t mean she’s
“Yes, you are,” Kara says in an almost condescending kind of tone that Lena bristles at. “You’ve been paranoid for weeks about your mother popping out from around every corner and you’re looking for a reason to mistrust Jeremiah.”

“I don’t have to look very hard,” Lena points out with a quirk of her brow that Kara frowns at.

“Why is it so difficult for you to trust him?” Kara asks and Lena balks incredulously.

“Why is it so easy for you?”

Kara scoffs. “Because he’s only ever protected me. He was the only father figure I knew for years and he-“

“Was with Cadmus for fourteen years, Kara,” she insists, feeling heated as the argument starts to escalate. “That changes a person.”

“He was their prisoner,” Kara says emphatically.

“How are you so sure?” Lena asks, praying for Kara to just see past emotion to the logic of the matter.

“What?”

“How are you so sure he was just their prisoner?”

Kara doesn’t seem to have a direct answer for that, her mouth opens and closes a few times before she’s scoffing again. “You’re being ridiculous.”

“No,” Lena says slowly. “You’re just not seeing straight.”

“Not everything has to be some tragic messy dark thing, Lena,” Kara says with a certain amount of heat and exasperation.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Lena asks defensively and she can feel this argument about to escalate unnecessarily, but she’s not sure how to stop it. The adrenaline of Cadmus’s sudden reappearance and the fear Jeremiah’s presence has created in the back of her mind all seem to come to a head.

“Jeremiah was rescued today and now he’s back and he’s going to help us defeat Cadmus once and for all and-“

“I want to believe that just as much as you do, Kara, but the fact remains that he was with Cadmus for fourteen years, and even if he’s only known my mother for a year at most, she has very effective ways of inspiring loyalty.”

“You were with your mother for a lot longer than a year, should I make assumptions about where your loyalties lie too?” Kara says and Lena can tell she regrets it immediately by the face she makes as the words come out, but it’s too late. They’re out there, slicing through Lena’s chest painfully.

Something stills between them. Frozen and tense. Kara’s eyes widen just as Lena’s narrow.

“I can’t believe you just said that,” Lena says, wondering how just a day ago she was drowning in feelings of contentedness and peace and now she’s here – staring at Kara with hurt and disbelief. It
takes everything in her not to just snap back.

“I didn’t mean it,” Kara tries, scraping a hand down her face and blowing out a low breath and Lena does believe that, but it doesn’t erase the sudden stab of pain she felt. “This has just been a long day. We’re both on edge.”

Lena purses her lips, tries to quell the sudden surge of hurt and anger that’s bubbling up in her chest. “The only thing putting me on edge right now is the idea we’re letting a spy for my mother get close to us.”

An answering look of anger tightens in Kara’s jaw and they both observe each other for a long second. “If that’s the way you feel then maybe you shouldn’t come to dinner tonight.”

Throat going suddenly thick, Lena swallows against the feeling and forces her expression to remain neutral. “Fine.”

Kara looks hurt at that, like she expected Lena to protest, but Lena can’t find a mutually satisfying way out of this argument at the moment. It’s probably best if they both take a second to cool off anyway, even if the thought of Kara walking away from her right now is painful.

“Fine,” Kara repeats, observing Lena for a tense moment. After a second of hesitation, she steps forward and kisses Lena swiftly on the cheek before turning on her heel and heading for the door. “I’ll see you later, I guess.”

Lena watches her retreat with what feels like a band around her chest squeezing too tightly. The sound of the door shutting echoes throughout the now empty apartment and Lena twists her lips together to fight the spike of heat in her eyes.

Kicking off the heels she just put on, she reaches up to undo the bun her hair has been twisted up into and heads for her kitchen and straight for her wine chiller.

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“Can I stay here tonight?” Kara asks when Lena opens the door to her knocking. Without waiting for an answer, Kara just pushes inside and flops down onto Lena’s couch, sprawling over it.

“Of course,” Lena says though her acquiescence feels redundant. She paces back over to her desk where she’d been working on a design for class and sits down. “Have you been sex-iled from your room or something?”

An adorable crinkle appears in between Kara’s brows as she hangs her head upside down off the side of the couch and observes Lena. “Sex-iled?”

“Exiled from your room for sex reasons,” Lena clarifies with an arch of her brow and an amused smile.

Kara’s cheeks go pink. “No, more like exiled because my roommate hates me.”

“What is it this time?” Lena asks, pushing her homework away in the interest of looking at Kara - a much more enjoyable prospect.

“What isn’t it?” Kara answers, rolling over onto her stomach and propping her chin up on the arm of the couch. A pout takes form on Kara’s lips that Lena finds hard to resist.

“You should really talk to your RA about a mediator or something. They provide dispute settlement
services,” Lena points out.

“I don’t need a dispute settlement,” Kara sighs, sitting up and then looking around the couch for something.

It occurs to Lena what that could be a few seconds later and she points a finger to the coffee table. “It’s under my physics textbook,” she says and Kara scrambles forward to pull the television remote out from hiding with a triumphant smile.

“Hiding out in my room every time the two of you have a tiff isn’t really solving the problem,” Lena says when it’s clear Kara’s moved on to the conversation in favor of finding something to watch on TV.

“Nothing is going to solve the problem,” Kara huffs, settling on some old moving playing on LifetimeTV. “Not until she gets an attitude adjustment and stops being offended every time I trip over her shoes.”

“I don’t know how you trip over so many things when you can fly,” Lena mutters. Kara makes a hmph noise that has Lena quirking her lips in a smile.

“The point is that I wouldn’t trip over anything if she’d stop leaving her stuff all over the place.”

Lena just smiles at her and turns back to her homework. “I don’t know how to help you.”

“Tell me how to not make my roommate hate me,” Kara whines. Lena laughs at the high-pitched sound. “There were no roommates on Krypton, Lena.”

“There were also no dogs, and you seem to do just fine with those,” Lena says, glancing upwards. Kara looks affronted, her arms crossing as she pouts yet again. Idly, Lena wonders if Kara’s aware of the effect she so effortlessly has on Lena’s heart. “I don’t know. How do you resolve fights with your sister?”

“Alex doesn’t count,” Kara says. “Alex is Alex. That’s totally different.”

“Seems very normal,” Lena says wryly. Kara laughs a little, scooting over on the couch and patting the now empty space.

Weak to the inviting look on Kara’s face, Lena joins her, sliding into Kara’s side. Their relationship is new. Really new and tends to overwhelm Lena whenever she thinks about it too hard. But when Kara wraps an arm over her shoulder and presses a kiss to her temple it just feels warm.

“I still think you should talk to your RA,” Lena says, letting her shoulder fall into Kara and focusing her eyes on the movie Kara’s chosen.

“I don’t want to involve other people.”

“You’re involving me,” Lena points out and Kara shrugs.

“That’s different.”

“Is that your excuse for everything?”

“Yes.”

“Kara,” Lena tsks in admonishment.
Kara sighs. “It’s not that I - I mean I like to be honest and figure stuff out, but that only works if the other person does too. When I took my girod tests, I scored really high on truth.”

The sudden Kryptonian word isn’t one Lena knows and she picks her head up to blink at Kara in abject confusion.

Kara laughs. “Sorry. The girod. They’re the,” Kara pauses as if searching for the right translation. “The eleven virtues.”

“Eleven?” Lena asks. “High expectations.”

Kara holds her hand up and starts to tick her fingers off. “Truth, peace, synergy, imagination, purity,” she switches hands to the one by Lena’s shoulder. “Justice, restraint, hope, industriousness, altruism.” Out of fingers, Kara just kind of stares at her hands for a second until Lena laughs and holds up her own finger in between them.

With a happy smile, Kara taps Lena’s finger and concludes, “Zehdh.”

At Lena’s inquiring look, Kara tilts her head back and forth a moment. “It doesn’t have a great translation. But it’s about belonging. Home. Family.”

Lena nods, scrunches her finger back and forth before putting her hand back in her lap.

“So the point is to try and remember these virtues and balance them in your lives,” Kara says, letting her hands fall too.

“That’s nice,” Lena replies, looking up at the wistful look that Kara always gets when she talks about Krypton.

“Yeah,” Kara says softly and then the distant look passes as she focuses back on Lena’s face. “But I can’t really tell my roommate that.”

Lena laughs. “I’m not sure it would help even if you did.”

Kara acknowledges the truth in that with a soft hum. “How did you fix fights with Lex?”

“We mostly just yell at each other,” Lena admits with a shrug. “Not that we fight very often. Luthors are big fans of the restraint virtue. Or as some might call it, the repress your feelings forever virtue.”

Kara tsks, frowning. “I don’t think that strategy will do me much good.”

“You’re probably right,” Lena says and Kara’s head drops back on the couch with a soft groan. “But you’re here now, so stop worrying about it.”

That, at least, makes Kara grin when she picks her head back up. “We can’t ever fight or else I’ll end up sleeping on the bench outside your building.”

Lena laughs. “You could fly back to Midvale or to Alex’s.”

“Lena!” Kara says with considerable indignation. “You’re supposed to agree that we can never fight.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t get the script,” Lena teases, charmed by the bright glint in Kara’s eyes.

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By the next morning, Lena hasn’t spoken to Kara – though the urge to call her later that night just to check in had been strong.

A year ago, not speaking to Kara was the norm – something Lena was just starting to get used to after four years – but now it feels like a lifetime every minute that passes with no contact.

Her work day feels slower than normal. Her morning meetings drag on and by lunch she’s ready to fire the next person that needs to talk to her just to avoid it.

All she can focus on is what’s happening at the DEO. It’s unsettling to think of Jeremiah entrenching himself back into his old life. It feels a lot like her mother is sitting somewhere with a self-satisfied grin watching the whole thing.

Instead of hearing from Kara like she half expects at some point, it’s Winn that shows up at her office in the middle of the afternoon.

He looks slightly harried as her assistant, Alana, shepherds him inside the office and Lena stands in reaction, a look of concern crossing her face.

“Winn?”

“Hey, Lena,” he says, trying for a smile as he paces forward and the door closes behind him. “Sorry to drop in like this.”

“Not at all,” she says with a gesture towards one of her office chairs. “Is everything okay?”

“Yeah,” he says at first as he drops down into his seat. He makes a face, wincing a bit. “Not really. Maybe. I don’t know.”

Lena arches a brow, but the pace of her heart picks up thinking of what kind of problem Winn could possibly be coming to her with. “Is Kara okay?”

“Oh yeah,” he says, sitting forward to reassure her. “She’s fine.” He pauses a second, his brows coming together. “Apart from being on a warpath today. Are you guys fighting?”

The memory of Kara’s face before she left her apartment last night twists in her gut. “Not especially,” she answers, but Winn seems to see right through that answer.

“That’s not why I’m here anyway,” he dismisses, waving it off. “Though I’m sure everybody at the DEO would appreciate you guys making up and returning Kara to her usually happy self.”

“Noted,” Lena says with a short laugh and a clearing of her throat. “So why did you stop by?”

His face goes serious. “Right, yeah. I was talking to Mon-El,” he starts and Lena starts to get an idea of where this is going.

“That’s not why I’m here anyway,” he dismisses, waving it off. “Though I’m sure everybody at the DEO would appreciate you guys making up and returning Kara to her usually happy self.”

“Noted.” Lena says with a short laugh and a clearing of her throat. “So why did you stop by?”

His face goes serious. “Right, yeah. I was talking to Mon-El,” he starts and Lena starts to get an idea of where this is going.

“About Jeremiah,” Lena fills in for him and he nods solemnly.

“He’s back at work today,” Winn says with a pinched look. “J’onn gave him full access.”

A knot of worry tightens in Lena’s stomach. “Full access to the DEO.”

“Yup,” Winn says with an ominous pop of the word. “And after J’onn gave him a tour of the building I sort of…saw him go straight into the central mainframe.”

It’s suspicious enough, but Lena knows half of that is her own personal paranoia regarding
Jeremiah so she keeps her tone even and calm. “And?”

Winn takes a deep breath. “He broke into the DEO mainframe, Lena.”

“How are you so sure?” She asks just because she needs to be sure. Jumping to a conclusion just because she – on some level – wants it to be true isn’t the smartest course of action.

He gives her a look, pulls a tablet out of the bag still slung across his shoulder. “I’m sure,” he says and he hands over the tablet – on the screen are security logs and Lena reads it clear as day – Danvers, J – followed by a series of workaround commands to get into the system.

Lena reads through it and can already feel a headache coming on. “What was he looking for?”

“He accessed a number of classified files,” Winn says. “I haven’t actually swept through it all, but he forced his way into the system all sneaky and-”

“Did you tell Kara?” Lena asks, handing the tablet back and wondering why Winn came to her with this. It occurs to her just as he answers.

“I was hoping you could help me with that.”

“I really don’t think I’m the best person for that job right now,” Lena says with a bitter laugh.

“Mon-El and I tried,” Winn says. “But she doesn’t want to listen to either of us. She’ll listen to you.”

“You showed her this?”

“It didn’t get that far,” Winn explains. “As soon as she saw us she walked the other way.”

It makes Lena laugh, a little exasperatedly, as she rolls her eyes. “I’m not sure she won’t do much of the same if it’s me.”

“You know that’s not true,” Winn says, but Lena is much more uncertain.

“Have you tried to talk to Alex?”

“Oh please,” Winn says with a loud exhale. “Alex is even worse. I get it, it’s their dad, but still. This guy is loose in the DEO and if he’s a mole for your mother…”

The thought dangles out there – the same thought that kept Lena up most of the night despite the bottle of pinot noir she managed to get through. With a heavy sigh, she closes the laptop on her desk and stands. “Okay,” she says. “Let’s go talk to her.”

--

They meet Mon-El in the empty training room of the DEO and Winn pages Kara with a message that he needs to see her immediately.

Then they wait, Lena feeling uncharacteristically nervous at the prospect of seeing Kara for the first time since she walked away last night.

A few minutes later, Kara’s opening the door – dressed in street clothes and adjusting her glasses as she enters. It does something warm to her stomach to see Kara after an unwanted absence and she takes a moment to drink the sight in. Wishes it were different circumstances. “Winn, what did you-"
The words choke out of her mouth as she notices the three of them in the room and she looks like she’s about to bolt back the other direction before her eyes stick to Lena significantly.

“What’s this?” Kara asks and the question comes out sounding dark as she crosses her arms over her chest.

Mon-El is the first to speak. “It’s about-

“I think I know what it’s about,” Kara interrupts, her eyes bouncing to him for only a second before back to Lena. There’s a hint of accusation in them that she forces herself not to react to.

“Hear them out,” Lena says, lifting her chin and mimicking Kara’s posture with her arms over her chest.

For a moment, it looks as if Kara might protest some more, but she just thins her lips before giving a defeated looking shrug. “Fine,” she says. “What is it?”

Winn steps forward and explains what he told Lena earlier, shows Kara the logs and everything. The look of muted anger on Kara’s face fades to one of solemn resignation as her eyes scan the screen. “He broke into the mainframe,” Kara murmurs, eyes glancing at Lena’s for a moment.

Kara’s jaw is tight, her shoulders tense and Lena aches with the urge to touch her.

“Believe us now?” Mon-El asks and Lena sighs, knowing that’s not going to improve Kara’s mood in the least.

As expected, Kara graces Mon-El with a frosty look, but she doesn’t respond to him other than handing the tablet back to Winn and chewing her bottom lip a moment. “Let’s go talk to him.”

--

Jeremiah is standing next to Alex and J’onn observing the radiation tracking program they have pulled up to find the fusion bomb and Lena overhears the tail end of their conversation as they approach.

“Do you think they could have some kind of cloaking device?” Alex is asking.

“No,” Jeremiah says, eyes on the screen. “They’d need me to build it.”

Lena furrows her brow at that – as if her mother wouldn’t have the resources to build such a thing herself. Cloaking technology had been a Luthor Corp project since Lena was a teenager.

“Jeremiah,” Kara says when they’re in earshot. “Do you have a minute?”

“Yeah, of course,” Jeremiah says, turning to look at her. Alex turns as well and when her eyes fall on the way Lena, Mon-El and Winn are all standing behind Kara, they harden.

Lena’s sure Kara likely filled Alex in on their argument the night before and it’s only confirmed when Alex’s shoulders brace themselves when she looks at Lena again.

With a touch to her glasses – a move Lena recognizes well – Kara takes a breath and asks, “Earlier today you accessed some highly classified files from the mainframe.”

“That’s true,” Jeremiah says with a picture perfect expression of innocence, his face barely reacting as the group watches him.
Alex looks up sharply at that. “Why?”

“I’ve missed so much,” he answers with a soft smile for both Alex and Kara. “I wanted to see what my daughters had been up to.”

“Why didn’t you just ask?” Kara asks, a frown on her face.

“I wanted the whole story,” Jeremiah says. “You two always keep everything so close to the vest.”

Winn’s head tilts quizzically, and his eyes dart to Lena before asking, “But then why the…”

“The workaround?” Jeremiah supplies with a friendly quirk of his lips. “I tried my old passcode, but it didn’t work so I found another way in.”

Kara leans over to look at the tablet in Winn’s hand. “Is it true?”

The question is soft, meant for Winn, but Alex noticeably bristles and moves closer to her father, an uncharacteristic look of anger directed straight at her sister.

“Uh, ye-yeah,” Winn says as he scrolls through the information on his screen. “These are all your case files from the last two years.”

Jeremiah shrugs, a smile on her face. “I guess it made me feel a little bit like I was there.”

It shouldn’t surprise her that Jeremiah has easy answers for all of this and it does nothing to ease her concerns.

Kara, however, seems completely appeased by his answer. Her steely gaze lands on Mon-El and Winn and Lena in that order.

Alex looks even more enraged by the entire confrontation and she moves to guide her father away from the group. “I can’t believe you,” she says as they start to move away and though it seemed as though the words were directed at all of them they land on Kara the hardest. “Of all people,” Alex adds, with a last look at her sister and it’s then that Lena hears the hurt in Alex’s voice.

Kara’s entire being is rigid and Lena can practically feel heat radiating off of her from where she’s standing. If Kara had been in a bad mood before, she’s certainly not in any better one now faced with the ire of her sister.

“Kara,” Lena starts, but Kara shakes her head, cuts her off with a quick glance.

“Don’t,” is all Kara says before she lets out a long sigh and goes off presumably to track down Alex.

“Well, that went well,” Mon-El says, hands in his pockets as he rocks back and forth on his feet.

Winn actually winces and Lena resists the urge to take her frustration out on him. Settles for just putting as much ice as she has into her glare and walking past him.

--

In lieu of spending the rest of her afternoon in her office getting little if any work done, Lena sends Alana a message that she’ll finish the day at home and buys two bottles of wine at the liquor store down the street from her building.

If she’s going to worry the rest of the night alone she’d like to do it as tipsy as possible on mid-
priced cabernet sauvignon.

Half of her expects to hear from Kara at some point that night, but she winds up disappointed and goes to bed early, her fingers spreading across cold sheets.

--

The next day she isn’t any less distracted as she heads into work, but she’s got a full slate of meetings for the morning and it keeps her occupied as much as possible.

Lunch, however, is eaten in her office and she spends the entire time twirling her phone on her desk with the urge to call Kara and check in.

Maybe she could call Winn and ask or even Mon-El, but she’s pretty sure Kara wouldn’t appreciate the subterfuge.

Instead she decides to head down to the labs in the hopes Lana has some project Lena can tinker with to keep her mind off it.

As it turns out, Lana does indeed have a project for her and she greets Lena with a happy smile and a laugh. “Actually yeah, we have tons of stuff, boss. Take your pick.”

She hands Lena a small tablet with a list of unfinished projects and Lena takes a seat at one of the work stations.

“I’ll make coffee,” Lana says with a wink. It settles some of Lena’s nerves just to be around a friend.

“Thanks, Lana.”

After a few seconds of scrolling through the inventory, something catches Lena’s eye and gives her pause. She checks the storage location of the project inventory and sets the tablet down on the desk before pulling out her phone.

“Winn?” She asks when he picks up. “Can you meet me? Somewhere not at the DEO?”

--

Lena heads to the alien bar – whose name she should probably deduce at some point – because Winn was already there and she knows Kara and Alex won’t be.

He’s throwing darts at a board while Mon-El perches on a nearby pool table and laughs every time Winn misses dramatically.

“Hey!” Winn greets, his arms wide in an exaggerated greeting. Lena glances around to see if anyone’s watching them with an exasperated roll of her eyes. Winn just waves her off, moves forward to hug her in greeting and Mon-El slides off the pool table to do the same.

“So, what’s with the impromptu hang?” Winn asks as they walk to a nearby table and take stools.

“Drinks?” Mon-El offers and Lena shakes her head.

“It’s barely four, Mon-El,” she says with a soft laugh.

“It’s the happiest hour, Lena,” he says pointedly and Winn rolls his eyes. “Plus after today…we deserve a drink.”
It pulls Lena back to the memory of their confrontation with Jeremiah and she barely contains a cringe. “How were things after I left?”

“Oh, just great,” Winn answers sarcastically and Mon-El laughs.

“Yeah, totally great. Alex and Kara yelled at each other for about twenty minutes and then Kara threw a cement block at my head.”

Lena’s eyes go wide at that, but Mon-El waves her off. “But I dodged it,” he says with a cocksure grin. “Like a ninja.” He makes a ridiculous motion with his hands as he says it and nearly knocks a glass off the table before scrambling to right it. “Oops.”

“Anyway,” Winn drags out, giving Mon-El a side-eye before looking back at Lena. “What’s up?”

For a moment, Lena hesitates. It feels so much like going behind Kara’s back – which is probably because it is – and she hates the idea that she might create more conflict between them. But a stronger urge to protect Kara and those she’s come to consider her friends and family makes her move on.

“I’m going to assume neither of you were very convinced by Jeremiah’s explanations,” she says, more as fact than question.

Winn nods and Mon-El lets out a scoffing sounding laugh. “Neither was Kara from the sound of it.”

That tidbit puzzles Lena for a moment. “How’s that?”

Mon-El shrugs. “She basically said so to Alex when they were going at it. I mean half the DEO could hear them at one point.”

“And it’s possible we followed them and eavesdropped,” Winn adds with a slightly contrite look.

The idea that Kara spent the afternoon fighting with her sister makes Lena ache to call her and check-in all over again. Kara and Alex don’t fight often as far as Lena’s aware but she can remember the handful of times it had happened in the past. Kara had been nearly inconsolable.

“Well, regardless of how Kara feels,” Lena says, the words slow and strange in her mouth. “I thought I might have something to help us.”

“What’s that?” Winn asks and Lena reaches into her purse, glancing around to make sure they’re not being watch too closely before sliding a small black box across the table to Winn.

Mon-El watches with a furrowed brow and Winn leans across the table and picks the box up.

“A tracking device,” Lena explains in a low tone.

Winn’s eyes go a little wide as he opens it up and peers at the contents.

“Nearly undetectable. It dissolves into the bloodstream and emits a signal we can track,” Lena adds.

“And it works?”

That’s the bit that Lena’s not entirely certain of, but it had passed the first few stages of testing so it should work. “I believe so,” she says, keeping her face neutral.
“For Jeremiah,” Mon-El says, much more serious than his easy grins of earlier.

“In the event something happens,” Lena says. “I don’t really have the opportunity to get very close to him. At least not in the immediate future.”

In light of their argument, Lena’s not entirely sure Kara will ever want Lena around Jeremiah, but she shakes the thought from her head. It’s one fight and they’ve certainly had worse ones. She remembers a particular clash in college over leaving drawers open that somehow became like the cold war among them for a week.

“Leave it to us,” Winn says, pocketing the small box as Mon-El nods in agreement.

“Yeah, no problem,” he says and he gives Lena what she thinks is meant to be a thumbs up, but from the way he fumbles the gesture she’s not totally sure.

Just then a loud beeping sound emanates from Winn’s pocket and he jumps, scrambling around to pull his phone out. A wide smile spreads on his face.

“What is it?” Lena asks and Winn puffs up triumphantly.

“Okay, remember that time when I was just like literally good at everything?”

Mon-El and Lena manage to simultaneously respond, “No.”

“Well, it paid off,” Winn says, ignoring them with a triumphant grin. “Found the fusion bomb.”

He holds his phone up to show them the display just as he slides off his stool.

Lena’s heart rate skyrockets at the news and she doesn’t know what to do – does she go back to the office, home, to the DEO? Should she call Kara?

Winn doesn’t seem to notice her internal dilemma. He’s already grabbing his discarded jacket and heading for the door, but Mon-El hesitates, looks at her face a second.

“Do you want to – I mean are you – should I - ”

Lena shakes her head, gathers her composure and stands. “Call me if anything happens,” she tells him even though every cell in her body is dying to follow him to the DEO and monitor the mission herself.

“We will,” he says with soft certainty and it does the job of calming her just a bit.

Not enough, however, to stop her from pulling her phone out the minute the two of them have left and dialing a number she knows by heart. As it rings she steps outside the bar and around the corner, finding a space against a brick wall with relative privacy as the call connects.

Kara’s voice is uncharacteristically hesitant as she picks up. “Winn got a hit on the bomb,” Kara says in lieu of a greeting and Lena nods even though Kara can’t see her.

“I know,” she replies and then realizes how that sounds – not willing to divulge that she was with Winn at the time if she doesn’t have to. “I mean I heard.”

“You did?” Kara asks, her voice sounding confused.

With a short clearing of her throat, Lena realizes she needs to divert the trajectory of the conversation. “Are you going after it?”
A pause. “Yeah. Alex, Mon-El and I.”

A persistent worry creeps across Lena’s skin. It’s hot and uncomfortable. “Be careful,” she says softly and Kara is equally as soft when she responds.

“Always.”

Silence stretches for a moment and Lena feels foolish, but she hasn’t really talked to Kara in what feels like forever and she has to close her eyes against the feeling of disconnect.

“I love you,” she decides to say, her voice impossibly low but she knows Kara can hear her. “I hope you know that.”

“I do,” Kara says, her voice lighter this time in a way that makes the ache in Lena’s chest a little less painful. “Me too.”

“Be care - “ Lena shakes her head, not wanting to repeat herself, but feeling heat in the back of her eyes.

“I will,” Kara says anyway and there’s a conviction in her voice that helps steady Lena just a bit. “Everything’s going to be fine. This is a good thing. It means Jeremiah wasn’t lying, right?”

Lena doesn’t know how to respond to that without starting another argument so she doesn’t, just lifts her eyes skyward and tells herself to chill out.

“I’m sorry about the other night,” she says softly and Kara lets out a noisy kind of exhale before responding with an equally quiet, “Me too.”

“Call me when it’s done?”

Kara’s voice is strong when she replies, “Of course,” and it’s the only thing that doesn’t make Lena’s fingers shake as she hangs up.

--

Hours pass and Kara doesn’t call.

Lena goes through a gamut of emotions. Worry over what’s happening, irritation that she’s incapable of getting any work done because of said worry and the lingering unease that comes from her sudden distance with Kara.

After a glass of scotch that does nothing to calm her nerves and a failed attempt at finding something on television to watch, Lena gives up and sends a quick text to Winn.

Status? is all it reads.

A reply doesn’t come for long anxiety ridden minutes. Minutes where Lena considers the virtue of getting remote access to the DEO mainframe just to check for herself.

Then her phone vibrates where it’s resting on her thigh and Winn’s reply makes her snap upright in her couch. Not good.

Seconds later she’s listening as her phone calls Winn’s and eventually connects. His, “Hey, Lena,” sounds tired and weary and puts her on edge.

“What happened?”
“What didn’t happen?” Winn says. “Has Kara not called you?”

A lump forms heavily in Lena’s throat and she stands to start pacing across the carpet of her living room. “No, she hasn’t,” she admits in a small voice. “Is she okay?”

Winn pauses. Far too long to calm any of Lena’s anxiety. “Yeah, I mean she’s like, physically totally fine.”

Normally, Lena thrives on being right, on the vindication of knowing she’d figured something out before others, but as she can see the pieces sliding together there’s nothing satisfying about it. “Jeremiah?”

“Turns out we were right,” he says and he sounds about as thrilled with the idea as she feels. “The bomb was a ruse. He stole something from the mainframe as soon as the team got to the site and then blew the whole thing up.”

“What?!” Lena startles, hand to her chest.

“Yeah. And beyond that he’s got like a cybernetically enhanced arm a la Hank Henshaw.”

“Oh God.”

“Apparently your mother likes her henchmen battery powered,” Winn says, punctuated by an awkward beat of silence.

Lena manages a strangled sounding laugh just as Winn hastily adds, “Oh, shit, sorry that was gross. I didn’t mean it like – I mean I don’t even – I’m sure your mother - ”

“You can stop now,” Lena interrupts, pinching the bridge of her nose, but slightly grateful at the way his comment has dispelled a bit of the tension. “Do you know what Jeremiah stole?”

With a slight cough, Winn sounds relieved to be moving on, but it’s clear he has no good news. “I won’t know until I can get the system back up and running and do a diagnostic. Could take minutes, could take hours. He literally blew the whole thing to pieces.”

“The tracker,” she says, crossing her fingers. “Were you able to-”

“Yeah,” he interrupts, but it doesn’t sound good. “Alex and Kara went after him, but he was prepared. He got away. Tracker went off radar the minute they got there,” An ominous pause stretches down the line. “Lena, Kara should really be the one to tell you all this.”

She can hear it clear as day in his voice. Doesn’t need Kara to tell her anything, and is in fact a bit grateful that she’s having this conversation with Winn. “My mother was there,” she deadpans and strangely something settles in her system. As if she really needed confirmation her mother would be the one behind all this – would be the one intimately involved in it.

“Yes. With Henshaw,” Winn supplies. “Listen you really should-”

“Where’s Kara?” Lena interrupts, already heading to her kitchen to grab her keys and find a discarded pair of flats.

“Home I think. She and Alex were in pretty rough shape.” Which is the likely explanation as to why Kara hasn’t contacted her, but she avoids thinking of other reasons.

“Thanks, Winn,” she says and doesn’t wait for his reply before hanging up.
Indecision makes her hesitate before knocking on Kara’s apartment door, her fist hovered mid-air for a long anxious second. Alex might be with her, after all. The sisters would likely want to lick their shared wounds together instead of apart. It’s not really Lena’s place to intrude on that moment, but her chest aches with the need to see Kara, to be there for her if she’s in pain.

It isn’t until Kara’s voice comes calling out, muffled by the door but understandable, that Lena startles out of her thoughts. “It’s open.”

At the invitation, Lena pushes the door open and quietly steps inside, her heart twisting at the sight of Kara burrowed under a blanket on her couch. Alone.

“I could hear you from down the street,” Kara says, barely audible and that at least makes Lena smile a bit as she comes forward. Kara’s head shifts on the pillow until she looks at Lena and she can tell Kara’s been crying. It makes her want to do something drastic – anything at all to wipe the expression of her face. “Is this an I told you so because I’m not super in the-

“No,” Lena interrupts, emphatically and she moves until she sits next to Kara on the couch. “Not at all.”

Kara sits up, her face holding a hint of skepticism and then suddenly a twinge of apology. “I’m sorry, I meant to call you. I just got caught up in-

“Kara,” Lena entreats, stopping the flow of words and reaching out to capture one of Kara’s hands with her own. The sleeve of her shirt is slipping over the fingers and Lena glides her own under the fabric until they join with comfortable warmth. “Winn told me what happened. I’m not here for any of that. I’m just here for you. For whatever you need.”

Something settles between them, soft and sure and familiar, and Kara’s face softens. It lasts a moment, the two of them just looking at each other, before Lena can tell she’s about to break.

“Come here,” Lena murmurs, opening her arms and waiting for Kara to shift on the couch into her. Without hesitation, Kara moves, snuggles down into Lena’s embrace and burrows her head against Lena’s chest.

Lena wraps her arms around her, strokes a comforting hand over her head and kisses her there. Kara sniffles, her face hot against the skin of Lena’s neck. “Do you want to talk about it?” Lena asks softly and Kara shakes her head.

“Just be here with me,” Kara says quietly and Lena tightens her arms around Kara, runs her fingers up and down Kara’s back and pulls the blanket around them tighter.

They lay there on the couch for long moments, Kara breathing in steadily against Lena’s neck and Lena cradling her as much as she can.

“You were right about Jeremiah,” Kara says after a bit, shifting in closer against Lena’s body.

“I didn’t want to be,” Lena replies, idly twisting a lock of Kara’s hair around her fingers.

“I didn’t mean it,” Kara says sincerely, picking her head up so they can look at each other. Her eyes lock with Lena. “About your mother. About you and your mother.”

Lena strokes an errant hair off Kara’s forehead, smiles. “I know you didn’t, darling,” she says as reassuring as possible, voice full of warmth and certainty because it’s true. The words may have
hurt her – an instinctive reaction more than anything – but she knew Kara doesn’t think that. Kara had said as much almost immediately afterward. “It’s okay.”

“I shouldn’t have said it.”

“I said it’s okay,” Lena says, dipping her head to keep her gaze on Kara’s when it wavers. “You were right. It had been a long day and we were both on edge.”

Kara’s lips push together, her eyes still tinged with red and Lena wants to wrap them both up in wool and hide away somewhere. “Between fighting with you and then with Alex, I feel like I took a Kryptonite shower,” Kara mumbles and Lena’s heart aches.

“What happened with Alex? Winn said you guys were yelling at each other in the DEO.”

“Just...stuff. About Jeremiah,” Kara says, falling back forward into Lena’s arms. “I just hate it.”

“I know,” Lena murmurs, returning her fingers to trace errant patterns on Kara’s back.

“Sometimes I feel like I don’t know who I am without her.”

Suddenly, the sound of Kara’s phone ringing breaks the moment and they both startle to look towards the sound. “It’s Winn,” Lena says just as Kara’s detangling from Lena’s embrace, reaching for the phone and answering it quickly.

“Did you figure it out? What Jeremiah stole?” The question comes out stern and steady – at odds with the soft, sad woman wrapped up in Lena’s arms seconds before. Now, Kara’s sitting straight up on the couch, shoulders back and voice even.

Lena can sense that the answer isn’t good by the way Kara’s spine seems to go even straighter even as her hand comes up to rub tiredly across her forehead. “Okay, I’m coming in,” is all Kara says before hanging up the phone and tossing back on the coffee table.

“What is it?” Lena says, sitting up and searching Kara’s face for the answer.

“The National Alien Registry,” Kara tells her. “Cadmus has a list of all the aliens in National City and then some.”

Icy fear pours down Lena’s chest at what that could mean. The kind of coup that would be for her mother. “Let’s go,” Lena says without further questioning and with a burning need to do something.

“Lena,” Kara says, standing when Lena does and reaching out to grip her wrist. “You don’t - ”

“I’m coming with you,” Lena says in a tone she knows will get through to Kara. “If anything I can help Winn get the mainframe back up and running.”

Kara’s expression wavers as they stand in front of each other before it relents into a soft grin. “I really do love you, you know,” she says, sounding almost amused by the prospect.

Lena hasn’t heard Kara say that in what feels like countless hours and the words wash over her with a warm feeling – like coming home after a long day. “I really love you too,” Lena says and she pushes into Kara’s personal space to kiss her, arms wrapping around Kara’s neck while Kara’s hands settle on her hips, lifting her up into a kiss in a motion as familiar as breathing.

--
Heading to the DEO ends up being largely futile.

Lena does give Winn some help in piecing back together the central mainframe while Kara debriefs the situation with J’onn, but there’s nothing else to do. The registry is in Cadmus’s hands and they have no idea where they’ve gone.

“It’s not like we exactly caught them for any other reason because they wanted us to last time,” Winn grumbles, slapping the side of a half-cracked monitor to get the picture on it to focus.

“Comforting,” Lena replies, picking up a keyboard that’s been shot to pieces and throwing it towards a growing pile of useless parts. A few pieces of loose plastic come flying free from it, but she ignores it.

“If I ask you a question that upsets you, can you promise not to bean me with a broken mouse?” Winn asks. Lena can’t help but laugh a little, shaking her head as she digs through a mess of a former server stack.

“Go ahead,” Lena says.

“Was your mom always shitty?” Winn asks. “I only ask because - you know. My dad was always a little weird, sure, but it takes a special kind of crazy to start sending exploding teddy bears to people. Or you know. Wanting to kill all aliens.”

Lena considers the question, shaking loose some of the wires hanging off one of the servers and tugging the largely untouched CPU free. She settles it carefully on the cart they’re collecting workable tech on.

“She was never very nice to me, I suppose,” Lena says. “Or most people. But I never would have thought that she would do this.”

Winn makes a humming noise, tossing another broken monitor over to the trash pile. She doesn’t notice him coming closer until he’s just at her side.

“Hey,” Winn says, reaching out to put a comforting hand on her shoulder. “We’ll get them. The good guys always win, right?”

It tugs at Lena’s lips and something good and purposeful settles in her chest at being so firmly classified as the good guys.

--

They’re at dinner with her mother and Lena’s just grateful that this meal is going far more smoothly than when it had been Kara next to her, instead of Jack.

Then again, if someone had offered an unpleasant dinner conversation with Lillian Luthor in exchange for having a life with Kara Danvers in it…well. No use dwelling on that impossibility.

Everything is going great. Jack is charming and her mother is actually taking to him fairly well and Lena’s able to stay quiet and sip her wine. Until, of course, the conversation topic turns abruptly to Superman and everything goes quickly downhill.

“That Kryptonian,” her mother all but hisses, a nasty looking snarl on her lips. “Is a symbol of everything wrong with this city.”

A wary look crosses Jack’s face and he looks at Lena. She knows the expression. He’s trying to
decide if falling out of Lillian’s favor is worth standing up for his beliefs. Lena just quirks a brow at him – she can’t make that decision for him.

With a quick sip of his bourbon, Jack looks straight at her mother. “Respectfully, Lillian, I disagree.”

The air at the table chills uncomfortably and Lillian’s eyes narrow so abruptly that if Lena weren’t prepared for it she might have flinched. “Is that so, Jack?”

“I think Superman does a lot of good things,” Jack says. “He stands up for people who have no one to stand up for them.”

“He’s an interloper,” Lillian says, her eyes taking Jack in in a completely new way. Lena can’t help but frown into her wine glass as she watches the scene unfold. “The people can stand up for themselves.”

“If the people could always stand up for themselves, why do organizations like the Luthor Foundation exist?” Jack asks. “Just last week, Superman stopped a sweatshop fire in China and then flew to St. Roch to help with hurricane relief. Is it so bad that he helps where he can, just like you do?”

“He plays God,” Lillian says. “What if one day he chooses to turn on us? He could destroy everything. Not to mention what all these other aliens coming out of the woodwork are doing. They suddenly want to be naturalized as citizens just because they crash landed on Earth?”

“All the aliens I’ve met have been good people,” Jack starts. Lena nearly feels her eyes roll into her head as Lillian glares heavily.

“People,” Lillian spits, shaking her head. “Typical of my daughter to continue to associate with alien sympathizers,” Lillian adds with considerable distaste.

“It’s the first thing on my dating profile,” Lena says, breaking into the conversation and offering a strained smile her mother’s way. Jack lets out a laugh that seems to release some of the tension in his shoulders, slumping backward in his seat and unclenching his hands. He reaches for one of hers, squeezing it tightly. Lillian regards her for a few moments before a calm smile slips back onto her face.

“Perhaps you ought to delete that profile, Lena,” Lillian says. “Jack here seems like a perfect match.”

Lena suspects she should feel something other than disgust at her mother’s approval, but her thoughts only stray to the cold reaction she had offered to Kara. She sips her wine, grips Jack’s hand, and smiles blandly through the rest of the dinner.

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It takes two days for Cadmus to take action on the alien registry.

At first, no one seems to make the connection, but when the DEO gets alerted about the fourth abduction just that week, everyone starts to put it all together at once.

And it doesn’t stop at four. Suddenly it seems like all Kara is doing is following leads on a new abduction. Lena barely sees her and when she does, Kara’s face is always tired and weary.

“Fifteen abductions since Cadmus got the registry,” Kara says one night after landing on Lena’s
office balcony. It’s late, but Lena is still at the office and can’t fight the flutter of pleasure to see Supergirl making an impromptu visit. It’s long past when she should have probably gone home and Kara’s arrival is as good an excuse as any.

Kara flops down on the couch of her office, red cape swishing out around her and providing a vivid picture of color against the stark white fabric.

“I’m sorry,” Lena sighs, flipping a binder closed on her desk and observing Kara for a moment. A wave of guilt and responsibility floods through her – it’s her mother that’s causing all this after all – but she tries to repress it.

“It’s not your fault,” Kara says, letting her head fall back and rubbing tiredly at her eyes. “I just wish we had something else to go on.”

Standing up from her desk, Lena walks quickly to the door of her office, making sure it’s shut and flipping the lock before settling next to Kara on the couch. It takes a bit of rearranging of red fabric, but she manages it and strokes soothing fingers over the lines of tension in Kara’s forehead.

“How about we go get some ice cream,” Lena suggests, thinking of things that could distract the worry out of Kara’s face.

It does the trick – only slightly, but enough. Kara’s face relaxes a bit and she shifts closer to Lena. “I should probably go back out on patrol.”

“Kara, you’re exhausted,” Lena points out, watching as Kara’s eyes flutter sleepily as Lena’s fingers continue their stroking over her hair. But she looks like she might protest, so Lena continues. “You’re no good to anyone if you’re asleep on your feet. Let’s go get a pint of that weird ice cream you like with the pecans.”

Kara laughs. “It’s not weird. It’s New Carthage Super Fudge Chunk,” she says and Lena just shrugs it off even though she knew exactly what it was called. Kara had made her store multiple pints of it in her dorm fridge in college.

“So let’s go get some of that and go home and we’ll put on really comfy warm socks and just destress on the couch.”

“That sounds really good,” Kara admits, her head falling to the side and her body curling towards Lena.

“Tomorrow’s a new day,” Lena says, her fingers reaching out to play with Kara’s. She can see the telltale little bump in the fabric of Kara’s suit at her wrist – her bracelet, now always on. “We’ll find them.”

Kara sighs, but doesn’t disagree and after a few more seconds of just resting together on the couch, stands and takes them home.
Chapter 17

It feels like every single day there are at least five alien abductions that Kara’s chasing – sometimes she arrives just in time, but most of the time too late. The stress has made both Kara and Lena agitated and exhausted so when Winn suggests they hold a game night, Lena gratefully agrees.

The last time they tried to have a game night it had been interrupted by a fifth dimensional attempt at a wedding so it’s not too hard to convince Kara to agree. Even if she does so very reluctantly.

“I still think we shouldn’t be here playing games,” Kara complains, but she still reaches across the board on the table and moves her piece to a new space. “We still know next to nothing about where Cadmus is taking the aliens they’ve been abducting.”

“Or what they want.” Mon-El adds, tipping his beer bottle Kara’s direction and idly playing with a set of dice in his free hand. “Because that is the trillion dollar question.”

Winn leans over and corrects him in a stage-whisper. “Million dollar question, buddy.”

Forehead creasing, Mon-El glances at Winn. “Really? That low?” Winn nods, but Mon-El doesn’t seem to believe it until he looks at Lena, who matches the gesture with an amused smile.

“The point is,” Winn says, drawing attention to him. “Kara, you’re right, but…I don’t know what else to do. I’ve monitored everything from traffic cams to cell phone chatter. Nothing.” He serves Alex a hesitant look before so pointedly not looking at her or Kara that he may as well be staring at them. “Maybe Jeremiah taught them how to avoid our radar.”

Neither Kara nor Alex seem to know what to say that. Alex looks down at the beer in her hand, picking at the label, and Kara – after seeing the clear distress in her sister’s face – leans over the table. “Okay, so we need to let people know so they can protect themselves. They have to know that Cadmus is out there abducting aliens.”

Against her will, a thread of discomfort churns in Lena’s gut for a moment. It’s still a harsh reality to swallow that when they talk of Cadmus they’re really talking about her mother.

Mon-El puts a hand in the air. “We can make an announcement at the alien bar. Or like, post flyers,” he suggests, already looking like he might stand up and head to the bar right now.

Kara sits him back down with a hand on his shoulder. “That’s not enough. There are hundreds of aliens on that list. It’s not like every single one of them frequents the bar.”

“Maybe the DEO could issue a statement,” Winn says, but Alex shakes her head immediately.

“That would compromise the agency,” she tells him, finally looking up from where she’s nearly picked the entire label of the beer bottle off. “The DEO is off the books for a reason.”

“What if we did it anon-anonymiously?” Mon-El says, fumbling with the word in his mouth and looking confused.

Lena drops her head closer to him and whispers, “Anonymously.”

“Yeah, that,” he says, pointing at her.
“No one would take us seriously,” Kara says.

“I’d offer L Corp’s platform, but I doubt that would be taken much more seriously,” Lena says with a wry smile twisting the stem of her wine glass. “Everyone’s well aware of the Luthor-Cadmus connection.”

Something stormy goes across Kara’s face, but it’s gone as quick as it came. “Maybe I could write an article for CatCo. Get Snapper to promote it,” Kara says, brightening at the idea.

Alex looks skeptical and Lena pretty much shares the emotion. The two of them exchange wary glances before Alex asks, “You really think Snapper would run that?”

“Totally.” Kara waves her off, clearly happy at the idea of solving a problem.

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The abductions continue. The next day, there are two of them by the time Lena turns the news on over her lunch hour. Another that afternoon and Lena wonders if Kara’s had any success at work this morning.

From the way Kara’s face looks when she picks Lena up at the office for drinks, it’s clear Snapper wasn’t quite as enthusiastic about her article as Kara had been.

A quirk of her brow seems enough communication for Kara to tell her as much.

“He’s the worst,” Kara says as they walk out of her office and towards the elevator, Kara reaching behind her without even looking to grab Lena’s hand. “Said Supergirl wasn’t a good enough source.”

Alone in the elevator, Lena laughs a little, leans against the back wall and close to Kara’s side. “Don’t you think using Supergirl as your only source all the time is suspicious?”

Kara shrugs, eyes trained on the numbers counting down on the display above the doors. “Clark does it.”

The elevator stops at the lobby and they step out. “So what are you going to do?”

“I told Snapper he should interview Supergirl herself,” she says as they stride through the massive lobby floor. Lena sends small smiles to the night shift security guards just coming on and lets Kara lead them towards a waiting black town car out front.

“You think that will work?” Lena asks as Kara holds the door open and they pace outside.

“I mean, I hope so,” Kara replies. “Supergirl can be pretty convincing when she wants to be.”

“Of that,” Lena laughs, “I have no doubt.”

They slide into the back of the car and Lena gives her driver the address of a cross street not far from the alien bar they’re set to meet the rest of their friends at.

“You know I could fly us there,” Kara whispers even though Lena’s already put up the privacy partition in the car. Lena watches as she fiddles with the door controls, opening the window just a crack and breathing in the air.

Lena just rolls her eyes. “You’ll survive the five minute car ride,” she says and Kara’s lips thin as if she’s holding back a smile.
“Five minutes?!” The words are drawn out with exaggerated incredulity and this time Kara’s not able to hold back the teasing smile nor the laugh that comes bursting out of her and Lena just rolls her eyes, shoves a little at Kara’s side.

Instead of falling over like Kara would usually do, she captures Lena’s hand in her own and tugs until they’re pressed against each other in the backseat. It pulls a surprised little gasp out of Lena, but before she can let out an indignant squeak of Kara’s name, Kara’s nosing forward and suddenly they’re kissing.

Rational thought abandons her brain for a few seconds because Kara’s lips feel really good and they haven’t kissed all day and the car gets warm real fast.

“What are you doing?” Lena murmurs when Kara pulls back enough for her to speak.

Kara just smiles, kisses her again, slides a hand across Lena’s hip under her jacket. “Surviving the five minute car ride,” she says cheekily and Lena thinks she should probably roll her eyes again, but instead she just fists the fabric of Kara’s shirt in her fingers and pulls her forward.

The five – more like ten – minute car ride goes disappointingly fast after that because Kara keeps kissing her and Lena lets her hands wander a little inappropriately. By the time the car is pulling to a stop, Lena’s breathing heavily and her cheeks feel flushed and for a few seconds she considers what kind of excuses they could give their friends for not showing up.

Seeming to read her mind, Kara laughs – the sound a little hoarse and thick in a way that does nothing to quell the heat in Lena’s gut. “We can’t ditch. I promised Alex.”

Lena clears her throat, smooths her palms over the wrinkled clothing over Kara’s chest and pushes her there, hard enough for Kara to notice. “Then you need to move away from me.”

With one last kiss that turns into two and then three, Kara finally pulls far enough away that Lena’s able to straighten her clothing and fix her makeup in the small pulldown mirror from the car’s ceiling.

When they finally get inside, Maggie and Alex are already at the pool table in what looks to be a deeply contested game of pool. It’s a bit unusual – Alex usually wipes the floor with anyone she plays against – but judging from the look on her face, Alex isn’t celebrating her usual victory.

Winn and James are at a high-top conversing with each other and when Winn spots Lena, he waves them over.

“Hey guys,” Kara greets, leaning to air kiss James’s cheek and then Winn’s. Lena gives them both a similar greeting before taking her seat at a stool.

“What are we drinking?” James says, seeming uncharacteristically enthusiastic, but Lena chalks it up to the empty whiskey glass in front of him. “First round’s on me.”

“You needn’t do that, James,” Lena says, tilting her head a bit to the side.

“I’m totally fine if you do that, James,” Winn interjects, pushing his empty beer glass forward.

James laughs even as Kara swats a little at Winn’s arm. “Okay,” James says, standing and collecting the empties on the table. “Usual?”

Everyone murmurs assent and James is off to the bar. Winn turns immediately to Lena to start discussing an idea for a new flamethrower addition to his latest battle bot – Judge Shredd. Kara
puts her hand on Lena’s thigh in a warm, possessive gesture and Lena finds herself leaning into it. There’s a lingering heat between them from the car, but it’s muted now, comfortable and Lena sinks into it.

For a moment, she allows herself to forget about all the bad happening – the abductions, Cadmus, her mother – and lets the now-familiar feeling of being with these people and with Kara drape over her. It feels suspiciously like family, but Lena’s not sure if that’s real or just how it’s always felt to be with Kara.

“What do you think, Lena?” Winn asks her when he’s done explaining his idea. James returns to the table and hands Lena a cocktail.

She takes a sip before responding. “I think no matter how much firepower you give the thing he’s never going to beat Steg-O-Saw-Us.”

Kara chokes on her drink a bit and turns an amused look on Lena. “You named it Steg-O-Saw-Us? How did you become worse at naming your robots since college?”

“You’re just mad I never went with any of your suggestions,” Lena says, lifting her chin a bit haughtily.

“Squirmin’ Vermin was a great name,” Kara insists and this time it’s Winn that chokes on his drink as he tries to stop a laugh.

Lena doesn’t hold back and neither does James and it ends with Kara just glaring at all three of them.

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They’ve barely gotten through their first round of drinks when Kara’s phone goes off with a DEO alert and she sighs, bumping a bit into Lena’s side and showing her the screen.

“Robbery on 13th street,” Lena reads and James perks up, leans a bit as if to read Kara’s phone. “You need help?” He asks and Kara waves him off.

“No, no, you stay here. This will only take a second,” Kara says and she glances to where Alex and Maggie are playing pool.

“You sure?” James says, following Kara’s look, but clearly unable to interpret her expression.

Lena can guess what’s running through Kara’s mind if Alex’s sullen expression is anything to go by, but she stays silent. Danvers Sister Drama has ways of working itself out.

“Yeah totally,” she says, stepping up from her stool and taking a long swig from a glass of water on the table. “I’ll be back in no time. You won’t even notice I’m gone.”

“I doubt that,” Winn says with a friendly smile that Kara returns before looking down at Lena.

“Are you going to be okay here?” Kara asks softly and Lena dismisses her with a wave of her hand.

“Go,” she says, and noses forward to press a solid kiss to Kara’s lips. “Duty calls.”

The blue of Kara’s eyes dances prettily when she smiles and she pushes forward for another quick kiss. “Okay, I love you.”
Lena just smiles. “Be careful,” she calls out as Kara walks away, weaving in and out of chairs and other bar patrons.

“Always!” Kara shouts back with a grin, turning to walk a few steps backwards before bumping into a table and nearly spilling a pitcher of beer all over its three occupants.

Lena smothers a laugh with her hand and turns away from Kara’s sheepish grin and stuttered apologies.

It occurs to her that it no longer feels as awkward as it once did to be alone with Winn and James – Kara’s friends. From the way Winn carries on conversation after Kara’s left it’s starting to feel like they’re her friends too. Kara aside.

They talk about random things – what’s been going on at CatCo with James at the helm, a quick story about Winn’s latest dating failure – Mon-El is currently out to dinner with a woman that had handily rejected Winn after only one date – and an anecdote about L Corp’s latest reveal about a new energy project.

They order a second round of drinks and when Winn returns to hand them out he leans forward at the table, hands gripping his beer. “So, I just heard this great joke at the bar – about the Valerian that goes into the coffee shop –”

The punch line to Winn’s joke never comes. Instead the whole bar gets rattled with the sound of an explosion and crashing sounds and Lena’s thrown off to the side. She hits James – or who she thinks to be James – in the chest and they both go sprawling across the floor.

It’s a chaotic mess of sound and confusion after that. A group of people storm into the bar wearing tactical gear and holding guns and Lena feels frozen in shock until James shakes her out of it, picking her up off the floor and pulling them to safety behind the cover of an overturned table.

“You okay?” He asks, holding her by the biceps. They both flinch when another explosion rips through the building and suddenly Winn is scrambling near them, hunching behind the bar a few feet away.

Distantly she hears the sound of struggling, Alex’s voice yelling, “Get down!”

Winn lets out a low expletive, but loud enough for Lena to hear it and turn towards him with worried eyes. He’s holding his phone in his hands but from the look on his face and the cracked screen she can just make out it seems it’s not any use to him. “Someone call Kara,” he says to them, throwing his phone to the side and sneaking a peek around the corner of the bar.

On instinct, Lena flips the face of her watch open and suddenly realizes that…James is doing the same thing.

The watch face on his wrist is flipped open to reveal the crest of the House of El and they both look up at each other, frozen for the moment until the sound of a gun going off makes both of them startle out of it.

“Clark gave it to me,” James blurts like this is an appropriate time for any kind of explanation and Lena can’t think about what all this means or the wide-eyed look James is getting or anything really so she just pushes the button on her watch and hunkers down when a bar stool goes flying over their heads and cracks against the wall.

“Winn!” James calls out over Lena’s shoulder. “Armor?”
“In the car,” Winn shouts back, gesturing towards a back exit, and without hesitation James is up and sprinting towards the door, barreling through it and away.

“Oh shit,” Winn says when a body goes sliding across the floor between them – one of their attackers in full tactical gear. Lena peeks over the table to see Alex engaged in a fight, Maggie at her back with her gun drawn.

The man on the floor starts to stand up and Lena can’t think to do anything else. She stands and grabs the nearest thing she can, a wooden chair, and with all the strength she can muster smacks it over the guy’s head.

Winn has a kind of awed expression when she glances at him and the man attempting to stand has slumped back down on the ground in an unconscious heap.

But the awe turns to a fear as he looks over Lena’s shoulder and she turns to see another of the attackers levelling a gun at her. It ratchets her heart rate up tenfold and she puts her hands up defensively, shifting just a bit to put her body in front of Winn’s and forcing her expression to remain defiant.

These guys have Cadmus written all over them and it’ll be a cold day in Hell when she cows to some low-rate thug hired by her mother.

“Lena,” Winn says slowly and with warning as he clambers up off the floor to stand behind her.

“Hello,” the man says in a slow wondering tone. He takes his hand off the gun to pull his ski-mask off and reveal his face. It strikes her as immediately familiar, but she can’t place it. He’s bald, a severe nose, and he’s looking at her like he knows who she is. He likely does. All things considered.

“I’m sorry. Have we met?”

“Oh, your mother is going to be very happy with me,” he says with a sardonic smile and Lena’s stomach drops, unsure if she’s going to be shot or kidnapped. She can feel Winn tense even more behind her and she silently pleads with him not to do anything stupid.

To her right, Alex is busy fending off two people and Maggie’s running after one of the brutes trying to abduct a Dhorian Lena’s seen in the bar a few times.

Just as she’s set to try and talk her way out of getting shot, another crash echoes through the building. It’s James. In full Guardian gear coming in through the door and smacking one of the guys attacking Alex with his shield.

It’s just the opening she needs to move forward and without even thinking about how stupid this plan is, she goes to grab the gun in the guy’s hand, hoping to use the element of surprise to her favor.

It nearly works. Her hands hit his and his arm goes up, the gun now not pointed directly at her face, but he’s strong. Too strong. And she realizes it just a second too late. Without so much as breaking a sweat he just throws his hand forward and shoves her to the ground.

She lands with a painful smack and then Winn is right next to her on his knees, a hand outstretched in front of her as if he could stop the bullet just like that.

In an instant, Lena feels the air in the room float with stillness. The look on the man’s face telling her he is absolutely going to pull the trigger and Alex realizing what’s happening just a moment
too late – cracking a pool cue over a guy’s head and letting out a surprised shout as she takes in the scene.

Lena thinks maybe she should close her eyes or push Winn away, but then everything revs back into regular motion and the room heats up and before Lena can think another thought a blue and red blur explodes a massive hole in the far wall of the bar and crashes heavily into the man.

The two of them hit a pool table and it splits in two until they’re on the ground and Lena can practically feel the pure fury rolling off Kara in waves. Not that she’d need to know it was happening; it’d be apparent to just about anyone.

Kara lets out what can only be described as something between a growl and a yell before she punches the guy in the face so hard it reverbs through the room and Lena lets out a silent prayer Kara didn’t just accidentally kill this guy.

Everyone in the room stalls at the sound, unsure what to do and Lena catches some of the Cadmus agents scrambling for the exit, running as fast as they can to get away.

Alex just eyes her sister as she pulls back for another punch and somehow it’s Alex’s ashen expression that makes Lena feel like she can function enough to scramble to her feet.

“Supergirl!” Lena shouts out, mindful of where they are even if it takes an extra second of thought not to use Kara’s name. It’s likely there are only friends left in the bar apart from the very obviously unconscious Cadmus agent, but Lena doesn’t want to risk it. “Supergirl!”

It takes a third shout of her name and a closing of proximity to get Kara to stop. Alex shakes out of her freeze and does the same and suddenly Kara is zooming up off him and looking around with a crazed look.

She bolts immediately for Lena. “I heard the signal, are you okay?”

Lena nods, a calm infusing through her the second Kara gets close enough to pull her into a tight hug. Lena’s face gets pushed into Kara’s collarbone, a strong hand holding the back of her head and she knows that if she takes the time to think about what just happened she might actually lose it.

So instead, she clears her throat softly and moves against Kara’s hold, subtly tugging at her cape in a signal to let her go. “I’m okay,” Lena murmurs softly until Kara’s hand relaxes and Lena’s able to move.

Kara looks over her head at Winn. “You good?”

“Yeah,” Winn says, dusting his hands over his pants and looking a little shell-shocked.

Maggie comes jogging back into the room, gun drawn and breathing hard. “What happened?” She moves next to Alex, puts a hand at your elbow. “Alex? You okay?”

Alex nods and then moves towards the Cadmus agent lying unmoving on the ground between the broken shards of a pool table. His face is bloodied from Kara’s punch, but when Alex puts her fingers to his neck she says, “Let’s get him the DEO.”

With quick movement, Kara is suddenly cradling Lena up in her arms. “I’ll fly us.”

Kara doesn’t wait for a reply, just turns and flies straight out of the hole she’d created earlier. “Kara,” Lena protests, startled at the abrupt departure. “We should probably help-“
“They’re fine,” Kara says and Lena hears how shaky Kara’s voice is. There’s something tenuous in the hold Kara has on Lena’s legs and she’s not entirely surprised when Kara lands on a nearby rooftop that is not the DEO.

“Hey,” Lena says softly when Kara sets her down. “Everything’s okay.”

“Adrenaline crash,” Kara explains, heaving in a breath uncharacteristically and Lena doesn’t hesitate before bringing Kara’s hand up and pressing it against her chest. Kara watches the movement and her breathing seems to calm immediately.

Lena smooths her hand down Kara’s arm, passing over the heavy metal of her bracelet, stays in close and watches her face. “Kryptonians produce epinephrine?”

With a laugh, Kara’s head droops forward a bit, presses against Lena’s until they’re more solidly hovered in each other’s airspace. “Don’t try to distract me with science.”

A lump in her throat at the memory of a gun being pointed at her face surfaces. “Maybe I’m trying to distract me.”

Blue eyes connect solidly with her own, wide and searching. “I shouldn’t have left you there. Of all the-”

“You couldn’t have known,” Lena says, shaking her head. “Let’s just go to the DEO, debrief the situation and then go home and open a case of wine.”

After a moment hesitation, eyes darting over Lena’s face, Kara nods. “Yeah, okay, you’re right.”

“Hey,” Lena says, stopping Kara just as she bends to sweep Lena back up into her arms. Kara pauses mid-motion, tilts her head inquiringly. “I love you.”

Kara doesn’t smile, but her eyes go soft and vivid before she kisses Lena – heavy and sure – and murmurs the words back in her native language.

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It’s quiet in Lena’s dorm room. A lazy kind of Saturday morning.

Most of campus is likely still asleep – tired from a late night of partying and the like. But Lena’s wide awake and on the floor of her bedroom tinkering with her latest robot. The coffee table that usually sits in front of her couch has been pushed off to the side. The floor is littered with parts and tools.

Kara is spread out on the ground next to her, half under the raised bed. She’s been alternating between sleeping and blearily watching Lena work, occasionally attempting to help. There aren’t many people Lena feels comfortable enough to let them hover around her work; she had once thrown a wrench at Lex when he suggested an adjustment offhand. But Kara doesn’t seem to bother her.

“That’s the wrong one,” Kara comments absently, her voice low and sleepy, when Lena picks a small screw up from a pile without really looking.

“No it’s –“ Lena just purses her lips when the screw won’t fit in the hole it’s meant to go in and she tosses it at Kara’s face before sifting through the pile again to find the right one.

“Just trying to help,” Kara says with a laugh, after lazily swiping the screw out of the air and
“Sure you are,” Lena says, focusing back on the chassis she’s currently assembling and pulling her tape measure along its length. “Help me and write down that I need to cut a...twenty-eight inch panel. Or - thirty and I’ll weld it in.”

Kara hums as she grabs for the legal pad, scratching out something that looks nothing like what Lena’s just said. It’s a strange series of lines and curves that she’s never seen before. She’d think Kara was having a stroke if she wasn’t also pretty sure Kara couldn’t have strokes.

“Darling,” Lena says, reaching over to press her hand against Kara’s back. Kara hums again, turning her sleepy eyes to Lena for a moment before she glances back down at the legal pad and blinking down at it.

“Oh, that’s - sorry,” Kara murmurs, starting to erase what she’s just written. But Lena grabs for it, adjusting her glasses and looking down at the series of symbols. Kara sits up a little more, her hand still loosely gripping the notepad.

"Is this - is this Kryptonian?” Lena asks. Kara eyes her for a moment before she nods slowly, her hand dropping away from the pages in Lena’s grip and her posture loosening into a slouch. “What does it say?”

“It says you need to cut a thirty inch panel,” Kara says. “I haven’t done that in a while, sorry. I think it’s because I’m still half-asleep. Maybe because my girlfriend woke me up at five.”

Ignoring the teasing look of admonishment on Kara’s face, Lena traces her fingers across the series of lines on the page. “How do you say this?”

Kara blinks owlishly at her, and she rubs at her nose where her glasses usually sit. After a moment of hesitation, she finally says something that approximates an utterly foreign series of sounds, her hands twisting together in the space between them. Lena is utterly endeared to her, can’t help but lean forward and press a kiss to Kara’s lips that has Kara inching closer.

“Will you teach me?” Lena asks. Kara stares at her, her blue eyes wide as though she’s surprised by the question. Why she would be, Lena doesn’t know - of course she wants to know more about Kara’s culture and life.

“You want to learn Kryptonian?” Kara asks and when Lena nods slowly, Kara’s eyes dart to the side. “It’s sort of a - I mean it’s a dead -” The words choke a bit in Kara’s mouth and make Lena’s chest ache at the forlorn look on Kara’s face. “It’s not like it’s very relevant.”

Lena frowns at that, dropping the screwdriver in her hand and sliding closer to Kara, who easily moves to make room for her.

“It’s relevant to me,” she says, stroking her fingers over Kara’s temples, pushing hair back behind her ears and smiling down at sleepy blue eyes. “I’d like to learn. If you’d be okay teaching me.”

Kara’s face seems to still before doing a number of things Lena doesn’t know how to interpret, but she stays silent, let’s Kara work out whatever is going through her mind.

Just before Lena thinks to maybe take the suggestion back - Kara nods and a soft smile spreads over her lips. She says something indecipherable, but smooth sounding and Lena blinks, confused before Kara laughs. “It means I’ll teach you in Kryptonian,” Kara says soft and light.
“How do you say thank you?” Lena asks, thumbing across Kara’s bottom lip and shifting more squarely into her space.

Kara tells her and Lena watches the words form in Kara’s mouth. “I like how you sound when you speak it,” Lena says in a soft murmur, the truth pulling out of her before she can stop it. Her cheeks warm a bit at how flirty it comes out, but she doesn’t take it back and Kara’s smiling.

“I already said I’d teach you,” Kara jokes, but she’s already sliding a hand around Lena’s waist and turning them over on the floor. “You don’t need to convince me.”

Her laughter is swallowed when Kara kisses her and presses her into the floor. Her project abandoned, they spend the rest of the morning tangled together trading words in different languages and forgetting about the outside world for a long while.

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“Do we know how many people they were able to take?” J’onn asks, pacing across the floors of the DEO central platform. They’d gone over their stories after taking their prisoner – Griggs, they’d found out – to holding.

A small video monitor shows a feed of his cell and Lena can’t help but glance at it every so often. He’s conscious now and sitting on a chair, his face swollen and lip busted. But he looks unconcerned, even though Alex had given her medical report of a fractured orbital bone.

“It was chaos,” Alex says, answering J’onn’s question. “Everyone made a break for it, but it was too hard to tell.”

Maggie’s right next to her, arms crossed over her chest. “I saw a couple of them get into a black van and get away, but I didn’t get a headcount or see faces.”

J’onn sighs, arms propped at his hips. “Okay. I’ll see what I can learn from Griggs. The rest of you, get cleaned up and go home.”

“J’onn,” Alex starts, sounding a lot like she’s going to protest, but J’onn cuts her a glare, looking authoritative and somehow dad-like.

“That’s an order, Agent Danvers. Get some rest.”

Maggie watches the interaction silently, looking like she can’t decide between backing up her girlfriend or dragging her home for the ordered rest.

Alex’s shoulders deflate. “Can I at least stay until after you’ve questioned him?”

J’onn mulls it over, lips thinning for a moment. “Very well. But the rest of you, go home.”

The group murmurs their assent to the order and Kara presses a kiss to Lena’s temple. It feels shaky, but warm. “Stay here. I need to talk to Alex really quick.”

Lena nods, squeezes Kara’s fingers before they let go of each other’s hands and she’s left standing next to Winn.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Winn asks, hand moving to grip lightly at her elbow. It warms up her arm, but she can’t stop thinking about Kara and she spares her a glance before answering.

“It’s been awhile since someone from my family tried to have me killed,” Lena says, using the
only coping mechanism she really knows. “Almost feels comforting.”

Winn’s lips twist. “They were there for the aliens,” he says, voice soft and careful.

“And I was a bonus,” she adds pointedly. “Don’t act like you didn’t see the way his eyes lit up when he recognized me.”

Winn doesn’t deny it. Doesn’t say much at all, but sighs, a sad look on his face as he gives her a short nod. “I’m glad you’re okay,” he murmurs with a last squeeze to her arm before walking away towards where James is talking to Mon-El, who had just arrived.

Then Kara is striding towards her, all tense lines of muscle, cape swishing around her legs. She’s an imposing figure, but Lena can read through the hard line in her jaw to the worry she knows is threatening to break through.

“You ready?” Kara asks, when she gets close and her eyes roam Lena’s face – likely checking – for the tenth time – for injuries.

“Yes,” Lena answers, reaching out to touch Kara’s arm and smiling at her until she feels the cord of muscle there relax just the slightest. “Home?”

Kara nods and lets a smile poke through before reaching over to scoop Lena into her arms. Lena thinks to protest – it’s not like they’re at the landing platform and she can very well walk there herself, but asking Kara to put her down right now feels like the wrong move.

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It’s not until they’re back at Lena’s apartment that Lena really lets herself start to process what just happened.

The first thing she does is walk into her bedroom and change out of her pencil skirt and blouse, trading it for a pair of well worn yoga pants and a soft tank top. The second thing she does is move to her bathroom in the hopes of washing her face and collecting herself, but as soon as she’s in front of the mirror the image of a gun hovering in front of her spikes hotly through her memory.

It’s not the first time she’s had a gun pointed at her. Not even the second. Definitely not a new experience to have her life threatened or to be in serious danger. But for whatever reason, this time is hitting her so much harder than any of the others. Maybe it’s because this time she’s aware of all that she has to lose.

Hot tears appear in the back of her eyes and it takes every ounce of control she has not to break down crying. She knows Kara would hear her – has likely already picked up on the spike in her heartbeat – and she’d burst in here to find out what’s wrong which would probably just end with the both of them crying on the bathroom floor. Not a productive end to their evening.

“I’m fine,” she whispers to herself before picking her head up and making eye contact with her reflection. “You’re fine.”

Kara’s voice startles her from the other side of the door. “Lena? You okay?”

Rubbing slightly at her eyes and taking a deep breath, Lena settles her expression and opens the door. “Yeah, of course. Just washing up,” she says to Kara’s waiting form. It seems Kara’s changed as well – gone is the red and blue of her suit, replaced with pajama pants a few inches too long and an oversized sweater Lena knows Kara favors when she’s emotional.
“Food?” Lena offers, reaching out to tangle her fingers in the soft, warm fabric on Kara’s body.

“How about that case of wine you promised,” Kara counters, stepping forward to wrap Lena up in a tight hug.

“That sounds better,” Lena agrees. Maybe the alcohol will calm some of the lingering nerves and make it so when she sleeps that night she doesn’t have to relive the moment she was sure she was about to be shot.

But Kara doesn’t move away from her right away, just tightens her arms solidly around Lena’s back and puts her lips against the crown of Lena’s head.

“You’ve never used the watch before,” Kara says, quietly into Lena’s hair.

Startled by the thought, Lena just blinks a moment before realizing Kara’s right. “I—I…I didn’t really think about it,” she says trying to remember the moment. There hadn’t been a hesitation about using her watch. As soon as she was in safety behind the table and she realized they needed to call Kara her fingers just flipped open its face.

“I’m kind of happy to find out it works.” Kara takes a deep inhale, her chest expanding against Lena’s head. “Small comforts, I guess.”

There’s a haunted tone to Kara’s voice, a sound Lena feels sympathetic to.

“James had one too,” Lena says, remembering the moment when James was pressing at his own watch just like hers. “Like mine.”

Without the benefit of being able to see Kara’s face, Lena just blinks a moment before realizing Kara’s right. “I-I…I didn’t really think about it,” she says trying to remember the moment. There hadn’t been a hesitation about using her watch. As soon as she was in safety behind the table and she realized they needed to call Kara her fingers just flipped open its face.

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“He said that.” Lena scratches softly with the fingers she still has against Kara’s stomach. Tries to reassure her that she didn’t mean anything about the comment.

“It sounds different,” Kara adds in a soft voice, sounding no less haunted than before. Lena just wants to make it better. Aches to do so really. She takes a deep breath.

“Wine,” she says definitively and she taps against Kara’s abs in a signal to let her go.

“Wine,” Kara agrees after a beat of silence, but not before nosing forward into Lena’s personal space and kissing her swiftly. “I’m really glad you’re okay.”

“Let’s focus on that,” Lena says, putting her arms around Kara’s neck and feeling something settle in her soul when Kara responds by lifting her up into the kiss just like she always does.

“Let’s,” Kara murmurs against Lena’s lips before walking them towards the kitchen with a smile.

The next day, Kara flies out the door early, but not so early that she doesn’t get them both coffee and a box of donuts before she goes – we deserve donuts is Kara’s explanation for the two dozen treats that are on the kitchen counter when Lena walks in.

Lena heads into work in her favorite power dress, the red one that makes her feel commanding and confident. She wears it to board meetings sometimes just to gain an upper hand against a room full of old white men, some of whom still have not fully accepted her authority.
Alana is waiting for her with a cup of coffee and Lena takes it with a grateful smile. “Have Lana Lang meet me in my office whenever she’s available,” she tells her as she walks behind her desk and Alana nods politely before scurrying off to do just that.

By the time Lana arrives in her office, Lena has managed to make it through a phone call with an exuberant stockholder in Germany.

“Hey, sorry it took a bit for me to get up here,” Lana says, dropping into the chair across from Lena’s desk. “One of the labs was doing a demo that might have burst into literal flames.”

“I miss when my days were putting out literal fires instead of figurative ones,” Lena says, with an exaggerated sigh. It’s not as if her life lacks excitement these days, but at the office she’d take the underground labs Lana spends her time in over her top floor office any day. Lana shrugs, tugging at her name badge with a grin.

“My job now, boss,” Lana says. “What’d you need?”

Playing with a pen on her desk, Lena glances quickly to her office doors. “It’s a bit sensitive in nature. I asked for you because - well because I trust you.”

Lana blinks as if surprised by the admission, but Lena knows it to be true. She’s already involved Lana in so many parts of her life at this point it shouldn’t be too shocking. “Okay,” Lana says, suddenly much more serious as she sits up in the chair and tilts her head to the side. “What’s wrong? What can I do?”

“As I’m sure you’re aware,” Lena starts, setting the pen down so she stops fidgeting with it. “My mother is behind Cadmus.”

Lana nods slowly. “It’s been well publicized.”

“Indeed,” Lena says with a wry quirk of her brow. “A few weeks ago, Cadmus managed to get their hands on the National Alien Registry.”

At the information, Lana’s eyes start to go wide. “How do you know that?”

It occurs to her for a heartbeat that maybe it sounds like Lena is in fact working for Cadmus and she scrambles to clarify. “I’m working with Supergirl.”

“To get the registry back?” Lana asks, forehead creasing as she tries to but the pieces together.

Lena shakes her head. “It seems Cadmus is using the registry to abduct aliens around National City. We’re not yet sure why they’re taking them or what they’re planning to do, but we’ve been searching for them. I have a feeling that -” Lena sighs and in the pause, Lana jumps in.

“You think your mother might be using old Luthor Corp resources,” Lana ventures and the purposeful look on Lana’s face reassures Lena that she made a good choice in trusting her.

“When Lex ran the company, she was on the Board,” Lena says even though she knows Lana’s likely aware of this. “And you’re the only person I know with the company back then that I can trust with this.”

“I’ll get right on it,” Lana says, standing up from her chair. “I mean, I know how this superhero supervillain game works. There’s always a warehouse, right?”

It makes Lena laugh a little. “There’s always a warehouse,” she repeats with a grin.
“Then let’s find the warehouse,” Lana says gamely and she paces forward to reach across the desk and grab Lena’s hand - a surprisingly personal move for the overtly professional setting. “We’ll find her, Lena.”

Lena squeezes Lana’s fingers. “Thank you, Lana.”

Lana shakes her head, but smiles warmly. “Thank me when we win.”

The confidence in her tone sustains Lena through the rest of her morning - all the way until Kara shows up in her office around lunch with a weary expression on her face.

“Snapper just interviewed Supergirl,” Kara tells her, dropping down into the same chair Lana had occupied just a few hours ago.

“And?” Lena asks, sending off some last minute e-mails she wants to get out before she breaks for lunch.

“I don’t know,” Kara replies, blowing out an exasperated breath so hard that it ruffles some papers on Lena’s desk. Kara’s face goes sheepish. “Sorry.”

Lena just laughs. “What do you want for lunch?”

“And?” Lena asks, sending off some last minute e-mails she wants to get out before she breaks for lunch.

“I don’t know,” Kara replies, blowing out an exasperated breath so hard that it ruffles some papers on Lena’s desk. Kara’s face goes sheepish. “Sorry.”

Lena just laughs. “What do you want for lunch?”

“Any chance I could convince you to take the afternoon off and work from home?” Kara asks with a kind of plea in her voice and face that Lena’s helpless to resist. As if she’d want to deny Kara something she clearly needs.

It should be telling that the thought of playing hooky from work a few months ago was abhorrent to Lena, but now, with Kara draped across her office chair sending her inviting eyes, Lena can’t think of any better way to spend her afternoon.

“I could probably be convinced,” Lena says with a smile and a crooked sly sort of grin spreads over Kara’s face.

She and Kara spend the afternoon at Lena’s apartment, congregated at the kitchen island with both their laptops up and running. They order in for lunch and then for dinner and by early evening Kara starts to exchange e-mails with Snapper about his Supergirl interview and Kara’s hopes to publish an article about Cadmus. From the deepening frown on Kara’s face, the exchange isn’t going well.

It culminates in Kara shoving her laptop angrily across the counter and standing up, hands clenched in rage as she begins a rant about her boss the likes of which Lena’s rarely seen.

“It’s so stupid. This could save lives, it’s important and it’s a story. I wish he could see that.”

“Why don’t you call Cat?” Lena suggests, watching as Kara paces back and forth across the floor of the kitchen.

“Because it doesn’t feel right to go over his head like that. Even if he is being super dumb,” Kara says. “And I told myself I wouldn’t ask Cat to fix all my problems.”

Kara looks adorably determined in that last bit, making a definitive sweeping motion with her hand as if to end the discussion.
Lena turns back to her work, opens up the file she’d asked Lana to put together as Kara plops down onto a stool next to her and flips open her laptop. “This is the worst,” Kara groans, letting her head fall to the countertop with a soft thud.

It’s just heavy enough that Lena looks up quickly to make sure Kara hasn’t cracked the surface before going back to her computer.

“If it’s that important to you, Kara, then find a way to publish it,” she says, almost absently as she flips through some of the information Lana had sent her.

“I’m trying, but Snapper just keeps putting up walls,” Kara complains, taking her glasses off to rub at her eyes tiredly. Lena glances up and watches the motion, a soft affectionate smile taking hold on her face.

“I meant self-publish,” Lena clarifies. “Like a blog or something. Start a hashtag. Tweet the hell out of it. People trust you to deliver the truth when it comes to aliens.”

A thoughtful look crosses Kara’s face for a moment, pen tapping against her lips. “That’s not a bad idea,” she murmurs, looking into the distance.

“I don’t have anything but good ideas,” Lena says with a faux haughty tone that draws Kara’s attention back to her with a soft laugh.

“Peanut butter and pickle sandwiches,” Kara replies, a pointed look on her face as she wags her pen in Lena’s direction.

Rolling her eyes, Lena goes back to her laptop. “Ideas I have whilst intoxicated don’t count.” Kara hums through a smile that Lena takes a glance at and blushes. “Don’t look at me like that when we have so much work to do.”

“Sorry,” Kara says, not sounding at all apologetic. But she returns to her own laptop and Lena enjoys the sound of Kara typing away at an almost inhuman speed, but just slow enough to be believable.

After a few minutes of working, Kara sighs, taps her pen against an open notepad to her right for a few seconds before saying, “Snapper will flip.”

“You don’t have to put your name on it,” Lena says, but Kara just shakes her head.

“It has to be credible. That’s the only way.”

Lena looks at her then, a little more serious as she watches the conflict play across Kara’s features. “I can’t make this decision for you,” Lena says softly and she reaches out to touch Kara’s hand. “You need to decide what the right thing to do is and then do it.”

That seems to settle something in Kara because she straightens a bit and gives a final-looking nod before pressing a button on her laptop.

“Well? Did you blob it?” Lena asks and then laughs at Kara’s adorable look of confusion. “Mon-El’s been learning internet slang. I overheard him asking Winn how to blob the other day.”

Kara rolls her eyes, but laughs, her shoulders relaxing just a bit as she closes her computer. “Yes, I blobbed it,” she says, sounding a mixture between satisfied and resigned.

“Do you feel better?”
“I’ll feel better when we stop Cadmus,” Kara says, turning a poignant look at Lena that makes her squeeze Kara’s fingers.

“We’ll stop them,” she says with as much conviction as she can muster. “For what it’s worth, I would have done the same thing.”

Kara smiles, but the expression gets a bit shaky and Lena can feel a barely perceptible tremble go through the hand clasped in hers.

“Kara?” Lena asks, concerned with the sudden and swift change in mood on Kara’s face. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Kara denies, but her voice cracks a bit on the word.

“Are you okay?” Lena says, standing and moving closer in hopes proximity will pull the truth out of Kara.

“I’m fine,” Kara says but her tone so clearly betrays her and she deflates, a panicked look entering her eyes. “Sometimes when I close my eyes I can hear your watch go off,” Kara admits in a small voice. “And then I see that guy with the gun and I hear your heartbeat and—”

Lena stops the stream of words with a soft *shhh* and her hands at Kara’s cheeks. The fear and panic mixing in Kara’s voice is something intimately familiar. There are still nights when Lena hears Kara screaming in pain, the green glow of kryptonite flashing in her veins while her mother smiles.

With insistent hands, Lena manages to pull Kara’s head into her chest and hold her there in a tight hug. She presses a warm kiss to the crown of her head and feels Kara take in a deep breath. “We need a vacation,” Lena murmurs and after a second Kara laughs.

“Bora Bora?”

“No,” Lena replies immediately, the word coming out on a laugh. She smiles where her lips are still pressed in to Kara’s hair. “We can go literally anywhere else. I don’t know if you know this, but I’m rich.”

Kara laughs again, relaxes further into Lena’s hold and Lena’s heart feels warm and full and satisfied knowing that she can do this to Kara – *for* Kara. “Vacation sounds nice.”

“I have a boat,” Lena adds and feels Kara’s fingers clench a bit in the fabric at Lena’s hips where they’re resting. “Multiple boats actually.”

“I like boats.”

“Me too,” Lena says, kissing Kara’s head again.

They stay there, tangled in each other, for a long comfortable minute. Lena sinks into the feeling of holding Kara together, of feeling her relax inch by inch the longer they touch.

“Sorry,” Kara sighs, her arms sliding to tighten around Lena’s waist and her ear pressing against Lena’s sternum.

“Don’t be,” Lena says, pulling Kara’s head away to look her in the eye. She strokes her fingers across Kara’s temples, rearranging errant hairs behind her ear. “Like I said, we both need a vacation.”
Kara hums agreeably, eyes fluttering closed as Lena continues to stroke her fingers through her hair.

The moment is broken by the suddenly loud vibration of Kara’s phone that nearly buzzes off the counter before Kara’s hand shouts out to grab it. Just as Kara swipes to answer it, Lena spots Winn’s contact picture – a selfie of the two of them wearing matching top hats and oversized heart shaped glasses.

“Winn?” Kara answers, but she doesn’t move away from Lena and when Lena tries to pull away, Kara’s hand at her hips stops her, her ankles hooking a bit at Lena’s calves. “She what?! When?!”

With only the benefit of one half of the conversation Lena can’t really track what’s happening but with the way Kara’s starting to tense again, a dark worried look on her voice, Lena can guess it has something to do with Alex.

They talk for a few minutes, Kara mostly listening and interjecting with increasingly surprised what’s every so often until she hangs up with a heavy sigh.

“What happened?” Lena asks, worry putting a crease between her brows.

Kara just kind of stares at her phone a moment before up at Lena. “Alex got put on suspension,” she says. “She tried to beat up that guy we brought in.”

“What?!” Lena asks, shocked. Alex is – well she’s not a good soldier exactly – but she tends to always end up on the right side of protocol. She can’t imagine what kind of headspace she’d have to be in to go beating up on a suspect. “Is she okay?”

A tender look crosses Kara’s eyes before she nods. “It’s Alex. She’ll be fine.”

“Yeah, of course,” Lena says with a quirk of her lips. “I was thinking of heading back into the office for a bit anyway. Lana sent me some information I need to cross reference and I can’t access the files remotely.”

Kara hesitates a moment, looks like she’s going to say something – a protest about Lena going out by herself most likely – but seems to decide otherwise and just nods. “Okay, be careful,” is all she ends up saying, leaning over for a quick kiss.

“You too,” Lena whispers, tracking Kara’s lips forward to steal seconds. “Let me know about Alex.”

“I will.”

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It takes a few weeks of research, but Lena finally finds a place suitable for what they need. They need seclusion, a space with plenty of room to roam, and she finds it after much scrutinizing of maps in their area. She waits to bring it up until one Sunday morning when Kara stays over after they watch a movie.

“Kara,” Lena whispers, nudging at her friend’s body and trying to ignore the warm feeling in her stomach when Kara noses into her shoulder and hums something. “Kara, I have a surprise for you.”

She watches as one of Kara’s eyes opens and the hand Kara’s got on Lena’s shirt runs up and down her ribcage, tapping a little.
“Is it cake?” Kara mumbles. Lena can’t help but laugh.

“No, it’s - that thing we talked about, a couple weeks ago,” Lena says. “I found a place for you to try out your powers.”

Kara freezes up a little, the hand on Lena’s side stalling in its slow movement as her face wakes up noticeably.

“You still want to do that?” Kara asks, her eyebrows coming together in confusion. Lena frowns in response and nods, and she can’t help but reach out and press a finger into the small crinkle on Kara’s face. Her face relaxes then and a small smile spreads on her face. “Okay. But - um-”

Lena laughs again, reading into the way Kara’s tongue flicks out against her lips and trying to ignore the flutter it pulls in her stomach. “We can stop at the bakery on the way.”

The smile widens at that, and Kara stretches full bodied on the bed in a way that Lena has to turn away from lest she act on the itch in her fingers to touch Kara intentionally.

They stop at Dinkel’s on the way there. Kara orders an obscenely large hot chocolate and six donuts for herself and gets Lena her usual latte order. It’s still a little cold out and the morning fog has yet to clear.

Kara slumps down in the passenger seat of Lena’s car, rolls the window down even with the chill of the outside and lets the breeze ruffle her hair.

Lena keeps the heat on low to fight the cold Kara’s invited into the car and glances at her friend. There’s something gorgeous about Kara in moments like these and Lena swallows against the hot rush of feeling she gets every time she acknowledges that truth. She has no space for that kind of feeling in her life.

They get as far as they can drive - Lena had intentionally picked a spot far from roadways - and they park the car in a secluded spot near a wooded area. Kara looks a little skeptical when Lena just starts walking into the lush forest area, but Lena holds her hand out entreatingly. “You can fly us next time,” she says with a quirk of her lips.

Kara seems to blush at that, but she takes Lena’s hand and squeezes it before following her into the trees. It was probably a mistake to tangle their fingers together - it’s doing nothing to help Lena ignore the growing feelings between them - but she can’t seem to correct it. It only gets worse when Lena stumbles over a tree root and Kara catches her easily, holding her upright in a strong and warm embrace.

When they arrive at the field, the tall grass there hits up around their knees, and the fog is still hovering over the space. The sun is just beginning to break through the haze, and Kara’s hair is starting to shine in the light. Lena adjusts her grip on the tablet she’s brought along to record data, and watches Kara breathe in the air for a moment too long.

“It’s nice,” Kara murmurs, closing her eyes against the early morning sunlight streaking across the field.

Lena lets her take it in for a few moments longer, waits for Kara to reopen her eyes and look at her.

“Well,” Lena says, taking a breath and gesturing with her hand out to the field.

Kara just looks at her, looking uncertain. “Well what?”
Lena shrugs. “Do something.”

Adjusting her glasses, Kara continues to look unsure and Lena sighs. “Okay, let’s start easy,” she says and she moves forward until she’s in front of Kara. Slowly, she reaches up to tug the glasses off Kara’s face.

It’s odd how different Kara manages to look without them and she takes a second to study her friend’s face. Lena tucks the glasses into the pocket of her sweatshirt.

They stare at each other for a long moment, Lena feels something heat up – probably her cheeks – and she tries to curb the rolling attraction she keeps getting whenever she’s this close to Kara. With a soft clearing of her throat, she steps to the side and points at a tree not too far from them.

“Heat vision,” Lena says. “Can you do that?”

Kara glances over, looking nervous, but the look fades as she takes a deep breath and steadies herself. “I can try,” she says. Lena nods, and watches as the space around Kara’s eyes starts to turn a steady orange color. It’s a bit crazy to witness. As soon as it starts, though, Kara blinks and the orange is gone.

Immediately, Kara starts pacing back and forth in front of Lena at a speed that almost makes her look like a blur before she stops suddenly. The look of determination on her face is almost adorable, and the orange glow starts up again as she squints toward the tree - but it stops all the same. Kara resumes pacing.

“Kara,” Lena says, and Kara stops short, looking at Lena with wide eyes. “Are you okay?”

“I just - I’ve never - I haven’t used my powers in a long time,” Kara says. “There was this whole thing with - it doesn’t matter, I just haven’t - and you’re - ”

“It’s just me,” Lena says, and Kara rolls her eyes, spins around in a circle that seems a bit overdramatic.

“As if you are ever just you,” Kara says, her voice sarcastic. Lena tries to ignore the way the sentence makes her feel.

“Well, I don’t know,” Lena says, shrugging helplessly. “I don’t know how to coach you, Kara. Just...focus. Find something and focus on it.”

“Focus,” Kara mutters, pacing more slowly before she stops and looks at Lena again. She nods, almost to herself, and turns back to the tree. “Focus.”

It takes a moment, but the orange around her eyes comes back, and Lena watches as Kara’s posture shifts, her hands clenching at her side. The bright beam of blue energy that bursts from her eyes seems to shock them both, and they both stare as one of the tree’s limbs hits the ground with a loud crack. The fog billows up to swallow it and a few birds scatter from the remaining branches.

“You did it,” Lena says, excitement bursting through her as Kara’s eyes return back to normal. Kara starts hopping up and down, letting out loud yelps.

“I did it!” Kara says, and she comes toward Lena so fast that Lena can’t get her arms up to receive Kara’s hug in time. She’s still jumping, and Lena can’t help but laugh and bury her head at Kara’s shoulder.

By the time she pulls her head away, she realizes they’re off the ground and are staying off the
“Kara,” Lena says, her fingers tightening on Kara’s arms. The other girl hasn’t seemed to notice what she’s done, is just smiling happily down at Lena. “Kara. We’re floating.”

“What?” Kara asks, and she looks down. The alarm that crosses her face clearly breaks her concentration, because Lena finds herself crashing down into Kara’s body heavily seconds later. Kara holds tight to her in what is probably an attempt to not jostle her, but it’s still something like landing on concrete.

“Ow,” Lena mutters, dropping her head down to Kara’s shoulder again and laughing when Kara starts spouting off an increasingly panicked series of apologies, then an increasingly annoyed series of requests to stop laughing.

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L Corp is quiet when she arrives – just late enough that most of the workforce has headed home, but not late enough that the building is empty.

In fact, Alana is at her desk when Lena walks in and she looks up in surprise, standing quickly to greet her. “Miss Luthor. What are you – I mean what can I do for you?”

“It’s good you’re here actually,” she says, slightly grateful she took the time to change into a pair of slacks and a nice blouse from the soft comfortable clothes she had on before. “I could use your help.”

“Of course,” Alana says, following Lena into her office.

Lena strides behind her desk and drops her bag there, opening up the laptop still on her desk and booting it with quick keystrokes. “Can you get me the annual budget report for last year?”

When no answer is immediately forthcoming, she looks up with a quirk of her brow to see Alana just standing there, a slight crease in her forehead as if she didn’t understand Lena’s question.

“Problem?” Lena asks and that seems to startle Alana back to the present.

“No, sorry, Miss Luthor,” she says, straightening and turning to leave.

“Oh, and Alana?” Lena adds, opening a program on her computer and pulling her desk chair close. “I’d also like to see the Board minutes for the years 2015 through 2016.”

“What for?” Alana asks and when Lena sends her a surprised look at being question she seems to hear what she said. “I mean, I’m sorry, I’ll get those for you right away.”

Alana exits the office and Lena pulls up the list of Luthor Corp owned facilities Lana had complied earlier. One of them keeps standing out to her – the naval research facility Lex had built, but had been shut down nearly a decade ago.

There are a few others that hold some promise and she marks them down on a list. On the television she has mounted to her wall she pulls up a picture of the research facility – its blueprints and location.

Alana returns after a few moments with a folder and hands it to her. “The budget, Miss Luthor.”

“Thank you,” Lena says, flipping through the budget to find what she’s looking for. And there it
is, a line in the budget set aside for expenses related to the facility. A facility that shut down years ago. “Odd,” she murmurs.

“Your brother’s naval research facility?” Alana asks, eyes on the picture displayed on Lena’s screen.

Lena tracks the gaze with a quirked brow, unable to interpret the look on Alana’s face. “I wouldn’t think you would recognize it,” Lena says slowly, starting to put pieces together of a puzzle she’s not sure she wants to finish. “You had to be pretty young when it shut down.” Lena laughs. “I certainly was.”

Alana shrugs, plays with her fingers and puts on a polite smile. “I make it a point to know as much as I can about Luthor Corp past and present. That’s my job, right?”

It’s a practiced answer if Lena’s ever heard one and eyes Alana skeptically for a moment before shaking the feeling away. She’s just paranoid as a result of everything that’s happened in the last few days – few months really. “Well for whatever reason L Corp is still footing a bill for the building,” Lena says, gesturing at the picture of the research facility. “In fact, there was a metal shipment there just last month.”

Lena stands, walks over to look at the building in the picture. “It doesn’t make any sense.”

Alana steps forward from behind her. “Accounting did just switch operating systems. Could be a glitch.”

“I suppose,” Lena says, stepping away and settling back at her desk. “You can head home for the night, Alana. I won’t be here much longer.”

With only a twitch of hesitation, Alana smiles and turns to leave.

For the next hour or so Lena slogs through budget reports and board minutes, cross referencing accounting tables with the list of possible locations Lana had sent her earlier. It’s a tedious task, but she knows the answer is somewhere here in the numbers.

After double checking and then triple checking her hunch - a call to Lana to confirm a suspicion and another down to accounting - she calls Kara. The last thing she wants to do is send anyone on a wild goose chase.

Kara picks up after only a few rings. “Hey, you still at the office?”

“Yeah,” Lena says, shuffling through the papers on her desk and pulling out the address of the facility. Holding the paper in her hand, she stands. “How did it go with Alex?”

A defeated sigh says it all. “Not great. I’m worried she’s going to go do something reckless.”

“Maybe I can help with that,” she says. “I think I found something.”

“Yeah?” Kara sounds hopeful then and a renewed sense of purpose thrums happily along Lena’s skin.

“There’s an old Luthor Corp facility that’s supposed to be defunct, but-“ Suddenly the door to her office is opening and two men in black suits stride in. The words choke out of her mouth and she hears Kara say her name with growing concern at the silence.

Without thinking much about it she drops her cell phone on the desk and reaches into her purse for
a rarely used taser she keeps there – ironically a gift from Lex years ago. “Stay back,” she warns them, holding the weapon up in front of her defensively, but they’re undeterred.

Distantly she can hear Kara’s voice shout out from her phone still holding the connection on the desk. She just needs to buy some time.

The first guy rushes her and she manages to hit him in the neck with her taser, the weapon vibrating intensely in her hand as it connects with flesh. But the second guy is coming for her and there’s not much room to retreat. The balcony door is to her back and she steps outside – *just buy time*, she tells herself.

The first guy is already recovered and back on his feet and the second guy gets his hands on Lena, clearly trying to disarm her. It turns into a struggle, but she knows she’s not strong enough to overpower both of them.

“Don’t make this hard,” he growls at her and her back suddenly hits the rim of the small ledge around her balcony.

She resists his grip as it tugs her back towards the office and suddenly before she can even realize it, she’s actually managing to pull away. It’s so surprising and with so much force that it topples her balance, her entire body pushing backwards, up and over the balcony into open air.

And then she’s falling.

Before she can even process that she’s about to *fall to her death* a pair of familiar strong arms are catching her, flying down with her trajectory to cradle her into a hold.

“Can’t leave you alone for a minute,” Kara murmurs, her hair windswept and cheeks flushed. Lena lets the intense pounding of her heart calm and laughs softly as Kara flies them back up towards her balcony.

The two men are still standing there, looking wide eyed as Lena and Kara come into view and Kara just glares at them. “Drop something?”

Both of them just look stunned and Kara takes in a deep breath before letting it out in a frosty chill. The force of it pushes them to the side where they roll unconscious onto the small balcony and Kara sets Lena back on the ground softly.

Without hesitation, Kara moves – stomps really – towards the two men with danger blazing in her expression, but Lena stops her swiftly lest she do something she regrets.

“You do?” A renewed sense of purpose takes over Kara’s face and Lena bathes in the warmth of it.
“I do,” she says, stepping back inside her office and pulling a flash drive out of her laptop. “I put the details on here.”

Kara takes the small device and tucks it into the neckline of her suit. “Great, I’ll head to the DEO.” But instead of leaving like Lena half-expects, Kara wavers, turns a wary eye to the two unconscious bodies slumped on Lena’s balcony. She looks back at Lena and Lena can guess pretty easily what conversation they’re about to have.

“I’m fine,” Lena says, heading the argument off. “I can clean up here as long as you take care of them.”

“Lena,” Kara says warningly.

“I have an assistant to fire after all. If she hasn’t wisely fled the scene already.” She sends a hint of a glare for her office door, though she’s sure Alana is long gone.

“Why don’t I take you to Alex’s?”

“Alex’s?!”

“Yeah,” Kara says, hands on her hips in a clear signal that she’s not going to take no for an answer. “You can keep an eye on her for me. I told you I’m worried she’s going to do something crazy.”

With a narrowing of her eyes, Lena crosses her arms and considers. “You’re not trying to whisk me away to safety far away from the danger?”

“If I wanted that would I really send you to Alex?” Kara says and even though Lena’s sure that’s exactly where Kara would send her - the safest place Kara knows - she can see the tenuous lines of Kara’s face where she’s likely just barely holding on to her nerves.

So she relents. “Okay. To Alex’s apartment it is.”

“Great,” Kara says and without further ado steps forward and sweeps Lena up into a familiar hold. “I can drop you off.”

Lena barely has time to grab her bag from the desk before Kara’s taking them back out onto the balcony and then up, up and away.

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The outside of Alex’s building is calm - night having settled long ago on National City. It’s a strange dissonance to the adrenaline of the last hour, but it’s nice when Kara sets Lena down on the sidewalk.

After making Lena promise about six times that she’ll head straight up to Alex’s apartment, Kara is zooming back to L Corp to dispose of the Cadmus agents and then to the DEO to deliver Lena’s information.

Lena heads up to Alex’s apartment - a place she’s only been a handful of times - and realizes far too late that she forgot to make sure Kara told Alex she was coming. Oh well. Too late to back out now.

It takes four knocks on the door for Alex to answer - tense seconds where Lena thinks maybe Alex isn’t home and has already left to do that reckless thing Kara was so worried about. But just as she’s about to call Kara and tell her just that, the door swings open to reveal Alex.
Alex dressed like she’s ready to go out in her leather jacket and boots – a gun strapped to her thigh. She looks behind Lena in suspicion. “Lena? What are you doing here?”

“Are you heading out?” Lena asks, gesturing to her jacket, but then a glance behind Alex shows the kitchen table - the one she’s sat at over dinners with Alex and Kara and Maggie - overflowing with a spread of weapons. “Alex, what are you doing?”

It’s fairly obvious to Lena what Alex might be doing and without waiting for an invitation, she steps into the apartment. With a touch of surprise, Alex doesn’t stop her, just moves aside and closes the door behind them. “Where’s Kara?”

“The DEO,” Lena answers, walking up to the table and reaching out to pick up what looks like a grenade. Alex snatches it from her hand immediately with a glower.

“Don’t touch that.”

“Tell me you’re just cleaning out your weapons cache because you’re bored,” Lena says, realizing that Kara was right - Alex is about to do something reckless and Lena’s the only one standing in her way.

“It’s nothing,” Alex says, putting a bag on the counter and starting to load it with items from the table. It certainly looks like something. “What are you doing here?”

“Kara sent me,” Lena answers, watching Alex’s movements carefully. “A couple of Cadmus agents threw me off a balcony.”

That information makes Alex still, her hand hovered inside her bag as she picks her eyes up to Lena’s face. “What? Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” Lena says, with a shrug and shake of her head. Near death experiences are starting to become old hat to her. “Kara took care of it.”

Alex nods and then resumes what she had been doing. “And she sent you here because…”

“She thinks you’re going to do something reckless,” Lena says and then arches a pointed brow. “Which is exactly what it looks like you’re doing.”

“More like she sent you here so we could babysit each other,” Alex says. “She’s being overprotective.”

“She’s worried about you,” Lena says, watching as Alex tosses yet more explosives into the duffel bag in front of her. “Alex, whatever you’re planning on doing, I’m sure it’s not something you should be doing alone.” A thought occurs to her. “Where’s Maggie?”

Surely if Alex were planning on jumping into the lion’s den she’d think to bring her battle tested cop girlfriend.

“I don’t want to involve her in this if I don’t have to,” Alex answers. “It’s dangerous.”

A beat of silence. Lena observes Alex for a moment and then makes a decision. “I’m calling Kara,” she says, but before she can even unlock her phone, Alex’s hand is darting out and plucking it from her hands. “Alex,” she says with clearly warning, narrowed eyes, tight jaw.

Alex just shakes her head. “Lena, I have to do this. You can’t call Kara.”
“This is ridiculous,” Lena says, blinking incredulously at Alex. Her fingers reach to the watch on her wrist. A phone call isn’t the only way she has to reach Kara and Alex follows the motion with her eyes, understanding clear on her face.

“Don’t,” Alex says, her hand outstretched towards Lena. “Please.”

It’s the please that makes Lena hesitate. The expression on Alex’s face is impossibly complicated.

“Alex,” Lena says again, this time on a sigh. She doesn’t know what to do, but Alex takes a deep breath.

“It’s my dad, Lena,” Alex says in this soft, vulnerable voice that Lena doesn’t know how to react to. A memory surfaces then, of Alex’s words when she had asked Lena to help find Jeremiah - *If anyone can understand this grey area, it's you.* It feels like that moment was years ago from where they stand now. They lock eyes and a tension threads its way between them. It doesn’t make her want to press the button on her watch any less, but Alex keeps talking.

“He’s on our side. I know he is,” she says. “And if the DEO finds him, they’re not going to give him the benefit of the doubt. J’onn declared him a hostile fugitive.”

Lena’s not sure where to start with all of that information so she tackles the first thing she thinks of. “I don’t know what to say about trusting a man that just a few days ago proved how untrustworthy he is,” she says, not deterred by the narrowing of Alex’s eyes or the frustrated way she crosses her arms over her chest. “I spent a night with Winn picking up pieces of the DEO’s mainframe because your father took an automatic rifle to it after stealing the registry for Cadmus so they could—”

“He didn’t have a *choice,*” Alex interrupts and Lena huffs in disbelief.

“There’s always a choice.”

“He has his reasons. I have to believe that,” Alex continues. “I get why you don’t trust him, but that doesn’t mean I’m not going to.”

“You’re not thinking clearly,” Lena tries. “Kara said you *beat a prisoner* and now you’re loading a bag full of weapons and—”

Alex scoffs, turns back to grab a magazine of ammo and tuck it into a side pocket of her backpack. “I hardly needed to beat Griggs considering Kara nearly killed him with one punch,” she says and then looks pointedly Lena. “And I think we all know why. Talk about not thinking clearly.”

“That was different,” Lena says in a low voice, knowing how lame that sounds as soon as she says it.

“Was it?” Alex challenges, straightening and looking Lena dead on. “Because it seems to me like Kara was protecting her family. No matter the consequences. Just like I’m trying to do.”

Lena passes a frustrated hand over her face, sighs in the face of Danvers stubbornness. Alex just stares at her, expression conveying unwavering determination. “Do you even have a plan?” Lena asks wearily, already scrambling to figure out how she’s going to tell Kara about this when it’s all said and done.

Alex shrugs a shoulder, turns back to the arsenal of weapons on the table and grabs an extra handgun to tuck in her bag. “I know where Cadmus is taking the abducted aliens. I’m going to go there and—”
“You do?!” Lena interrupts, a bit shocked at the information. How did Alex find out?

The surprise in her voice pulls Alex’s gaze back up just as she finishes stuffing her bag and zipping it up. “Yes,” Alex says in a slow wary tone.

“But I know where Cadmus is,” she says uselessly and Alex’s brow furrows.

“The research facility?” Alex asks as if to confirm for herself and Lena nods. Alex holds her gaze a few more moments before nodding definitively. “Good. I have to get to my father before the DEO does.”

“I’m coming with you,” Lena says before she’s even finishing making the decision. It’s half because she sure as hell isn’t going to let Alex go alone – not when Kara is already so worried she’s going to do something exactly like this – and half because a deep part of her wants nothing more than to confront her mother.

Alex just laughs - a loud incredulous sound as slings her bag over her shoulder. “You are not.”

“I am,” Lena says and she holds her wrist out, pressing the button on her watch that flips the face open and holding it like a weapon in front of her. “Unless you want me to tell Kara what you’re up to.”

Alex’s eyes flash, jaw tightening. “You can’t. I have to do this.”

“Then you have to take me with you,” Lena says, letting her chest expand and eyes go serious. “I’m not letting you go alone. And if I tell Kara, you know she’ll stop you.”

“You don’t understand, Lena,” Alex says vehemently, coming around the table until they’re face to face. “This isn’t just about the abducted aliens.”

Lena locks her gaze with Alex for an intense moment. “If anyone understands that, Alex. It’s me.”

Alex’s eyes dart back and forth, the lines of her face tense as she clearly considers her options. With an aggravated exhale, she seems to relent, reaching over to grab a gun from the table and hold it out to Lena. “Fine,” she says and then look Lena up and down. “But we’re not storming the castle with you in those heels.”

Grabbing the gun and glancing down at the pair of black heels on her feet, Lena lets out a little laugh. “You’d be surprised what I can do in these,” she says, but Alex is already rolling her eyes and heading back into the apartment towards her bedroom.

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After a string of incidents around campus, the entire student body is forced to undertake a week-long self-defense seminar. Lena feels largely unconcerned with this news, apart from the inconvenience of having to schedule around classes, but Kara expresses an anxiety about it that Lena has no idea what to do with.

“Someone’s going to notice,” Kara eventually confesses, buried under the sheets of Lena’s bed and looking timid.

“Going to notice what?” Lena asks, perplexed by the words.

“That I’m, you know,” Kara gestures vaguely, pulling Lena’s brows together in further confusion.
“Use your words,” she instructs with an encouraging smile and Kara sighs.

No more words are forthcoming, but Kara reaches out, slides a hand under Lena’s hip and abruptly lifts her a few inches off the mattress without looking strained by the motion in the slightest.

Lena lets out a surprised squeak at the movement and it causes Kara to set her back down rather quickly, but realization dawns her as her indignation fades. “I see.”

“Someone’s going to notice,” Kara repeats in a hushed whisper like if she says it too loud someone might overhear them.

The truth of what Kara’s saying is obvious – there’s little way Kara’d be able to successfully hide her powers in the middle of a sparring session. The second someone accidentally hits her or if Kara doesn’t read a movement correctly, game over.

Her silence seems to ratchet Kara’s anxiety up further and when blue eyes go comically wide, Lena reaches out to soothe her with a stroke of her palm. “You’ll be fine,” she says softly, but Kara clearly doesn’t buy it. Not that Lena blames her entirely.

“Maybe I can get a sick note or something,” Kara suggests, eyes darting around as she tries to solve the problem.

“They’ll just make you retake it,” Lena says and then a thought occurs to her. “But we’ll just make sure we go together.”

“How does that help?!”

“I already know about you,” Lena tells her. “So, we can go through the moves without giving anything away.”

“That isn’t better,” Kara says, looking slightly incredulous. “What if I accidentally punch you in the face or something?”

“It’s not like there’s a lot of punching in a basic self-defense class,” Lena laughs though Kara doesn’t look very reassured. Switching tactics, Lena shifts closer to Kara and presses her fingers into Kara’s stomach, slides them up under the warmth of her sleep shirt in a soothing gesture. “I trust you,” she says softly, trying to erased the panicked look in Kara’s eyes. “You know that.”

It mimics a conversation they’d been having for what feels like the last month. Kara’s worry over accidentally hurting Lena a hurdle they’d been attempting to overcome slowly but surely.

“I know you do,” Kara sighs. “But maybe you shouldn’t.”

Lena rolls her eyes at how circular their conversations have started to feel in this context, but instead of arguing, she just moves her body until she’s practically crawling on top of Kara. Kara rolls over to her back as Lena does it, hands moving automatically to Lena’s side to keep her steady.

“Maybe you should trust me more,” Lena says softly, her hips slotting down against Kara’s.

“I do trust you,” Kara insists, her hands sliding from Lena’s side to the small of her back, intention starting to swirl between them with the way their bodies press fully against each other.

“Remember when you didn’t want to touch me?” Lena points out and she reaches behind herself to
push Kara’s hand up under her own shirt until it’s warming bare skin.

Kara swallows visibly, but doesn’t move her hand. “That’s not exactly what happened,” she says with a pointed look as her palm trails downward. Lena laughs.

“We got through that,” Lena continues. “Because you trusted me, right? And was I wrong?”

Blue eyes dart down to Lena’s lips, a little distracted, but Kara shakes her head. “No, you weren’t.”

“So trust me,” Lena murmurs hovered over Kara’s mouth.

“Okay,” Kara whispers just before she pushes upward and kisses Lena hotly, her hold on Lena’s waist tightening as she rolls them over and pushes Lena down into the mattress.

A week later, Lena meets Kara outside her Acting for Non-Majors class wearing yoga pants and a sweatshirt of Kara’s. They amble their way toward the student union where the self-defense classes are being held, and Kara rambles on and on about the strange acting exercise they did in class.

“And apparently the imaginary ball could change size and we had to pass it to each other in different ways,” Kara says. “I don’t really understand what it has to do with acting.”

“Darling, it has nothing to do with acting,” Lena says. “Your professor is insane.”

“Tippi is not insane!” Kara says, with some indignation, but there’s a smile on her face as she swings Lena’s hand back and forth. When they make it to the room and check in, though, Lena can see the anxiety start to leak through. The self-defense instructor is a tall woman with bright blonde hair - the classes are split along traditional gender lines - and she seems relatively unconcerned with the largely disengaged students who have shuffled their way into the room.

“So, I see most of you are in pairs, that’s awesome,” she says cheerfully. “Everybody stand up, let’s get limber and then we’ll go through the basics!”

They find a spot in the corner of the class, relatively shielded from the rest of the students - not that anyone is paying them any mind.

“What did you do in gym class in high school?” Lena asks quietly, mostly out of curiosity, leaning down to touch her toes and eyeing Kara as she stands there and attempts to look like she’s stretching. She isn’t; she’s mostly staring at Lena’s legs. When she clears her throat, Kara blinks and her face flushes.

“Um, I had asthma,” Kara says. “And since Eliza and Jeremiah were doctors, no one ever tested it. I went to class for a week and I shattered a uh - the thing in basketball.”

“A backboard,” Lena offers, and Kara nods, her eyes darting around the room before they reattach themselves to Lena. “Were you always a leg girl? Or am I just special?”

Kara seems to take a moment to understand Lena’s question before she crosses her arms and blushes heavily.

“Lena,” she hisses. Before Lena can tease her further, the teacher is gathering everyone’s attention again, leading everyone through a series of basic punches and kicks that most students put a lackluster effort into. Kara seems to take it in stride, even though she looks around self-consciously every few moments.
“Now, let’s work this out with a partner!” the teacher says. She demonstrates how to block a punch and then urges everyone to mime it with their partner - one blocking and one punching. Kara doesn’t bother looking particularly alarmed when Lena tosses a few punches her way, but looks a little more nervous to direct slow motion ones towards Lena.

“It’s okay,” Lena whispers, the sound inaudible to anyone but Kara. “I trust you.”

It becomes something of a dance, as the teacher moves them through the blocks and reactions, something soft. Kara’s eyes are blue and frightened, like a deer caught in headlights, but she moves her closed fist towards Lena slowly. Lena catches it softly, knocking it to the side, and then uses it as leverage to swing forward and fake a knee to Kara’s groin. The teacher makes them all repeat it a few times, and Kara’s expression has relaxed by the end of it, a small smile on her face as she lets Lena trail a hand up to her bicep and drift perhaps a little too close to count as a retaliation to an attack.

The last thing they learn is how to break out of a hold. Kara volunteers to go first, shrugging and letting Lena pull her hands together behind her back. It’s amusing, in some ways, to have Kara act as though she could actually be restrained at all by Lena. The teacher demonstrates how to hit the attacker on their instep and then break the hold to reach back and elbow them in the solar plexus. When Kara attempts it, Lena can’t help but be endeared when she stops herself from bumping Lena at all.

It’s too fun to tease Kara, and Lena knows it will probably help to relax the lingering restraint Kara’s exhibiting so she leans in a little closer than appropriate during the next try and Kara’s body jolts in Lena’s hold.

“Lena,” Kara chastises in a soft hiss, pouting when she turns a little glare over her shoulder.

With practiced innocence, Lena shrugs, but she can’t stop the laugh that comes when Kara easily breaks out of the hold this time and fakes a punch to her chest.

“Don’t be mean,” Kara warns, but Lena’s not deterred by the stern expression on Kara’s face. Not when Kara looks so cute in her cut off sweatpants and oversized sweater, cheeks pink and eyes narrowed.

“What are you going to do about it?” Lena challenges, but she realizes her mistake the second Kara’s glare turns mischievous and before she can blink, Kara is behind her, gripping her wrists in one strong hand and holding them together.

The sudden switch of power makes Lena’s head swim as does Kara’s free hand coming to rest on Lena’s hip, a little too low to be friendly.

Kara’s pressed in as close as Lena was, heat radiating against Lena’s back and she feel the ghost of Kara’s breath against the back of her neck where her hair is pulled up on her head. It makes Lena shiver and it certainly doesn’t help that when she tests the hold Kara has on her wrists, she can’t move an inch.

The teacher starts to walk through the set of moves again, but Lena’s too distracted by the shift in energy between her and Kara. It seems Kara’s hesitance has gone out the window, replaced by something a touch darker and much more confident. She wonders if Kara has picked up on the way her heartbeat has started to quicken or sensed the changes in attitude the way Lena has.

From the shuddery breath Kara releases towards Lena’s shoulder, she’s fairly sure she has.
The rest of the room starts to go through the series of moves they’re learning, but Kara forgets to release her hold on Lena for a few more seconds. Enough that Lena has to whisper her name and tug harder as a reminder.

Lena thinks to be embarrassed by the way her breathing has deepened or the thick liquid feeling in her throat, but from the look on Kara’s face when Lena finally twists in her hold, thoughts of embarrassment flood away.

When the class is finished, Kara nearly flies them home, they move so fast, and Lena’s laugh is swallowed up by Kara’s lips and her hands pressing Lena tightly against her dorm room door.

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Appropriately dressed - according to Alex - the two of them head towards the warehouse. Lena fills Alex in on what she knows about the property while Alex does the same of the information she’s gathered herself. She’s able to pull up a small copy of the blueprints on her phone and Alex looks them over on the way.

“Stay behind me no matter what,” Alex is instructing her as they make their way towards the back entrance she’d decided on as the most direct route inside.

“I’m good, Alex,” Lena says, holding the stun gun out in front of her a bit at the ready. Alex observes her for a long moment.

“Do you even have weapons training?” Alex asks.

“I don’t have my certifications on me at the moment,” Lena hisses back, and Alex glares heavily. “Yes, Alex. People have tried to kill me enough times to warrant a few self-defense classes. I know how to point and shoot.”

Alex stares at her for a moment longer before she sighs.

“Kara’s going to kill me,” she mutters, shaking her head.

“If she doesn’t kill me first. Just - focus,” Lena says, voice lowered.

Alex is nothing if not efficient and it’s almost mesmerizing to watch her work. There are two guards posted outside the back entrance, patrolling back and forth and the way Alex creeps forward and knocks them out with quick effective moves makes it all look easy. Even though Lena knows it’s not.

When they get inside the building, Alex pulls her bag forward and rummages inside, pulling out what Lena realizes quickly are a collection of small mines. “Okay,” Alex says in a whisper as they crouch behind a wall just inside the door. “I’ll clear the path. You spread these around.”

Lena nods, adrenaline mixing with purpose at the back of her throat. She takes the devices from Alex’s hands and notes how small they are, wonders how big of an explosion they’d create.

Alex must read her mind. “It won’t take the place down, but it will do as a distraction. Enough for us to get out if we need to.”

That makes Lena react just enough for Alex to seem appeased. “This button here to activate them,” Alex instructs, pointing towards a small notch on the side of the mine.

“Got it,” Lena replies with as much confidence as she can find inside herself and then they’re off.
With little delay, Alex takes the corner confidently, striding forward and grabbing the neck of the first guard she sees. In seconds, the guard is slumping in Alex’s hold and she’s sliding him to the ground.

“Let’s go,” Alex says and Lena takes the opportunity to place one of the mines on a nearby column, pressing the button to activate it.

It’s an easy rhythm after that as they move swiftly around the perimeter of the warehouse. Not long after they’d gotten there, they’ve got all ten of their mines planted and activated.

As she’s setting the last one up, Lena glances to Alex, her heart pounding with the tension of it all.

“What now?” she asks and a grim look appears on Alex’s face.

“Now we get caught,” Alex says simply and before Lena can protest at the absurdity of that suggestion, Alex is striding out into the open towards the group of three guards and Lena can’t do anything but follow.

Without a moment’s hesitation, Alex raises her gun and shoots the first guard to her right. It spooks the group and they rush her.

In a series of throws and kicks, Alex is able to disarm the second guard and even the third, but Lena hears footsteps behind them and when she levels her gun in that direction a group of guards in full tactical gear come running towards her, rifles raised.

“Alex,” Lena calls over her shoulder, hearing the sounds of Alex still engaged in a fight.

Lena’s not sure what to do other than keep her gun raised. Not that it would do much good against the five rifles pointed her direction.

Suddenly, Alex is at her back, hands in the air. “Put your gun down,” she murmurs to Lena, barely audible. “Before they shoot you.”

But before Lena can obey the directive another voice is joining the fray. “Don’t shoot! They’re with me.”

It’s Jeremiah. Who walks through the group of guards and frowns at his daughter and Lena.

“Alex,” he says with a frown that only deepens when he looks at Lena. “You shouldn’t have come.”

Hands in the air – a posture Lena mimics, the gun in her hand hanging on a finger – Alex keeps her face still as she addresses her father. “Dad,” she starts, but he cuts her off with a quick glare.

Holding his hand out, he waits with an expectant look for Alex to hand over the bag on her back and the gun she’s still holding in one hand. He does the same to Lena, plucking her handgun from her grasp and stowing it behind his back.

With an aggrieved sigh, he turns to the group of guards. “I’ll take care of them,” he says before gesturing behind them towards a raised platform with an array of monitors and consoles.

From the platform, a massive hulking shadow is settled on the grounds outside the warehouse, and a line of figures are being funneled into it.

“What is that?” Lena asks, the question bursting out of her before she can stop it. Wide eyes take in
the schematics displayed on one of the monitors as she tries to make sense of it.

“It’s a Hoshin Frigate,” Jeremiah answers and Alex narrows her eyes. “Lillian’s sending the aliens into space.”

“She what?!” Alex says and Lena looks towards the far side of the warehouse where the frigate in question is parked. It’s a massive thing – clearly built to house large quantities of cargo.

“As soon as it hits the atmosphere, it’s gonna jump to light speed and go to Takron-Galtos. They’ll find passage home from there.”

“You’re forcibly deporting them,” Lena says, fury creeping into her voice.

“Lillian can’t do that,” Alex adds and Jeremiah takes a deep breath.

“It was my idea to send them away,” he says and Lena watches a multitude of emotion flit across Alex’s face. “Lillian wanted to kill them all. At least this way they can have a life.”

“They have a life here,” Alex argues as Lena tries to swallow the bitter taste that always comes with the shattering reality of her mother’s evil. “Some of them have escaped famine and poverty and genocide,” Alex continues, a look of devastation on her face.

“Alex,” Jeremiah sighs, his face a plea for his daughter’s understanding. “At least they have a chance this way.”

Incredulous is the only way to describe Alex’s expression now and Lena’s not too far from that emotion herself.

“Imagine if it was Kara on that ship,” Lena spits, anger roiling through her at the thought. Jeremiah’s face barely changes in reaction. “You’d be sending her back to nothing.”

“It was all a lie,” Alex adds, accusing finger pointing at her father. “Everything you said in the woods about working for Cadmus for me.”

“It wasn’t,” Jeremiah says intently. “From the moment Cadmus took me prisoner they threatened to kill you and Kara if I didn’t comply. I made my choice. Protect my girls at all costs.”

There’s righteousness in Jeremiah’s face, resolve even and Lena’s reminded unerringly of Lex. Of the way he looked at trial, the things he said trying to convince Lena that what he was doing was the right thing, that it was for her.

In that moment, Lena thinks she and Alex Danvers probably have far more in common than either of them realize.

“How could you think that we would want you to hurt others to protect us?” Alex asks in a shaky whisper and Lena can hear an echo of her former self asking her brother a similar question.

Jeremiah shakes his head, a grim frown on his face just like Lex had. “There are just some things you’ll never understand until you’re in my shoes,” he says, walking away as if to end the conversation, but Alex isn’t done.

“Dad,” Alex says in a low intent whisper. “We can fix this. It’s not too late.”

Then, with a chill down Lena’s spine that nearly makes her flinch, the voice of her mother interrupts them. All ice and authority. “I’m afraid it is, Agent Danvers,” she says, striding forward
and up to the terminal. Her eyes connect with Lena’s, but she calls out to the scurrying of Cadmus guards around her. “Get to your launch stations.”

“Lillian,” Jeremiah warns in a low, confused tone, but Lillian ignores him, focuses her gaze on Lena as she stalks forward.

“Not exactly how I pictured our reunion, Lena, but it will suit, I suppose.”

“Lillian, what are you doing?” Jeremiah asks as her mother continues her stride towards a console and starts to press a series of buttons. The screens near Lena light up and she realizes with some amount of fear that her mother’s launching the ship.

“Mom, stop,” Lena says hastily, an unbidden reaction. Lillian does little more than flick a glance her way before addressing Jeremiah.

“Your other daughter unleashed an article online linking Cadmus to the abductions. It’s time we cut our losses.” Lillian sends a sardonic look Lena’s direction. “If my daughter is here, it can’t be too long before her Kryptonian comes bursting in to spoil the party.”

There’s a scurry of Cadmus agents all around them as the telltale sounds of something powering up starts to resound through the warehouse. Lillian hunches over the console.

“We’ve got a few hundred of them already. It’s not what I envisioned,” Lillian acknowledges with a tilt of her head. “But it’s a start.”

“Turn it off,” Lena hears herself say, low and with considerable authority. Her fingers itch for the safety of the weapon she had earlier. “Now.”

A shocked expression takes hold of her mother’s face for no more than a second before it’s replaced with a heavy glare and she turns it straight on Lena. “I think you’re forgetting who has the upper hand here, dear,” Lillian says.

“You heard her,” Alex says, voice just as cutting as Lena’s had been. “Turn it off.”

Lillian just smiles, unconcerned. “Or what?”

Alex actually smirks. “You think we would walk into the lion’s den without a whip?” Lillian just arches a brow, but Alex pulls the detonator out of her jacket pocket and Lillian’s face flinches just slightly. “We planted ten Haldorr particle mines all over this facility. Stop. The. Launch.”

Lillian’s eyes flit to Lena, harden in their glare as she smiles – that viper kind of smile she always has when she thinks she’s winning something. “You’re lying.”

Alex shakes her head. “You wanna bet?” And with a press of her finger the first mine detonates. It rocks the little platform their standing on and the two guards that have been behind them raise their guns to Alex who turns with a hand in front of her. “The rest of the bombs are on a dead-man switch. I let this go and the entire place lights up.”

The thing Lena expects is for the guards to suddenly turn their weapons towards her. It’d be the logical move. They can’t shoot Alex, but they could use Lena as leverage.

But just as she sees the first guard look at her, a barely perceptible shake of her mother’s head stops him.

Lena has no idea what to make of it. Especially when she locks eyes with Lillian and her
expression is no less hard than it was when directed at Alex.

“I’m not going to stop this,” Lillian says, turning back to Alex who is still holding the detonator up in the air.

“I don’t need you to,” Alex says and looking at Jeremiah. “Dad.”

A deep look of conflict settles on his face and Lena finds her chest twisting when she realizes the choice Alex is giving him – unsure of what he’ll choose. She certainly knows what Lillian would.

“Tamper with my launch, Jeremiah,” her mother says. “And I declare war on your whole family.”

“Dad,” Alex says emphatically, drawing his gaze back to her. “We protect each other. Always. Don’t listen to her.”

“She’s lying, Jeremiah,” Lena adds. “She wants Kara dead, and she’d kill any one of us to do it.”

“Jeremiah,” Lillian says, low and dangerous. The tug of war in the moment is palpable and Lena prays that Alex’s faith in her father isn’t misplaced. Had she known that was the crux of this plan she might have tried harder to talk Alex out of it.

“Come on, Dad,” Alex says, now in a whisper, soft and pleading. “Make this right.”

Lenas’s chest goes tight, heart pounding – anticipation and fear mixing together. The conflict on Jeremiah’s face is almost tangible as he looks between Lillian and Alex and Lena wonders if this story is going to end differently for Alex than it did for Lena.

Only a second more and she gets her answer when Jeremiah gives Alex a barely perceptible nod and the two of them move simultaneously to disarm the two guards holding rifles on the platform.

Lena takes a step back as it happens, watches Alex flip one guard over her shoulder as Jeremiah nearly dislocates the arm of a second and then Jeremiah’s handing Alex her gun back with a look of clear solidarity.

Without intending to, Lena’s brain wanders to think of what it would be like if Lex had switched sides again like this, had chosen redemption over righteousness. But she shakes it off as quickly as the thought came, focuses on the scene in front of her.

Alex aims her gun straight at Lillian. “Stop the launch,” she orders, but her mother just crosses her arms, shrugs a shoulder.

“No.”

Jeremiah steps forward. “Give my daughter the override code.”

It’s obvious to Lena that Lillian has no plan to waver, doesn’t even feel threatened. And for a moment she wonders if she’s about to watch Alex Danvers shoot her mother.

“I can’t,” Lillian says, the hint of a smile on her lips that feels inappropriate considering her situation. “There isn’t one. The only way to stop the launch is to release that trigger.”

Lena turns to Alex and can tell in a heartbeat that Alex isn’t bluffing. The decision, no hesitation, is all over her face and sure enough a second later she’s smirking just the slightest and dropping the detonator to the ground.

The explosions shake all four of them forward. Her mother goes sprawling towards a console and
Alex just barely stays on her feet, reaches out to steady Lena when she goes unbalanced.

Chaos breaks out in the hangar and Lena can see that the launch is yet to stop despite the mines detonating all around them.

“I’m going to see if I can stop that ship from the inside,” Alex says, then points at her father. “See if you can override it from here.”

Lena looks at her mother, who is watching them all with a deepening scowl and Lena wonders if she’s going to make a move. Her fist clenches without meaning to and she contemplates having to deck her mother if she does.

“Lena, you coming?” Alex asks, her hands gripping the back of Lena’s tactical vest, eyes wavering between Lena and her mother. There’s commotion everywhere.

A snarl finds its way to her mother’s lips as she hears Alex’s question and she levels a glare at Lena. “That girl, this foolish family - they aren’t yours. You’re a Luthor, Lena. You’re on the wrong side of this,” she says in that quiet but dangerous voice she always had when she was disappointed in something Lena had done.

But it doesn’t have the same effect it did when she was a child. It will always hurt, Lena thinks, but it’s just not the same anymore.

So she doesn’t hesitate. “No,” she says with a soft smile and a shake of her head as she starts towards where Alex is tugging her with a hurry the fuck up expression. “I’m not on the wrong side. But you are.”

And without waiting for a reply she’s jogging with Alex, picking up speed when she does and they both turn to head towards the frigate at the far side of the warehouse. Alex stops for half a second to liberate the stun gun she had given Lena from an unconscious guard, and then they’re off again.

“Let’s go!” Alex shouts and then she’s full on sprinting towards the ship and all Lena can think about is how maybe she should exercise more if they both survive this. Alex is considerably faster than her, but they both manage to get onto the ramp of the ship before it takes off.

A computerized voice rings through the air. T-minus sixty seconds to engine ignition.

“We need to find the cockpit,” Alex says, stalking forward.

A Cadmus guard comes around the corner suddenly. “Stop!” He shouts, but Alex just raises her gun and shoots him square in the chest.

They move quickly through the corridors until a noise catches in her ear and she turns down a hallway. “Alex,” she calls out, realizing what she's looking at. It’s a row of cages. Filled with people.

Alex jogs back towards her, looks down the hallway and lets out a breath. “The missing aliens,” she says, before walking forward. “Come on, help me.”

At the first cell, Alex doesn’t even attempt to override the control panel, just shoots it. Lena thinks to tell her that might not open the door, but it ends up working, the gate of the cell sliding open.

Lena follows suit at the adjacent door and they work their way down the hallway. “Everyone get out!” Lena tells them and Alex shepherds them down the hallway towards the exit of the ship.
Another guard comes stalking towards them and this time, it’s Lena who doesn’t hesitate before lifting her gun and shooting him. He goes flying backwards into a wall before slumping to the ground.

Alex’s hand finds her elbow and pulls her the opposite direction. “We need to stop this launch,” she says.

It doesn’t take too long to find the main control room. The ship is fairly simple – apparently used primarily for cargo and with a straightforward layout. But they’re too late to stop the launch. The voice of the ship’s computer comes through loud and clear in the small room. Secondary engine ignition, it says. Main engine ignition.

The ship rocks forward and Lena has to grab onto the pilot’s chair the center of the room to stay upright, Alex gripping onto the side strap of the vest she’s wearing.

“Fuck,” Alex breathes out, staring down at the mess of controls on the panel in front of her. “I don’t suppose you know how to drive this thing.”

Lena blinks and then steps forward to look at the panel. “Remind me to pick up some new skills if we survive this,” she mutters, trying to make sense of what they’re looking at. The symbols aren’t at all familiar.

Alex actually laughs, but she’s got a hand at her forehead and it comes out sounding stressed more than anything.

It hits Lena then that they’re about to launch into space and in a few minutes they’ll be on the other side of the universe. Maybe this barely thought out plan to jump on a launching Hoshin Frigate wasn’t exactly the best call.

“We need to call someone at the DEO. Call Kara.”

Oh God. Kara. Kara is definitely going to be on another level of freaked out.

“I’ll just –” Lena goes to flip open her watch, press a button that will bring Kara straight there, but Alex stops her.

“Call her. If Kara can’t stop this we need to know how to land it,” Alex says and so Lena pulls her phone out and presses Kara’s contact info while Alex looks around the cockpit for anything of use.

It takes a few more rings than it normally does for Kara to answer, but she eventually does. “Lena, I have to call you back. We’re kind of in the middle of something here. That location you gave us just pinged an unidentified launch –”

“Kara,” Lena interrupts, hoping the urgency of her voice will resonate down the line. “Alex and I are on the ship. We’re the launch.”

A beat of silence. “I’m sorry. I thought you just said you and Alex were on the spaceship about to launch into space. But that would be crazy because I’m pretty sure I dropped you off at Alex’s apartment with explicit instructions not to do anything insane!”

Kara’s voice raises considerably in pitch by the end of her sentence and Lena winces.

“There’s not really time to explain it right now,” she says, but Alex grabs the phone from Lena, pushes a button to switch it to speaker.
“Kara, get Winn to tell us how to land this thing,” Alex says and they both watch out the front as the ship seems to slowly pick up speed.

It’s Winn’s voice that comes through next. “Uh, Kara’s left. Just me now. Give me a second, I’m finding the schematics.”

“Winn,” Lena says, watching the earth move through the front view panel. “Hurry.”

“Okay, okay,” Winn is saying in a harried voice. “Try toggling the switch next to the control yoke and that should put you back in manual control.”

Lena looks around and finds what Winn’s talking about. She presses the switch, but nothing happens apart from an unsatisfying beep. She presses it again. Nothing. Again. Nothing.

Alex pushes her fingers away and tries herself with the same result.

“Nothing’s happening,” Lena says, anxiety clawing at her throat.

“We have to slow this ship down,” Alex replies, lifting her gun and aiming it at the console like that might help. Lena’s fairly confident that the main controls to the frigate don’t work the same as a prison lock and she puts a hand out to stop Alex.

“You don’t know what that will do.”

“We’re out of options, Lena,” Alex says, but just then a familiar form appears in front of the ship in blaze of red and blue.

“Supergirl’s going to try to slow you guys down,” Mon-El is telling them through Lena’s phone.

Alex lets her gun fall, rushing forward to get a look at Kara and Lena can feel just a bit of the tension ebb away from the cockpit – as if Kara’s mere presence has saved the day already.

But then the screens go bright red and a tracking program appears on the view screen as alarms ring out.

“What’s going on?” Alex asks, straightening up and Lena realizes it with dread sinking in her stomach.

“The ship is recognizing Kara as a threat, it’s trying to target lock.”

“Lena’s right,” Winn says. “I’m trying to override it.”

“Keep moving,” Lena whispers, watching Kara’s form outside the window.

A bright burst of energy comes shooting out of the ship and Kara just dodges it in time, but when a second shot fires it hits Kara in the chest and throws her backwards into the air.

Lena and Alex both jump forward with simultaneous shouts of, “Kara!”

It’s punctuated by Winn and Mon-El through the tinny connection of Lena’s phone and then J’onn’s more even voice comes through. “It’s alright, she’s fine. She just lost her comms. Alex, you’re our eyes.”

They watch as Kara recovers, and the grip of fear on Lena’s heart eases. With a quick breath of frost, Kara manages to disable the weapons on the ship and she flies forward, both of her hands landing with a thud on the front of the ship.
Kara looks at them both then and Lena can sense the fear, the uncertainty in Kara’s expression as she tries to push the ship back with all her strength.

“Come on Kara,” Alex says under her breath. “Come on.”

The ship keeps moving, doesn’t lose speed and Winn’s voice comes back on the line. “Guys, in twenty seconds that ship is going to be on the other side of the universe.”

“We know that,” Alex bites out in frustration and with a dart of her finger she hangs the call up and turns back to her sister.

A look of pure devastation is on Kara’s face, her eyes darting between Alex and Lena. She shakes her head, looking lost and terrified.

“It’s okay,” Lena says, strong and loud, knowing Kara can hear her. “Just focus. Listen.”

Kara looks at her, the seconds seeming to tick by ominously, before she blinks her eyes shut for a moment. When they open again it’s with a look of sheer determination. Alex jumps forward, puts her hand up on the glass and hits it once before keeping her palm there.

“You can do this, Kara. Come on,” Alex says with a kind of confidence that pulls Kara’s eyes sharply in her direction. The look of purpose on Kara’s face only deepens. “You’re strong enough. You can do this.”

Kara puts her hand on the glass, right where Alex’s is, stares into her sister’s eyes and starts to nod. The fear has left her face entirely, now replaced by something much more certain and sure – focus and strength echoing back at them from blue eyes.

It pulls Lena forward and she places her right hand next to Alex’s on the screen, looks Kara in the eye and repeats the sentiment. “You can do it,” she says too as Kara brings her hand up to place it over Lena’s. “Focus.”

With a last look at both of them and a sharp nod, Kara takes a deep breath and repositions her hands on the ship. With a strangled kind of cry, she starts to push harder, the muscles in her neck tensing beyond belief and her eyes shutting against the strain.

Lena pumps every ounce of strength she has and channels it to Kara. And then a hand is gripping hers and she glances over to see that Alex has grabbed her free hand, connecting them all together.

And seconds later she can feel it working. Barely detectable, but the ship begins to slow. Lena sees it happen on the screen tracking their trajectory in the cockpit. A noise resonates through the ship that Lena recognizes – the sounds of the engines powering down just enough.

“She did it,” Alex breathes out, a look of wonderment on her face before she looks out at Kara again. “You did it!”

Kara collapses against the ship, her forehead pressing into the glass and her breathing clearly coming uncharacteristically hard.

There are tears in Alex’s eyes – and Lena feels something similar in her own – as Alex leans forward and slaps the glass a few times, drawing Kara’s gaze to her.

The sisters smile at each other, Alex even lets out a little relieved laugh, and their hands rest side by side, the glass the only thing between them.
Lena joins them, puts her palm on the glass near Kara’s face and leans into Alex’s shoulder.

With Winn’s guidance and Kara’s help, they manage to get the frigate down to Earth. They land it in a wide open field outside the city and Alex calls a team to the site.

As soon as the prisoners have all been released from the ship and the remaining guards – most of them unconscious from Alex’s original warpath through the ship – are rounded up, Kara comes bounding towards Lena and Alex.

Without breaking stride, she wraps her arms around her sister, pulling her into a tight hug and then over her shoulder she spots Lena and reaches out to pull her in too until the three of them are tight together.

“You are both idiots and I hate you,” Kara says, sounding like she might cry.

“Sorry,” Alex says through a watery laugh, her fingers gripping in Kara’s cape.

When they break apart, Lena runs her fingers down Kara’s arm until their hands are together. “It was Alex’s idea,” she tells her and Kara turns a glare to her sister.

“Lena threatened me,” Alex points out indignantly. “It wasn’t my idea to bring her along.”

“Lena threatened you,” Kara repeats in a deadpan that conveys how much she believes that accusation.

Alex makes an offended face. “Yeah, why is that so hard to believe?”

“It’s Lena,” Kara says like that’s an answer and Lena should probably be offended that Kara’s implying she’s not capable of effectively threatening her sister, but instead she finds herself charmed by the way Alex rolls her eyes through a smile.

“Regardless,” Kara says, amusement fading away into something more chastising and serious. “Neither of you should have been on that ship. Especially without backup.”

“I tried to tell her that,” Lena says. Alex looks affronted at having been thrown under the bus, but J’onn arrives then and steps forward – his Martian form sizzling back into that of Hank Henshaw as he lands.

There’s a moment of hesitation as he approaches. He nods at both of them, a look of clear relief washing over his face. “Glad to see you’re both okay,” he says in a gruff voice and Alex looks at him a long moment before reaching her hand out.

He takes it, seems to hold onto it tightly as he and Alex smile at each other.

They head straight to the DEO after that. Winn and Mon-El crowd around them when they land on the balcony. Lena finds herself lifted into Mon-El’s hug while Winn bursts into actual tears upon getting his arms around Alex.

The roller coaster of emotions are exhausting, but there’s still the matter of dealing with the remains of the Cadmus warehouse and the whereabouts of Lillian and Jeremiah. Alex asks after her father almost immediately after J’onn and Kara do a quick sweep of the scene and return to the
“Any sign of him?”

J’onn shakes his head, somber. “No,” he answers and then with a glance to Lena adds, “Nor of Lillian Luthor.”

“Not surprising,” Kara says with a sigh and a sympathetic look for Lena as she paces forward. Lena feels far too exhausted by the truth of that comment and declines replying in favor of sagging heavily against Kara’s body.

Despite her mother getting away, the day still feels like a victory – hundreds of aliens were saved and her mother’s diabolical plans foiled. Lena draws whatever satisfaction she can from that as she leans into Kara’s embrace and listens as the group debriefs the rest of the situation.

By the time they’re done, it’s nearly two in the morning. Exhaustion has long ago settled over Lena’s shoulders and it’s a wonder she can even keep her eyes open at this point.

While Kara finishes up talking to J’onn, Lena sits in one of the chairs on the main platform. The room is sparse – a thin night crew the only people around. She lets her head fall back and slumps a bit, but doesn’t dare close her eyes.

Instead, she focuses on watching some monitoring program that’s running on a nearby monitor. Her eyes feel achy and dry, but it’s something to do.

A quiet, “Hey,” pulls her gaze to the side to see Alex standing there looking as tired as Lena feels.

“Hey,” Lena says, sitting up a little and affecting a soft smile.

Alex’s hands go into the pocket of her leather jacket, her eyes darting around for a moment. “I just wanted to say thank you.”

Lena quirks a brow. “For what?”

With a little laugh, Alex shrugs a shoulder. “For not letting me go alone,” she says, looking straight on at Lena and nodding a little as if to herself. “You did good back there.”

Pleased, Lena smiles. “Thanks,” she says, her brain too tired to think of anything better to say.

Alex observes her for a moment longer before taking a deep breath and turning to leave.

Standing, Lena stops her with a quiet call of her name and Alex turns with an inquiring look. “I’m glad you were right about your father,” she says and Alex’s face manages to go soft and tight at the same time. “I hope we find him.”

“Me too.”

Kara interrupts them then, bouncing up the platform towards where they’re standing and looks even more exhausted than either of them. Lena’s not sure how that’s even possible, but a need to get Kara home and in bed rushes through her anyway.

Hands on her hips as she approaches, Kara sends both Lena and Alex little glares. It’s clear she’s still not over the spaceship incident and confirms as much when she tells them, “No more getting on random spacecraft without me.”

Alex laughs a little, her eyes red rimmed and glossy when they look at her sister. “Deal.”
Deflating as she looks at Alex’s face, Kara shakes her head, but pulls Alex into a hug. They embrace tightly, Alex’s fingers clinging into the red of Kara’s cape and Lena thinks she hears Alex let out a low breath.

Gone is the tension she’d observed between them in the last few days and back is the solid strength she’d always sensed around the two sisters.

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They take a DEO van back to Lena’s apartment. Even though Kara sat under the sunlamps for nearly an hour after they’d gotten back she still looks far too drained to be allowed to fly. Lena’s half-sure Kara would fall asleep midflight and drop them both to the ground as a result.

There’s no discussion about going home together. Just a silent understanding between both of them that they don’t want to be apart. Lena’s partly surprised Kara didn’t insist Alex join them, but Alex heads to her own apartment after an emotional goodbye for the each of them, claiming Maggie is waiting for her.

When they’re finally back, Lena considers just flopping down on her couch and passing out, but she forces herself to change and at least wash her face.

Envious, she watches as Kara superspeeds her way through the process and is already pulling the sheets back on the bed before Lena can so much as make it to the bathroom.

“For the record,” Kara murmurs when Lena’s finally sliding down onto the mattress and letting Kara pull her closer. “I’m still mad at you for nearly getting launched into space.”

Sighing at the feeling of finally being able to lie down, Lena just scoots closer to Kara and cards her fingers though blonde hair. Kara’s eyes flutter and Lena feels like her body is so heavy it could sink through the mattress. “You can yell at me in the morning.”

“I don’t want to yell,” Kara says, but her eyes are barely open. “I just want you to make better choices.”

Seconds from falling asleep and being lulled further by the warmth of Kara’s body and her hand shifting over Lena’s hip, Lena doesn’t want to argue. “Okay,” she says softly and she feels Kara’s lips ghost over her forehead before she finally succumbs to slumber, warm and safe in Kara’s arms.
Chapter 18

One of the things Lena’s started to learn about National City is that it’s a lot like Metropolis. She imagines that’s mostly due to the fact that they both play host to a resident Kryptonian protector, but for whatever reason, both cities have the same unspoken ability to just move past all the strange things that happen on a frequent basis.

Living in Metropolis meant there was always some strange new Superman rogue terrorizing downtown. It had once become commonplace for Lex to complain about the slime coating a block down by his favorite sushi place, or Lena’s driver to pick her up forty minutes earlier to avoid the wreckage left over by some way-too-large mutant creature.

Much the same, National City doesn’t seem all that distraught by the events of the previous evening. Apart from light coverage on the morning news, most of the city goes about their day as though an alien spacecraft didn’t try to launch into lightspeed from a warehouse not too far away.

She and Kara watch the short coverage together over early morning cups of coffee. The television drones away over footage of families hugging each other – authorities have thwarted a terrorist plot to send registered aliens back to space.

Oddly, neither she nor Supergirl are mentioned on the news – Lena idly wonders what it took to keep them out of it – but the memory is still vivid and it shivers through her.

Kara must feel the same way considering how deeply she frowns at the television before clicking it off and reaching into the fridge for the bottle of creamer.

“Feels like it happened to someone else,” Lena murmurs into the steam rising from her coffee.

Kara quirks a brow from where she’s pouring way too much creamer into her coffee. “And yet it didn’t.”

Lena sighs, but doesn’t comment – despite waking up tangled together, Kara’s still a little frosty this morning about her and Alex going after Cadmus on their own and Lena’s not sure how to fix it. Isn’t entirely she wants to, really.

“If you have something you’d like to say to me, Kara...” Lena starts and Kara sighs so dramatically Lena nearly laughs. Wisely, she swallows the urge and hides it behind the lip of her coffee mug.

“I can’t believe you went off guns blazing into a Cadmus warehouse,” Kara says matter-of-factly like, hands at her hips. “How many times do we have to have a conversation about this stuff?”

“It was Alex’s plan,” Lena says, shrugging a largely unrepentant shoulder. “What was I supposed to do, let her go in alone?”

Kara looks stumped by that – just kind of moves her jaw around in thought for a moment. “Yes,” she says, albeit with such extreme hesitation that Lena has to choke down a laugh again.

“If you recall, I was perfectly agreeable in letting you stash me away with your sister. It’s not as if I planned to have her already gearing up to storm the castle,” Lena points out with an arch of her brow.

“You could have stayed put,” Kara replies, with a firm set to her eyes.
“Alex was off to challenge my mother and her minions. Seeing as I couldn’t stop her, I wasn’t very well going to let her just go off by herself.”

“You should have at least called me.”

“There wasn’t exactly time,” Lena says even though that’s not entirely true. Admitting she used the threat of calling Kara to leverage Alex into letting her go to the warehouse doesn’t seem like her best move. “And we did call you when we got a chance.”

“When you were already halfway to the other side of the galaxy!” Kara exclaims.

“That’s dramatic,” Lena counters, blowing out a breath at the stern look she gets in return. “We hadn’t even left the troposphere,” she adds softly.

Kara rolls her eyes severely enough that it makes Lena bristle a bit. “That is so far from the point.”

“Which is?”

“That you shouldn’t have been there to begin with,” Kara replies quickly, her voice sounding like she’s barely restraining herself from snapping the words out angrily.

“I don’t know how many times I have to tell you that I wasn’t going to let Alex go alone,” Lena says. “I stand by that decision. No matter the consequences.”

Something breaks across Kara’s expression, a tightening of her jaw and a widening of her eyes. Her fingers tap nervously against her coffee mug as she just observes Lena for a moment longer.

“Look,” she says, taking a breath. “Alex can handle herself, she’s a trained DEO agent, but you’re –” Kara’s words cut off at the look Lena shoots her, but her lips thin in displeasure and she lets out a sighed, “Lena.”

“Everything turned out fine,” Lena says, trying to navigate her way out of an argument she can’t see having an easy resolution. “You stopped the ship, we thwarted my Mother’s evil scheming and no one was hurt.”

“It could have easily gone the other way.”

“You can’t go through life thinking of what-ifs,” Lena warns her. “Our lives are too crazy for that.”

Letting out a low breath, Kara turns her eyes up to the ceiling for a moment before slouching her shoulders and dramatically letting her forehead fall to the countertop. Lena jumps a bit at the motion, worries over whether Kara just cracked the surface for a second. “Kara?”

“You almost got launched into space, Lena!” Kara exclaims, the words muffled by the countertop, but still quite loud.

“I’m aware of that,” Lena replies dryly. “I thought you didn’t want to yell at me.”

“I’m not yelling at you,” Kara says, considerably quieter as she picks her head up from the table.

“Kara,” Lena sighs, reaching across the table to clasp the top of Kara’s hand. “We had a long night last night. We’re both exhausted.”

“It’s not just last night!” Kara retorts, her voice returning to its earlier decibel, but retreating at the arch of Lena’s brow. “It’s not.”

“Then what is it?” Lena abandons Kara’s hand in favor of crossing her arms over her chest.
With a brief look of consideration, Kara laughs, but the sound isn’t happy or all that amused.

“You know, when you called me to tell me you were on the same ship that we were watching take off into space, part of me wasn’t surprised?” Kara says, eyes drifting away from Lena. “Some sort of Cadmus death trap outside National City. Where else would Lena be?”

A hot spike of indignation hits Lena square in the chest. “That’s incredibly unfair.”

“Certainly not in the nice safe apartment with my sister where I left her,” Kara continues as if Lena hasn’t spoken.

“You’re being ridiculously overprotective,” Lena says in lieu of something sharper.

“Yes?” Kara counters, her eyes suddenly flashing as they dart back to Lena.

“Am I?” Lena replies, trying to stop herself from getting just as angry as Kara looks. Their emotions have clearly still not recovered from last night and Lena can sense the argument escalating beyond both of their control. The last thing she needs before heading into a busy work day is to be fighting with Kara. “I don’t want to argue about this.”

Kara stands from the counter, hands at her hips and despite the faded t-shirt and low sitting shorts she’s wearing, looks the perfect picture of Supergirl. It reminds Lena, unbidden, of Kara standing outside her freshman physics lab insisting they’d go to dinner together before Lena ensconced herself in the library for the weekend. It’s stupidly endearing even when Lena finds it deeply frustrating. “Maybe I do.”

That much is clear in the way Kara’s chin lifts a bit and her jaw goes tight, but Lena has to go to work and she can tell this isn’t something they’re going to resolve over quick cups of morning coffee. “Well I have to go into the office,” Lena says, glancing at the digital clock on the nearby microwave. “And so do you I’d imagine.”

Silently, Kara looks that direction as well, her lips thinning as she sees the time. “We’ll talk about this later,” she says even as her shoulders lose some of their tension and she drops her hands off her hips.

“I’m sure we will,” Lena says dryly, finishing her coffee before depositing the empty cup in the sink.

A desire to leave it at that and exit the kitchen wordlessly runs through her, but a deeper pull that’s always tugged her straight to Kara wins the fight and she steps up into Kara’s personal space to tangle her fingers in the fabric of her t-shirt.

“I love you,” Lena says firmly, threading forward and pressing a solid, swift kiss to Kara’s lips.

“I love you too,” Kara returns, her voice immediately losing the steel from earlier as her blue eyes soften just enough.

“Have a good day at work,” Lena tells her quietly before disengaging and retreating towards the bedroom to get changed.

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The first person to greet her off the elevator is a very unimpressed looking Jess, holding a tablet and a coffee that Lena takes with an arched brow. The smell of a perfectly brewed americano from her favorite coffee shop makes the slight unease she felt from arguing with Kara that morning start
“You’re supposed to be on vacation,” Lena admonishes, striding into her office as Jess trails behind.

“Yes, because I was very well going to stay in Hawaii after I heard about Alana,” Jess says icily, though Lena can tell very clearly her ire isn’t directed at Lena.

“I still have Hector,” Lena replies with a touch of exasperation. “I can manage.”

“While that’s not at all my point, as sweet and handsome as Hector is, he can’t handle your entire schedule every single day on his own,” Jess replies, following Lena through the office in a practiced routine as Lena sets her bag down and boots her laptop up.

“Jess, as much as I admire your work ethic, I did genuinely want you to have a vacation,” Lena says, settling in her office chair and watching as Jess looks down at the tablet in her hands.

“Technically I’m only back part time until the end of the month.”

“Do I need to remind you of what a vacation means?” Lena jokes before taking a sip of her coffee and trying not to react to just how good it tastes. It’s such a small comfort, but it settles any lingering nerves in her chest.

“The raise was generous enough,” Jess says. “I’ll take a so called real vacation when you stop getting thrown off balconies. Perhaps you’re the one who should take a vacation. Hawaii was lovely up until I saw my Google Alerts go insane.”

“That was a one-time incident,” Lena mutters, as Jess begins to queue up her usual and familiar list of items to start the day.

“Why do I find that hard to believe?” Jess replies, tilting her head knowingly.

“You sound like Kara,” Lena mutters, mostly under her breath, but she catches Jess smile before moving past the comment and on to the day.

“It seems this latest Cadmus defeat has left a few vacancies in the company,” Jess informs her, handing over the tablet in her hands. On it is a list of resignations submitted that morning and Lena sighs. The list takes some scrolling. She considers calling Kara and demanding to abscond to Hawaii for a short, desperate moment.

“You’re joking.”

“Think of it as a good thing. Those still loyal to your mother are staging a strategic retreat.”

Lena hums as she scrolls through the list in her hands, a headache already forming at the idea of having to go through the hiring process to fill all the positions. Far too many are too high level, ones that she’ll have to sit through meetings over or others that require Board approval.

As a child, she had often enjoyed following her father into the office to watch him work. Even when Lex first started, Lena would enjoy long breaks lounging on his office couch and idly watching him take conference calls or handle an international crisis. Neither of them had ever looked quite as exhausted as Lena feels these days.

Maybe Lex had. At the end of it all.
“Don’t worry,” Jess says, interrupting Lena’s derailing thoughts and reaching to flick through the tablet in Lena’s hand. “I already have a list of qualified candidates for you to look over. I’ve narrowed it down as much as possible.”

A different list loads up on its screen, and Lena can’t help but feel impressed and it must show on her face if Jess’s expression is anything to go by, a small smile on her face.

“When on Earth did you have time to compile this?” Lena asks idly, eyeing the list of possible targets.

“I have my ways,” Jess says airily.

A name sticks out immediately and Lena nearly laughs when she reads it. “Samantha Arias?”

“The junior finance officer over in Central City? Rumor is she’s looking for a move to National City,” Jess replies, a quizzical arch to her brow as she observes the bio displayed in Lena’s hand. Sam looks inevitably older than Lena remembers, but her smile is as beautiful as ever.

“What a small world,” Lena murmurs, mostly to herself.

“You know her?”

“We went to boarding school together briefly,” Lena says. Her memories of Sam are nothing but fond. “I haven’t spoken to her in years.”

“Well, she went on to National City University after high school, finished summa cum laude with a degree in finance. Several of her supervisors have recommended her for higher placement in the company.”

“Interesting,” Lena murmurs, looking through the original hiring record they have on file.

“Boarding school. Very stereotypical,” Jess says, half under her breath. Lena isn’t certain exactly what she means, but she thinks it must be somewhat insulting considering the smirk on Jess’s face.

“What are you implying, Jess?” Lena asks. Jess shrugs, directing her gaze outside as though something interesting is happening in the morning sun. Lena decides to let Jess have her fun for the moment and scrolls down.

She snorts when she sees Jack’s name and qualifications, the picture included from a few years ago, when he was growing a rather amusing mustache for charity. She can recall Lex asking him whether he had time travelled from the ‘20s as a joke.

“You want me to hire Jack Spheer as our chief technology officer? Did you just compile a list of my romantic entanglements?”

Jess looks a bit startled by the sudden admission and Lena feels a flush at hearing her own words. Thankfully, Jess recovers first. “If you’ve dated Tripp Burlington, I might start to doubt your taste,” she comments dryly and Lena laughs.

Sidestepping the turn in conversation, she returns to the screen before her. “I can’t imagine Jack is in the market for a job. He runs his own company.”

Jess shrugs. “A company that you are a major shareholder in,” Jess says. “Spheerical is about to announce their new IP here in a few weeks. Your invitation came just this morning. Perhaps you could engage in a small takeover.”
“I don’t prefer to engage in small takeovers,” Lena says and they share a smile when Lena hands the tablet back over. “Make sure HR opts me in on director and above level hires. And RSVP to that invitation for the Spheerical event.”

“Shall I put you down with a plus one?” Jess asks. Lena pauses, looking down at her phone, where an unread text message from Kara awaits her. It’s often a picture of whatever monstrosity Kara’s found to eat for her second breakfast on the way to work, but in light of their disagreement that morning, Lena’s not too sure.

Turning back to Jess, Lena nods. “Yes.”

Jess nods dutifully, turning away to return to her desk.

“Jess?” Lena calls out, just as her assistant gets to the door.

“Yes, Miss Luthor?”

“It’s nice to have you back.”

Jess doesn’t reply other than a smile before exiting the office and leaving Lena to her work.

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It’s never a date. There’s never a promise or hope for more. Lena makes sure of that.

This time it’s a girl in France – not blonde, name beginning with an E, Emily maybe, Emma? The girl works at a marketing company contracted by Luthor Corp in Paris, smart enough to be discreet. She’s pretty and interesting enough that Lena has two drinks instead of one before suggesting they move from the hotel bar up to the penthouse suite she’s staying in.

It’s never hard to convince them. Sometimes, some part of her wishes it weren’t so easy. It’s the part of her that always feels uneasy touching someone that isn’t Kara.

It’s their anniversary. Her and Kara’s.

She spends it whispering in French to a virtual stranger that’s as far from Kara as she could find. It’s been a year and a half since she last saw Kara, a few months since she returned from Japan with a renewed interest in joining society, in Luthor Corp. It’s getting better. Or so she tells herself. She goes on business trips all around the world, sees it for what it is, rose-colored glasses firmly tucked away.

Sometimes, she thinks about calling Kara just to hear her voice, an ache present in her chest when she can’t quite remember the inflection of how Kara would say something. Those are the days when things like this are best had.

The sex is quick. It usually is. It’s mechanical, simple, a series of movements and sayings that have formed into a sequential order for Lena. The suite is lovely, the girl beautiful, the location superb. And somehow, it never amounts to anything but a checked box.

The girl leaves satisfied, still flushing with pleasure and hair attractively tousled as Lena politely kicks her out of the suite. There’s no lingering in bed, no more words exchanged apart from soft thank yous and goodbyes.

And then Lena’s alone again. It’s the exact opposite point of the whole endeavor, but it always ends this way.
Wide awake, she sidesteps the bed and retreats to the balcony, flipping through her phone until she’s pulling up her brother’s contact info - a silly picture of him looking absolutely terrified of a giant freshwater stingray appears on her screen.

It’s warm in Paris. A breeze ruffles the soft, worn shorts she’d put on and her eyes wander over the lights of the city at night. The sound of the call trying to connect rings in her ear and her mind starts to wander against her will.

Kara would love it here. The food, the history, spending all day luxuriating in a penthouse suite with a balcony view of the Eiffel Tower. Before her thoughts can grow dark, Lex is picking the phone up with a frustrated, “I’m going to throw Maxwell Lord off a cliff,” and just like that Lena’s chest relaxes.

“How’d he manage that?”

Lex lets out a frustrated breath. “Some hogwash about National City school systems. As if that’s more important than being on the cutting edge of science.”

“Spoken like a true bachelor,” Lena says, laughing as Lex joins her in the sound.

“You okay?” Lex asks after the laughter tapers off. “My little sister senses are tingling. You haven’t gone and sold the company to the French, have you?”

“No, of course not,” Lena answers. “But I’m off to Germany tomorrow, so there’s still time.”

Lex doesn’t laugh at her joke. “Lena,” he says in the tone he always uses when he knows she’s hiding something.

“I just missed you,” Lena replies, sighing and watching a couple stumble their way down the street below her room. The man is singing La vie En Rose very poorly, but the woman is laughing loudly. “Am I not allowed to miss my brother?”

“Very suspicious,” Lex says, though it’s light and punctuated by a soft laugh as if to indicate he’s not going to push her.

They’re both silent a moment and Lena feels guilty for pulling Lex away from what’s likely a busy workday back in Metropolis. “I’m sorry to bother you.”

“You’re not bothering me. Are you sure you’re alright? You know you can talk to me if you need to.”

“I’m fine. Just trouble sleeping,” she says and before Lex can react to that she adds, “This project has been tiresome.”

Lex hums like he doesn’t totally believe her, but moves past it. “Well, if you need me to send you a better support staff...”
“I’ll be sure to let you know,” she says, picking her head up and looking down the street to where the trees of a nearby park are ruffling in the wind. “Well, I’ll let you go throw Max off a cliff, then, I suppose.”

“Call me if you need me, Lena,” he says before she can hang up. “Anytime.”

“Thanks, Lex,” going for casual, but likely not succeeding.

Nevertheless, Lex disconnects the call and Lena’s left to retreat back into her room where the bed sheets are still rumpled and smelling of sex. She looks down at it for a moment before turning to the couch in the outer room, gathering a bottle of wine along the way. When she turns on the television, a musical is on - one of the only ones Lena had ever bothered to care about during Kara’s education on the genre.

She watches it without watching it. She drinks her wine, and does not think about what Kara is doing, wherever she is. Whether she knows what day it is or not.

She doesn’t fall asleep until she’s finished the whole bottle of wine, and before she knows it, she’s out of the room and off to Germany, repeating the whole process over again with some girl, not blonde. Name with an H.

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It’s a surprise to see Kara appear in Lena’s office over lunch.

Their argument is fresh in her mind, but Lena’s glad that it doesn’t stop Kara. She strides into Lena’s office just as Lena’s turning to her phone to have Jess order her something.

A flutter of delight ruffles in Lena’s chest at the unexpected sight of her. Fighting with Kara always leaves Lena with a general sense of unease the rest of the day and the sudden possibility of reconnection soothes the disquiet in her stomach.

But Kara doesn’t seem quite as delighted as she makes her way into Lena’s office. Quite the opposite, in fact, and heartbeats after Kara’s entered the room, Jess is scurrying in behind her with a worried glance to her employer.

Subtly as she can, Lena waves her away and stands from her desk, gaze snapping to lock onto Kara’s face and try to figure out what’s got Kara walking with robotic motions to flop forward into one of Lena’s office chairs without so much as a hello.

“Kara?” Lena leans over her desk, fingers splayed out across the white surface to keep her propped up as Kara just sort of blinks dazedly at Lena in reaction. “Are you okay?”

An odd silence wafts around them another moment, twists nervously in Lena’s guts, before Kara sits up a bit and darts her eyes around.

“Yeah,” Kara answers, sounding nothing at all like anything is okay. “Hi.”

“Hi,” Lena returns, thinking to laugh, but quelling the reaction at the restless look in Kara’s eyes. “I was just about to order lunch; do you want something?”

Kara blinks at her as if not understanding the question and then seems to startle out of her confusion. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t just drop in on you like this,” she says suddenly, the words quiet and rushed as she makes to stand.
With a hot spike of concern, Lena stops her, holding out a hand. “Kara, darling, sit back down,” she orders and Kara seems to obey without thinking about it, falling back into her chair immediately. “What’s wrong? Tell me what happened.”

The last word seems to pull Kara just enough out of her haze to respond coherently. “I got fired,” she answers, her brow furrowed like she can’t quite believe the words she’s saying.

Lena feels her own eyes go wide with surprise. “I’m sorry? You what?”

“Snapper fired me,” Kara says, looking some measure of confused and irritated.

“He did what?” Lena asks indignantly, idly wondering if she has any professional leverage at CatCo.

“He fired me. For breach of contract,” Kara adds, twisting her fingers together.

“The article?” Lena asks, not knowing what to do with the look on Kara’s face, but she comes around her desk to lean up against it in front of Kara’s chair, arms crossing over her chest.

Kara just nods. “For blobbing,” Kara adds with a quirk of her brow that makes Lena’s shoulders soften just a bit.

But it doesn’t stop the wash of guilt that suddenly flows over her. She had been the one to encourage Kara to self-publish after all. “That’s ridiculous. That article helped save hundreds of lives. You shouldn’t be punished for it.”

As a business woman, Lena’s aware it’s a lot more complicated than that, but as Kara’s --- her brain can’t settle on any word other than mate – she can’t see past a need to protect and defend. Any disconnect between them from that morning washes away from her in light of the forlorn look on Kara’s face.

“The article was redundant,” Kara says. “You had the location an hour after I published it. Alex did too. We stopped the spaceship and it had nothing to do with what I published.”

Lena bends her neck in an attempt to lock with Kara’s evasive eyes. “That’s not true. The article was what prompted my mother to launch the ship ahead of schedule and –”

With a drop of her head backwards, Kara blows out an aggrieved sigh. “Oh, great, so I actually nearly caused hundreds of people including my –”

“Kara,” Lena interrupts and this time she steps forward and unceremoniously drops into Kara’s lap. It seems the only way to grasp the whole of Kara’s attention and it does the trick. Kara sits up when it happens and her hands go straight to Lena’s hips, blue eyes locking onto Lena’s face. “If she hadn’t done that the DEO would have never detected the launch and we would have –”

“We didn’t need to detect any launch because you and Alex were already there and if I hadn’t published that article then I wouldn’t have had to stop a giant frigate from launching you and my sister into space!” Kara’s voice escalates at the end of it, agitation and fear mixing together in a sound that makes Lena reach out to cup her cheeks, thumbs stroking against the skin there.

“Hey,” Lena says in as soothing a voice as possible. Kara’s cheeks have gone a little red and there’s a crinkle in her brow that Lena reaches out up to rub away. “Everything turned out okay. I’m fine, Alex is fine, you’re fine and we foiled my mother’s plans once again.”

There’s a palpable anxiety bubbling up around Kara that Lena’s not sure how to ease. It’s the same
one she’s felt ever since they returned home from that night in Lex’s warehouse with her mother. Part of Lena’s sure it won’t go away until the Cadmus threat is eliminated once and for all. She tries not to think too hard about what that might entail, or how long it might take.

“Sorry,” Kara says softly, eyes closing briefly and Lena lets her hands trail up into Kara’s hair, scratching lightly at her scalp in a gesture she knows Kara likes.

“It’s okay,” Lena murmurs soothingly, enjoying the way Kara’s blue eyes flutter a bit as she leans into Lena’s touch. “There’s been a lot going on.”

Kara laughs, the motion relaxing her just a bit. “That’s one way of putting it.”

“And Snapper is an idiot,” Lena adds, trying to pull Kara’s attention away from the memory of last night.

Kara makes a noncommittal noise, but doesn’t disagree. Her posture slouches even more, her head seeming to get heavier where it’s cradled in Lena’s hands. “I can’t believe he fired me.”

“He’s an idiot,” Lena repeats.

“Yeah, I guess,” Kara says, looking listless.

“Hey, you’ll get another job,” Lena says, going for reassuring, trying to pull Kara’s gaze back up to her own. “If you want, you can always come work at L Corp.”

It’s said with enough tease, that Kara’s lips quirk a bit and she finally looks back up at Lena. “I’m not sure I could handle working under you like that.”

Lena quirks a brow until Kara’s cheeks go pink. “I’m sure you could manage,” she says and Kara rolls her eyes, but laughs. In an effort to keep the happy expression on her face, Lena continues to tease, “You could live off my salary. I have always wanted a trophy wife. It’d be very Luthor of me.”

That pulls a louder laugh this time, full and genuine, and Kara plays with her glasses, ducking her head a bit. “I think you’re underestimating what your grocery bill would be if I just stayed home all the time.”

“Maybe you’re underestimating the weight of my bank account,” Lena points out.

“Unlikely,” Kara replies, but she’s smiling now and her shoulders have relaxed. “Well. Since I’m all kinds of unemployed now, do you want to spend an evening on the couch with me and my Netflix queue?”

At Lena’s acquiescence, Kara retreats home and Lena finishes up her work day with the promise that she’ll pick up takeout on her way to Kara’s apartment that night.

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They do, in fact, spend their evening on the couch eating the Indian food Lena brought over and scrolling through Kara’s queue. They end up watching far too many episodes of some true crime documentary series that Kara had become obsessed with some time that afternoon.

Eventually, Lena turns to her phone in favor of watching it and just enjoys the feeling of leaning into Kara’s side and blocking out the real world for as long as possible.
It’s Lena’s irrepressible yawns that finally pull Kara’s attention away from the television. “Tired?”

Though she’s still mid-yawn, Lena shakes her head. “You can keep watching.”

Kara regards her a moment longer before reaching forward and flicking the television off. Then, with little warning, Kara scoops Lena off the couch and all but tosses her over her shoulder. It pulls a startled yelp out of Lena and an indignant, “Kara!”

“Yes?” Kara asks, moving towards the bedroom.

Lena swats at whatever body part she can reach. “Put me down,” she orders, though she’s sure the laughter she can’t suppress is taking some of the authority out of the words.

Kara does put her down, flat on the bed, and then the lights are off and the bedroom door shut, and Kara is pressing her face into Lena’s sternum. It only takes a matter of seconds and it has her laughing even more.

It feels good. To just be with Kara like this. There’s not some death-defying adventure they’re both recovering from, nothing ominous sitting on the horizon and with Kara’s hands pushing up the sides of Lena’s sweatshirt, their fight feels far away.

“I didn’t need to go to sleep right this minute,” Lena points out, running her fingers up Kara’s back and smiling when soft lips find their way up under her jaw.

“I know.” Kara’s breath hits warmly on her neck and sends goosebumps down her chest.

Any further discussion gets swept out of Lena’s throat the second Kara’s fingers take a journey south and tug at the waistband of her yoga pants.

In the morning Kara watches Lena get ready with a look wavering around pitiful. She lies on the bed and pouts as though she’s dying - a favorite tactic of Kara’s to get Lena to stay in bed and skip her required history class. It had worked far too often. The only reason it doesn’t now is because running a company is perhaps not as easy to do as taking a class pass/fail.

“Why don’t you call Alex?” Lena suggests as they share cups of coffee in the kitchen.

Kara stirs a spoon in her own cup aimlessly, staring down into the drink. “Alex is just as unemployed as I am,” Kara points out and Lena’s brow furrows.

“Her suspension isn’t over yet?”

“I’d doubt it considering she decked a prisoner,” Kara says, looking up at Lena. “And then took a civilian on a solo crusade against Cadmus.”

Though their fight had been set aside last night, it simmers quickly to the surface in the pointed way Kara delivers the last bit. It’s a struggle not to rise to the bait, but Lena manages to restrain herself to a silent glare as she sets her own cup of coffee down on the counter.

“Then you can wallow in unemployment together,” Lena says, a touch testily despite her efforts.

“I’m not wallowing,” Kara argues, grabbing for the creamer still out on the counter and beginning to pour a ridiculous amount into her coffee.

Lena just raises her brows, but declines to reply. “You’re not going to feel any better sitting around
“I can’t believe you think my beating Mario Kart is doing nothing,” Kara mutters, shoulders hunched as she sips at her coffee, before she shrugs. “But I suppose.”

“Go into the DEO. Maybe J’onn or Winn have something for Supergirl to do,” Lena tries as she turns to her phone on the counter. There are a few morning messages from Jess and Lena scrolls through them, looking at her calendar for the day as Kara continues to sulk over her coffee.

“You’re right,” Kara says eventually and with a burst of air, she’s out of her chair and waltzing out of the bedroom changed into her supersuit.

A smile hints at Lena’s lips, unbidden. Kara always looks so different when she’s dressed like this, but so many of her mannerisms remain the same. How everyone doesn’t see through her disguise Lena doesn’t understand, but she’s sure not many people have spent as much time as she has studying the intricacies of Kara Zor-El.

Striding towards a drawer in the kitchen, Kara pulls it open and rummages through it until she’s pulling out a small silver key and depositing it on the counter in front of Lena. “I keep forgetting to give this to you,” Kara says, soft, but casual, like it’s not a big deal.

Absurdly, Lena feels a slow crawl of emotion well up in her throat as she reaches her fingers out to pull the key towards her and realizes what it is. “A key?”

“Yeah,” Kara answers, not even looking at Lena as she gathers her phone from the counter. “Lock up after I go?”

Lena blinks at the small item in her hand, but manages to make an affirmative noise as Kara presses into her side and kisses her warmly at the temple. “Have a good day at work.”

Swiftly, Kara’s gone again, flying away into the blue morning sky and Lena’s left standing in the kitchen holding a small metal key and wondering when life will stop constantly surprising her.

It turns out that even though Alex’s suspension had actually been rescinded, she nor anyone else at the DEO had anything to occupy Kara’s day. Neither did Clark, who Kara had flown to see in Metropolis when National City proved to be too sleepy to entertain her.

Kara complains about it all when they meet up later at the alien bar. It’s supposed to be a full friends-group hang out, but for the moment it’s only she and Kara perched at the bar.

Winn and James are hovered over an antique jukebox in the corner and Mon-El is trying his hand at picking up what Lena thinks might be an Alstairean judging by her leafy hair, but Lena’s lexicon of alien knowledge isn’t perfect. Most of it had been whispered to her by Kara in the dark, late at night and Lena can’t be held accountable for remembering every little detail.

Alex and Maggie are nowhere to be seen, but M’gann had mentioned something about their disappearing into the back alley a half hour ago with an all too-knowing look in her eye. Lena tries not to think too hard about how M’gann is telepathic.

“When nothing exciting is happening in Metropolis that’s when you know nothing exciting is happening anywhere,” Kara comments, surly as she picks at the label on her beer bottle and slouches down on her stool. Lena finds her hands trailing over her spine, tracing some calm into her.
“You should have flown by Gotham,” Lena replies wryly, sipping at the old fashioned M’gann has crafted for her earlier. “There’s always something underhanded happening there.”

Kara makes a face. “That place is so dirty. The river smells.”

“I think they like it that way,” Lena says, laughing at the way Kara’s scowl deepens. “There was really nothing happening in Metropolis?”

“Nope,” Kara replies, popping the word on her lips. “Everyone’s just talking about how Morgan Edge is trying to relocate to National City. Clark’s been non-stop covering the story.”

The name immediately draws Lena’s attention and she turns more fully to look and Kara and make sure she heard right. “Morgan Edge?”

Kara nods, noticing Lena’s sudden interest, but clearly unsure what’s so interesting about that information. “Yeah, Clark thinks that’s why things have been kind of quiet in Metropolis. I don’t know what that has to do with anything, but Clark’s convinced.”

“What would Edge want with National City?”

Observing Lena for a moment, Kara plucks a few peanuts out of a bowl at her fingertips and pops them in her mouth. “I don’t know. Do you know him or something?”

“Everyone in Metropolis knows Morgan Edge. He’s an ass,” Lena answers with a soft, derisive laugh. “It’s never been publicly acknowledged, but it’s widely suspected that he’s behind Intergang.”

A look of confusion furrows between Kara’s eyes. “Intergang?”

For a moment, Lena’s reminded of just how far away Metropolis actually is from National City. “Clark’s non-stop covering the story, but he didn’t fill you in on the details?”

A blush dusts across Kara’s cheeks, just visible in the dim light of the bar, and she shrugs sheepishly. “I didn’t really ask. Hearing about Clark’s great job writing for the Daily Planet wasn’t high on my list of things to do.”

“Ah,” Lena says, understanding easily enough. “Well, Intergang is a criminal organization that’s been rooted throughout Metropolis for years. Ironically enough, Lex tried very hard to expose Edge a few times.” Lena purses her lips. “Though that may have been a corporate competitiveness rather than altruism. His day job is commercial real estate.”

Kara hums, taking the information in and a memory strikes Lena.

“Don’t you remember that bank heist in college? The one with the hostages?” Lena asks, remembering the news coverage surrounding Superman’s absence.

Kara’s brow stays furrowed as her eyes dart about as if searching for the memory. “Kind of?”

“You wanted to fly off to Metropolis because Superman was a bit late to the scene,” Lena reminds her with a smile playing at her lips.

The flush on Kara’s cheeks deepens and she laughs a bit. “Right, yeah, I remember.”

“That was Intergang,” Lena says and then tilts her head a bit. “Likely Morgan Edge.”

“Oh,” Kara says, nodding and picking up her bottle of beer from the counter. “Well, I’d like to see
him try that in National City.”

Picking up her own drink, Lena laughs softly, but scrunches her nose up in slight distaste. “I’d prefer he’d stay away from here entirely. He’s so…smarmy. Lex and I once had dinner with him where he spent twenty minutes talking over his quest to date an entire calendar’s worth of models as though I wasn’t there. Lex nearly dumped his scotch on him.”

Kara picks her chest up a bit, wraps an arm across Lena’s shoulders and smiles at her. “Don’t worry, I’ll protect you.”

It makes Lena laugh again and she lets Kara tug her closer, enjoys the warm security of it, but still reminds Kara, “I don’t need you to protect me from everything, darling.”

Kara frowns, but they’re interrupted by Mon-El slinking away from his potential love interest with a frown on his face and slinging his arm around both their shoulders.

“Not going well?” Lena asks, amused by the hang dog expression on his face and the annoyance written across Kara’s at his presence.

“Things were so much easier on Daxam,” Mon-El says. “I don’t know what happened when I got here. It’s like I lost my mahjong.”

“Mojo,” Lena corrects, gently, as Kara very un-gently pushes his arm off them.

“Maybe it was because the majority of Daxam was under the influence of atmospheric psychotropics meant to make them compliant,” Kara grumbles in an uncharacteristically snarky tone.

Lena shoots her a look that makes Kara’s expression go more contrite, but Mon-El largely ignores the comment in favor of sighing dramatically, dropping onto the barstool next to Lena and letting his forehead fall forward onto the countertop. It reminds Lena of Kara yesterday morning, and she reaches out to pat him on the head briefly.

“My mojo is all gone,” Mon-El moans, mostly into the wood of the bartop. “I stopped this dude from stealing this old lady’s purse earlier today while I was getting ice cream and I totally almost cried when she hugged me.”

“I’m sorry that Earth has improved your morality,” Kara says. Her hands play at Lena’s waist, smoothing along the fabric of her shirt there. Mon-El picks his head up to glare at her.

“Be nice, darling,” Lena murmurs. “He’s lost his mojo.”

It’s said with enough tease that it pulls a smile on Kara’s lips and she sighs. “Maybe you’re just asking out the wrong people,” Kara offers, leaning into Lena’s body enough to face Mon-El.

“I don’t know how that’s possible since I’m asking out everyone,” Mon-El says.

Kara rolls her eyes, turning back to her beer bottle with a murmured, “He’s beyond our help.”

“How did Kara find you?” he asks Lena, tapping at the watch on her wrist and eyeing it almost thoughtfully.

“We just ran into each other at school,” Lena answers with a shrug.

The explanation makes Kara snort. “Actually she ran into me. Literally.”
Though Lena smiles at the memory, exchanging a warm glance with Kara, Mon-El sighs heavily and manages to slouch even farther into his stool.

“Maybe a drink will help,” Lena offers, gesturing to M’gann who is already fishing out a bottle of beer from a nearby cooler and setting it in front of Mon-El.

“I’ve been trying that,” Mon-El complains, but he takes the beer anyway. “It hasn’t made me any more charming.”

“Shocking,” Kara deadpans and when Lena tries to elbow her she just laughs.

“We should do shots!” Mon-El exclaims suddenly, a grin bursting across his face.

Lena’s eyes go wide and she grabs at the hand he’s about to raise to flag M’gann down again. “We’re not doing shots,” she tells him.

“Come on, we should,” he entreats, looking at Kara and then back at her. “I mean you’re sad because your mom sucks, right?”

Behind Lena’s back, Kara reaches across to punch Mon-El in the shoulder, who cowers away from her, grabbing his arm in pain.

“What?” He asks, looking indignantly at Kara. “It’s true. We’re all sad. I’ve lost my mojo, Lena’s mom sucks, you lost your job.”

Lena doesn’t need to be looking at Kara to know Mon-El’s about to get punched again, so she just grabs Kara’s wrist and scoots closer to her, trying to deescalate the situation even as she can’t help but laugh. “Okay, everyone just –”

“I just think shots would help,” Mon-El says, still rubbing at his shoulder and watching Kara warily.

“There aren’t enough shots in the bar to help you recover your mahjong,” Kara says testily, nearly sticking her tongue out at Mon-El like a child.

“I thought it was mojo,” Mon-El says, looking confused at Lena.

“It is,” she responds quickly before turning to Kara with a pointed look and a soft, “Be nice to our friend.”

“He’s dumb,” Kara whispers.

“He’s still our friend,” Lena replies quietly, her palm spread out across Kara’s thigh.

“I can hear you,” Mon-El tells them, leaning over the bar so he can see them more clearly. “Are we doing shots or not? They’ve got that stuff from Rimbor in stock that I hear can make you hallucinate.”

Before anyone can comment, Winn is suddenly slinging both his arms around Lena and Kara – much like Mon-El had – and grinning. “Did I hear mention of shots?”

The rest of the night is a series of drinking games that Mon-El and Winn devise in which the sole object seems to be to do as many shots as possible. Lena refrains from joining after the first game, but Kara finds some kind of sudden enthusiasm for the venture and joins in with the boys exclaiming quite loudly that, “What? It’s not like I have work tomorrow.”
It’s the first time she’s ever seen Kara even remotely affected by alcohol and the result is some mixture of adorable and alarming. When she’s not accidentally shattering glasses or upending tables, Kara seems content to press close to Lena, her arms warm and surprisingly gentle considering how out of touch she seems with her strength.

They make it home just fine, but not before Kara breaks two bar stools and nearly puts a hole in the brick wall outside the bar when she stumbles against it.

“I’m not safe right now,” Kara says when she sees what she did and she looks at Lena with wide eyes.

Lena laughs. “Just be careful and get in the car. Let’s get home before you knock a building down.”

“I could knock a building down,” Kara mutters, looking down at her hands as Lena tugs at her. “I should stay still.”

Kara does just that, going rigid against Lena’s attempts to pull her along and Lena tries very hard not to laugh. “Kara, let’s get in the car.”

“I can’t make it to the car,” Kara says solemnly, looking at the waiting black town car at the end of the alley. It’s no more than ten feet away, but Kara’s looking at it like she has an ocean to cross.

“Yes, you can, come on,” Lena entreats, but Kara just shakes her head.

“I could knock a building down,” she repeats and then suddenly, absurdly, laughs at the prospect.

“Kara, focus,” Lena commands, trying not to laugh at the bizarre mixture of glee and confusion on Kara’s face.

“Everything’s so fishy,” Kara observes, blinking dazedly at Lena.

“Okay,” Lena laughs, gripping Kara’s hand which thankfully goes with the motion. “Can you focus please?”

Kara’s shoulders hunch up, and her lips pull into her mouth in an expression that conveys I don’t know so clearly that Lena laughs again. Pressing Kara’s hand to her sternum, Lena pushes in close and captures drunk blue eyes as best she can.

“Focus and get in the car,” she tells her until the haze in Kara’s face seems to clear just enough.

“Can we get Big Belly Burger?” Kara whispers, but she shuffles forward when Lena moves her this time and they make it into the waiting car. George looks at them both a bit strangely, but doesn’t comment when the door makes a little crunching sound against the strength of Kara pulling it shut.

“You’re in no shape to be travelling dimensions, darling,” Lena says, pushing the button for the privacy partition after she tells George to head to Kara’s apartment.

“I got drunk,” Kara states, staring straight ahead and blinking as if surprised by the admission.

“You did,” Lena agrees.

“That’s dangerous,” Kara says then, sounding serious despite the drunken way the words slur out. Lena slides down against the leather seats of the car, pushes against the warmth of Kara’s side.
She’s nowhere close to Kara’s level of intoxication, but there’s still two cocktails and a round of shots swimming in her system and she could probably fall asleep against Kara’s shoulder if she let herself.

“Kara,” Lena murmurs, already closing her eyes.

“Yeah?”

“Relax,” Lena tells her, blinking her eyes open a moment to regard her girlfriend, glasses slipping adorably down her nose and cheeks flushed. “I’ll take care of you.”

Kara’s body does as its told, folding softly around Lena’s in the back of the car. “I love you,” Kara whispers.

“I love you too,” Lena returns with a smile, leaning heavily into Kara’s side.

“Are you still mad at me?” Kara murmurs out of nowhere and Lena’s brow furrows in confusion at the seemingly random question.

“I was never mad at you,” she says, watching Kara lick out against her lips a bit noisily.

“Yes, you were. You think I’m overprotective. You keep saying that.”

“You were the one mad at me,” Lena points out, knowing it’s pointless to try to have this conversation now with the state Kara’s in, but trying to navigate it nonetheless.

“You’re fragile, Lena. Like eggs,” Kara says, the words coming out like a whine. If they weren’t slightly insulting, Lena might laugh.

“Fragile compared to you, maybe.”

“Definitely,” Kara corrects, her eyes set in the start of a glare.

“I’m not talking about this with you when you’re drunk.”

“Okay,” Kara says, a bit irritably, her voice huffy even as she reaches for Lena’s hand and runs her fingers over the bones there.

They’re silent after that, Kara turning to watch the city pass by outside the car window. It’s warm in the back of the car and quiet compared to the noise of the bar they’d recently left. Lena sinks into the feeling and lets her eyes fall on the way the city lights play over Kara’s face.

“Thank you for the key,” Lena says quietly, remembering the moment that morning in the kitchen with a warm pressure against her chest.

Kara turns to her, confused for a moment before realization clears on her face and she smiles, drifting impossibly closer to Lena in the process. “Of course. I don’t know why I didn’t give you one before.”

Because it’s a big deal, giving someone a key to your place, Lena thinks. It’s never been something Lena’s done with a significant other. Not that she’d ever dated anyone long enough to warrant such a thing. Jack, maybe, but it hadn’t even crossed her mind to do so.

“I can have one made for you,” Lena says, chewing softly at her bottom lip. “For my place.”

Kara’s squinting at her, her eyes darting across Lena’s face in a drunkenly distracted manner. “I
don’t really use the front door a lot,” Kara whispers as if confessing something.

It makes Lena laugh and she threads her fingers in between Kara’s. “True.”

They smile at each other and for a moment, in the back of the car, Lena feels like any normal couple retreating home after a night out. A comfortable, warm kind of silence falls over them, but then, even as Kara’s eyes start to drift closed, her head falls forward a bit and she licks her lips as if to say something.

“I still want a cheeseburger,” is what Kara ends up informing her and Lena just laughs before pulling her phone out of her purse and opening up a food delivery app she has on the front page.

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“What do you want to do this weekend?” Kara asks, hanging off the end of Lena’s couch at an awkward-looking angle. “I heard they’re doing movies on the quad. Max said they might show the original Alien.”

Lena makes a face at that. “You want to watch Alien?”

Kara shrugs, shifts on the couch into a more comfortable looking position. “It’s funny.”

Returning to the calendar she has open on her computer, Lena laughs a bit. “Only you think it’s funny.”

“Oh, fine,” Kara says her lower lip poking out just the slightest even as she chuckles. “We can do something else.”

The idea of spending the weekend lounging lazily on the quad with her girlfriend is beyond tempting. Even if it means listening to Kara laugh her way through a film like Alien. But the reality of the situation is that Lena has no such luxury, and she sighs softly before turning back to face Kara. “Actually, I can’t this weekend,” she says, reaching out to poke at the crinkle that appears between Kara’s brows. “My mother is in town.”

“She can come,” Kara replies easily and Lena laughs at the very thought of Lillian Luthor settling down on a picnic blanket to watch Alien.

“As hilarious as that would be, I think I’m better off taking her to dinner and attending some ridiculous event she undoubtedly has scheduled for us.”

Kara nods, shrugs a shoulder in silent agreement, but her eyes start to dart around nervously and Lena tracks the motion with a furrow in her brow.

“Can I ask you a question?” Kara finally says.

“Of course you can.”

“Is there a reason you don’t want me to meet your mother? She’s been in town three times since we started dating, and I was...just wondering.”

“Yes,” Lena replies immediately, almost laughing again. Of course there’s a reason. If Kara ever met Lillian, surely she’d understand.

“Oh.” Kara blinks in surprise, looking taken aback by that answer and Lena sees the wrong conclusion shadow over Kara’s face.
“Not that kind of reason,” Lena clarifies.

“What kind of reason?”

“My mother isn’t the most pleasant of people,” Lena says, trying to decide how to frame this. “It’s not something I subject someone to unless I have to.”

“I know how you feel about your mother,” Kara replies, a quirk of a smile. “I was there when you had Aaron pin her picture to his dartboard.”

“Then it shouldn’t come to any surprise that I wouldn’t make someone endure her company if I could avoid it,” Lena says, rolling her eyes just the slightest at the drunken memory of the night Kara referenced. “Certainly not you.”

“I just want to be there for you,” Kara insists softly and Lena’s chest swells.

“I know, darling,” she says. “But she’s...she once visited me at boarding school and took me and my friend Sam out to lunch and Sam left the restaurant crying because my mother said her shirt looked too tight and asked if she needed help.”

Kara frowns, picking at some thread on her jeans that probably only she can see.

“I’m glad you had Aaron print out extra pictures for the dartboard,” Kara mutters. Lena snorts, reaching for Kara’s hands.

“This isn’t about not wanting you to meet her. This is about...it’s just,” Lena takes a breath, “I don’t want to have to sit and listen to her say something backhanded or rude to you.”

“So you’re just going to let her say all those mean things to you?” Kara looks incredulous at the idea and it only makes Lena’s cheeks warm.

“I’ve had years to build an immunity to Lillian Luthor’s special brand of insult,” Lena says because it’s mostly true. Lillian still seems to have an ability to make Lena feel small and insignificant when she wants to, but most of the time, Lena barely registers it.

“That doesn’t mean you should have to deal with that,” Kara argues. Lena’s been aware of Kara’s vague disapproval of her mother’s treatment to Lena, but it’s certainly the first time Kara’s been vocal about it. It makes her feel warm, to know that Kara is on her side.

“All I know is that if I can protect you from my mother, I will,” Lena says, her tone serious and gaze unwavering.

“I don’t know if you know this, but I’m indestructible.”

“That’s not the point,” Lena counters.

“I can handle your mother,” Kara clarifies and Lena sighs.

“That’s not the point either,” she says, “Though I think you’re vastly underestimating what my mother is like.”

“If she’s that bad, I don’t want you having to deal with that alone. Isn’t that what dating is about?”

Lena reaches out to grab one of Kara’s hands and tangles their fingers together. “I’m okay, darling. It’s just how it is.”
“How long will it be this way?” Kara asks, frustration evident on her tone as she struggles to wrap her mind around what Lena is saying. It’s clear that this is one of those things that Kara isn’t going to immediately grasp just because it requires the acceptance of Lillian Luthor being an overall awful person.

“I don’t want to argue about this, Kara.”

“It’s not an argument,” Kara protests.

“Regardless,” Lena replies, arching a brow.

“I can’t not feel the way I do about you,” Kara says quietly. “I don’t know how to change that.”

It feels a bit like her chest might crack under the pressure. “I’m not asking you to,” Lena says, searching sincere blue eyes. “Can’t you understand that it’s the same for me?”

Kara’s eyes seem almost shiny as they regard each other and Lena can’t help the protective urge that takes over her whenever she thinks about Kara and Lillian in the same room together. It’s hard to imagine Kara will ever be something Lena will want mixed with what it means to be a Luthor.

“You do so much for me,” Lena says softly. “Let me do this one thing for you.”

Kara’s lips go thin like she’s going to argue, but after only a moment she deflates. “Fine,” she grumbles. “But I’m buying you ice cream Sunday night.”

Lena laughs, doesn’t protests when Kara pulls Lena onto the couch with her. “Deal,” she says, pressing her lips against Kara’s and resolving to forget about her dreaded weekend plans for the rest of the afternoon.

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The next few days are a sequence of jam packed days of sitting through hell at work and Kara trying to fill her days of unemployment at home.

For the first few, Kara doesn’t leave her apartment. Instead, she stays curled up on her couch watching television. Lena only knows as much because Kara spends the majority of it texting Lena intermittently about whatever it is she’s watching.

At one point Kara just sends a series of selfies that become more and more bored as they go on. Then, an interesting catalog of photos showcasing new and inventive food concoctions Kara’s come up with in her free time.

It breaks up the monotony of Lena’s days. Days filled with meetings that seem to drone on endlessly. A trail of lawyers and public relations teams dealing with all the fallout of her mother’s recent reappearance. Though Lillian’s involvement wasn’t something broadcast on the news, it’s well circulated knowledge internally at L Corp, made especially obvious by those employees who had tendered resignations.

“Your mother clearly has a few claws still left in the company, Miss Luthor,” one of her directors is saying, leaned back in his chair, the bright red color of his tie an eyesore against his white shirt. “If word got around that it was Luthor Corp property she was using to –”

“L Corp,” Lena corrects, interrupting him with a sharp enunciation of the word and an even sharper cut of her glare.
It seems to do the trick and he cowers a bit under the stare, his hand adjusting his tie as he clears his throat. “Right, of course, my apologies.”

“If I may, Miss Luthor,” another man – Alan – says, leaning over the table. “I believe Geoffrey’s point is merely that despite the flood of resignations, there may be a few moles left over and it’s best we get ahead of this issue before it becomes a problem. Your mother sat here at this very table, let’s remember –”

“I assure you, I haven’t forgotten,” Lena says, unwilling to get baited into a larger discussion about her mother.

“The problem is with public perception,” Alan continues. “Like it or not, your last name is still Luthor.”

Lena can’t help the incredulous look that lights up her eyes even as they set into a harsher glare. A sliver of satisfaction thrums up her spine when she sees the man react just as Geoffrey did, sitting back a bit and swallowing visibly. “Try to remember that my last name is also why any of us are even sitting here,” she says slowly. “Like it or not.”

In the pocket of the black slacks she had chosen to wear that day, her phone buzzes, the vibration soft but noticeable against her hip. It’s Kara, she’s sure, with some ridiculous message about whatever documentary she’s watching or disgusting grilled cheese modification she’s discovered and just the thought of it starts to quell the twist of anger in her gut. Lena sighs, adjusting the watch on her wrist and letting its shine pull her more out of irritation before she speaks.

“Perhaps we could turn our attention to something more important,” Lena says, softening a bit and pushing a tablet forward. “I trust you all have the information on the LRT-67 Project.”

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Of all the public perception problems Lena thinks to be worried about, her relationship with Kara is vastly lower on her list than the things her board is worried about. Lena’s spent much of her adult life in public view, is young enough and singular enough that the press often finds her an interesting bit of gossip fodder whenever they get their hands on something more interesting than an L Corp innovation or a charity event.

It had been something she had been mildly concerned about when they first reunited, but since then it’s definitely fallen much farther down her list of priorities. Somewhere below her genocidal mother and the near constant attempts on her life.

Which is why she’s so blindsided when one of her weekly e-mail dumps includes the headline:

Spotted: L Corp CEO Lena Luthor and CatCo Magazine Journalist Kara Danvers

Wide eyed, she clicks onto the article to discover she and Kara have certainly made the news. Nothing front page, but it’s there nonetheless, tucked beside a fluff piece about a charity event hosted by the local professional basketball team.

To her further surprise, the article contains more than one picture of the two of them together.

The first is from the renaming ceremony Lena held to announce L Corp. The same one John Corben attacked all those months ago. She and Kara are off to the side of the platform and they’re leaning towards each other as they talk.

Lena remembers the conversation fairly well. Remembers the steely way Kara had tried to
convince her to cancel the event, the flare of protectiveness that Kara couldn’t hide even back then.

In the picture, both of their hands are shoved into the pockets of their jackets and Lena can tell by the clench of her jaw that she’s on the verge of crying. Kara is clearly aware of it, her eyes trained on Lena and posture rigid.

The second picture is much more recent and the difference is obvious, if only to her. It’s a quick moment between L Corp’s front lobby and her usual black town car out front. Hand-in-hand, she and Kara are walking together towards where George is holding the door open for them. Lena can’t even remember the moment in particular, it could be one of dozens of times Kara’s come to pick Lena up from work like that. Kara is half-turned to look back at her, and the photographer got a fairly lucky shot of them smiling at each other. It’s strange to see her own image looking so joyful when most of the images she’s seen of herself in the press have been more stoic.

While neither picture is especially romantic in nature, the article still speculates as such - there’s a choice line over Lena’s “long-rumored Sapphic tendencies” that makes Lana laugh for four minutes over their lunch that afternoon. It makes a few negative comments Lena’d expect – particularly that she’s only dating Kara for good press.

This seems to be the detail Kara latches onto first, though her reaction misses the point entirely.

“Former CatCo Magazine journalist,” she corrects with a frown.

“Yes, that’s the important thing here,” Lena replies with a pointed quirk of her brow.

“They’re implying you’re dating me for good press,” Kara says. “As if I have any kind of journalistic sway anymore.”

“Maybe the good press comes from the idea that I’ve convinced anyone as good looking as you to date me,” Lena counters, trying to pull Kara out of her self-pity.

It seems to work. Kara laughs softly. “I’m pretty sure I convinced you, actually.”

With a noncommittal noise, Lena turns back to the picture of the two of them in the article. “Either way, my image can only improve if they keep printing pictures of us.”

“Better than them printing pictures of you with Supergirl like they were before,” Kara comments, reminding Lena of the few times they’d made the news together – after the L Corp gala incident is the first that comes to mind.

“There’s a difference?” Lena jokes, quirking her brow and expecting Kara to laugh, but she doesn’t.

“Of course there’s a difference,” Kara says instead, frowning. “One of those things paints an obvious target on your back.”

As Lena catches the turn in conversation, she sighs. “I already have a target on my back, Kara,” she says. “I’m the only visible member of a family filled with terrorists.”

“Filled with terrorists is an exaggeration,” Kara says and at Lena’s look she laughs a little. “I’m just saying. Everyone knows that Superman and Lois Lane are kind of a thing and Lois gets kidnapped every other week.”

“Kind of a thing?” Lena asks, laughing again. “If that’s how you refer to their marriage, I’d hate to hear you talk about us in public.”
An immediate expression of deep offense takes hold of Kara’s face before she catches the teasing glint in Lena’s eye and it fades to something more amused, but unimpressed. “Lois is married to Clark Kent, unassuming Daily Planet journalist according to the press.”

“Right, yes, of course,” Lena says.

“Yet she’s still been the target of almost all of Superman’s enemies,” Kara replies with a pointed look.

The memories she has of her brief encounters with Lois make her laugh. “I’ve met Lois,” she informs Kara. “I’m fairly certain she’d be getting kidnapped every other week whether she knew Superman or not.”

At Kara’s look of confusion, she shrugs. “She once tracked me down while I was in the Amazon visiting a renewable energy company Lex and I were thinking about buying out. Despite not publishing any details of our trip she managed to find us.” Lena pauses at Kara’s impassive look and adds, “In the jungle.”

“Lois is a resourceful journalist,” Kara says with a shrug.

“She’s a journalist that manages to get involved in a whole slew of things that put her in harm's way with or without Superman.”

“Sounds familiar,” Kara mutters. Lena throws a glare her way just as Kara’s cheeks leak of color.

“What is it?” Lena asks, a bit alarmed at the sudden expression of anxiety across Kara’s face.

“What do you think the likelihood of Clark or Lois not noticing this article is?” Kara asks, flicking again to the top of the page, where the image of them at the renaming ceremony sits. Lena finds a small edge of panic leaking through her mind. Lois Lane randomly showing up to send the Luthor Corp security team into a frenzy while in the Amazon was one thing; Lois Lane informing her superpowered husband that his cousin was dating the sister of his mortal enemy was another thing.

“I would say low,” Lena says, after a moment. “We should probably break up now. It’s our only option.”

“You think you’re so funny,” Kara says though she can’t stop the smile tugging at her lips even as she attempts to glare quite heavily.

Of all the things to worry about, Lena’s not going to spend any more time on this particular subject so she slips into Kara’s arms instead, charmed when Kara’s glare wipes immediately from her face.

“I should call Kal,” Kara says softly even as her hands are taking hold of Lena’s hips and pulling her closer.

“Later,” is all Lena says before threading forward for a kiss.

Kara’s reaction is immediate. Her body goes slack against Lena’s and she pushes forward into the kiss and they’re both laughing when they fall back onto the couch.

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Tensions at L Corp continue to rise higher and higher each day after the resurfacing of her mother. As irritating as her Board of Directors can be, they were certainly right about the connection public opinion is continuing to make between L Corp and Cadmus.
Friday morning starts with a line of protesters across the street from the front entrance and Lena’s grateful George has the foresight to drive her into underground parking before dropping her off.

She’s no stranger to cacophony surrounding her workplace, but it’s unnerving to realize that the responsibility of the company now rests solely with her - it’s not something that she and Lex can commiserate over dinner about after work. And even though she and her mother’s relationship had been strained at best, there was still some sense of security in having her steely presence on the board to back their decisions.

Their presence throughout the day – and the general strain that can be felt around the upper floors of the building – pushes Lena to spend the rest of her afternoon down in the labs with Lana.

“Slumming it with the nerds today?” Lana jokes, arriving at the workstation Lena’s been camped out at for the last two hours with a fresh cup of coffee and a wink.

“Hiding out, if I must confess,” Lena admits taking the offered drink with a grateful smile.

“I saw the crowds this morning,” she replies with a sympathetic tilt to her head. “If you’d like, I do have a pretty decent bottle of whiskey in my office.”

Lena laughs. “Don’t tell me that,” she admonishes with a smile as she palms her face briefly. It seems to be enough to convince Lana of the virtue of that plan.

“Come on, boss,” Lana entreats with a jerk of her head towards the office space in the corner of the lab. “Let’s liven up these coffees.”

With another laugh, Lena relents, setting the digital pen and tablet she’d been working on down and flipping off the small light on the desk.

They settle on the small leather couch of Lana’s office and Lena lets her brain take a much needed rest for a few moments. It’s nice in Lana’s office. Cluttered, but clean and so much quieter than the upper floors she usually has to spend her days in. Lena’s old office in Metropolis had been much the same, and Lex had spent far too much time lying on the floor of it tossing a baseball in the air and talking over some absurd investor meeting.

“How’s Kara been doing?” Lana asks, after she’s told a funny story involving her graduate research thesis on AIs. Lena rolls her head around on the couch and glances down at her phone, where a text from Kara sits detailing updates in her quest to make her way through all 10 seasons of Friends.

“She’s bored,” Lena says. “Yesterday she went to IKEA and bought a huge bookshelf to build because she claimed her old one was faulty. I came home to her cursing the instruction booklet.”

“Well, even I think IKEA instructions are ridiculous,” Lana says, sipping her coffee and giggling. “Has she been looking for a job?”

“She’s in her wallowing phase,” Lena says, smiling down into her own cup. “You just have to let it happen. She once failed a test in college for her biology class and laid in bed for a weekend watching nature documentaries and eating ice cream.”

“Sounds cute,” Lana says. Lena rolls her eyes.

“It’s cute until you’re being convinced to go out at eleven before the convenience store on campus closes to get more ice cream,” Lena says.
Lana laughs, and it’s nice - to forget for a moment about the mess of her life. But it comes back again as she looks around the office and spots the small photo on Lana’s bookshelf of she and Lex shaking hands with a patent certificate thrust towards the camera.

“I’ve been meaning to ask you something, but there just hasn’t been the time.”

An interested look crosses Lana’s face. “What’s that?”

“When I was kidnapped by my mother, she took me to one of Lex’s vaults,” Lena says. Lana’s face goes almost impassive, but her eyes are still curious as she regards Lana. “I wanted to ask if you would help me find more of them.”

“Help you find them?” Lana asks, carefully.

“You’ve worked for this company nearly as long as I have,” Lena says. “I know he has more vaults stashed around the city and my mother seems quite set on using former Luthor Corp resources to further her cause. I have to imagine Lex did much of the same.”

“You think there are more here in National City?”

“I’m not sure, honestly,” Lena says with a bit of a laugh. “I don’t even know where to begin. They could be anywhere.”

“Knowing Lex there’s probably some elaborate treasure map hidden somewhere that leads to a series of puzzles followed by another series of puzzles,” Lana says with something in her tone that can almost be categorized as affection.

As the words register, Lena feels herself go still. Lana’s right. That sounds exactly like Lex. But so few people know Lex well enough to say such a thing. Or to say it with the kind of fondness that’s radiating from Lana’s face.

Perhaps it’s the stress of the past few days, or the fact that the protestors outside have put her mother into the forefront of her brain, but Lena feels a tendril of distrust climb up her spine.

“You’re right,” she says to Lana carefully though something dark must show on her face because Lana reacts immediately, the smile dropping into a frown. “You speak of Lex like you knew him well,” Lena says, thinking perhaps some of Kara’s paranoia of late has started to seep into her brain.

A hesitant look crosses Lana’s face before she replies. “I suppose you could say I did. Once.”

“You did,” Lena deadpans, not sure if she wants Lana to elaborate.

“Well. Lex and I,” Lana starts and Lena can already feel realization start to twist in her gut. “I mean, you know Lex and I were together. Briefly.”

The shock of it locks onto Lena’s face before she can stop it and Lana’s eyes go wide. “You didn’t know,” she adds.

A catalog of memories shuffle around in Lena’s brain and she tries to sort through it. “When?”

“Years ago,” Lana answers, softly. “I was an intern at the time and he – well – we kept it quiet for a reason.”

“You dated Lex,” Lena repeats, blinking at the information as she processes it.
“I’m sorry, Lena,” Lana replies. “I thought you knew.”

“Years ago - when?”

“It was a long time ago,” Lana says, sitting up and setting her coffee aside. Her attention stays riveted on Lena, a worried look wrinkling the skin around her eyes. “Way before he ever… I mean I didn’t know about…”

Lana looks lost, but Lena’s brain kicks back into working order just in time and she takes a deep breath, punctuating with as soft a smile as she can manage. “You needn’t explain,” she says. The look on Lana’s face is all too familiar to Lena.

“I don’t agree with the things he did,” Lana continues anyway. “At the end.”

There’s truth in the way Lana is looking at her, the genuine set of her eyes and the steady way her voice sounds. “I believe you,” she says, feeling the reality of it in her chest.

Memories try to put themselves into some kind of coherent order in Lena’s head, but she still feels a little blindsided. “It was serious, though, wasn’t it?”

Lana takes a visible breath, her lips setting into a line as she nods. “Yeah. It was, for a while.”

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Kara’s reaction to the new information about Lana is much less conflicted than Lena’s was. A fiery kind of emotion shadows across her face immediately and her eyes set into a determined glare.

“She dated Lex?”

“Apparently while we were in college,” Lena tells her, still trying to put the story fully together herself. “I had always wondered who had Lex so hung up back then. I guess now I know.”

“She left him for Clark, then,” Kara says.

That part of the equation hadn’t occurred to Lena. She’d almost forgotten Kara had told her Lana and Clark were once together and that Lex had blamed Clark for his mysterious breakup at the time as well. “I suppose so.”

“So Lana dates your brother, breaks up with him for Superman and then Lex goes –”

“Kara,” Lena warns, drawing the name out as she can follow Kara’s thoughts fairly easily.

“There are only two options here,” Kara says. “Either Lana is still some kind of sleeper agent for your brother or she’s the reason he went all rage-y and therefore probably still a target which puts you in danger purely by proximity and –”

“How are those the only two options?” Lena interrupts before Kara’s rant tumbles further into insanity. Defensiveness and indignation are starting to mix uncomfortably in her stomach and it only gets worse with the expression growing on Kara’s face.

“Because that’s generally how our life goes, isn’t it?” Kara replies, starting to sound a bit hysterical.

“I trust Lana,” Lena says slowly.

“You barely know her,” Kara counters and Lena bristles.
“I’ve known her for years, Kara.”

“It doesn’t matter. You should - stop hanging out with her. Or fire her,” Kara says as if she has any kind of authority on the subject.

“Excuse me?” Lena asks, incredulous. Kara nods to herself as though she has stumbled on the most logical solution to the problem.

“Fire her,” Kara repeats. “I’m not letting you go to work every day with a possible spy for your brother in the building like a ticking time bomb.”

A hot well of irritation hits so hot in her chest that a bitter taste forms on the back of her tongue. “You don’t let me do anything,” Lena says slowly in an attempt to keep her tone even and low. “Especially when it comes to my job.”

“If you won’t take steps to protect yourself, then I will,” Kara replies, undeterred by the flash of anger Lena can feel in her eyes.

“What exactly do you think you can do?”

“Remove her,” Kara answers, arms crossing over her chest.

Lena can feel her eyebrows shoot up her head and she laughs – a sharp angry burst of sound. “Do you hear yourself?”

“I’m done sitting around while you continue to take risks like this with your life. She knew about the kryptonite, she knows about the vaults - she could be helping your mother look for them right now.”

“You’re talking about my friend,” Lena says. “And my employee.”

“I’m talking about your life,” Kara counters and Lena resists the urge to roll her eyes, settles for scrubbing her palm across her face and taking a deep breath.

“Kara, you’re being absurd,” Lena says. “Lana is not a sleeper cell agent intent on killing me, nor is she somehow making me a target by association.”

“You don’t know that,” Kara says, indignant.

“You don’t either,” Lena says. “You can’t just accuse every person who gets close to me of being an evildoer. Who’s next? Winn? Jack? Jess?”

“You have a pretty high rate of associating with bad people,” Kara says. Whether it’s true or not, Lena feels anger rising up in her even higher.

“At some point, Kara, the common thread in that is me,” Lena says. “Perhaps I’m the bad person.”

“No,” Kara says, shaking her head.

“You don’t get to tell me how to run my life,” Lena says. “I don’t tell you how to go out and punch people.”

“I know, Lena,” Kara says, her hands raising in the air between them, clearly trying to slow the train of Lena’s rant. But it makes her more frustrated.

“You don’t, Kara,” Lena says, trying to restrain herself from slapping her palm on the table
between them in annoyance. “You spend all your time reminding me about my apparently bad decision-making as if I choose to get kidnapped or shot at or thrown off a balcony.”

“That's not what I meant,” Kara says, her tone pleading. “Lena, I know - you just need to be more careful! I feel like you just - you don't - you willingly put yourself in dangerous situations without -”

“I’m not having this argument again,” Lena interrupts, unable to stop the exasperation from soaking her tone. “You can’t wrap me in wool every time you think there’s some threat lurking.”

“I’m not going to apologize for wanting you to be safe,” Kara says, sounding firm. Lena can read the anxiety fairly clearly in her face, but she can’t give in to a deep desire to soothe it.

“I don’t know how many times I need to tell you that this kind of behavior isn’t a sustainable way of living. I watch you fly out to fight monsters every day, Kara, and I don’t ask you to not because I know that’s who you are and I love you for that. Why can't you afford me the same courtesy.”

Kara runs shaky fingers through her hair, blows out a breath and looks like she might start yelling, but her voice is quiet when she speaks again. “You take risks that you don’t need to take.”

“We’re not talking about taking a risk here, we’re talking about you trying to interfere with my professional life.”

“She could very well be a threat,” Kara insists and this time Lena does roll her eyes. “You can’t know that she’s not!”

“Sure, I don’t know that Lana isn’t going to hand me over to Cadmus tomorrow,” Lena says. “Lex didn’t know whether Superman was going to go tear apart Metropolis, either.”

Kara blinks for a moment, her arms crossed and eyes still fierce. Lena feels herself deflate, rubbing at her eyes as she sees the time.

“I don’t want to fight about this,” Lena says, feeling like a broken record. An answer to Kara’s seemingly increasing paranoia and overprotectiveness seems far too elusive for this argument to ever end. Lena’s exhausted just thinking about it.

“I’m not trying to fight about it,” Kara replies and Lena sighs.

“I know,” she says, blowing out another breath before glancing again at the time on the clock over Kara’s shoulder. “I have to go.”

Surprise pulls Kara’s brows down. “Have to go where?” she asks, standing as Lena does.

“Out,” Lena answers succinctly, pulling her phone out of her pocket and opening up her messages.

“Out where?” Kara says and before Lena can even move an inch, Kara’s in front of her, blocking the way.

Lena blinks unimpressed eyes up at her girlfriend and takes a breath against the new wave of angry words that threaten to come out. “Move, Kara,” she says slowly, hoping her tone breaks through.

“If you just don’t want to be around me, I can leave,” Kara says, but this time all the anger has abandoned her voice replaced by a soft resignation coated in worry.

The sound of it tugs Lena’s hand out and pulls her forward until she’s curving her fingers around
the tense muscle of Kara’s forearm and feeling it relax almost immediately. “I’m not trying to get away from you,” Lena says quietly. “I told Winn I’d help him with something at the DEO tonight. That’s all.”

The tension in Kara’s shoulders deflate further, but she bites at her bottom lip as if she’s trying not to cry and nods softly. “Okay, do you need a ride?”

“George is waiting outside,” Lena says. Kara nods, tears clearly present in her eyes. Even though Lena wants to help soothe the issue, she’s still irritated enough that she can’t bring herself to supplicate to Kara’s wishes.

“Listen, I’m - I’m sorry,” Kara says, softly, after Lena starts to move toward her coat and bag by the door. “I’m trying to not be crazy.”

“You might want to try harder,” Lena says, turning to glance at Kara as she pulls her coat on. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” Kara says softly, and she takes the kiss on her cheek Lena gives with a soft hand on Lena’s waist. Lena leaves her in the apartment, looking forlorn.

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There aren’t a lot of people Lena allows in her personal lab. In fact, at present there’s really only one – her brother – and that’s mostly because the lab used to belong to both of them, before she was moved up to the Director position. In college, she had shared lab space with hundreds of other engineering majors, but she had always been happier to work in the peace and solitude of her dorm room.

Kara had been a near constant there, and Lena could have imagined, at one point, gifting her a Luthor Corp access card. But that was a dream that had proved impossible. She tried not to think about it too much.

Lena doesn’t really allow Jack access to her lab so much as he just invites himself in it. One moment, she’s trying to tell him that she can’t possibly do dinner over the intercom, and the next, he’s standing in the large space and looking around, stroking his beard and proclaiming that their reservation is in two hours.

“I’m very smart, you know,” he tells her, wandering about her lab and poking about unfinished projects. Her prototype of the rocket boosters on Lex’s supersuit seem to be of particular interest to him, and she can’t help but watch him as he looks over the blueprint and then inspects the fuel wells. He moves closer to her workbench, after a moment, running his fingers along its edge.

“That’s irrelevant,” she says, pulling a wrench out of his hand when he picks it up off the table.

“I could assist you with some of this and then maybe we’d be on time to dinner,” he points out and she rolls her eyes.

“I don’t need your assistance,” Lena says. “Dinner can wait and so can you.”

He sighs, very dramatically, before he flops into the seat on the other side of the bench, where Lex likes to sit and complain about how tiresome he finds board meetings. Jack pulls out his phone, then, flicking through the screen easily. “What are you doing?”

“I was going to play a game wherein I switch around little fruits to form color chains,” Jack says, turning his phone around and grinning. “I’m on level two hundred and forty nine.”
“Impressive,” Lena deadpans. She can’t help the small smile that finds its way onto her lips.

“It is very impressive, I agree,” Jack says. “I am a catch. You’ll understand one day.”

Lena rolls her eyes, attempting to refocus on the work in front of her. For a few minutes, she manages to feel comfortable, fiddling with the screws on the small device on her desk. Jack remains quiet and unobtrusive, and even when he lets out a little victorious noise, Lena doesn’t feel too much annoyance.

She’s focused enough that she holds out her hand without thinking.

“Darling, can you hand me the microdriver?”

The microdriver arrives in her hand quickly, but she can’t quite feel its weight. Her hand is buzzing, and she thinks of Kara, suddenly, sleepily lying on the couch and jotting down notes whenever Lena asked while she watched early morning television.

Jack has already looked back down at his phone, his fingers moving dexterously across the screen as he apparently does a very good job forming color chains. She stares long enough at him that he feels his eyes on him and looks up.

“I know that I’m handsome, but I thought you had work to do?” he says, a smile on his face.

Without so much as thinking about it, she throws the microdriver in her hand directly at his face. It hits him square in the nose, bounces off to fall on the floor as he lets out a yelp of surprise and pain.

Lena’s eyes go wide.

“Oh my goodness, I’m so sorry,” she says, moving so hastily out of her chair that she almost falls over in an effort to get around the workbench.

“Good lord,” Jack moans, mostly into his hands. “You might’ve just said you didn’t want Italian tonight!”

“I’m so sorry,” Lena repeats, her hands sliding up his arms and onto his shoulders. “Are you alright? I don’t know what I was thinking.”

“You’ve killed me,” Jack says, and now Lena is aware that his shoulders are shaking in laughter. “It’s all over. My mother will disown me as you’ve scarred my face.”

“Stop,” Lena says, pushing at his shoulder and trying to quell the laughter rising up in her. Jack mimes falling backwards under her hands, his hands waving through the air. “Stop!”

When Jack resettles in his chair, his hands are resting around her waist, and she finds herself in the space between his legs. He’s smiling up at her, complete with the small red spot on his nose left over from the microdriver. His shoulders still shake under her hands as he tries to hold in his laughter.

“I’ve survived,” Jack says, almost wondrously. His voice shakes. “I’m indestructible. I’m a miracle of science.”

There’s a heat in her eyes at odds with the way she laughs at him, but her feelings are all twisted around her ribcage and she tries valiantly to say present in the moment.
“You’re the worst,” she manages to say and though she rolls her eyes at him, she still allows him to pull her in closer and press a kiss to her cheek.

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Winn is excitedly waiting for her at the DEO when she arrives, waving her badge through security. He’s nearly bouncing by the time they settle in the command room at a secluded set of computers, running over digital simulations for a suit prototype.

It’s steady work that requires concentration, and over the next few hours it helps some of the anger in Lena dissipate even as her attention is admittedly torn between thinking of Kara and trying to focus on the various chemistry readouts and such she and Winn are pouring over.

At some point, Winn’s attention diverts to the extrapolator he’d been running tests on earlier and he begins to poke it absently. Though Lena’d run through some of the basics on how dimension hopping works, she still keeps half her attention on Winn’s movements to make sure he’s not breaking anything.

“So weird to think something this small is so powerful,” he observes casually.

Slightly assured he’s not doing anything too reckless, she turns back to the screen where a readout on the aerodynamics of adding lead armoring to Kara’s suit stares back at her. “Don’t break it,” is all she says.

She feels him look at her, but doesn’t turn to catch his expression. Instead, she lets silence fall for a bit while she continues her work.

“You and Kara fighting?” Winn asks after a few moments. The way his eyes have strayed to focus on the extrapolator in his hands is an obvious attempt to keep the question casual.

“I wouldn’t call it fighting,” Lena says, watching the numbers pile up as she increases speed on the simulation. Too much drag.

“You’re grumpy is all,” Winn says, a smile on his face.

“I’m not grumpy,” Lena snaps, and then glares when Winn laughs a little. “She’s being frustrating.”

“I know,” Winn says. “When I went to get a snack ten minutes ago she was dragging Mon-El into the training room and even Alex looked wary of her intentions.”

The anecdote makes Lena shoot him a quizzical look and then glance over his shoulder as if Kara might appear there at any moment. “I didn’t realize she was here.”

“You didn’t?” Winn asks with a brief flash of confusion. “Didn’t you guys come together?”

“No,” Lena replies, turning back to her work with a roll of her eyes. “But I can’t say I’m surprised she’s here, I suppose.”

It’s clear Winn doesn’t fully understand and Lena sighs softly. “She thinks I’m liable to be killed at any moment,” Lena tells him in a dry, unimpressed tone. “And intends to lock me in a cage, possibly for the rest of time, to protect me.”

“Seems like a reasonable approach,” Winn says, grinning. Lena gives him a dead stare that has him laughing even harder as he flips the extrapolator in his hands and comes to sit next to her at the
workbench. “Oh come on, it’s kind of cute. Kara’s penchant for overprotectiveness.”

“It’s not cute,” Lena counters, her voice firm though it does nothing to wipe the smile of Winn’s face.

“It’s a little cute,” Winn replies, rolling the extrapolator around his fingers as if it were a coin. She snatches it out of his hand and holds it in front of his face. “This isn’t a toy.”

With a glower, he takes it back from her, but manages to look a little sheepish. “I know that.”

“Good,” she says, turning back to her monitor.

Silence stretches for a beat. “You’re like, really mad at her, aren’t you?”

Pinching the bridge of her nose with the realization that Winn isn’t going to let this go, Lena turns again from her screen and shakes her head at him. “I’m not mad at her. We just disagree about a few important details when it comes to our lives together.”

“Feels like a really polite way of saying you want to throw a Kryptonite brick at her face for trying to protect you.”

Indignant at the suggestion, she straightens and frowns at him. “I do not want –”

“It’s a joke, Lena,” Winn interrupts before she can snap at him. There’s a smile playing on his lips even as he looks appropriately cowed by the glare on her face.

Declining to reply, she just half-rolls her eyes and tries to return to her work, but the feeling of Winn’s continuing attention lets her know that’s not going to happen.

“Winn,” she sighs, shoulders slumping.

His hands shoot up in a defensive gesture. “I just – if you want to talk about it. As someone that knows both of you…”

“I don’t need to talk about it,” Lena denies. “Kara just thinks I have some kind of death wish or something and she’s taken it upon herself to be my personal bodyguard.”

“Well,” Winn starts and then startles at the glare she redirects at him. “I don’t think you have a death wish, but I also think Kara’s just being…”

“Kara?” Lena ventures dryly.

Winn takes a breath, affects a soft expression that draws Lena’s attention in suddenly. “I’ve done a lot of studying on Kryptonian culture,” he says quietly. “I mean, my best friend is a Kryptonian. It felt appropriate.”

Lena smiles a bit, thinks of late nights in an off-campus field listening to stories of Kara’s homeworld.

“Mating is like…” Winn’s shoulders hunch up a bit as he searches for the right words. “I mean we think of it like marriage, right, but it’s more than that.”

A heavy thump to her heart makes Lena glance down at the watch on her wrist. “Yeah,” she admits, unsure what else to say.
“Like on Krypton, if I threatened you or hurt you or whatever, Kara would absolutely be in full rights to attack me.”

“This isn’t Krypton,” Lena replies. “And with the kind of lives we lead, Kara can’t go around attacking anyone that so much as looks at me funny.”

The suggestion makes Winn chuckle, but he shrugs a shoulder as if disagreeing. “I made a joke about throwing Kryptonite at her face and you –” he laughs again and gestures at the expression Lena can feel her face forming “– you made that face. Like you’re thinking about throwing the monitor at my head.”

Affecting offense at the suggestion, Lena turns away from him to hide the flush creeping up into her cheeks. “Why do you think I’m prone to throwing things at people’s heads?”

He reaches out to touch her shoulder softly. “I’m trying to point out that it goes both ways,” he says. “You’re just as crazy protective over her as she is of you. It just so happens that Kara can like lift airplanes out of the water and punt buildings into space so it feels a little different.”

It’s a surprising bout of wisdom from a man she’s starting to consider one of her closest friends. Unerringly, it makes her think of Jack and late nights in the lower labs of Luthor Corp.

In lieu of responding, however, she just gives him a short smile and with a soft, inaudible sigh turns back to her screen. “Can we refocus on the suit?”

Before he can respond, Mon-El comes limping around the corner, clutching at his side as he pushes himself up the platform and flops down into a chair next to Lena.

“I think Kara is trying to kill me,” he whines. Lena feels her eyes go wide, but Winn just laughs, glancing pointedly at Lena before turning back to Mon-El.

“What’d you do this time, buddy?” he asks, swiveling in his seat to pick up an instrument on the table and starting to tinker with the extrapolator he’d been playing with earlier.

“Nothing!” Mon-El protests, looking at Lena who finds her attention drawn between the pitiful look on Mon-El’s face and continuing to make sure Winn isn’t breaking anything. “I swear.”

“I’m sure you didn’t,” Lena says. “I’m sorry.”

“Mon-El!” a shout comes from down the hall, prompting a groan from the man now slumped onto the table next to the computer.

It’s only seconds later that Kara comes around the corner, cape floating behind her as she strides quickly up the platform. Her steps falter a little as she sees Lena, but they step back into motion almost immediately.

“Hi,” Kara greets. Winn salutes her, Lena nods, and Kara’s face sets into unhappiness as she looks over the room.

“I didn’t know you were here,” Lena says pointedly, trying not to find Kara’s sudden flush adorable.

“I was…” she looks lost for an explanation for a few seconds until she gestures at Mon-El’s slumped-over form. “Training.”

“Right,” Lena replies, lips thinning into a line to avoid smiling. Her conversation with Winn hasn’t
diminished the entirety of her frustration, but she allows herself to find the sheepish look on Kara’s face a touch adorable.

Kara’s eyes dart everywhere but at Lena until they lock onto the device Winn’s tinkering with.

“You gave Winn the extrapolator?” Kara asks, glancing over at Lena in confusion, incredulously enough that Winn gets a defensive look.

“Hey, I take care of this baby just fine,” he says, but it’s ruined when he tries to show it to Kara and fumbles it in his hands for a few seconds.

Kara snatches it from him with a scowl. Lena is about to tell Kara to let Winn have the device back when another commotion rounds the corner.

“Look alive, people,” J’onn interrupts. “We have a new prisoner coming in.”

Behind him, a short, dark haired man in handcuffs is being led by the elbows through the hallway toward containment. He looks around with plenty of interest, as if he’s searching for something, and Lena watches him suspiciously even as Kara shifts just slightly in front of her. Alex is trailing in after the guards, arms crossed and eyes watchful.

“He looks fun,” Winn says under his breath to Lena who just shakes her head at him, but smiles.

The man seems to find what he’s looking for the second he spots Kara and his eyes light up in such a way that has Lena standing to shuffle closer to Kara’s back, her fingers lightly touching the fabric of her cape. Mon-El stands with her, his arms crossing as he eyes the man and probably tries to look intimidating.

“All my favorite players in one place, how exciting. And the star of the show!” the man says with a casual smile that has Kara throwing a look of confusion over to Lena. The guards holding him have completely stopped their progress towards containment. Alex looks confused as she steps the slightest bit closer to the group on the platform.

“Who, me?” Kara asked, pointing at her chest.

The man laughs a bit, looks to the agents holding him up by the biceps. They still look stupefied, and something doesn’t feel right here. “She’s funny,” he comments before turning back to Kara. “Yes, you. Why else do you think I’d let myself be caught? I’ve been looking for you.”

The carefree grin drops from his face, replaced by something more serious and Lena feels something ominous twist in her gut. Her hand tightens in the back of Kara’s cape.

But nothing much happens. The man just stares at Kara for a second, holding her gaze. They stare at each other for what feels like too long a time, before Kara takes a few halting steps forward, halfway down the steps of the platform. Lena tries to keep ahold of her cape, but it slips from her grasp.

“Supergirl?” Alex asks, her eyes concerned as she looks at Kara’s face. Kara goes rigid, frozen in place.

Chaos breaks out. The man’s cuffs unlock suddenly, and his guards fall away. He dashes forward to grab for the extrapolator still frozen in Kara’s hand and grins maniacally as Mon-El and Alex bear down on him, just as Winn tries to pull Lena back from the action.

“Drop your weapon!” Alex yells, gun pointed at his head, but he just looks at the device in his
hand with a smile.

“Oh, no this isn’t a weapon, this is part of my brilliant escape,” he says with a wink for Lena as he presses a button on the device and a familiar blue portal opens up behind him. “Ladies and gentlemen, this dimension has been so much fun. I’ve had a blast! But I gotta go chase down the fastest man alive.”

He gives an exaggerated bow before yelling, “Toodles!” And with that he’s throwing the extrapolator out towards Winn and jumping backwards through the portal.

Winn lurches forward to catch the device and just manages. But Lena’s focused on Kara, who hasn’t moved an inch the entire interaction, her hand still extended downward and fingers still mimed like they’re holding the extrapolator. It’s funny to think that just a few days ago, she had been thinking about how all the strange things happening were commonplace for her, how Kara’s penchant for overprotectiveness was something she could, and should, control.

Hypocrisy races through her the moment it seems Kara’s safety is concerned and Lena feels the fear take a grip of her throat that she can’t quell. Winn’s question pops into her mind as she feels anger rise up in the fear’s wake, something dark and heavy.

“Supergirl,” Lena says, feeling alarmed at the stiff way Kara’s posed. As if unleashed by her words, Kara’s body goes boneless - her head falls back, her knees buckle, and her arms drop. Mon-El manages to catch her before she hits the ground, looking frantic when he glances up at Lena and then Alex. Lena is on her knees and feeling along Kara’s wrist for a pulse at the same time Alex is shouting for help.

Kara’s heartbeat is steady and strong, but nothing about Lena feels the same as she grips Kara’s wrist and looks from Mon-El to Winn, who’s still holding the extrapolator in his hand and staring down at Kara’s form.

“What the hell?” Lena asks, her voice edged with heat.

It doesn’t seem like anyone has an answer.

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They move Kara into a nearby medbay and Alex immediately goes about hooking Kara up to a machine and checking her vitals. Lena pulls the monitor her direction and starts looking over it herself. Nothing about it seems abnormal at all - the heartbeat is steady, the brain waves are active. It’s as though she’s awake and perfectly healthy.

Both of them exchange brief looks of confusion before turning back to Kara as J’onn walks into the room carrying the report on the prisoner.

“He was captured for hypnotizing a few guards and knocking over a bank,” J’onn says. “No name, no registered information.”

“Are we thinking magical, then?” Winn asks. “We know Kryptonians are susceptible to that.”

“I would have to assume so,” J’onn says, looking frustrated. “I don’t understand his motivations, though. When I read his mind, there was nothing to indicate he had any plan at all.”

“Well, clearly that was wrong,” Mon-El says, his arms crossed, hovering at Lena’s side. The relative warmth of his presence gives Lena some comfort as she adjusts the blanket draped over Kara’s body.
“Her vitals seem stable,” Alex says to the room even as Lena double checks the connection and that the machinery is working. “How did they wake the guards at the bank from hypnosis?”

J’onn shrugs, dropping the tablet in his hands on a table and rubbing at his forehead.

“They woke the moment he was captured,” he says. “Perhaps he has to be the one to release her from it.”

“We don’t know where the hell he went,” Alex says, looking more and more angry by the moment. Lena can’t help but feel the same as her hand drifts to rest over Kara’s wrist, feeling the weight of the bracelet underneath her suit.

Winn is sliding into a chair nearby and logging into a terminal. “I’ll work on finding our new friend.”

The idea of tracking him drags Lena’s thoughts away from Kara enough that her brain starts to solve that problem. “Earth-1,” she says, watching as Winn pulls up a tracking program.

J’onn, who is standing near Kara’s body with his hands at his hips, zones in straight on Lena, his brow pulling together in a critical expression. Something feels like it flutters across Lena’s brain, but before she can say anything J’onn’s speaking her thoughts aloud. “Barry Allen?”

Lena nods, a little unnerved by the implication J’onn just read her thoughts, but moving past it in the interest of Kara’s still form nearby.

“The fastest man alive,” Winn says, nodding as he starts typing into the computer program he’s opened up. “That makes sense.”

“What would he want with two superheroes from two different dimensions?” Mon-El asks. “Is he another imp?”

“I don’t care as long as I can shoot him,” Alex mutters. Lena can’t help the soft laugh that escapes as she exchanges a nod with Alex across Kara’s form. Their moment of camaraderie is interrupted by Winn’s excited whoop.

“Okay, I tracked him,” Winn says, pointing at his monitor. “Lena was right. Earth-1!”

“We can bring her to the facility at S.T.A.R. Labs,” Lena says, recalling the resources they’d had available to them while on Earth-1. “Barry has a team there, they might know more about what’s going on.”

Alex doesn’t seem interested in questioning Lena’s plan, just nods decisively and starts to unhook her sister from the monitoring equipment. “You,” she says, pointing at Mon-El when she’s finished her task. “Grab Kara and let’s go.”

Mon-El looks around like he’s misunderstanding before pointing to himself. “Me? Why me?”

Pulling her sidearm out of its holster, Alex goes about checking its settings. “Because I can’t carry her and aim a gun at the same time. And Lena’s our driver.”

Without any further need for an explanation, Lena makes for the extrapolator, making sure it’s set for the correct location, keys it in twice just to be certain.

“Why are we bringing Kara, though?” Mon-El asks, sounding even more confused.
“This guy is the one who put her under, he’s the one who’s gonna bring her out,” Alex says, sounding terse.

Mon-El is clearly still hesitant, hovering by Kara’s bedside, and Lena doesn’t have time for that kind of indecision when the sight of Kara lying unmoving makes her feel like she can’t breathe.

“Mon-El, do what she says,” Lena orders.

It seems to do the trick. Mon-El’s lips thin, but he moves to pick Kara up from the bed.

“On the platform,” Lena instructs, and the group begins moving that way, Alex fiddling with her gun as she leads the way. DEO agents move quickly out of their way as they see the unconscious form of Supergirl in Mon-El’s arms.

“The device should allow you to communicate with us if you need to,” Lena says, turning to Winn.

Winn nods, looking serious and nervous. J’onn hands Lena the tablet with information on the prisoner without a word, and she gives him a nod as well.

“Good luck. Bring her home,” Winn says, offering a fist bump to Lena before she climbs up the steps.

“Be careful, Alex,” J’onn adds waiting for Alex to nod in response.

“We will,” Alex says, nodding again at Winn and then at Lena before stepping up next to Mon-El on the platform. Lena follows her and gives the signal to Winn to open up the portal.

With a final look at Kara’s still form in Mon-El’s arms, Winn presses a sequence of buttons and just like that the world dissolves around them in a tunnel of color. Lena feels a familiar pull in her stomach as the three of them are thrust between universes.

As quickly as their earth disappeared, Earth-1 reappears before them – Barry and Cisco with matching looks of surprise as they remanifest on the platform in Earth-1’s S.T.A.R. Labs.

“Lena?” Barry asks, blinking at her with a mixture of surprise and confusion before his attention turns to her companions and his eyes go wide. “Kara?!”

“Hi, Barry,” Lena says, stepping first off the platform and feeling Alex and Mon-El follow.

“Lena, when I gave you that extrapolator, I was thinking more of like a pen pal situation than a show up with an unconscious alien superhero scenario,” Cisco says.

“What happened?” Barry asks, his concerned gaze raking over Kara’s form.

“We’re not sure, honestly,” Lena says and Barry’s eyes go wide.

“Come on,” he says, “let’s get her into the lab.”

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The rest of Barry’s team is congregating in the control room of their operation and they exchange hellos and introductions. Caitlin hugs Lena upon her arrival and Iris does the same with a fond smile.

“I wish I could say it was good to see you both,” Iris murmurs, her hand warm on Lena’s bicep.
Lena meets Wally, Iris’s estranged brother, for the first time and though Iris refers to him as *Kid Flash* Wally makes it very clear he’s not married to that name. “You have the same powers as Barry?” Lena asks, shaking his hand.

“Just about,” he replies sounding proud, but hesitant.

Curiosity must show on Lena’s face because he smiles and answers her next question before she can ask it with a shrug and, “It’s a long story.”

Alex helps Caitlin hook Kara up to a series of machines and stands there as Caitlin runs through the results on the small monitor. Lena feels her heart sink when she sees the numbers there. “Her vitals are low,” Caitlin says. “How long as she been like this?”

Grimly, Alex looks at her sister, arms crossing over her chest. “Not long. She was in a healthy range when it first happened.”

“We’re here to find whoever did this to Kara and punch him repeatedly until whatever spell he put on her goes away. And I get to punch him first,” Mon-El says, standing nearby Lena’s side. He pauses a beat and glances at her. “Technically, Lena gets to punch him first, but I’ll do the punching for Lena. Or Alex can. We both can. As long as this dude gets punched.”

Barry watches Mon-El with a confused wariness that lightens Lena’s mood just the slightest. “I don’t understand, are you like,” Barry can’t seem to figure Mon-El out, but his eyes run up and down the defensive posture Mon-El has taken, just slightly in front of Lena. “Lena’s bodyguard?”

“Yes,” Mon-El answers without a hint of hesitation just as Lena says, “No.”

“Lena is a human and Kara will kill me if she gets hurt punching someone, so I’m punching for her,” Mon-El says. “It’s allowed in the dueling conventions.”

“The - dueling conventions?” Barry asks, looking even more confused.

When she catches Alex’s expression, there’s an exasperated look in her eye, but a hint of a smile plays against her lips. “Can we focus?” Alex asks.

“Why don’t you tell us what happened,” Iris says, glancing between the three of them.

“An alien prisoner escaped our custody,” Alex explains. “He did something to her, put her in some kind of coma, but we’re not sure how or why.”

“And then he used my interdimensional extrapolator to disappear,” Lena adds, thinning her lips in Cisco’s direction.

“Rude,” Cisco replies. “He knew how the extrapolator worked?”

“He went for it immediately after he put her under. We tracked him here and followed,” Lena says, looking at Barry. “We believe he came here for you.”

Barry looks a mixture of affronted and confused. “For me?! Why?”

“He said something about tracking down the fastest man alive,” Lena answers, hoping maybe Barry might have more insight himself on the subject.

But it’s Cisco that steps forward. “Okay, clearly we’re talking about a breacher, right?”

“A breacher?” Alex asks, brow furrowed.
“People that hop dimensions,” Caitlin answers for him. “We call the portals breaches.”

“Thus, breachers,” Cisco finishes as if the nickname is some sort of marvel of language. “And if there’s one thing I can definitely do, it’s track breachers.”

He moves over to a computer terminal and the rest of them follow. Barry comes step to step with Lena. “So what else do you know about this guy?”

“Not much,” Lena replies, handing over the prisoner file J’onn had given her, glancing to Alex to see if she has anything to add.

“J’onn said he basically appeared out of thin air,” she offers, a bit of helplessness in the way she shrugs a shoulder. “I got called in for escort by his guards when he got brought in. He seemed pretty harmless, and then he - went nuts.”

“Appeared out of thin air like this guy just did?” Cisco says, pointing at his monitor and blinking in surprise.

Lena shifts quickly to his side and checks the display. Sure enough, on the security camera footage of another part of the lab, their breacher is standing there casually, waving at them with an easy smile.

“On it,” Barry says and not unlike Kara, a gust of sudden air precedes his disappearance. On the screen, Lena watches as Barry reappears on the feed in his red and gold suit.

“He’s fast,” Mon-El comments with wide eyes.

“He’s the Flash,” Cisco tells him lowly and Mon-El makes an impressed expression, nodding.

“Cool name,” he says, attempting to give Cisco a thumbs up, but he doesn’t quite succeed until Lena reaches over and pulls his fist upright. Mon-El gives her a grin of appreciation before leaning close. “Do you think I can get a name sometime?”

“We’ll workshop it once Kara is no longer in a coma,” Lena says. Mon-El nods very seriously.

Turning her attention back to the monitor in front of her, Lena sees the confrontation between Barry and the breacher begin and just as quickly, sees it end.

Not in their favor.

“Barry,” Iris gasps from Lena’s right and just as she says it, she takes off out of the lab.

“Iris, wait!” Cisco calls out and with a low curse, jogs out after her.

On the screen, the breacher is standing over Barry’s prone body for a long moment before turning back to look straight into the camera. And with a wink that feels like it’s aimed directly at Lena, he’s gone.

All that’s left is an empty room, Barry’s still form, and then Iris and Cisco running into the frame.

“This just got a whole lot more complicated,” Alex says, exchanging a look of worry with Lena.

With Mon-El’s help, they manage to move Barry into a bed next to Kara and hook him up to the same machines that are tracking her vital signs. Alex spends her time checking and rechecking the
results, hovering over Kara like her concern alone might somehow wake her up. Lena is hoping mostly for her anger to do the same, pacing back and forth at the foot of Kara’s bed as Iris worries over Barry.

“This is not good,” Caitlin says after running through a test on her screen. Lena tracks over the numbers on the screen and tries to analyze what it all means. The information Cisco had given her about Barry’s powers and metahumans in general feels like it’s distant in her brain, buried beneath the panic rushing through her over seeing Kara still and unmoving.

“What is it?”

“The Speed Force levels in Barry’s cells have been severely depleted,” Caitlin says and that’s when Lena realizes what she’s looking at. Iris looks near tears as the words sink into the room.

“That’s Kara’s solar radiation,” she says softly, pointing to a number on Caitlin’s screen. Alex moves over quickly to look over Lena’s shoulder and confirm for herself.

“They’re being drained?” Alex asks, the words manifesting a heavy thrum of fear in Lena’s stomach. “How is that possible?”

“They have to be being consumed at a rate beyond what she can take in,” Lena says, popping her watch face open and closed. “Do we know what happens if it drains all the way?”

“Her powers go away,” Alex says. “It’s what happens when she solar flares, but she - that takes enormous usage of powers. She’s laying in bed.”

“If the breacher is the one draining their powers,” Cisco asks, slowly. “Do we know if he’ll stop there?”

There’s silence in the room for a moment as they take it in. Lena feels like she could throw up, start crying, or put a hole through a wall, or all three. She watches the numbers drop a little bit lower and her fist clenches.

“We have to bring this guy in,” Mon-El says, his arms crossing over his chest as she shifts in closer to Lena.

“He’s right,” Wally says and in a blur of gold and red he’s suddenly dressed in a suit not that dissimilar to Barry’s apart from the colors being inverted. “Vibe, suit up, let’s go.”

“I can help, too,” Mon-El offers. “I don’t have a flashy suit, but I can…” he pauses, glances at Lena and shrugs a shoulder. “Jump really high?”

At Cisco’s look for confirmation, Lena nods and offers Mon-El an encouraging smile. “Go with them,” she says before looking back at where Kara’s lying. Still unmoving.

Cisco disappears then, takes Mon-El with him and Caitlin follows with the purpose of finding something for Mon-El to wear in the field apart from the jeans and t-shirt he showed up in. Wally quite literally flashes out of the room after them.

And then it’s just her, Alex and Iris in the room. The beeping of the monitors near Kara and Barry’s still bodies the only sound filling the room until Alex is letting out a heavy sigh and scrubbing her hands over her face.

“What does it say about me that almost getting launched across the universe didn’t feel as stressful to me as this,” Alex comments softly, exchanging a smile with Lena.
Lena shrugs a shoulder, but moves close enough to settle a warm hand against Alex’s biceps. “I know what you mean.”

“I’ve got to do something,” Alex says, moving her hands to her hips and observing the unmoving figure of her sister. “I can’t just sit here and stare at her.”

Iris glances up from where she’s pushing her fingers through Barry’s hair, but doesn’t comment.

“I’m sure Caitlin has something for you to do,” Lena murmurs, looking at Iris and gesturing with her head to the door.

Alex takes a deep breath, but nods, squeezing Lena’s wrist quickly before pacing out of the room.

It leaves Lena alone with Iris then and she steps up to Kara’s bedside, looking down at her and trying to stop the compact feeling twisting around her ribcage. Without thinking of it, her fingers travel to Kara’s wrist, stroke the ridge of the bracelet pushing up through the fabric of her supersuit.

After a few moments of watching Kara and Barry do nothing but lie there, it’s Iris that breaks the silence. “I hate this.”

Lena hums her agreement, nearly laughs at the simplicity of the feeling, and tightens her fingers around Kara’s wrist. “Me too.”

Eyes flickering to Lena’s touch on Kara’s arm, Iris gives Lena a short smile. “So you two figured it out?”

The memory of being on Earth-1 with Kara feels like a lifetime ago. It’s odd to think of a time when they were still figuring out how to come back together, of a time they were still uncertain. It makes Lena smile. “We did,” she answers. “Actually, being here on your earth sort of set things into motion.”

So did the fact that Lena nearly took Kara to bed in that small hotel room they shared not too far from S.T.A.R. Labs. Despite the gravity of the situation, Lena remembers the heat of that moment intimately.

“I’m glad,” Iris says, punctuated with a genuine look of empathy.

“And you and Barry…” Lena replies, trailing off a bit. Though Kara and Barry had kept in touch through the communication functions of the extrapolator, Lena can’t remember any salient details regarding their relationship. When they had visited Earth-1, Lena’s priorities hadn’t been about working out all the relationship drama happening around them. She had enough of that in her own life.

From the look on Iris’s face, she and Barry aren’t quite as figured out as Lena and Kara. “He proposed to me,” she says, softly as if confessing something.

Lena nearly says congratulations until her eyes dart down to the bare ring finger on Iris’s left hand.

“Yeah,” Iris laughs, responding to the question Lena wasn’t sure if she should voice. “We’re not – I mean he – it’s complicated.”

“I get the feeling things in your life usually are,” Lena replies for lack of anything more profound to say.
At the least, it makes Iris smile, but it falters off her lips a bit when she looks back down at Barry. “It doesn’t feel so complicated right now.”

Lena’s throat feels tight suddenly and she blinks heat out of her eyes as she studies the peaceful expression on Kara’s face. “Kara and I have been…arguing the past few days,” Lena admits, sharing a wry smile with Iris. “She thinks I take too many risks and I think she’s being overprotective, but right now…”

Her words trail off, but a sympathetic look of understanding takes hold of Iris’s face. “There’s not really a handbook for dating a superhero, is there?”

Lena laughs a little, the sound thicker than she intended. “I think Kara would be like this powers or not.”

A glossy look creeps into Iris’s eyes. “Yeah, Barry too,” she says softly after a moment.

Lena blows out an exaggerated breath that lifts Iris’s gaze back up to connect with her own and they both share a laugh.

Before any more words can be exchanged, Alex comes jogging back into the room, a triumphant light in her eyes that Lena responds to immediately.

“They got him,” Alex offers, smiling as Lena steps forward.

An aura of relief washes over the room and though Kara and Barry remain unmoving on the bed, Lena starts to feel like they’re getting somewhere.

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They lock their new prisoner in an elaborate sort of prison system S.T.A.R. Labs has set up. The cells, Lena’s told, mutes any sort of metahuman powers and are nearly impossible to escape from.

They watch some footage they’ve loaded into the database of the encounter with the breacher. It seems as if he’s not just draining Kara and Barry’s powers, but transferring them to himself. Watching him use Kara’s powers makes a flare of anger spike so sharply in Lena’s chest she nearly punches a desk.

It doesn’t seem like Alex is much better. A determined glint settles into her eyes. “Let me talk to him,” she commands the moment the group is done debriefing the capture.

“Alex,” Lena warns softly, remembering Alex’s aggressive interrogation of a prisoner at the DEO not too long ago.

“Just to talk,” Alex insists in a whisper just for Lena.

“Maybe we should figure out what we’re going to say first,” Caitlin says. “Someone should call Joe. He has experience with this sort of thing.”

“So do I,” Alex says, her hand sitting against the gun at her side.

“I’d just like to remind everyone that Lena and I called first dibs on punching,” Mon-El says, raising his hand to draw the room’s attention.

“We’re not punching him,” Alex replies sharply.

Cisco shrugs a shoulder from his perch against a nearby desk. “Yeah, Wally already took care of
that,” he adds, miming a punch with his fist and holding his palm out for Wally to high-five him.

The exchange makes Caitlin roll her eyes before she’s turning back to a computer monitor. “I’m trying to figure out what kind of metahuman this guy could be, but there’s nothing in the database and –”

“I don’t think he’s a metahuman,” Alex interrupts and Cisco joins Caitlin at her computer and the group continues to throw theories back and forth.

Amidst the chatter of conversation, Lena notices Iris has started for the open door toward the containment area and with a quick glance to where Alex is focused on something Caitlin is showing her, Lena follows. They both slip away unnoticed.

Out in the hallway, Lena darts forward to grab for Iris’s arm and stop her out of earshot of the group. “What are you doing?”

“I’m going to tell him to let Barry go or else,” Iris says, her voice cold and angry. Lena feels it reflecting in her own mind, can’t help but agree with the impulse. “I’m not sitting around arguing about it while Barry’s dying on that table.”

The very reminder that Kara could die sends a cold shock through Lena that has her letting go of Iris’s arm, letting her lead the way in silence down into containment. Iris locks the door behind them and calls up the cell they just shoved their prisoner into.

Lena watches him appear down the hallway as she and Iris make their way that direction and he turns with a flair and wide smile to greet them.

“Hello, featured players!” the man yell as they approach. “I’d been wondering when you two would show up.”

“Tell us what you did to them,” Lena demands, just as Iris asks, “Who the hell are you?”

“The passion,” he replies, drawing the word out and miming a frame with his fingers askew in front of him. “It’s all over your faces. Beautiful.”

“Answer her question,” Lena orders lowly with as much threat and authority as she can muster. “Now.”

The only reaction she gets is a slow crawl of a smile widening across his lips and the way her grins at her is unnerving. “Lena Luthor,” he says in a slow careful annunciation of her name. “You really don’t disappoint, do you?”

“How do you know my name?” Lena asks and she’s reminded of their encounter with Mxy, of the smug omniscient aura that surrounded him.

She can feel her heartbeat start to race at the idea of having to confront another Fifth Dimension-er, but she tries to see the logic of it. Mxy had been impossible to contain. The mere fact that this guy is successfully locked in a cell means he can’t be from the Fifth Dimension. Right?

“Oh, I know all about you,” he says, flicking his gaze between them. “Both of you.”

“How?” Iris asks, stepping forward and drawing his attention. “Who are you and what do you want?”

He smiles. Completely unaffected. “I’m the Music Meister,” he answers simply. “And I’m here to
teach your dear sweethearts a very important lesson.”

“And what lesson is that?” Lena asks.

With a click of his tongue, he wags a finger at her. “Tsk, they say to show, not tell.”

“Why don’t you show us how to fix them,” Iris suggests and he laughs.

“I’m not the one that can fix them,” he says, his hands up defensively like he has no part in this.

“Fix them,” Lena demands anyway. “Fix them and we’ll let you go.”

A look of disappointment crosses his face and he shakes his head at her. “Lena, Lena, Lena. We’re not bargaining here. Though I’m sure it looks great for the audience. All that desperation and rage.”

The rage he’s referencing coils bitterly in the back of her throat and she wonders what would happen if she had Iris open the cell door so she could punch him.

“This isn’t some show,” Iris says. “This is real life and –”

“Ah, all the world’s a stage and all that,” he dismisses, interrupting Iris with a wave of his hand. “Now listen. We’ve all got our little parts to play. Even you two.”

His gaze goes critical as he glances between them for a moment. “You’re in control of how this narrative ends. Can you rescue our heroes?” He twirls in place with a showboaty grin. “Stay tuned to find out.”

“Tell us how to help them or you won’t live to see the ending,” Lena threatens, but he just laughs. Loudly, like he’s happy she said that.

“You think you can kill me?” he asks, incredulous, but still smiling. Suddenly, his grin drops into something more serious. “Would you try? If it would save her?”

The answer to that is obvious. The yes nearly bursts quickly from her throat, but she takes a breath and just levels him with a glare.

He doesn’t seem to care that she doesn’t reply, just grins again. “You would do anything wouldn’t you?” He looks at Iris. “Both of you would. That’s why I’m here, after all.”

“You’re not making sense,” Iris snaps.

The happy expression hardens briefly. “You want Kara and Barry back from the world they’re in, you can go get them yourselves.” When he smiles again it’s much more unnerving than his happier grins of earlier. “You have that power.”

“How?” she and Iris manage to ask at the same time, exchanging a quick look before turning away.

“Love will find a way,” is all he gives as an explanation. “You can do it. Now, if you’ll excuse me. I have a whole lot of nothing to get to in these lovely new accommodations of mine.”

He turns away from them and unceremoniously plops onto the ground.

Iris moves forward as if to bang on the cell window, but there’s an audible commotion coming from behind them that Lena somehow knows is Alex. With a quick look to Iris, they both move back towards the door just as it’s opening to reveal an indignant looking Alex Danvers.
“What the hell, Lena?” Alex says, grabbing ahold of Lena’s arm and preventing her from moving down the hallway as Iris makes her way back to the medbay. “I think Kara might be on to something with that whole locking you in a safe house thing.”

“We needed answers,” Lena replies, trying not to snap at Alex. She can see the worry and fear etched around Alex’s eyes, feels them in her own chest. “I wasn’t going to sit around and argue about it.”

“Going off to interrogate a prisoner without a plan or backup is reckless,” Alex says, stomping along with Lena when she resumes walking towards the medbay. “This is exactly the kind of thing Kara’s been –”

“I don’t care what Kara thinks,” Lena snaps, whipping around to face Alex again and halting them abruptly just outside the lab. “Kara is getting her powers drained by a crazy person and we don’t know how the hell to fix it. There’s nothing I wouldn’t do –”

“I get that,” Alex interrupts, sounding just as angry. “But you’re not going to help anybody if you get yourself –”

“Lena!” Mon-El’s voice exclaims as he suddenly appears beside them. “What the hell?”

“That’s what I said,” Alex grumbles, looking pointedly at Lena before shaking her head. “How am I supposed to bodyguard you if you just run off without me?”

“That’s not a verb and you’re not my bodyguard,” Lena dismisses, rolling her eyes.

“Still,” Mon-El replies, lifting his chin a bit. “I was just talking to him. Just because Kara’s not here doesn’t mean you both have to embody her insane overprotectiveness.”

“It’s not insane,” Alex says. “Clearly.”

The last thing Lena wants to do is fight with Alex and Mon-El. Or anybody. Not when Kara’s still unconscious on a nearby bed and not when she still can’t figure out how to save her. There’s only enough room in her brain right now for the problem before her – helping Kara.

“I’m not having this conversation. We need to figure out a way to rescue Kara.”

“Well, did you find anything out from the prisoner?” Alex asks, crossing her arms.

Lena feels her jaw go tight. “All he had to say is that we had the power to save them from the world they’re in. But he wasn’t exactly expressive on the details.”

“Great,” Alex sighs, blowing out a breath.

There’s an insistent, hot pressure at the back of Lena’s eyes and she hates the feeling of uselessness thrumming through her. “Multiple degrees and years of experience and I can’t seem to figure it out,” she murmurs, mostly to herself.

Alex doesn’t look much better than she feels. “Look, maybe we’re overthinking it. Maybe the answer is simple and we just can’t see it.”

“Occam’s razor,” Lena says, shrugging a shoulder and taking a breath. “Maybe.”
“Yeah,” Mon-El says, nodding imperiously and crossing his arms to match Alex’s posture. “Occam’s razor. Totally.”

“You have no idea what that is,” Alex says and the air feels a bit lighter for a moment when Mon-El looks to her in question, clearly expecting an explanation.

Before Lena can give a response, an loud alarm comes blaring down the hall from the medbay. Panic sinks in Lena’s stomach atop the already heavy anxiety and she sprints down the hallway.

When she arrives in the room, the problem is immediately apparent. Barry is shaking in his bed, his vitals blinking red. Iris moves swiftly to grab at Barry’s suddenly seizing body. Lena moves around to pull the monitor towards her and see what’s happening. “His vitals are going all over the place,” Lena reads, watching as Barry’s blood pressure takes a sudden inexplicable dip.

Alex is suddenly skidding to a stop next to her. Mon-El not far behind. “What’s happening?”

“I think we’re –” Her voice stops in its tracks when Kara’s body begins moving in much the same way, her vitals dropping suddenly as well. Lena grabs for her, feeling Kara’s feverishly hot skin and pressing down as Alex and Caitlin start attempting to figure out how to address the problem.

Cisco looks wide-eyed at his computer terminal as Alex requests a sedative. “What’s going on?”

“I don’t know,” Caitlin says, looking over the vitals over and over. “Their vitals are dropping like crazy.”

“We have to do something,” Lena replies. Alex looks desperate, her hands fluttering across Kara’s skin and then the computer next to her.

“I don’t know what to do,” Alex admits, sounding equal parts frustrated and terrified. “I can’t figure out what’s causing the problem.”

Lena locks eyes with Iris suddenly and something determined sets into the other woman’s eyes. “We need to go to whatever world they’re in,” Iris says, keeping her gaze locked with Lena.

It’s the simplest solution, right? She has no idea how they’re going to accomplish such a thing, but Iris looks like she’s figured it out and the determined set of her expression bubbles hope into Lena’s throat.

Alex looks at them both like they’re crazy. “How do you think you’re doing that?”

“Cisco, you can vibe us there,” Iris says suddenly and Lena doesn’t immediately follow Iris’s plan, but trusts the certain way she looks to her friend.

“It doesn’t work that way,” Cisco says, shaking his head rapidly and taking a step back. “I can’t just –”

“Yes, you can,” Iris says vehemently. “You sent me into the speed force, you sent Barry and Wally into the future.”

Lena spares a moment to shoot a surprised look at Caitlin who makes a face and nods when she sees it.

“What does she mean?” Alex asks, staying on topic just as Mon-El looks at Lena and asks softly, “What’s a vibe?”
“I’ll explain later,” Lena tells him just as Cisco takes a deep breath.

“Okay,” he says, and he jumps towards a nearby desk to grab a pair of mechanical looking glasses that he puts on his face before moving to the foot of the bed and placing a hand on Barry and Kara’s shoulders. “Grab on to me.”

Lena does just that and exchanges a determined nod with Iris.

“Let’s hope this works,” Cisco mutters.

Seconds later, Lena’s head feels like it turns over inside itself and gets pulled upward. Earth-1 disappears and the walls of the world turn a muted sepia-toned color as they suddenly reappear.

They’re on a city street. That much Lena registers immediately. But the car to her right is old, antiquated really and Lena blinks at it a second before she hears the slamming of a door and a familiar voice calling out, “Barry!”

It’s Kara. Kara in a shimmery dress and heels, looking gorgeous. Her hair is in waves that look appropriate for whatever time this is supposed to be, and Lena has a sudden urge to sink her fingers into the curls there that shakes through her. She’s skipping towards a prone figure lying on the street that Lena realizes must be Barry. “Kara!” Lena calls out and it draws Kara’s attention immediately that way.

She gets one moment of Kara’s bright smile blooming across her face as she recognizes Lena. It’s like something out of a nightmare. The second she and Kara connect eyes, a gunshot rings out loudly in Lena’s ears. So loudly that she flinches away from it, but still catches Kara’s eyes go wide and frozen, her hands dropping to her stomach in surprise.

Lena doesn’t know how to react. It’s like her brain freezes and becomes incapable of processing the look on Kara’s face and the growing red stain against her stomach. She’s had a thousand awful nightmares of Kara being bested by monsters, by her brother, and irrational ones like this - but this is real. Kara is falling to her knees, blood on her fingers, and Lena is frozen.

Iris, however, doesn’t seem to have the same problem. The cry of Barry’s name that bursts out of her in a raw yell startles Lena out of her shock.

It should probably occur to her to look around for a shooter, or to take some kind of cover, but she does neither of those things. Kara’s collapsing down to the street next to Barry and Lena just takes off in a run that direction.

Her knees hit the pavement and it radiates a phantom kind of pain up her legs, but she doesn’t care because Kara’s bleeding. Crimson is staining the gold fabric stretched across her stomach and Lena can see the way Kara’s face is going pale and oh god.

It feels like her chest is falling out of her body, like her guts are twisting up into her throat. She presses her fingers into the wound at Kara’s side, tries to see through the tears in her eyes and the blood pouring over her hands.

“I’m fine,” Kara is saying, a slurry mumble of words as she tries to lift her hand to Lena’s face.

It feels like there’s no time. Like Kara’s life is slipping through her fingers and Lena slogs through the cloud of emotion in her brain in an attempt to focus. For a moment she wishes Alex were here instead of her. Alex who is trained for high pressure situations, whose medical expertise matches Lena’s but whose hands would surely be steadier, more decisive in this situation.
She turns to where Iris is hunched over Barry, cradling his face in her hands. “We have to get them out of here,” Lena says, but Iris can’t hear her, can’t see past the way Barry is slipping away just like Kara.

“Lena,” Kara whispers and when Lena turns back, Kara’s smiling.

“Stay with me,” Lena orders, brain scrambling for a plan. Her hands stay pressed against Kara’s stomach even as Kara reaches up to play with a strand of Lena’s hair.

“I’m sorry,” Kara says and the heat in Lena’s eyes is so intense she can barely see through it.

“Don’t say that,” Lena replies through the tears escaping her eyes. “Don’t say that. You’re going to be fine. I’m going to get you out of here.”

“It’s okay,” Kara gasps out and Lena can feel her body go rigid, in pain or something else.

“No it’s not,” Lena says, abandoning the wound to grab at Kara’s face. The blood on her fingers smears there a little, but Kara leans into the touch and Lena thinks her heart might give out with the realization that Kara’s about to die. Kara’s going to die and Lena couldn’t save her.

“I’m glad you came back,” Kara gets out between pained breaths and Lena’s throat is so impossibly thick with tears and hot emotion she thinks she might collapse. “To me.”


“Tell Alex –”

“No,” Lena interrupts in a snap of the word.

“It’s okay. I love you.”

A choked sob rips out of her throat and Lena falls forward until their heads are together, her lips pressing against Kara’s.

“I love you too,” Lena says, the words nearly impossible to pull through all the desperation in her body. “I love you so much.”

Kara goes limp underneath her, but before Lena can even deal with that the world is shimmering around her again and disappearing, replaced quickly with the more familiar looking walls of the S.T.A.R. Labs medical bay.

“Lena?” Kara’s voice whispers and Lena’s eyes focus to see Kara, all the color returned to her face, blinking confused blue eyes up at where Lena’s hovering over the head of the bed.

As if startled, Kara shoots up in the bed, nearly conks Lena in the head on the way. Alex, who’d been standing at the foot of the bed standing vigil, takes Kara into a quick hug immediately. Her eyes connect with Lena’s over Kara’s shoulder and the relief and joy on it burst straight into Lena’s chest.

The moment Alex releases her sister, Lena’s around the bed, pulling Kara straight into her chest and pressing a reassuring kiss to the crown of Kara’s head. Just feeling the warm solid feel of her is easing the tension still thrumming across Lena’s skin and Kara sinks into the hold, lets Lena manipulate her closer.

“Hey,” Kara murmurs looking up at her when Lena finally pulls away. “You okay?”
The clear concern in Kara’s eyes makes Lena laugh, a watery sound as tears pool in her eyes and she just falls forward until her forehead is pressing into Kara’s temple and she can breathe in the feel of having Kara alive and nearby. Distantly, she’s aware of Alex taking Kara’s hand and of Barry sitting up in the bed next to them.

“Bravo!” A voice calls out from behind them and Lena startles, twirls to see the Music Meister striding casually into the room. “Standing O. I loved it. That was a hell of a show.”

Lena immediately steps more fully in front of Kara and keeps her stance ready just as Alex draws her weapon.

“How did you get out of that cell?!” Cisco exclaims and the Music Meister laughs.

“Cisco, did you really think that cell is just going to, like, hold me?”

A bewildered look is the only response Cisco gives before Barry is sliding up off his bed to stand. “No, hold on, what’s going on?”

Barry looks unsteady on his feet, but Iris holds him up at his side.

“I told you when we first met,” he answers, shrugging. “It was to teach all of you a lesson. Because I see everything. Sorry I had to like, mess with you a little bit,” he says, looking at Lena and the Iris. “I was just trying to get you to, you know, play the song and dance.”

He says the last bit with a little shimmy of his hips and a snap of his fingers and Lena really wishes they were in the DEO where there might be some kind of weapon lying around she could shoot him with. Alex looks like she is only moments away from destroying him with her gun.

“Are you like from another Earth, universe, multi-verse thing?” Barry asks. He looks mostly confused, curious. If she weren’t so angry at the sight of the Music Meister, she might find it endearing, the groggy look on his face.

“You wouldn’t even understand where I come from.”

“The Fifth Dimension,” Lena hazards a guess, a glare setting in her expression as she remembers Mxyzptlk.

“Ah, no,” he replies, a bit confused by the suggestion. “Though it sounds like a fun place.”

“It’s not,” Kara grumbles from behind her.

“Anyway,” he says, clapping his hands together. “I must be off. More people to see, more lessons to give.”

He starts ambling away, whistling to himself. Alex seems to give up on holding back her violent urges, and fires a shot his way. But it doesn’t even hit him, ricocheting into the ceiling and sending a round of sparks down.

“Seemed worth it to try,” Alex mutters, reholstering her gun and turning around to reach for Kara’s hand.

“Are we not going to, like, stop him?” Cisco says, pointing at the retreating man, but before anyone can reply he’s disappearing into thin air. “I guess not.”

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The second they confirm that Kara and Barry are okay and not suffering any ill effects from the power drain, Alex starts to demand they head straight home. A few hours under the sunlamps seems to be in Kara’s future, but Kara rebels against the suggestion with the hope of staying a touch longer.

Barry comments over how hungry he is and a light hits Kara’s eyes that deflates the authoritative posture Alex had adopted.

“A few hours won’t hurt us,” Lena says to Alex softly, watching Kara laugh at something Barry is saying.

Alex relents, though she runs Kara through another quick test to reassure herself everything is in working order. Kara doesn’t protest. Not with the way Lena looks at her over Alex’s shoulder as if daring her to disagree. Kara’s smart enough to know when she’s outnumbered apparently.

The group makes their way out of S.T.A.R. Labs to a nearby restaurant that Cisco suggests. Lena spends the walk over trying to replace the vivid image of Kara bleeding out on the ground with the image of her now—walking and joking with Barry, humming some terrible song they’ve clearly made up about being super friends.

Alex actually laughs when Kara shuffles into some kind of mini tap routine. It’s a far different look than the harried expression Alex had back at the labs. Lena feels the entire group relaxing step by step.

They’re waiting at a crosswalk and Kara is picking Barry up off the ground in a move that clearly shows her powers are fully reinstated when Lena thinks to contact the rest of their friends back home.

Cisco watches with interest as Lena pulls out her extrapolator and goes about connecting with Winn—she uses one of the modifications she and Winn had worked on and runs the call through her phone.

“Everything’s fine,” she says the moment the connection goes through and Winn is picking up with a worried sounding Lena? “Kara is up and moving. We’re grabbing dinner and letting her recharge before we head back.”

“Oh thank God,” he says, the sound of his sigh crackling over the connection. “Okay. Good. And the prisoner?”

Lena takes a breath, glances to where Kara is leaning into her sister and laughing. “Disappeared. It’s a long story I’ll tell you all about when I get back.”

His okay is a bit more skeptical this time, but he doesn’t seem keen on protesting. “Well, if you’re staying, can you grab me a copy of *Game of Thrones* while you’re there? Kara told me once that he’s finished the last books over there.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Lena says laughing when Winn lets out a short cheer.

They disconnect the call just as they arrive at the restaurant. Abandoning her duet with Barry, Kara finds her way to Lena’s side and slings an arm around her shoulders as they make their way to a large round table.

“You okay?” Kara murmurs, pressing her lips against Lena’s hairline quickly but with solid pressure that does something to relax Lena’s still-frayed nerves.
“Yeah,” she says, smiling up at Kara. It’s not entirely the truth. Not with the way she can’t stop feeling Kara’s blood spilling over her hands, or hearing Kara’s soft apologies while her life slipped away. But Kara’s here now. Alive and laughing and Lena takes a breath against the urge to whisk them both away somewhere far and keep them there for a long time.

They all settle at the table, Lena in between Kara and Mon-El and across from where Barry is whispering something to Iris.

“Does this earth have orange soda?” Mon-El whispers, looking over his menu.

Though the question had clearly been directed at Lena, it’s Cisco who answers as he plumps into a chair next to Mon-El. “Any universe without orange soda is not a universe I want a part of,” he says, pulling a smile out of Mon-El.

“This earth isn’t that different,” Lena says patting him on the arm.

“Well, Krypton never exploded here,” Kara adds, reaching out for the glass of water a waiter has just set in front of her.

The comment pulls Mon-El forward until he can look at Kara with wide eyes. “Really?”

“There’s no Superman,” Kara answers with a casual shrug. Alex, from her position on the other side of Kara looks startled, like she hadn’t thought about the possibility.

“No Supergirl then either,” Alex observes, a little wide-eyed as she connects gazes with Lena who nods slowly. “Wow. Weird. I wonder what I’m like here.”

“I googled myself when we were here a few months ago,” Lena says, shrugging. “It was strange.”

Kara hums in agreement, but her eyes are typically trained on her menu. “What is everyone eating?”

“Wait, so then Daxam…” Mon-El’s voice trails off as his expression turns into something much like Alex’s and he blinks at Lena in surprise, as though he’s still working through the possibilities. A small surge of empathy comes through Lena for him.

“Daxam?” Caitlin asks suddenly from across the table and Lena’s eyes dart toward her suddenly remembering the rest of their companions.

“My home planet,” Mon-El offers. His eyes flicker between Kara and Caitlin before he continues. “When Krypton exploded, it took Daxam out with it.”

“I’m sorry,” Caitlin says, but Mon-El just shrugs.

“It’s okay. I like Earth,” he says simply.

“It’s your homeworld though, right?” Cisco interjects. “There must be some things you miss about it.”

Lena catches the soft scoff Kara lets out, but she thinks it must be quiet enough that Mon-El doesn’t because he just shrugs in Cisco’s direction, only a slight frown on his face.

“So some things, sure,” he says. “But I like being on Earth with my friends. Helping people and…” His words trail off into another shrug and when he looks at Lena she smiles softly enough that he returns the expression.
Lena glances over to Kara and finds her face contemplative as she looks over Mon-El. Her blue eyes are focused, a little confused. Lena winds her fingers through the ones splayed across her thigh and squeezes.

“Everything happens for a reason,” Mon-El adds, shooting Kara a small smile. “Krypton exploding brought us all here, right?”

It reminds Lena of Kara saying much the same all those months ago in a small hotel room not too far away. “Every moment is a bridge to the next,” Lena says, nodding at Mon-El and feeling Kara squeeze her fingers.

They’re interrupted by their waiter returning for drink and food orders and the conversation turns towards Kara and Barry’s adventure into the Music Meister’s world – apparently a world in which they were forced to live out a musical.

Lena nearly chokes on her drink when she hears Barry mention one particular detail and she locks eyes with Iris across the table.

“Wait, Iris and Lena?!” Alex says, with an incredulous look of surprise on her face that bleeds into deep amusement. “Like together?”

A look of slight disgust takes hold of Barry’s face and he nods. “Yeah, it was a forbidden romance story.”

Next to her, Kara makes a similar expression and visibly squirms. “Still so weird.”

Iris laughs, raises her glass in Lena’s direction and winks. “I don’t know, I think Lena and I would make quite the couple.”

Amused by the matching looks of horror on Kara and Barry’s faces, Lena laughs with her, raises her own glass as well just as Kara shakes her head and Barry raises his eyes to the sky.


A wave of amusement waves across the table and Lena bumps her shoulder into Kara until Kara allows herself a soft laugh.

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If Lena were being entirely honest, she’d stay on Earth-1 with Kara for another month. Maybe find some bungalow up in the mountains and hole up there safely ensconced away from the near constant danger their life puts in front of them.

But that’s the kind of unrealistic thinking she’s been chastising Kara about for what feels like months now and Lena just barely avoids voicing her feelings to Kara as they’re preparing to head home.

They exchange goodbyes and promises to keep in touch. Lena in particular assures Cisco that the next time she uses the extrapolator it will be for an impromptu vacation and not because Kara’s in some kind of magical coma.

When they get back to the DEO, Winn and J’onn are waiting for their return. Winn hugs them all immediately and, to Lena’s surprise, J’onn steps forward with little hesitation to pull Kara into his arms and then Alex. He even nods warmly at Lena with what feels like some kind of approval she didn’t know she was waiting for.
Alex debriefs the entire thing after forcing Kara to sit under the sunlamps. Lena’s not sure it’s necessary, but there’s no room for argument on Alex’s face so Kara does what she says.

By the time they finally leave and head to Kara’s apartment, Lena’s exhausted.

They move around each other mechanically, Kara speeding out of her suit and into something more comfortable while Lena shuffles into the closet to find her own pair of pajamas to change into.

Eventually, they’re falling into bed and Lena shuffles as close as she can towards Kara. The sudden darkness of the room making her feel shakier than she’d like. Kara must read her mind because after just a few moments of silence she’s blowing out an audible breath up towards the ceiling.

“So that happened,” Kara says and Lena allows herself a laugh.

“It did.”

“Our lives are pretty crazy,” Kara replies, turning her head to look at Lena.

“They are,” Lena agrees, reaching out to tangle her fingers with Kara’s. The need to keep in contact is buzzing so insistently across her skin that she can’t resist it.

Silence descends again until suddenly Kara whispers an, “I’m sorry,” at the exact same time Lena says the same thing.

They share a laugh, but Lena shakes her head. “I don’t think you’re the one that needs to apologize.”

“Neither do you,” Kara says quickly and Lena takes a breath.

“I do though,” she says, shifting in close enough that Kara’s face is clearer in the darkness of the room. “I still think you’ve been overprotective, but…I get it now. And I’m sorry I didn’t before.”

Kara’s quiet for a beat, her brow pulling down. “What – I mean – what changed?”

A wry smile tugs across Lena’s lips. “Watching you nearly die like that put a few things into perspective.”

It had been like that time with Metallo when Kara had lain on the ground unconscious, bleeding from her temple as Lena’d been ripped away from her. But this time was different. This time Lena’d had a front row seat to the way the life started to dim from Kara’s eyes, to the way her blood had felt as it poured out of her stomach and the terrifying realization that there was nothing Lena could do to stop the inevitable.

“I’m fine,” Kara tells her, the words whispered but firm as a look of concern crosses Kara’s face. It pulls Lena out of her memories and back into the present.

“I know that,” Lena replies, her fingers reaching out to press against Kara’s sternum and then up towards her neck where she can feel the steady thump of a heartbeat there. “But I still had your blood all over my hands and I saw the way your face –”

Kara interrupts, gripping Lena’s wrist, right where her watch sits and holding it there firmly. “I’m okay.”

The thick feeling in Lena’s throat feels impossible to talk around, but she swallows the emotion down and nods. “I just – I get it now. I’d do anything to protect you.”
“I don’t need you to protect me,” Kara says and Lena laughs even though it’s not funny.

“I know,” she says. “But I’m going to do it anyway.”

There’s something contemplative about the way Kara’s eyes search Lena’s face, but she smiles after a moment. “I love you. If this is what our lives are going to be like together, I want us to be on the same team. I’m sorry if I’ve been suffocating lately. I’m going to try to be better at that stuff.”

“I’m going to try to be more understanding,” Lena returns before threading forward to press a kiss to Kara’s lips that’s immediately and fervently returned. For half a second, Lena feels like she did in the street, feeling Kara’s life drift out of her as they shared one last kiss. But Kara shifts underneath her, her hands settling with assurance on Lena’s waist as they roll sideways.

“I love you,” Kara says, a smile on her face as they part briefly. They come back together soon after, like always.

“I love you too,” Lena murmurs against Kara’s lips and then everything else is drowned out by the feel of Kara pushing against her.
Chapter 19

It takes a few days for Lena to stop reliving the moment of Kara’s near-death in the Music Meister’s world, but she manages. A significant portion of those days are filled at L Corp where she can bury herself in work for the day, but when free moments come, she searches for anything to avoid just sitting around stewing in her own paranoia.

Any task that sufficiently distracts her will suffice - continuing to search for Lex’s vaults with Lana, working with Winn at the DEO on a tracking program to detect magical and interdimensional activity, tinkering around on plans for upgrading Kara’s suit. The last task is particularly helpful as she at least feels like she’s doing something constructive, something aimed at protecting Kara from things beyond their control.

It helps too that with Kara’s continuing unemployment and lack of anything DEO-related to do, she’s at home most of the time or nearby. There have been more than a few times that Lena’s caught Supergirl flying by L Corp in the middle of the day and has invited Kara inside with a soft, fond sigh and a murmured, “Are you coming in or not?”

Kara will often land on her balcony, cape fluttering behind her as she sheepishly strides inside. “I didn’t want to bother you.”

It’s the same every time, just as Lena’s answer is: “You’re never a bother, darling.”

Some afternoons, when the distractions aren’t enough at L Corp, she’ll finish her workday at Kara’s apartment. On one such afternoon in which Kara’s been attempting to bake something for the past few hours (and failing), she gets a phone call from a contact that makes her heart skip just the slightest.

“Jack?” she greets after connecting the call. Her eyes wander to where Kara’s back noticeably stiffens from her hunched position over the oven. “Hi.”

“Hi,” he returns, the calm tone of his voice making Lena smile.

“How are you doing?”

“Great,” he replies, a little too enthusiastically. “You?”

“Great,” Lena says, though she mocks his enthusiasm as much as she can. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

He laughs softly. “I saw you got my invitation to the event,” he says.

“Yes, the mysterious new unveiling,” she replies, nearly rolling her eyes, but catching Kara’s sudden interest in the conversation. It’s clear Kara’s going for casual with the way she keeps fiddling with utensils on the kitchen counter, but Lena can pick up the signs of Kara using her superhearing a mile away.

“And a plus one as well,” he says, this time his tone much more curious. Lena had forgotten that she’d told Jess to RSVP for Kara and she looks up again to see Kara turning to face her, brow quirked in question. Lena quirks one back.

“Yes, I’ll be bringing someone,” she says, gaze connected with Kara’s. “A reporter I know. I thought you’d appreciate the extra press.”
“A reporter,” he replies, sounding all too knowing in that way he has. “Can I assume it’s the infamous Kara Danvers the papers have been linking you to recently?”

She thinks about denying it – an instinctive defensive reaction more than anything else – but the truth comes out before she can even process the impulse. “It is,” she says, deciding not to fully answer the unspoken question. “She’s one of the best reporters in National City.”

“Oh,” he says and Lena can picture his amused expression. Can see his tiny office at Spheerical and the way he’s probably rocking back and forth in his office chair. “Well, I look forward to meeting her then.”

Turning away from the quizzical look in Kara’s eyes, Lena goes for a change in subject. “Are you going to let me in on this new IP of yours?”

“And ruin the surprise?”

“Tell me it’s the nanobots,” Lena says, curiosity getting the better of her. The nanotech had been something she and Jack had worked on together for ages, but they’d never quite finished it and Lena’d left before they really had a chance. It’s the only logical thing Spheerical could be rolling out.

Jack tsks disapprovingly down the line. “You were never one for patience, were you?”

“I just think I have a right to know,” she replies airily, but laughing at the end of it. “And I think you enjoy jerking me around.”

His laugh is warm and bright. “It’s certainly an added benefit.”

“Is that why you called?”

Another laugh. “No, I was just hoping we could connect while I’m in town. Perhaps dinner after the event? It’s been an age.”

The thought of having dinner with Jack after so long feels a bit nerve-wracking. So many things have changed about her life since last they saw each other. Kara clearly tunes into the way Lena’s heartbeat picks up, taking a step further toward the living room where Lena’s settled, and Lena hopes Kara isn’t misinterpreting the reason.

“I’ll check my schedule,” is the only answer Lena thinks to give.

Thankfully, Jack doesn’t seem like he’s going to push her. “Very well.”

“I look forward to the press conference,” Lena says softly and when Jack returns a, “Me too,” she can hear his smile.

“Have a good night, Jack.” And with that, Lena hangs the call up and turns back to the laptop she has set on the coffee table, ignoring the way Kara’s staring at her.

As she returns to an e-mail from her legal team about a new patent filing, she wonders how long Kara will be able to stave off her curiosity and stay silent.

The answer is barely a minute. Kara ends up plopping down next to her on the couch and propping her feet on the coffee table, going for casual and failing with the way her eyes train on Lena.

“That was Jack?” Kara asks and Lena shoots her an amused look.
“Have you run out of baked goods to burn?”

Kara flushes attractively, an offended push to her lips. “Rude,” she mumbles, before staying on subject. “What did Jack want?”

Lena laughs. “I know you heard every word.”

Holding her hands up defensively, Kara tries to look innocent. “I wasn’t trying to.”

“Jack’s coming to town this week,” Lena tells her despite knowing full well Kara heard the entire phone call. There’s something endearing about the warmth in her cheeks, the honest expression on her face that Lena’s always felt so weak to.

“We’re going to his press conference?” Kara asks, brow arching inquisitively. “Both of us?”

This time it’s Lena’s turn to feel sheepish. She’d entirely forgotten to clue Kara into the event. “It’s for some new IP of his. He’d sent me an invite a while back and I’d RSVP’d.”

“For both of us,” Kara adds with a curious inflection.

“I thought you might want to go,” she replies. “I was offered a plus one and I think it’d make a great story. You can blob about it. You’ve been trying to find a good story for awhile now.”

Though Kara’d still been mostly put out by her firing from CatCo, she’d started to take Lena’s advice and continue with her blog. It’d been mostly posts about things happening in the alien activist community, but a few of her articles detailed whatever leaks Lena could afford to give her about L Corp’s activities. It was a questionable blurring of personal and professional lines, but if it put a smile on Kara’s face, Lena was willing to make the sacrifice.

Kara nods slowly, making an affirmative sounding noise through her lips and looking like she’s thinking really hard about the suggestion.

Smothering a smile at the look of conflict on Kara’s face, Lena reaches out to tug at the bracelet on Kara’s wrist. “Unless you don’t want to,” Lena offers and Kara’s blush goes a little deeper.

“No, no, no, it sounds fun.”

“It should certainly be interesting. If I know Jack, he’s somehow completed the nanobot project,” Lena says, abandoning her laptop once again in favor of moving closer to Kara on the couch. “I’m pretty curious to see how he did it myself.”

“Nanobots?” Kara asks, but her eyes track the motion of Lena’s hands as they get closer and attach themselves to Kara’s body, their limbs shifting easily around each other until they’re all but cuddled on the couch.

It’s been almost a week since the incident on Earth-1, but Lena still finds herself needing physical connection with Kara just to reassure herself they’re both alive and together.

“It was a biotech project Jack and I had been working on for a few years until I left Metropolis to come here,” Lena informs her. “We never quite got the algorithm correct for the swarm. I’m… surprised he was able to crack it.”

“And mad he did it without you,” Kara adds softly, a knowing twist to her lips.

Lena quirks a brow but doesn’t deny it. “It’s more that…I hate that I don’t know the answer,” she
says. “And he does.”

Kara nods understandingly, her fingers finding Lena’s and twisting together. “Was there some big thing that you couldn’t figure out?”

Thinking back on the project brings back so many memories, Lena doesn’t really know where to begin. She shrugs, shuffling through the various roadblocks they’d come across. “There were a lot of things,” she says. “The nano swarm had serious side effects. All of the rats during trials…their brain chemistry was forever altered.”

“What do you mean?”

“They had no control,” Lena explains. “We could make them do whatever we wanted.”

“And that wasn’t the point?” Kara asks.

Lena laughs, idly playing with the bracelet around Kara’s wrist. “No. Not at all. Think about how dangerous that could be with humans. That kind of power in the wrong hands.”

What she doesn’t say - who she doesn’t mention - is still obvious in the silence that follows. There are about five people off the top of her head she’d never want to know about the potential of the nano swarm. Two of them are related to her. Kara makes a small noise. “Yeah, you’re right.”

“Yeah,” Lena says with a soft chuckle that comes out more like a sigh. “But if Jack’s marketing it like this he must have found a way around all that.”

“Well, at least you’ll get a chance to ask him,” Kara points out and Lena agrees with a conceding shrug of her shoulder.

“True,” she says softly, letting her body drift further into Kara’s.

“Will it be weird to see him again?”

Lena gives the question consideration even though the little drop in her stomach is answer enough. “Yes,” she answers simply.

Kara’s quiet for a moment, her thumb stroking over Lena’s hand in a soothing motion. “You know, you never really told me why you guys broke up.”

Absurdly, it makes Lena laugh. “I was moving to National City,” Lena says as if that explains anything.

“And so you broke up with him?”

Lena thinks on that, recalls the memory of her last moments with Jack - informing him of her new title in the company, packing up her apartment, driving to the airport. “I suppose I never technically broke up with him,” she muses.

Seeing Kara’s horrified expression, Lena laughs again, settles a hand on Kara’s forearm to clarify, “I did, we just never really had the conversation explicitly.”

“What do you mean?”

“I told him I was taking over at Luthor Corp, that I was renaming the company and moving it to National City and then I just kind of...never implied he should follow. Or that we’d stay together. I just said goodbye to him at the airport and that was it.”
“That’s…” Kara trails off into an introspective sounding hum.

“Yeah, I know,” Lena says, rolling her eyes mostly at myself. “I have a certain style, don’t I?”

“That’s not what I was going to say,” Kara replies, putting a hand to her chest as if offended.

“Still true,” Lena says with a wry twist to her lips.

“I was going to say why didn’t you tell him to follow you? Why’d you have to break up just because you were moving?” The look on her face must be amusing because Kara laughs at her. “I’m serious.”

In all honesty, Lena hadn’t really considered that option. Once she knew she was moving to National City, it had never occurred to Lena to take Jack with her even though she knew he would if she’d only ask. “It seemed like the right thing to do,” is all Lena can think to say. “Jack and I were...we were heading that direction anyway.”

Not entirely the truth - Lena’s fairly certain if she’d stayed in Metropolis, if Lex had never gone crazy, if she’d never run into Kara again, she’d have spent the rest of her life with Jack. Lived out a halfway normal, though incredibly boring, existence with a man who loved her. And she had loved him, too, in her own way.

There was just something about deciding to go to National City that meant Jack wouldn’t follow.

“Good thing, I suppose,” Kara says and Lena can hear the tease in her tone. “I don’t know what I would have done if you’d showed up here with a boyfriend in tow.”

Lena’d imagined it, actually. Or something of the sort. Of what she’d have done if Kara had shown up randomly in Metropolis one day. Or they’d run into each other on one of the many business trips she’d taken with Jack. “That would have been awkward,” she jokes, wincing a bit at the idea.

“Totally,” Kara agrees with exaggeration. “I mean, for you to just drop him like a bad habit the second you saw me again. I feel bad for the guy.”

Kara barely gets through the sentence without laughing and it makes Lena laugh as well though she tries for a glare, pulling back enough to face Kara, but failing to keep the expression up. She shoves at Kara anyway, though it carries no strength and Kara merely captures her wrists and pulls her forward until they’re kissing.

It relaxes all the muscles in Lena’s body and she lets herself get pushed back onto the couch, the solid weight of Kara pressing down on her making her feel grounded and warm. Their conversation is forgotten as Lena relishes in the strong pull of Kara’s fingers and the confident path her lips take as they work their way down Lena’s body.

It isn’t until a loud beeping sound interrupts them that Lena registers the pungent smell of something burning. Kara’s head shoots up from where it’s perched near Lena’s hipbone and Lena looks to the kitchen. “Did you leave the oven on?”

Letting out a curse word, Kara vaults over the back of the couch and Lena slumps back onto the cushions, her palms covering her face as an exasperated laugh leaves her mouth. “Try not to break anything,” she instructs even as she hears the sound Kara’s frost breath and the distinct noise of glass breaking.

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Apart from the Spheerical event towards the end of the week, there isn’t anything too pressing on Lena’s docket. For the first time in a while it feels like things at L Corp are settling down and finding some kind of rhythm.

As has become habit, she spends more time with Winn working on their little side-project concerning Kara’s suit.

It’s gone pretty well so far. Winn is easy to work with and has an enthusiasm for the endeavor that warms Lena’s heart. They’ve gotten pretty far in modifying Kara’s suit to add a bit more armor plating and mobility. It’s finally at a point where they can start making prototypes and have Kara test them out.

“Kara will be safe from pretty much anything,” Winn says with a satisfied little smile. He shrugs a shoulder, his smile dipping only slightly. “Except good old-fashioned Kryptonite, I guess.”

It’s an absentminded statement and maybe if Lena hadn’t already been swimming in a kind of shaky paranoia about Kara being hurt or killed she might have laughed it off. As it is, however, her brain starts moving quickly with the truth of it. The suit is great, it’ll protect Kara from most anything that could come its way. But a sliver of Kryptonite is all anyone would need to destroy its defenses.

“You’re right,” Lena murmurs, a frustration starting to clench in her jaw. Winn must take note of it because he sits up, his brow a little furrowed.

“It’s a good suit, Lena. Definitely an improvement over my first model.”

But her brain can’t stop the spiraling thoughts, the terrifying image of Kara with a green glow in her veins.

She has to try.

“Does the DEO still have Kryptonite in their inventory?”

The suddenness of her question is likely what makes his face go tense and he hesitates a moment before shaking his head with a smile too forced looking to really pull off casual.

“Superman put up a big stink with J’onn about the DEO storing Kryptonite. We destroyed it all last year.”

It’s a lie. Of that Lena’s fairly certain – Kara had mentioned herself that they’d kept just enough around for things like the Kryptonite walls in the training room – something she’s seen with her own eyes. She’s just not certain why Winn might be lying and tries not to run to the usual knee-jerk conclusion her brain supplies.

“Is that so?” The arch of her eyebrow makes his eyes flirt to the side.

“Yup,” Winn says with a pop of his lips. They regard each other for a long moment and Lena doesn’t resist the steely gaze that takes over her face – the kind of expression she levels on board members she needs to rein back into line. It works on Winn in seconds and his entire being deflates.

“Oh, we might have kept a little,” he admits, blowing out a breath like the five second charade’s exhausted him. “It’s crazy top secret.”

“I’ve been in that Kryptonite training room,” Lena says dryly, declining to mention Kara’d said as
much as well. Winn makes a face with a soft drawn out right. “Have you run any tests on it? Are there records?”

“Me personally? With the Kryptonite?” Winn says, pointing to himself and laughing. “No.”

“Do you think we could acquire a sample?” Lena asks, hearing how absurd the question is, but going for it nonetheless.

Winn’s jaw drops open wordlessly, his finger still pointed square at his chest for a few beats before he shakes himself out of it and adopts a look of pure incredulity. “Lena…Kryptonite is like…you’re talking about…I mean I can’t just –”

“You’re right,” Lena says and it’s clear he thinks she’s talking about how crazy it sounds to want to get her hands on some Kryptonite. “This suit is good, but it’s not going to be any good to Kara against the tiniest amount of Kryptonite. I can’t know how to protect her from it if I don’t even understand the element myself.”

Winn blinks at her, clearly confronted by the truth in what she’s saying, but a mixture of resistance and impossibility plays over his face. A few silent seconds pass before he speaks. “Nothing good has ever come from anyone having Kryptonite,” Winn says, slowly as if he’s trying to be careful about all his words. “Even in the hands of the good guys.”

Lena can see she’s not going to get through to him. At least not right now. His eyes are darting over her face, judging her reaction and she lets a little conceding smile grace her lips. “I just want to do whatever I can to protect her,” she says softly and his shoulders droop, his smile warm.

“I know you do,” he says, putting a hand out to briefly touch her shoulder. “But we’d be better off trying to destroy what’s left of that stuff.”

“Yeah,” she replies, but her brain’s already searching for another avenue to her goal. “You’re right.”

“I mean, think about it. Your mom tried to replicate it and it was so unstable it blew up an entire storehouse,” he says, turning back to the screen in front of him with the specs for the suit. “Max Lord tried to make some once too and could only make a red version of the element that completely messed with Kara’s mind.”

If Winn thinks he’s dissuading Lena from investigating Kryptonite, he’s surely doing the opposite. A distant memory surfaces of Kara mentioning the red Kryptonite all those months ago on Earth-1.

“Kara’d mentioned she was exposed to red Kryptonite,” Lena says, turning towards a prototype sitting on the table of the wrist bracers they’re thinking of adding to the suit. She goes for casual as she continues. “Said it destroys inhibitions.”

“Yeah,” Winn says with a laugh blown out on a heavy breath. “That’s one way to put it.”

“What’s another way?”

Winn shrugs a shoulder, punching in a set of numbers on his screen and glancing at her. “Well she basically carved a path of destruction through downtown. She broke Alex’s arm, threw Cat Grant off a building, messed with James and Lucy’s relationship, and was about seconds from going off to Metropolis for whatever reason when we finally stopped her.”

The mention of heading to Metropolis sends a cold shiver down her spine. Winn might not realize the reason, but Lena can see it clear as day – wonders for a second what she would have done if a
red Kryptonite affected Supergirl had shown up on her balcony in Metropolis years ago. “How did you finally stop her?” Lena asks, swallowing the lump in her throat.

“Max gave us an antidote for it and Alex had to shoot her with it. Broken arm and all,” Winn says, a twist to his lips betraying how upsetting the whole ordeal must have been. “It wasn’t good. Kara and Alex were a mess for a long time after that. From what I heard Kara said some things to Alex while under the influence that kind of…tipped everything on its side.”

It aches across Lena’s chest to think about. Kara had certainly glossed over a few details when she’d relayed the story all that time ago.

“That’s…” Lena can’t find the right words.

“Yeah,” Winn agrees with a sad sounding laugh. “Like I said, Kryptonite just never goes well around here. Even Alex’s Kryptonite armor and sword got destroyed after the whole killing Astra, controlled by Non and fighting Kara thing happened.”

The air in the room feels like it goes suddenly thin, pulling quickly out of Lena’s throat as she processes. “The what thing happened?”

Lena has just enough knowledge of Kara’s family tree to recognize the name, the shock of what Winn’s saying – as offhanded as he said it – runs down her spine.

It must occur to Winn quickly that this is new information for Lena. His eyes go wide as he turns to her, his cheeks visibly paling. “I mean, Kara told you about Myriad and all that stuff, right?”

Myriad. Myriad. Lena’s brain shuffles around to try and understand the word and it occurs to her suddenly that in all their time reconciling their own pasts they haven’t talked much in depth about their time apart. They’d covered some things, of course. But from one small conversation with Winn it feels like she’s missed so much of what’s happened to Kara.

A memory finally surfaces, and she remembers a news story about National City on lockdown – about a mind-controlling substance that was turning the city population into something like zombies.

“Refresh my memory,” Lena says softly, trying to keep her voice from sounding too firm.

Winn squirms in his chair, clearly uncomfortable. “Look, this really feels like something Kara should tell you about. It was her family and all that stuff.”

“Astra was her aunt, right?” Lena says, trying to put all the pieces together. Vague memories of Kara explaining her family tree during late nights in their field flit across her consciousness.

“That’s right,” Winn says after a beat.

“And Alex killed her?”

Winn doesn’t answer right away, his lips twisted and pressed together. “Like I said,” he starts, his expression pleading with her to let him off the hook. “Nothing good has ever come from Kryptonite. Even in the hands of the good guys.”

It makes her think of Lex, of his vaults and of the warsuit they’d once built. If Max Lord was here in National City creating Kryptonite, if her own mother was using Cadmus to do the same, it’s likely almost unavoidable that Lex was likely working on it as well.
They’d already found one stockpile of Cadmus-created Kryptonite. Who knows how many more are out there – if her mother already has her hands on it. Though she’s had similar thoughts before, they seem to come with added intensity now, the paranoia of having almost lost Kara mere days ago making her skin crawl.

She had told Kara once - *if I can protect you, I will.* She doesn’t feel any different now. If anything, the fervent need to do everything in her power to shield Kara from danger feels overwhelming.

“Right,” Lena says, trying for a smile that will pacify the concerned look on Winn’s face. The agreement sounds about as empty as it could in her ears, but the furrow in Winn’s brow smooths and he seems to buy it.

As he changes the subject to an upgrade on his newest battle bot, Lena’s thoughts continue to wander and seem incapable of focusing on anything other than the new issues in front of her.

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Kara comes and finds her long after Winn’s left. Lena’d stayed in her office unable to get her brain to quiet down. Between thinking about Alex possibly killing Kara’s favorite aunt and the problem of trying to find a way to guard Kara against Kryptonite, Lena’s sure she’s going to have to be sedated in order to sleep tonight.

“Hey,” Kara says, knocking on the door softly and stepping inside. “I went to your apartment, but you weren’t there.”

“Sorry,” Lena says, closing her laptop on a detailed newspaper article titled *National City Turned to Zombies by Myriad Attack.* “I’ve had a lot of work. Did you need something?”

Kara stops abruptly, halfway across the carpet to Lena’s desk. “Do I need to need something to want to see you?”

That shakes Lena out of her mood and she stands, running her fingers through the hair she’d let down sometime after she’d finished working in the lab. “Of course not, I’m sorry. It’s just been a long day.”

“You okay?” Kara asks, resuming her walk forward and circling the desk until she’s close enough to pull Lena into a hug.

“Yeah,” Lena breathes, already feeling better just being next to Kara, feeling her solid and certain beneath her finger tips and smelling the lingering tropical scent of her shampoo. “How was your day?”

“Fine,” Kara replies, her fingers kneading into Lena’s back in such an efficient way that Lena nearly moans at the feeling. “I came to see if you wanted to come with me to the bar. I think Alex and James and maybe Lucy are meeting up there.”

The thought of socializing right now starts the ghost of a headache in the back of her brain and Lena sags a bit into Kara’s embrace. “If that’s what you want,” she says quietly.

Kara’s fingers move up into her hair, scratching at her scalp and Lena presses her face into Kara’s sternum feeling languid. “What I want is to be with you, so if just going home sounds better, I’m all for it.”

“I hate to keep you from your friends,” Lena says, the words muffled by Kara’s shirt.
“You’re not,” she says and before Lena can continue half-hearted protests, she continues. “Why don’t you and I go back to your place, draw a bath in that huge jacuzzi tub you never use and open up a bottle of wine that I won’t appreciate?”

It makes Lena chuckle, but it also sounds so heavenly that the laugh turns into a grateful sounding groan. “You’re my favorite,” Lena says, trying to let the dark and complicated thoughts she’d been swirling in earlier fade away. At least for the moment.

Without much movement, Kara manages to curl an arm around Lena’s waist and pick her up off the ground, one hand still rubbing circles at the top of her neck and onto her shoulders. “You got everything you need?” Kara asks, clearly indicating she’s about to fly them both out the balcony – probably irresponsible considering Kara’s in her street clothes, but Lena feels almost too tired to care.

“You should change before you fly us anywhere,” Lena says, tugging at the back of Kara’s shirt, but not moving away.

“Nah,” Kara says. “I’m sneaky.”

Lena laughs. “No, you’re not.”

Kara feigns offense. “I can be if I want to,” she defends.

“Come on,” Lena says, picking her head up off Kara’s chest to look at her. “I’ll call my driver. With our luck someone will see us fly off the balcony and it’ll be all over the TV in the morning.”

“Cars take forever,” Kara whines, but she puts Lena back on the ground and allows herself to be led downstairs all the same.

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As promised, Kara draws them a warm bath and pulls out a bottle of wine from a vineyard she can barely pronounce. She tries, in a terribly affected French accent, twirling an invisible mustache, and it nearly succeeds in pushing away the thoughts in Lena’s head.

Nearly. It seems impossible to really stop thinking about it all. If she could get her hands on the records about Kryptonite and how it affects Kryptonians on a cellular level, she could use what she knows of Kara’s biology to work backwards, she could engineer fabrics and plating that would protect Kara, and even Superman. It swirls around in her brain as she sips her wine and watches Kara settle into the warm bath.

They sit at opposite ends of the tub, their legs sliding together and facing each other, Kara putting on some soft music and sitting in relatively calm silence for a few minutes.

“Are you going to tell me what’s weighing so heavy up there?” Kara asks eventually, pointing with her glass to Lena’s head. Lena eyes her, unsure how to unleash the cavalcade of thoughts twisting through her head. She decides against bringing up the Kryptonite issue and instead settles on something no less complicated, but much more accessible.

“Winn told me an interesting story today,” Lena says, wary of her approach, but wanting to breach the subject regardless. “It made me realize how little we’ve really talked about our time apart.”

“We’ve talked about it,” Kara protests, her brow crinkling in a way that has Lena leaning forward to rub her thumb across it. Kara’s face smooths over momentarily in response, her hand landing on Lena’s knee.
“Not really,” she murmurs, still leaned in close. “Not about everything.”

“What did Winn tell you?” Kara asks, a wary look in her eye.

“Just some details about the red Kryptonite incident you might have glossed over and a bit about Myriad,” Lena answers.

Kara’s reaction is immediate. Her face goes hard and closes off. “Myriad?”

“Yes,” Lena says slowly, trying to judge Kara’s response.

“I’m sure it made news in Metropolis,” Kara says, her eyes intent on Lena’s for a moment as if searching for something.

“It did,” Lena replies, still feeling a sting of shame that she hadn’t really paid much attention to it. It was often like that. Metropolis had its own problems and National City was so far away. She remembers the snippets of Supergirl’s speech that they ran on the nightly news “But from what Winn mentioned, it was more personal for you than the news might have made it out to be.”

Impossibly, Kara’s face pulls tighter. “Which part? The part where my own people tried to mind control the entirety of National City or the part where my aunt died in my arms?”

Kara’s failure to mention Alex’s part in Astra’s death beats something heavy into Lena’s chest that has nothing to do with the angry cut of Kara’s jaw.

Undeterred by the steel in Kara’s voice, Lena lets her leg press into Kara’s. “Both, I’d imagine,” she says simply and it seems to loosen some of Kara’s expression.

“Why was Winn even talking about that?”

“He thought I knew,” Lena says with a pointed arch of her brow. “Which is when it occurred to me how much we hadn’t talked about.”

Suddenly, and far more athletically than Lena expects, Kara vaults herself out of the tub and onto the bathroom tile, reaching for a nearby towel and leaving Lena to flinch away from the small wake of water. “He shouldn’t be talking about that stuff with you.”

“What are you doing?” Lena asks, irritated by Kara’s abrupt departure. “Get back in the tub.”

“I’m going to go tell Winn to mind his business,” Kara says, swiping a towel down her torso and then throwing it back on a hook. Lena tries not to get distracted by Kara’s stark naked form just standing there in front of her, but her brain already felt like mush earlier and this certainly isn’t helping.

“Kara, come back here please,” Lena entreats, holding a hand out towards her in invitation. Her tone must be pitiful enough because Kara’s face softens, and she does as Lena asks, stepping back into the tub slowly.

“Here,” Lena adds when Kara moves as if to retreat to the side opposite her. Instead, Lena tugs at her forearm until Kara’s turning and backing up between Lena’s legs, her back resting against Lena’s chest and head falling to Lena’s shoulder.

It’s a reversal of their usual position, but it feels nice to be the one cradling Kara for a change, wrapping her arms over Kara’s chest and placing a comforting kiss to her temple. “Sorry I brought it up,” Lena murmurs.
Sagging further against Lena’s body and into the warm water, Lena sighs. “No, you’re right. We haven’t really talked about that kind of stuff. Mostly because I just don’t like to,” Kara admits, craning her neck to the side and letting it loll on Lena’s shoulder. “Some of it’s just too hard, I think.”

“I get that,” Lena says, knowing it’s one of the reasons she still can’t talk about Lex. Not really.

“How did that even come up with you guys?”

Lena considers her answer a moment. “We were talking about Kryptonite, I guess,” she says. “And he was illustrating how dangerous it can be.”

Kara hums affirmatively, her fingers capturing Lena’s and playing with them in the water. “So that’s how Maxwell Lord and his famous red Kryptonite came up?”

“When you mentioned it on Earth-1, you left out a few details,” Lena comments softly, not trying to push Kara, but wanting to know nonetheless.

“What did Winn tell you?” Kara asks, voice equally soft. Her shoulders are still a little tense where they rest against Lena’s chest and she tightens her hold the slightest in an effort to soften them.

“We don’t actually have to talk about it,” Lena says, aching at the unnaturally quiet tone of Kara’s voice. “I just want you to know that you can talk to me if you want. I feel like I’ve missed so much.”

“No, it’s -” Kara sighs, her shoulders finally deflating, head turning until her temple bumps softly against Lena’s chin. “I should talk about it. If only because you should probably know about the time your girlfriend turned into an awful power hungry supervillain for a day.”

“The red Kryptonite seems like it does a lot more than just destroy inhibitions,” Lena mentions, remembering Kara’s depiction of events when they’d spoken about it on Earth-1.

Kara makes a noise in her throat, punctuate it with a bitter chuckle. “The things I said to Alex...I could barely look at her after that. It took weeks until we felt close to normal again.”

“That must have been really hard,” Lena says, unable to stop her thoughts from wandering towards Lex, towards all the fractures in their relationship. Little fissures she’s sure will never truly be healed.


“You’ve clearly earned back their trust,” Lena points out and Kara makes a noise of agreement, but offers nothing more. They’re silent a bit until Lena speaks again. “Do you want to talk about Astra?”

Kara freezes up for a second before sighing the tension away. “What do you want to know?”

“Anything you want to tell me,” Lena says. “I just - had no idea that she was even alive, let alone that she had died.”

“It was a fun surprise,” Kara says, blandly, her fingers tracing the skin of Lena’s thighs. “Apparently, my pod pulled a whole Phantom Zone prison with it, and Astra and Non were on it. So they show up, try to eliminate humanity with Myriad, and then I - I was fighting Non, and Alex and J’onn were fighting Astra, and I was - distracted. It was right after the Black Mercy thing, and I was so angry and so focused on making him hurt the way he had hurt me...I didn’t even realize
she’d been stabbed until it was too late. I didn’t even hear it happen.”

Lena doesn’t know what to say apart from a sincere, “I’m sorry.”

“J’onn took the blame for Alex for a bit,” Kara adds. “I’m not sure why I bought it. Maybe wishful thinking. But Astra was stabbed by a Kryptonite sword we had at the DEO and I’d only ever really seen Alex be the one to use it.”

The mention of the sword brings Lena back to the thoughts that’d been brewing since the conversation with Winn earlier that afternoon. “I didn’t realize the DEO had Kryptonite weaponry,” she says, trying to remain casual.

“They don’t,” Kara says, a bit of a scoff forming. “Not anymore.”

“No?”

“Nope,” Kara answers, popping the word on her lips and tapping her fingers against Lena’s legs. “The only Kryptonite at the DEO anymore is used to power the training room.”

“Because of what happened to Astra?”

“Partly,” Kara answers. “But also because Clark basically froze J’onn out over the issue and frankly I agreed with him. Nothing good comes from having Kryptonite around. Max Lord tries to make it, it turns me evil. Cadmus tries to give a guy a Kryptonite heart and it blows up a mountain. Alex gets a Kryptonite suit and she gets mind controlled and attacks me.”

It’s a mirror of Winn’s comments and Lena’s not sure if she has the energy to push the issue. The itch to get her hands on some Kryptonite to study it feels all the more nagging in the back of her mind, but she can tell there’s nothing to be gained from talking about with Kara at present.

“It sounds like a lot happened in our time apart,” Lena says, not knowing what else to say.

Kara answers with a soft sounding laugh, her head sliding over Lena’s shoulder. “Yeah and to top it all off, I spent a lot of time pining after some girl that left me in an airport years ago.”

It takes a second for Lena to register the comment, but when she does she makes an offended noise, reaching into the water to splash it into Kara’s laughing face.

“Hey,” Kara protests, indignantly shielding herself from Lena’s attack. “Unnecessary.”

Without much warning, Kara lifts up in the tub and turns around until she’s hovered over Lena, the water splashing violently around them and making Lena sputter into her laughter. “Are we done talking about sad stuff, yet?” Kara asks, floating above Lena’s body, half in the water and half out.

“Better idea?” Lena asks, brow arched pointedly and chin lifted in slight defiance.

Kara’s smile makes Lena’s body feel warm in the tepid water, heat increasing as Kara’s face moves in closer to her own. A beat of silence. “Have you ever seen the show Dogs with Jobs?” Kara asks, the comment so random Lena can only blink at her a moment.

“You want to go watch television?” Lena asks and Kara’s smirk does things to Lena’s stomach that has her brain feeling fuzzy.

“For now,” is the only answer Kara gives before sliding an arm under Lena’s waist and lifting them both out of the tub.
Lena can barely catch her breath. She feels like she just ran a marathon and then some. The air feels thin and hot and her entire body feels limp like it might pull straight through the mattress. Kara shuffles beside her, but Lena’s barely aware of the movement.

“That was...uh...” Lena feels at a loss for words and Kara chuckles, the sound a little self-conscious as she returns back to the sheets.

“Yeah?” Kara asks, running a hand over Lena’s stomach. The motion flutters something across the ache between Lena’s legs and lord if her body would only comply, she’d go again. Honestly, she’s not so sure her body won’t just comply anyway.

“Yeah,” Lena laughs, shifting over to press a kiss to Kara’s swollen lips. “Happy Valentine’s Day. Glad I bought that last minute gift.”

Kara returns the sound happily. “I like this holiday, it’s one of the good ones here.”

“I’m sure,” Lena says, her voice feeling thick and languid.

They hover near each other, Lena soaking in Kara’s warmth and feeling like if she closed her eyes she might sleep for a week.

Just as she’s about to drift off, she feels Kara move again, reaching for something nearby and when she opens her eyes, Kara’s sitting up in bed and scribbling something on a notepad.

“Kara?” Lena asks, reaching out to run her fingers across the play of muscles at Kara’s back.

“What are you doing?”

“Sorry, I just have to get this down,” Kara mumbles, still writing.

Curiosity brings Lena to a sitting position and she peers over Kara’s shoulder at the paper. “Get what down?”

“I had an idea for an article and I don’t want to forget it.”

“An article?” Lena asks, unsure if her inability to follow this conversation is for lack of context or because Kara’d so effectively worked her over that her brain no longer operates at peak efficiency.

Kara hums, still focused on pen and paper. “I’m trying to write onto the school paper for next year.”

“Oh,” Lena says, the first she’s hearing of it. Curiosity satisfied, she falls back against her pillow. “That’s cool.”

A twinge of sadness twists in her gut at the reminder that Kara will be here at school next year and Lena...will not. But reporter seems like a good enough interest for Kara, who finds something to be curious about every day and has very little patience for meanness or lies. And it seems about right considering how many days her mother calls and mentions that pesky Clark Kent or Lois Lane beating down her door.

“Yeah, I have a bunch of good ideas,” Kara says, finally seeming to finish and throw her notepad back on the nearby desk.

“Yeah?” Lena asks, arching her brow. “Don’t tell me that’s what you were thinking about when
Lena makes a gesture between them as Kara turn backs toward her, and Kara looks so offended by the suggestion Lena nearly laughs.

“No, of course not,” Kara says, sliding until she’s half on top of Lena again. “Trust me, you had my full attention.”

Lena hooks her knee up to bracket Kara’s hip and bring them closer together. The damp, warm slide of their bodies giving her a renewed sense of energy. “Good to hear.”

“You need me to prove it to you?” Kara says, a hint of challenge in her voice that turns like liquid in Lena’s stomach.

“I wouldn’t be opposed,” she murmurs seconds before Kara captures her lips and robs her of any further thought.

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The Spheerical event falls on a Thursday just before lunch and Kara meets her at L Corp so they can walk over together. The press credentials Lena’d acquired for Kara hang from a lanyard around her neck and she’s already holding a pad of paper in her hand scribbled with questions.

“Let me see that,” Lena says, trying to snatch it from Kara’s hands, but Kara’s much too quick and avoids the move.

“Hey, journalist working here,” Kara protests, stumbling exaggeratedly when Lena swats at her.

“I could probably help you with that,” Lena points out, but Kara shakes her head.

“You’re a biased party.”

“And you’re not?”

“I don’t even know Jack,” Kara grumbles, scratching something across the page in a hurried scribble that Lena can’t quite make out.

“That’s not what I meant.”

Kara shoots her an unimpressed look before flipping the cover of her notepad over to close it. “I’m a professional,” she mutters, and Lena is hopelessly endeared to the flush in her cheeks.

“Much more so than I am at the moment,” Lena admits, remembering again what they’re doing there – that she’s going to see Jack again after leaving him on a private runway in Metropolis over a year ago.

“Nervous?” Kara asks, softly and with an open expression that beats against Lena’s heart.

“I haven’t seen him in some time. And the last time I did, I was basically breaking up with him and getting on a plane to come here,” Lena says, and Kara snakes an arm around her waist, their bodies coming together warmly.

“He wouldn’t have invited you if he felt any kind of ill will or whatever,” Kara comments and Lena can hear the probability of that.

“It’s still weird.”
“Yeah,” Kara says, and then laughs. “But as someone that’s had experience in this exact situation on Jack’s side of things…”

As she realizes what Kara’s referring to, Lena stops walking. Suddenly enough that Kara stumbles with the effort to avoid yanking Lena forward and comes to a stop in front of her. “That’s different,” Lena says, crossing her arms and shooting Kara a pointed look.

Kara’s smile however is teasing, wide and playful. “How?”

Rolling her eyes, Lena can’t help but laugh at Kara’s expression, grateful for the way the exchange is at least calming her. “You know how.”

“Sure,” Kara replies with a shrug of her shoulder. “But you can say it anyway.”

“Yes, I could,” Lena says, moving to walk around Kara and continue down the path. “But I’m not going to.”

“You’re no fun,” Kara pouts, turning to catch up and walk in stride.

Lena scoffs, but a laugh curls around the sound. “You need to hear yet again how nothing in my life has ever compared to the way I feel about you?”

“Honestly?” Kara says, sounding suddenly more serious than before. Lena turns to look at her, heart beating solidly at Kara’s unwavering stare. “I could hear it every day and it probably wouldn’t be enough.”

It stops Lena again and she studies the blue of Kara’s eyes a moment. “Kara,” she breathes out.

“Life’s short, right?” Kara says, and Lena thinks that’s a ridiculous thing for a near-immortal to say, but there’s a lingering image of blood seeping from Kara’s stomach that has Lena’s throat tightening. “I want to make sure you know every day that I love you more than anyone.”

“I know that,” Lena says softly, wanting to reach out and touch Kara’s face, but mindful of the people milling about them on their way down the sidewalk. No one pays that much attention to them, but Lena’s self-conscious to a fault.

“Good,” Kara says, a satisfied nod at the answer.

Lena chews at her bottom lip. “Do you too?”

“Do I what too?”

“Know that I love you more than anyone,” Lena supplies, and Kara’s eyes take on a shade of blue that makes Lena want to press in close and skip this event all together.

“I do,” Kara says softly, her voice thick and smooth across Lena’s skin.

“Good,” Lena replies, and they share a smile for a long moment.

“You ready to go in now?” Kara asks, gesturing with a nod of her head towards the entrance plaza to the convention center they’d been heading too. Lena hadn’t realized just how close they’d gotten.

She laughs and nods, but before they turn to walk in she reaches out and circles Kara’s wrist with her hand, the metal of Kara’s bracelet bleeding into her palm. “Thanks,” she says quietly though she’s not even sure herself for what.
“For coming with you?” Kara suggests, putting her own hand over Lena’s and squeezing it warmly.
“What are friends for?”

It makes Lena laugh again before she tugs Kara forward towards the double doored entrance.

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The lobby is moderately busy, but they get checked in and through security easily enough. The invite list seems to have been kept small, only about half the seating available is filling up. Kara leads them down towards the front in search of seating, pulling her notebook out again in preparation.

As they’re scooting down a row to take two open seats, Kara stops abruptly. So suddenly, that Lena nearly goes colliding into her and only stops with a steadying hand on Kara’s forearm. “Kara, what the –”

“Wow,” she hears from just around Kara’s shoulder, and she turns her attention to see Snapper Carr taking a seat in front of them, a look of detached distaste so clearly written across his scowl. “They really let anyone into these things, don’t they?”

Lena recovers more quickly than Kara, and her gaze goes frosty. “She’s here with me,” she tells him, but his look of disdain only deepens when he looks over to her.

“I suppose trophy wife is certainly better than the implication that blogging qualifies for a press pass,” he says, his voice the kind of gravelly and unimpressed that makes Lena want to buy CatCo just to fire him.

“Excuse me?” Lena says, her spine straightening and venom pooling on her tongue before Kara’s hand on her wrist restrains her.

“Just let it go,” Kara says softly. “He’s not worth it.”

Lena’s not so sure of that. She’d like to have a few words with Kara’s arrogant former boss, but the lights start to dim in the auditorium and she doesn’t have a chance. They take a seat just as dramatic sounding music starts to play and a light show emanates from center stage.

A shadowy figure starts to stalk forward, and Lena can tell by the cadence of his walk that it’s Jack coming out under the giant projection screen. It makes her laugh a little under her breath – the drama of it all.

“Jeez, Jack,” she says quietly to herself, but she feels Kara’s shoulder shake in a shared chuckle.

“Do you think we’re allowed to look him in the eye?” Kara jokes out of the corner of her mouth and Lena smiles even as she elbows Kara softly.

Jack looks almost exactly like Lena remembers. His beard is a bit fuller than it had been and his suit a bit more shiny as if an indication of Spheerical’s recent successes, but the confident way he strides out onto the stage is familiar and his smile when he notices Lena in the crowd makes her throat feel thick.

His presentation starts simply enough. It’s oddly reminiscent of an early draft they’d made together – fantasizing about a day when the nanobots would be ready for a public unveiling. If she hadn’t already suspected that was what this entire event was for before, she’d certainly know now.

A wave of nostalgia crosses over her as he continues with his speech, boasting about how
Spheerical Industries is propelling themselves into the future of medicine.

A woman begins to walk onto stage from Jack’s right and he turns to gesture towards her. “This is Beth Breen,” he introduces. “Our CFO.”

Beth holds a small sphere in her hands and she stands next to a small podium with a stage-smile. She’s unfamiliar to Lena, but she looks at Jack with an expression just one shade beyond professional. Idly, Lena wonders if this is a new flame of Jack’s and can’t help the way her stomach twists just the slightest at the thought.

“Now,” Jack says, as if to himself as he moves to the podium and picks up a knife sitting there. Lena’s brow furrows as she watches the video feed on the large screen and realizes what he’s about to do seconds before he’s sliding the knife across the surface of his hand.

The trail of blood is visible in the massive high def screen that hangs behind him and Lena’s a bit shocked his demonstration involves cutting himself open. It certainly serves for dramatic effect if anything.

Jack nods to Beth who opens the silver sphere in her hands and Lena watches as the nanobots she’d spent sleepless nights trying to perfect herself, fly out of the device and towards the open wound in Jack’s hand. The cut is healed flawlessly and the nanobots leave no evidence behind. Jack smiles to the crowd and shows his palm.

“What you’ve just witnessed,” he says, enunciating the words out to a captivated audience. “Is the fourth medical miracle…Biomax.”

Lena can’t help but feel both awed and impressed as Jack goes through his spiel. He catches her eye during it, his smile widening noticeably in a knowing sort of way that makes Lena press her lips together and shake her head.

She can’t believe he did it.

And without her.

Kara wasn’t wrong about that bit. It’s probably what’s striking her the most.

Something uncomfortable spikes up her spine – jealousy maybe? Regret? It’s hard to define, but it must be noticeable because Kara’s hand finds its way to her thigh and she’s got a questioning arch to her brow.

With a soft shake of her head and a smile she manages to divert Kara’s attention back to the stage and take back the reins of her emotions.

As Jack finishes his speech and the crowd erupts into applause he shares a smile with Lena and then his CFO, Beth who’s still standing to his side before putting his hands out in invitation to his audience. “I’m happy to answer any questions.”

To her surprise, Kara’s hand shoots up in the air so enthusiastically that even Jack looks a little taken aback. It’s likely the fact that he’d already been looking in Lena’s direction that makes his gaze stick to Kara, but whatever it is he sends a questioning look to Lena before calling on Kara.

“Hi, yes, Kara Danvers from um…” Kara stutters a glance towards Snapper, adjusts her glasses and Lena moves the toe of her shoe to tap against Kara’s – not sure if Kara can feel it, but it seems to settle her. “Kara Danvers dot com.”
Jack nods, his smile encouraging even if he still looks a bit baffled by Kara.

“Metropolis is Spheerical Industries’ principal place of business, and you’ve done the initial research and development of Biomax on that side of the country. What was your reasoning in launching the product here in National City?”

Lena doesn’t miss the way Jack’s eyes go back to Lena again before answering. “We’re a global company, Miss Danvers. And National City serves as a highly competitive area of technology and medicine. Many of the industry’s leaders are located here and we’d be foolish not to be a part of that.”

At the end of his answer, a chorus of his name resounds out around them as hands outstretch in hopes they can ask a question, but Kara stands where she is, undeterred.

“Yes, sorry, follow up, Jack,” Kara says firmly, stretching her hand out and silencing the other journalists around her. “You didn’t find the obstacle of FDA regulations for drug distribution across state lines to be cost ineffective?”

Jack manages to maintain his smile, even laughs softly. “FDA regulations aren’t an obstacle Miss Danvers. They’re the pillars of maintaining safety in our industry and here at Spheerical we are sure to abide by each and every one of them. We always factor in that cost regarding all of our products and the benefits of launching this product in this city were too numerous to ignore.”

“But why leave Metropolis where you’d have what some people might call a hometown advantage?” Kara continues, and Lena can’t decide if she’s proud of how professional and prepared Kara sounds or irked that her current girlfriend is very clearly grilling her former boyfriend in a public setting.

“Expansion sometimes requires risks,” Jack says, succinctly and before Kara can ask another question he very obviously turns his attention to another reporter and Lena reaches up to tug Kara back to her seat with a finger in the belt loop of her pants.

Obeying the pull, Kara settles back down as a journalist down the row starts to ask about distribution plans and pricing structures. Lena sends Kara a look, her smile a tad amused as Kara scribbles something down in her notebook. Kara looks at her a moment, returns the smile and shrugs a shoulder.

“He seems nice,” Kara murmurs, still smiling as she turns away.

Lena kicks at her leg just hard enough for Kara to maybe notice, but not so hard she breaks her toe.

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After the presentation is concluded, they idle outside the auditorium for a bit and Kara scans over the notes she’s written down in her notebook. “How do you spell cauterize?” Kara murmurs as she scribbles something down and just as Lena opens her mouth to tell her, a voice rings out clear as day.

“Lena!” They both turn to see Jack approaching and Lena can’t help the way her stomach flips over in anticipation of seeing him, really seeing him, for the first time since she left him in that airport in Metropolis.

The irony of having Kara next to her does not escape her.

He runs a hand through his hair as he steps towards them and adjusts the button of his suit jacket.
His smile never falters in that stalwart way he’d always had, the kind of unflappable demeanor that’d won Lena’s trust so early on in their relationship.

“Hi,” Lena breathes, returning his smile.

His eyes dart to Kara and then back to her. Kara, for her part, stays silent, though when Lena glances over she sees the critical look in Kara’s eyes.

“I’m so glad you came,” Jack says, pulling Lena’s attention.

“Oh course,” she says, waving him off. “I wouldn’t have missed it.”

He gives her a little laugh that has her heart warming and next she knows he’s wrapping her up in a tight hug. When they come out of it, his eyes go obviously towards Kara in a way that has Lena shifting closer to her.

“Jack, this is Kara Danvers,” Lena introduces and considers how to qualify a moment before adding, “She’s one of the best reporters in National City.”

Jack’s smile is charming and only slightly practiced looking as he takes the hand Kara’s extended towards him. “Yes, I think I’d remember the reporter that grilled me during my one shining moment.”

Kara laughs, a little too loudly to sound real and Lena shoots her a look that smothers the sound slightly. “Just doing my due diligence,” Kara says, and Jack looks at least appeased by that.

The two of them do a fairly bad job of hiding the fact that they’re sizing each other up. Their handshake goes on a touch too long and Lena can tell by the way Jack’s forehead creases that Kara’s likely squeezing too hard.

It compels Lena to step forward a bit towards Jack and draw his attention.

“The presentation was great, Jack,” she says.

“Thank you,” Jack says, his hands drifting into his pockets and a small smile on his face. “I know it’s not quite your flavor, all the drama.”

“Cutting yourself open did seem a bit much,” Lena says, laughing a little.

“I think it all went perfectly,” Jack says. “No matter what my majority shareholder thinks. What about you, Miss Danvers? What’d you think?”

Before she can answer, Kara starts fumbling abruptly, shoving her notepad under one arm and digging in her bag until she’s pulling out her phone and looking at it with a crinkle in her brow.

“Sorry,” Kara says, glancing at them. “I have to take this.”

Without another word, she steps away and presses the phone to her ear. Lena follows her with her eyes for a moment before Jack’s drawing her attention back to him. “So you liked it?”

She smiles, resists the urge to keep looking at Kara. “I did.”

“Actually,” Jack says, with insistence.

“I actually liked it,” Lena says, rolling her eyes.
“Not the way your mother said she liked *Hamilton,*” Jack says.

“I found it enjoyable,” Lena says, in a slow, careful drawl meant to imitate her mother’s tepid response. Jack laughs loudly, and Lena can’t help but join him. A comfortable silence sinks in for a few moments as they regard each other, before a thought breaks in.

“So, tell me,” Lena says, crossing her arms over and all but glaring at Jack. “How did you finally crack it? The nano swarm.”

A crooked smile graces his lips, the kind that always felt just shy of ominous. “I’ll tell you at dinner,” he says, and she sighs, glances to where Kara’s talking on her phone off to the side.

“Jack,” she starts, but he interrupts, shifting closer.

“It’s been a long time, Lena,” he says, voice soft and warm. “I just want to catch up. The way we left things…”

They regard each other a moment, but before Lena can answer, Kara’s walking back up to them, pocketing her phone. “Hey, I have to go,” she says, brows pulling down and general expression making Lena forget almost entirely about Jack.

“What is it? Are you okay?” Lena says, arms uncrossing as she turns to face Kara.

“Yeah, no, it’s fine,” Kara says, her palm smoothing down Lena’s back and eyes darting to Jack. “Just – it’s Alex.”

That’s not the truth, Lena can tell that much, but she hears what Kara’s not saying. It’s likely Jack’s presence that requires the subterfuge. “Do you need me to –”

“No,” Kara says before Lena can finish. “You stay here, catch up. I’ll call you later.”

“Miss Danvers, it was nice to meet you,” Jack says, extending his hand for Kara to shake.

“Yeah,” Kara says, taking his hand with a smile that doesn’t quite meet her eyes. “Likewise.”

Concern has her circling her fingers over Kara’s wrist, but when Kara turns to her, her smile stretches into something much more genuine, soothing across Lena’s chest. “It’s fine,” Kara says subvocally. “I’ll see you later.”

“Be careful,” Lena murmurs when Kara darts forward to press a warm solid kiss to the corner of her mouth.

Kara nods, whispers a phrase in Kryptonian that makes Lena’s heart clench before she’s turning to pace away from them and Lena’s left with Jack.

Jack’s eyes are on Kara’s retreating form and she can see the inquisition in his expression, but she’s saved from any further conversation by another woman approaching to touch Jack at his elbow – Beth Breen, the CFO that had helped him on stage.

“Jack,” she says, with an irritatingly fake smile for Lena. “You should really spend some time with the investors.”

Lena arches a brow, is ready to inform this woman that technically he’s doing just that, but Jack must sense she’s gearing up for a fight because he steps between them with a smile for Lena.

“Duty calls,” he says. She waves him off, eyeing Beth as she follows after him like a lost puppy.
Lena can remember the numerous times she had been the one at Jack’s side as they talked to investors and friends. It hadn’t even been that long ago, really.

Outside the giant glass windows of the conference center, Lena spots a familiar trail of blue and red fly by, zooming through downtown. It seems Kara’s sudden departure was Supergirl-related and Lena can’t help but feel worry thread its way up her spine.

With a final glance to where Jack is charming an older couple and they’re laughing, delighted, Lena turns to walk out the building marveling at how much her life has changed in the span of several months.

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Lena leaves L Corp early that afternoon with a message for Jess that she’ll take calls from her home office and to forward her anything urgent that might come up. Kara hasn’t messaged her in a few hours, but Lena heads over to Kara’s anyway, content to soak in the comfortable atmosphere of the apartment after a strange day.

The only person who texts her over the next few hours, in fact, is Mon-El, who seems to be participating in some sort of trivia contest that he is woefully unprepared for.

She’s in the middle of answering his newest jumbled question - *who is taxi driver and why* - when Kara lands in the open balcony door with a little less finesse than usual.

“Hey,” Kara says, her voice soft. She looks tired, but she still smiles when she sees Lena ensconced on her couch.

“Hello,” Lena says, getting up from her seat and working her way around the couch. Kara kisses her hello, lifts her up into her arms. It’s a calm centering force that she needs, and she sinks into it. When she ducks her head into Kara’s shoulder though, she notices something a little off.

“Why do you smell like burnt fabric?” Lena asks, picking her head up, her fingertips running over the line of Kara’s jaw as her eyes search for the source of the smell.

“Hmm?”

“Did you fly through a fire?”

Kara’s hand captures Lena’s wandering one and holds it steady, but the laugh she lets out is anything but. “Oh, yeah, no biggie.” At Lena’s arched brow, Kara adds. “Just a warehouse fire over on Halmond.”

Blue eyes dart around so suspiciously it’s almost comical and Lena opens her palm to press it against Kara’s chest firmly enough to draw all of Kara’s attention. “Are you okay?”

“Of course,” Kara dismisses, looking squarely at Lena finally. “I’m Supergirl.”

It does nothing to assuage the small knot forming in her gut, but Lena decides not to press. Kara’s always been a little slower about processing things that upset her. Sometimes, those things are small, like how she could never quite nail questions on symbolism in her English classes. They’ve already talked about enough hard things this week, anyway.

Kara smiles, kisses her swiftly before murmuring, “One sec,” and speeding towards the bedroom. With a quick gust of air, she’s walking back towards Lena, changed into soft pajama pants and a loose sweater, her hair pulled back into a ponytail.
“Busy night?” Lena asks. “I was just about to order food.”

“Oh, thank Rao, I’m starving,” Kara says, reaching into her fridge for a water bottle. “And yeah. National City is safe and sound though.”

“My hero,” Lena says. Kara’s lips quirk up in a small smile, but it drifts away just as soon as it appeared as Kara sets her water down.

“Hey, do you think Jack would let me interview him?”

It’s a somewhat unnerving question, one that Lena can’t quite track. But she considers it anyway.

“I’m sure it wouldn’t hurt to ask,” Lena replies, observing Kara critically. “Why?”

Kara shrugs. “I think you were right. Biomax could make a good story for my blog.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah,” Kara says, sliding onto a stool at the kitchen counter and pulling her phone out. “What are we ordering for dinner?”

There’s something off about Kara’s demeanor that Lena can’t decipher, but she tries to dismiss it for the moment. “I’m fine with whatever,” she answers. Kara seems to settle down once they get on the couch and press up against each other, watching some more of Dogs With Jobs. But Lena can’t help but feel like she’s missing something anyway, even after they head to bed.

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Lena has barely settled in at her desk the next morning before Lana is bursting through the doors to her office.

“I’ve got something,” Lana says, carrying a tablet and a very large cup of coffee in her other hand. “Do you have time?”

“Not many people are interested in meeting at seven in the morning,” Lena says, eyeing Lana as she drops into the seat across from Lena. “Which cup is that this morning?”

“Morning is relative,” Lana says, waving away the concern, before she drops the tablet on Lena’s side of the desk.

Lana’s got a spreadsheet open on one tab and clicks to a map on another. “So, I’ve got a lead on one of Lex’s vaults. An old trainyard Luthor Corp used to own forever ago before we started shipping in our own jets.”

“Do we still own it?” Lena asks, looking at the information on her screen and trying to remember the property.

“No technically. It was sold about five years ago to another corporation.” Lana reaches forward to bring up an image of the bill of sale.

It’s apparent immediately what’s caught Lana’s attention. The buyer listed reads Ignatius Inc.

“Could be a coincidence,” Lana says, and Lena’s lips go thin. “But I thought I remember Lex once mentioning -”

“I’d like to say my brother isn’t dumb enough to name a shell corporation after his childhood pet,
“It’s worth further investigation at least,” Lana says, and Lena agrees with a nod. She thinks for a second that she wants to go right now - to abandon her workday and track it down, to see if there are any weapons that she can pull apart and learn how to counter. A secret stash of Kryptonite or at least the same formula Cadmus had been using to create their own.

Lana is looking crazed enough in the eyes that she might agree.

“I’ll look it over,” Lena says, slowly, trying to talk herself off the ledge. Lana nods easily enough.

“Maybe we can patch Supergirl in, since you two are best buds,” Lana says, sipping at her coffee. “I’m sure she’d like to take a look.”

“I’m sure she would,” Lena says, knowing perfectly well that she’d die sooner than let Kara anywhere near another of Lex’s vaults. They’re surely somehow booby trapped against any Kryptonians entering. The memory of Kara in agony from one of Lex’s grenades spikes through her mind.

“Well I’m happy to go over there, get a team together or something,” Lana says, the hyper look in her eye doing wonders to calm Lena’s own exhilaration.

“I’ll look it over,” Lena repeats, this time slow and forceful enough that Lana backs off.

“Right, yeah, of course, boss,” she says, taking a maniacal looking sip of her coffee. “Just here if you need me.”

“I appreciate the help, Lana,” Lena says, reaching across to slap at the fingers Lana’s start to tap rapidly against her desk. “When’s the last time you slept?”

“I sleep,” Lana defends, the lie so loud Lena laughs.

“Do I need to order you to go home and get some rest?”

Lana glares at her. “And to think I was going to share my coffee with you.”

Lena eyes the cup in her hand skeptically. “Is there even any left in there?”

“There could be,” Lana retorts, indignant for a moment before they both share a laugh.

As if summoned by their conversation, one of her junior assistants, Hector, opens the door to her office and upon being waved forward by Lena, deposits her own coffee order on her desk. “Thank you, Hector,” she murmurs, taking the cup gratefully.

Lana smiles at him as he goes, leaning against Lena’s desk and waiting until the doors close again to speak.

“So, in other news, I saw that fancy press conference Spheer had for his nanobots,” Lana says, casual as can be. Lena glances up to find her still primly sipping coffee. But she knows Lana knows about her and Jack. “Weird that he filed the IP here.”

“Maybe Metropolis is no longer the City of Tomorrow,” Lena says. Lana snorts.

“Or maybe he wanted to chase down his ex-girlfriend completely unaware of how she’s moved on,” Lena says. “We’ve all been there.”
“You should go sleep that off,” Lena says, gesturing at Lana’s cup of coffee. “It’s seven in the morning and you’re already saying absurd things.”

“I’m not sure it’d even be safe for me to sleep,” Lana says, but she stands up anyway. “Keep me updated about the vaults. And good luck getting Spheer off your tail.”

“Thanks,” Lena says, and she even sort of means it.

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Hours later, the door to her office opens gently – she’s only aware of it in her periphery as she stays focused on the report in front of her. In her distraction, she assumes it’s Hector again, likely seeking out her lunch order or informing her of a change in her schedule. “Hector, can you move my afternoon appointments to the morning and cancel my dinner plans?”

“That’s disappointing.” The low calm tone of Jack’s voice tugs her attention upward and she can’t help the way her lips turn upward at the image of him sauntering into her office. His hands have traveled to his pockets and his expression is nothing short of teasing.

“You’re not my assistant,” she points out and he laughs a bit.

“Can’t get anything past you, can I?”

“And you don’t have an appointment,” she adds, already sighing at her busy day getting even more derailed.

“Too true,” he says, taking his time crossing the floor towards her desk. He lingers by her cabinet, inspects the tulips there. Kara had dropped them off a few days ago, talking about how she had bought them off a farmer in the Netherlands. “But I was hoping to get one.”

Lena’s eyes narrow. “How did you get past Hector?”

He turns to her, shrugs a shoulder. “No one’s beyond a snack break,” he says simply, and she can’t help but smile.

“I’m not trying to be rude, Jack. I really am very busy. It’s not a brush off.”

“I know, I know,” he says with his hands up as takes a seat at her desk chair. “I won’t be long.”

It’s clearly just as futile at deterring Jack on a mission as it was before, so she closes her laptop and sits back in her chair, gesturing with a hand for him to get on with it.

“I think you should have dinner with me,” he says. It whisks a brief memory of their early friendship through her chest. But it also settles unease in her stomach. “I keep asking, but you keep managing not to answer.”

“I told you I needed to - ”

“Check your schedule, yeah, yeah,” he says, waving the excuse off. “I think you should make room for the occasion.”

“And why is that?” Lena asks, only slightly wary of his intentions. Maybe it’s Lana’s implication he’s here to chase after her that has her so suspicious.

“I think we should talk,” Jack says. Lena sighs, flipping some papers around on her desk before glancing up at him again.
“About what?”

“I don’t like how things ended with us,” Jack says, matter-of-fact. It drops something in Lena’s stomach that has her sitting up a bit straighter.

“I’m sorry,” is all she can think to say and it’s not insincere. Their parting was abrupt in some ways, and lacked any kind of real closure. Lena picked up and moved to National City and that was that. And Lena knows that the separation was decidedly different for her than for him, but all the same - it was what it was. All she has left for Jack are apologies.

“Then have dinner with me,” he entreats, a smile on his face that Lena’d always found insufferably charming.

“And talk about the details of our breakup?” Lena asks. Jack rolls his eyes, grin firmly on his face.

“No, of course not,” Jack says. “I would never expect you to talk about your feelings. I want to mend things. Nothing nefarious.”

She really isn’t quite sure she believes him, with the way he’s still smiling.

“I really am very busy, Jack,” Lena says with an apologetic lilt to her tone.

“Certainly not so busy you’re skipping meals again.”

Lena laughs, thinks of late nights in the Metropolis labs when Jack would show up with take-out. She can feel her resistance slipping away under the weight of Jack’s charm. “I suppose not.”

“The concierge at my hotel recommended a great place not too far away,” he says and Lena waves off the rest of his invitation.

“Fine, fine, dinner tonight, just text me the address.”

His smile widens and makes Lena want to throw her phone at his head – affectionately.

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They’re out to dinner a restaurant they’ve frequented in their years of knowing each other. It’s situated almost exactly midway between Luthor Tower and Spheerical’s downtown offices which has always made it a perfect meeting spot for late night drinks or quick dinners.

Jack’s excitedly talking about some breakthrough he’s had that day in the labs, but Lena’s hardly paying attention. All she can think about is the decision she’d made earlier that day - the board meeting that had finalized Luthor Corp’s big move to National City and the first step in a new rebranding tour.

She has to tell Jack. She doesn’t want him to read about it in the morning or hear it from anyone else. She has to tell Jack, but when faced with the reality of doing so, of knowing she’s going to take that happy smile right off his face, she finds herself reticent.

“Lena, are you alright, love?” Jack asks, clearly having picked up on her mood. He’s leaned over the table towards her, concern etched into his dark features.

Lena blinks at him, brought back to the present moment and her words drop out of her unceremoniously. “I’m moving.”

Jack looks...not surprised...but still a tad taken aback. His smile feels fragile. “I’m sorry?”
“I’m moving,” she repeats, clearing her throat and reaching for her wine. “To National City.”

“You’re moving to National City,” Jack states.

“Yes.”

He looks unsure of what to say. “Why?”

“It’s the right thing to do,” Lena says. “For Luthor Corp. I’m thinking of renaming it actually. Having a fresh start in a new city.”

“So you’re moving headquarters?” Jack asks, confusion on his brow. “And you’re moving?”

“The CEO generally moves with the headquarters, yes,” Lena says. “Or at least, that’s what I’ve gathered.”

“You accepted the position?” Jack asks. “Why?”

“It’s not as if I had much choice,” Lena says.

“You have a choice,” Jack says. “You’ve always had choices. And now - I hadn’t realized moving the company was even on the table.”

“The board met this morning to discuss it,” Lena says. “It’s certainly not ideal - we’ll have to outfit the Luthor Corp building in National City with new labs and new meeting rooms, transition leadership here into new roles. And rebranding will certainly cost millions in logo reprints.”

Jack eyes her through the whole list, his eyes somewhat sad. His fingers swirl the base of his wine glass as he considers her.

“And you’ll be moving,” Jack says, and then leans back in his seat. “What about your involvement with Spheerical?”

It feels like a more loaded question than it sounds. Lena picks through her answer.

“Well, I’ll obviously have to scale back,” Lena says. “But we knew that anyway, right? I was going to be picking up a higher workload no matter what.”

“What about me?” Jack asks, his voice quiet. Lena has almost no response for that. In all her thoughts about telling Jack, she had never thought about next steps - she had thought she would tell him, and that would be that.

“What do you mean?” Lena asks. Jack sighs, reaching for his wine glass and looking up at the ceiling.

“Right,” Jack says. His voice cracks. “You’ve thought about changing the letterhead but not about your personal life. It’s very like you.”

“Jack,” Lena says, reaching out to touch his shoulder. He flinches visibly enough that Lena pulls her hand back almost immediately.

“You always had one foot out the door anyway,” he says, a mixture of sadness and something bitter in the tone. It curls a thread of guilt around her ribcage. It was one of those things they didn’t talk about, and here it was in front of them.

“What does that mean?” Lena asks, glancing around them.
“I would venture that you know what it means,” Jack says. “You’re a genius.”

“Jack - ”

“When do you leave?” He asks, a smile on his face she can tell is forced, but the way he takes a deep breath and tries for it swells an affection for him that Lena doesn’t tries to quell. “Need any help packing?”

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It’s been mostly radio silence from Kara that afternoon – something Lena’s trying not to take personally. It’s unusual for Kara not to check in near constantly even if it’s to text Lena some odd picture of a dog she’d seen that day or whatever she’s eating for lunch. Lena’d become almost dependent on the frivolous texting throughout her day though she’d never admit it.

A part of her that’s hard to quell drags her brain to the worst scenarios first – Kara’s in another dimension again, fighting some unstoppable evil, unconscious as the result of some new alien threat. Anxiety spikes on the heels of her spiraling thoughts until she knows she won’t be able to focus on anything if she doesn’t talk to Kara.

It takes no more than two rings before Kara’s answering her call with a breathless sounding, “Hey.”

“Hi,” Lena says, calming considerably just from hearing Kara’s voice, but feeling suddenly foolish at the desperation she’d felt before. “What are you doing?”

“Uh,” Kara says, sounding oddly suspicious out of nowhere. “Nothing.”

“Nothing?” Lena asks, skeptical.

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“Supergirl stuff,” she clarifies as if that means anything.

“Okay,” Lena draws out, part out of confusion and part out of scrambling for a good sounding reason for this call. “Well, I just wanted you to know that Jack asked me to dinner tonight.”

The line is silent for a beat before she adds, “And that I’m going to go.”

“Why?” Kara asks immediately, almost sounding strained.

“To catch up,” Lena says, feeling herself get defensive at the tone in Kara’s voice. “We haven’t seen each other in a long time and he’s an old friend.”

There must be something in the way she says it because she can almost hear Kara wincing across the line. “I know, I know, sorry. I didn’t mean it like that.”

“You okay?” Lena asks, a sense of unease wafting down the line that’s hard to ignore.

“Yeah, just…” Kara’s pause does nothing to soothe Lena’s apprehension. “Sorry, I’m just distracted. I’ve been investigating something and it hasn’t been going well.”

“Investigating what?” Lena asks, curious that it’s the first she’s heard of it.

Kara’s quiet again. “I can’t really tell you yet,” she says and Lena stamps down a wave of indignation. Enough to resist insisting Kara tell her regardless. Something grates at her at being kept in the dark.
“Okay,” Lena says instead, a displeased line to her lips. Kara’s allowed her secrets, same as she.

Silence stretches and Lena forces herself to change moods. “Anything I can help you with?”

“I’ll definitely let you know if you can,” Kara says in a soft affectionate voice that assuages some of Lena’s anxiety. “So, you’re going to dinner with Jack.”

“I am.”

“Where are you going?”

“Why, trying to crash my date?” Lena jokes and Kara makes a sputtering sounding scoff that makes Lena smile.

“No, of course not. I’m just wondering.”

“I’m not sure. Jack picked the place and he hasn’t told me yet.”

“Do you want me to come with you?”

Lena laughs. “I don’t think that’s what Jack has in mind.”

“Well I’m not sure I love what Jack might have in mind,” Kara says, a bit grumbly. It’s petty and a tad childish, but Lena feels an inappropriate flutter under her ribs.

“He’s harmless,” Lena tells her and Kara makes a noise that sounds like she disagrees, but has no other further comment.

“Text me where you’re going just in case?” Kara asks.

“Of course,” Lena says, conceding to the gentle pleading in Kara’s voice. “I love you. Good luck with all your Supergirl stuff.”

“Thanks, I love you too,” Kara says, the words warm and rich across Lena’s ears. “Have fun. But not too much fun. A medium amount of fun.”

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The restaurant Jack picks isn’t far from where Lena lives - which makes it easier to refuse Jack’s insistence on picking her up or sending a car over. Instead, she has her own driver take her the few blocks over and meets Jack in the front entryway only a minute early.

“You look lovely,” he greets in a soft murmur, pressing forward for a swift, friendly kiss to her cheek.

She smiles at him, and moves a more respectable distance away from him and allows him to take the lead with the host.

They’re escorted to a table towards the back and Lena feels a wave of nostalgia as Jack pulls her chair out for her and smoothly orders a bottle of wine when the server greets them. They share a smile and exchange pleasantries until the wine arrives.

It’s familiar and warm to be back with Jack after so long. Lena had always considered him a friend even before they ever became romantically entangled and she’s missed him, truth be told. He’s funny and smart and he understands some of her work in a way few others ever have.
“This is nice,” Jack comments, pouring more wine into Lena’s glass.

“Are you trying to get me to say this was a good idea?” Lena teases, knowing she’s caught him fishing for just that.

“Still hard to admit when I’m right, isn’t it?”

She takes a sip of her wine, but shakes her head at him with a laugh that’s half exasperated, half fond. “I’ll admit it’s good to see you. It’s been a long time.”

“It has,” Jack agrees. His drift down her body a moment - not too far to be suggestive, but Lena straightens under the scrutiny nonetheless. “You look great,” he says. “Have I already said that?” He has, of course, but she allows the compliment regardless. The dress she’s wearing is an old one she hasn’t worn since Metropolis and she can’t deny the slightest twinge of satisfaction knowing she can still rock it.

“You look the same,” Lena replies in an overly dry fashion she know will make him smile. Her brow lifts at the end of it and she can’t stop her lips from quirking up. It makes him laugh.

“I suppose you’re still the same Lena I remember as well,” he adds, picking his glass up and sitting back in his chair. His brow quirks. “Though you’ve gone all corporate now.”

“As if you’re one to talk,” Lena replies, taking a sip of her wine.

“I was already very corporate when you met me. I wasn’t the one that hibernated in her lab for weeks at a time mocking anyone that would dare pick a cushy tower office job.”

“It’s not as if I picked this job,” she points out. Jack had been there, after all, the day Lex was arrested. As well as the day Lena’d decided to assume her position in Luthor Corp. She imagines it’d be hard for Jack to forget that day - it was the same one she’d decided to change the name of her family’s company, to move it across the country and to leave Jack in Metropolis. She can still hear his shocked you’re taking the position clear as day.

“You’re always saying that,” Jack says, voice soft. “Listen, Lena - ”

Jack’s attention gets drawn away by a laugh at the front door that Lena finds herself recognizing a second before she turns to take in the sight of Kara and Mon-El arm in arm strolling towards them with the fakest look of innocence she’s ever seen.

“Whoa, Lena, hey,” Mon-El says, sounding like Kara’d coached him to say that. “Are you guys eating here?!”

Kara laughs through an exclaimed, “Oh my God, so random, we’re eating here.” It’s so ridiculous sounding that Lena almost laughs.

“We are,” Mon-El adds emphatically and Lena doesn’t know what to do apart from blink at the two of them. When she’d suggested Kara was planning on crashing her dinner she’d been joking.

“What a complete and utter coincidence,” she says through her teeth, tilting her head at Kara in as much of a what the fuck as she can muster.

At the very least, Kara reacts to that, her smile faltering for just a moment before Jack pulls her attention with, “Miss Danvers, so nice to see you again.”

“Oh, call me Kara,” she says, adjusting her glasses before taking his hand. “And this is my friend
Mike,” she adds, careful emphasis on the name as if trying to remind Mon-El of his moniker.

Mon-El steps forward on the cue and takes Jack’s hand. “Yes, Mike, I am Mike.”

Jack, for his part, doesn’t seem jolted by the sudden interruption, just smiles charmingly at Mon-El and makes an exaggerated tsk sound. “You know, I explicitly asked that I be the handsomest guy in the restaurant tonight.”

Mon-El laughs loudly, a pleased smile as he turns to Lena and points at Jack. “I like this guy.”

Before Lena can say anything, Kara’s coming around to her side, her hand brushing over Lena’s shoulder as she pulls out a seat next to her. “You don’t mind if we join you, do you?”

“Oh yeah,” Mon-El says, releasing Jack’s hand and mimicking Kara’s movements to pull out an open chair. “I’ll sit here.”

Lena furrows her brow and attempts to deliver a glare at both of them, but it doesn’t seem to work as Kara takes her seat and leans to the side to press a quick kiss to Lena’s cheek.

“What are you doing?” Lena whispers through thin lips the moment Kara comes close to her.

“Kissing you hello?” Kara answers, equally as soft. It doesn’t fool Lena one bit, but her cheek warms the slightest. From the corner of her eye, she sees Jack eyeing them with interest.

“Oh, sorry, should I have done the kiss too?” Mon-El asks, scrambling up from his seat. Kara pulls him back down hard enough that Mon-El yelps.

At least Jack looks semi-amused by the whole thing, his eyes bouncing from Lena to Kara to Mon-El. He was never disturbed by much, really. It was one of the things that had made him likeable to Lena.

“Can I look at the menu?” Mon-El asks. Lena rolls her eyes and hands him her menu, but Kara is already sitting about as far forward in her chair as one can without falling off it, her eyes trained on Jack.

“So, Jack, how’s the Biomax rollout going?” Kara asks, sitting forward at the table.

Jack’s leaned back in his chair, his fingers twisting together casually. “Trying to get me in your crosshairs?”

“A reporter’s job is never done,” Kara replies with a cheeky looking smile that has Lena pressing her toe against Kara’s calf in warning.

“I can respect that,” Jack says with a friendly chuckle. He reaches for his wine. “It’s going wonderfully so far, but surely there are more interesting things to talk about.”

“I disagree,” Kara says, the amicable curve to her voice dipping slightly. “I’m so curious as to how you knew it was ready. Did you do any trials? Human trials, maybe?”

“Kara,” Lena censures softly, her brow dipping at this sudden accusation she can sense in Kara’s line of questioning.

“It’s all public record if you’re really that curious,” Jack answers, shrugging and amused tilt to the corner of his mouth when he glances at Lena.

The curiosity Lena feels is undeniable, though it’s seemingly very different from the angle Kara’s
approaching from. It feels like her brain has been idly attempting to figure out how Jack solved the nanobot problem ever since she realized he did. “How did you solve it?” she asks, unable to help herself.

“Is that why you agreed to have dinner with me?” Jack asks, brow arched.

Lena observes him a moment, lips thin as she truthfully admits, “Not entirely.”

He accepts that with a soft amused sound. “Well, I suppose you deserve some answer,” he says, and she lifts her chin with a smile. “A few months after you left, I stayed up all night just… thinking. And when the sun came up, I saw a flock of starlings fly by. In perfect harmony, completely in sync.”

His eyes go soft at this part and Lena feels her throat go thick, her heart tight at the look on Jack’s face and the feeling of Kara shifting beside her. “I had a realization in that moment,” he continues, his eyes darting to Kara for a brief second. “We’d been modeling the nano swarm after the wrong animal. Bees need a base, a queen to revolve around. We’d been trying to make a nanobot into a queen by programming a protective algorithm, but…”

It hits Lena in an instant as he’s talking and she can’t help but sit forward with the joy of something clicking perfectly in her head. “Oh my god, murmuration.”

Jack’s smile goes wide and he sits up towards her. A connection between them that’d always been there goes taut. “Yeah,” he replies, nodding in an encouraging manner.

“The nano swarm, it migrates,” she says, somehow not believing she couldn’t see this years ago. “It’s linked AI sentience.”

“It’s all controlled through the Spheerial lab mainframe,” he says, and they’ve shifted so close their feet bump into each other. It jolts Lena back a bit, but she can’t fight the breathless feeling of solving a problem she’d long thought unsolvable. “I would never have gotten there if…”

The end of that seems obvious, it hangs in the air between them and pushes Lena back into her chair, a flush creeping up her neck.

“Well,” Kara says, pulling her completely out of the moment and Lena doesn’t know what to feel at that point. “That’s a great story.”

“Thank you,” Jack says with a humble nod of his head. “But I didn’t come here to talk business.”

It’s delivered with a look for Lena that makes her take a breath as Kara sits forward.

“What did you come here for?” Kara asks, frosty enough that Lena’s hand travels to Kara’s thigh. Jack’s smile is warm but reserved and his eyes glide to Lena with a shrug of his shoulder. “To reconnect with an old friend, I suppose.”

“Interesting,” Mon-El says, his tone so cold that even Kara is surprised by it, her face sinking into a frown as she looks over at him. He seems to be affecting his heaviest glare at Jack. “Have you ever tried boxing?”

Lena decides to distract Jack from whatever that line of questioning is before Mon-El can get going on it.

“I’m just…so impressed that you finally solved it,” Lena says, with as friendly a smile as possible.
“And pissed I did it without you,” Jack adds with the same knowing tease Kara had in her voice when she’d said the same thing.

Lena laughs, acknowledges the truth again with a shrug of her shoulder and reaches for her wine glass, taking a sip.

“We should probably go,” Kara says, standing so abruptly that Lena jerks back a bit in response.

Jack sends Lena a quizzical look before turning it to Kara and standing with her. “You haven’t even ordered,” he points out, but Kara waves him off.

“I just remembered that I hate everything on the menu here,” she says as if that’s believable, but before Lena can interject, Mon-El is standing too and pulling Jack into a tight hug with little preamble.

“Kara, what the hell?” Lena says under her breath as Mon-El speaks to Jack. Kara comes close and presses a kiss to Lena’s cheek, her palm warm on Lena’s arm.

“Sorry, sorry, I’ll explain later, I promise,” Kara says, gripping briefly at the watch on Lena’s wrist. “I promise.”

“You better,” Lena says, before Kara is turning to shake Jack’s hand. Mon-El wraps his arms around her tightly, muttering something about the dueling conventions that she barely tracks, before they’re both off and away, out the door of the restaurant. Lena sees for a second, Mon-El turning and saying something heated to Kara and Kara waving it away, and then Jack distracts her.

“That was something,” Jack says, eyebrows raised.

“Sorry,” she says. “I’m not sure what that was.”

Jack’s lips thin with amusement. “I can venture a guess,” he says. “You and Kara are…”

“Yes, we are,” she answers simply even though she knows he doesn't really need an answer. It's obvious enough, she's sure. Jack barely reacts to her confirmation nor to the fact that she's unable to stop the way her face reacts when she says it, her slight smile echoing the pleasant warmth she feels in her chest.

A look of consideration sits on Jack’s face a moment. “She’s the college ex, isn’t she? The one you’d never talk about.”

It still goes against instincts to confirm that. Lena’s not sure why, but she feels protective over the knowledge. Nonetheless, a small part of her feels she owes Jack this much. “She is,” she says softly, adjusting the napkin on her lap and fiddling with her watch. “What gave it away?”

“Your face,” Jack tells her and before she can unpack what he means, the waiter is back to take their dinner orders.

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The rest of the dinner is uneventful. They discuss the nanobots again, Jack goes in deeper as to what makes them tick and how the mainframe works in controlling them. He talks about marketing strategies and large scale plans for distribution. Lena offers her two cents when appropriate and it almost feels like they’d never separated.

It’s friendly and warm and Lena’s suddenly very grateful she’d decided to take Jack up on his offer
for dinner.

As they pay the check - Jack arguing with her over paying the bill for a good five minutes before she relents - and polish off the wine, Jack observes her a moment. “Well, we’ve had dinner and wine,” he says. “Surely post-dinner drinks are in order.”

Lena pauses, remembering how their routine used to go. Jack would pour them scotch at her apartment and they’d break down their days, eventually falling asleep together. It’s clear enough that Jack is remembering the same thing.

“I’m sure I have something aged and expensive in my office,” Lena offers, feeling more comfortable with that setting than her home.

Jack laughs and takes the change of venue in stride. “Spoken like a true Luthor,” he says and Lena can’t help but smile.

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L Corp is thankfully empty when they arrive and they’re able to get to Lena’s office with little fanfare. She walks over to the small wet bar she keeps there and pours them both two fingers of brandy. It reminds her of late night celebrations in the Metropolis office when she and Jack would sneak into Lex’s office and drink his liquor.

“I forgot to mention how nice this office is when I was here last,” Jack says and Lena can hear a hint of mockery in Jack’s voice. “So fresh. So clean.”

“I’m sorry that it’s not quite the pigsty you’re used to,” Lena says, rolling her eyes. Jack laughs.

“You even have a balcony! Where do you keep the blowtorches?” Jack asks.

“You’ll find out if you keep on this track,” Lena says, and Jack laughs even harder, taking a sip of his brandy and glancing outside. Silence slips over them, comfortable and warm. But Jack interrupts it after a few moments.

“I must confess, I haven’t been completely honest with you,” Jack says, setting his glass down before his hands retreat to his pockets.

Setting her own drink down as well, Lena crosses her arms over her chest defensively, a spike of fear at what Jack could possibly be referring to. He must notice her reaction because he pulls his hands out of his pockets and puts them up as if asserting his innocence.

“Nothing bad,” he clarifies. “Just…” He laughs. “I suppose I haven’t been clear about my intentions as to dinner and after seeing the lovely Miss Danvers show up so suddenly, I feel it’s only right to come clean.”

It occurs to her quite easily what he’s trying to say and while she absolutely could have seen this coming, she’d been hoping it never would. “Jack,” she sighs, dropping her arms, but moving behind her desk just to put something between them and stop the obvious path he was about to take towards her.

“Hear me out,” he pleads, stepping forward nonetheless to prop his hands on the edge of her desk across from her.

There’s nothing he could really say to her that she’d find persuasive, but she supposes she owes him this much. A conversation she never allowed him to have when she was breaking up with him.
“Fine,” she says, clipping the word with a raise of her chin.

“I came to National City because I want you back,” he says plainly and though she’d been expecting it, it still hits into her chest like a shock. “And I think you should consider it.”

She lets silence extend between them for a moment, gives the words some gravity as she observes him before letting out a long exhale. “Is that all you have to say?”

A look of discouragement flashes on Jack’s face, but he straightens and finds some determination from somewhere. “If distance is the problem,” he starts and she scoffs.

“That’s clearly not the problem,” she says, wondering if maybe he’s hit his head and forgotten the girlfriend he’s met now twice.

“But it was,” he argues. “Before Kara became part of the picture.”

She’s not sure how to tell him that Kara was always part of the picture and that breaking up with him wasn’t so much about distance and more about...things she’s not sure she wants to tell him. How she had tried very hard to love him and it had never been anything close to what she felt for a girl she hadn’t seen in years. How being with him had been more like a performance with a friend instead of a relationship.

“All the same,” Lena says, letting him get by with whatever he wants to think. “She is a part of the picture.”

“Yes, and she’s lovely,” Jack says, his hands raised in a wait-wait-don’t shoot pose. “But a bit scattered. And, well, a bit rude.”

“Are you really going to attempt to argue your way into breaking up my relationship?” Lena asks, reaching up to rub the bridge of her nose, feeling a headache coming on.

“I let you go once, and I’ve regretted it every day since,” Jack says, and she can hear how serious he is. “I love you, Lena. I have to try.”

Lena lets out a soft breath, is unsure how to avoid hurting him. “And so you have,” she says quietly, chewing her bottom lip when he winces.

“Look, I understand why you had to leave Metropolis, why you had to come and take on this company and do it on your own. I might not have understood it then, but I get it now.”

“I’m glad,” she says, hoping that’s the end of it, but from the look on his face she knows it’s not.

“I don’t want you to have to do this alone anymore.”

She barely stops the incredulous laugh that wants to bark out of her. “I’m not alone,” she tells him, marveling at how true she realizes that is.

“I get that you two have history,” Jack starts and Lena halts his words with a raise of her hand.

“Don’t talk about something you know nothing about,” she tells him, voice cold.

He reacts to that, straightening. “Fine,” he says, clearly set on arguing his point. “I’ll tell you what I do know. I know Kara Danvers got fired a month ago from CatCo Worldwide for breach of contract. I know that she’s been leaking L Corp information on her blog. I know she’s now disappeared twice, quite randomly, in my presence and if you ask me, seems flaky...at best.”
Setting aside the fact that Jack seems to know a lot more about Kara than he’s let on, Lena puts as much anger into her expression as she can. “You don’t know the first thing about her,” she says.

Jack doesn’t so much as flinch under her glare and Lena shouldn’t be surprised - he’d never really cowed to her moods, angry or otherwise. “I just think you should weigh your options here, Lena. We’re both at different places in our lives and I think I’m due some consideration.”

What she’d like to do is throw her computer at his face, but she squashes the urge and tries to end this conversation as gracefully as possible. “I’m going to tell you this once and that needs to be the end of it,” she says, locking eyes with him. “As long as Kara is in my life, there is nothing else to consider. Period.”

He looks as if to argue further and she stops him again, palm outstretched. “Please stop,” she says, soft and pleading. “Before there’s nothing left here to salvage between us.”

That finally stops him, his posture leaking of fervor. “So it’s really that serious,” he says softly. “It is.”

“You’d throw away all we had, all we could have, for some college girlfriend you hadn’t seen in four years?”

“You don’t understand,” she says, shaking her head and wondering if she should just press the button on her watch. Maybe Kara’d do a better job at explaining this. Internally, Lena winces at the thought. Kara would probably just punch first, ask questions later.

“I understand that you’re throwing away a chance at something real for a girl that can barely stick around for dinner, much less…”

“Jack, we’re practically married,” Lena finally says, seemingly incapable of finding a better way of saying it.

Shock crosses Jack’s face and his eyes dart so obviously to Lena’s left hand that she clenches it in a fist. “You’re what?”

“It’s a long story,” she says, kicking herself for saying it like that - no matter how true it feels.

A long silence stretches between them before he speaks again. “Well,” he says, a bitter sounding laugh dropping out of him. “I see things are a lot different than I expected.”

“Sorry to disappoint,” she says, knowing it comes out sounding insincere, but not correcting it. She’s not really sorry, more irritated at the direction the night had taken.

He looks at her, a sad expression that ebbs some of her anger away. “Can I just ask you why? Why her and not me?”

“I don’t owe you an explanation,” Lena says, voice tight. The audacity of him forcing her to defend Kara and their relationship from attack has made her feel irrational - like maybe she’s finally understanding why Mon-El constantly blabbers on about dueling conventions and mating rights.

“You don’t,” Jack agrees, all his earlier bluster gone from his voice and body language. “But I’m asking nonetheless. Consider it a selfish request from an old friend.”

Lena sighs, tries to find the parts of her that do truly love this man - who has done nothing wrong but fall in love with someone that’s cosmically unavailable. “I love you, Jack,” she starts, but it
doesn’t seem to give him any hope, his frown dipping further. “I’m not going to pretend otherwise.”

He nods slowly, listening.

“It’s just...it’s not the same,” she says. “I can’t give you what you want. I couldn’t when we were in Metropolis and I certainly can’t now. It’s Kara. That’s just...how it is.”

He sighs, his face soft and resigned. “Well,” he says, hands at his hips as he makes a show of puffing his chest out. “I feel quite the fool.”

“I don’t want to lose your friendship,” she says suddenly, feeling foolish for saying it herself.

He laughs a little, smiles at her though the expression falls short of genuine. There’s a hint of anger in his face. “I have to be honest, Lena. It might take me a bit to get there.”

She nods, understanding. “I get that.”

For a moment it looks as if he’s about to say more, one last try for it, but as if reconsidering in a nanosecond, his face freezes, eyes going far away. When he says nothing else, Lena bows her head to get a better look at him. “Jack?”

“Sorry,” he says, shaking his head and looking miles away from their present conversation. “I have to go.”

“Oh,” she says, taken aback by the sudden change in his tone. It’s as if all the emotion was sucked out of him and she wonders if it’s some kind of coping mechanism. “Okay.”

“Yeah, sorry,” he says again before turning abruptly on his heel and pacing quickly out of her office.

She watches him go with a mixture of confusion and relief.

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“Oh shit,” Jack says, just before the thing he’s working on explodes in the partitioned area they’ve set aside for their more volatile experiments. It blows the glass partition back by a solid three feet, and Jack lands on his back. Lena barely musters the interest to turn around.

“You alright?” she asks, focused on the bit of Nth metal she’s attempting to machine into micro pieces.

“You’re so caring,” Jack says, sitting up. Lena glances back to see him reaching up to adjust his goggles. “The little buggers ran into each other again.”

The steel door to their lab opens then, and Lex steps through gingerly, eyeing the smoke curling up from behind the glass with a small smile.

“You know, this building monitors sudden shifts in air pressure,” Lex says, displaying his phone where an alert is indeed showing. “Your little explosions are only fun for a short time.”

“Sorry,” Lena says, finishing off the cut she’s been working for the last few minutes while Jack scrambles up from the floor.

“It’s fine,” Lex says, coming over to sit in the lab chair next to Lena. “Gives me an excuse to ditch a board meeting. Mother was going on and on about how we need to make further steps into
weapons contracting, blah blah. You’d think a doctor wouldn’t be so interested in murdering people.”

“Sounds like mother,” Lena says, slipping the nanobot hulls under her microscope to take a glance at them.

“What have you two been blowing up in my building this time?” Lex asks, leaning over her shoulder to look at the digital display. “Fancy little metal bugs?”

“Nanobots, for healing injuries and illnesses at a micro level,” Jack says. “Or at least, that’s what it’s supposed to be.”

“That’s what it will be,” Lena corrects, turning around and showing Jack the display. He grins back at her with a happy satisfaction and she laughs at the way his hair’s been blown into disarray by the earlier explosion.

Lex picks a tablet up from the desk near Lena’s elbow and eyes the information with some interest, his curiosity clearly piqued.

“Interesting,” Lex says. “Applications?”

“Medical, largely,” Lena says. “Probably worth exploration in engineering fields as well. They could work to both fix tissue and hold off infections if they were outfitted with the right information and tools.”

“What are they made out of?” Lex asks, tapping at the display. “Your special metal?”

“Nth metal,” Jack says, proudly. Lex turns and looks at him with appraising eyes that make Lena roll her eyes at her brother.

“You’ve got enough funding to be purchasing Nth metal?” Lex asks, before whistling. “Congratulations.”

“Thank you,” Jack says, the grin on his face betraying his happiness at Lex’s approval.

“Let’s have dinner tonight, yes?” Lex asks, looking from Jack to Lena. “Mother is not invited.”

“Sounds good,” Lena says, leaning into her brother’s loose arm around her shoulders in a hug.

“Please don’t blow up my building,” Lex says, a grin on his face as he makes his way back to the door. “It’s expensive.”

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Kara is pacing the floor of her apartment when Lena gets back home and for a nanosecond she feels a pull of irrational guilt. As if she’s done something wrong and Kara’s found her out. Which isn’t the case at all, but her head is still reeling from her conversation with Jack and the look on Kara’s face is starting to concern her.

“Kara,” Lena says, dropping her purse on a sidetable and striding forward quickly. Kara startles as if she didn’t know Lena was there, which only further deepens Lena’s concern.

“Hey, hi,” Kara says, moving towards her, then stopping short. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing important,” Lena dismisses, feeling exhausted at the idea of rehashing her conversation with Jack.
“Tell me anyway,” Kara says, opening her arms for Lena to fall forward into her body.

Lena sighs, feels a renewed energy at the first press of Kara’s hands to her back. “Jack gave me a long-winded speech about why I should break up with you and get back together with him.”

Kara’s entire body goes rigid. So much so that Lena straightens to look at her. “I said no,” Lena adds as if that’s what has Kara so concerned - laughable as it may seem.

“I knew he was up to no good, but I didn’t think he’d go that far.”

The comment is odd enough to pique Lena’s curiosity and when she pulls back to look at Kara’s face she can tell her exhaustion is about to get worst.

“What do you mean you knew he was up to no good?” Lena asks and as if suddenly caught doing something wrong, Kara’s gaze turns from concerned to sheepish.

“I have to tell you something,” Kara starts, and Lena’s gaze goes narrow. This is the second time she’s had to hear this kind of confession and honestly she’s probably going to need another glass of alcohol to deal with all this. She didn’t even get to drink her brandy back at the office.

“Okay,” she says in a slow drawl, backing away slightly while her arms crossing over chest defensively.

Kara winces a bit, hesitation obvious in the way she fiddles with her fingers. “I’ve been investigating Jack,” she says, and Lena nearly barks out a laugh. Her irritation with Kara for her restaurant hijinks comes seeping back in.

“Uh, yeah,” she replies. “That’s no secret. Don’t think we won’t be talking about that stunt you pulled at dinner.”

“No, I mean,” Kara looks around as if searching for words somewhere in the room. “I’ve been investigating him like…a lot. That’s why Mon-El and I crashed your dinner.”

Lena has no idea what distinction Kara is trying to make and feels impatience start to get the best of her as she sighs, “Can we find the point here, darling?”

Kara takes a breath. “Lena, Biomax is dangerous and Jack’s covering it up.”

It’s not necessarily surprising to hear Kara say that – it’d been the angle Lena’d suspected Kara had been after this whole time – but instinctively she gets defensive. Biomax was a project she’d worked on for a long time after all, and Jack is, if anything, an old friend. Despite their last conversation, she still feels protective of what they once had - professionally if nothing else. “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“It’s true,” Kara retorts emphatically.

“You can’t know that,” Lena insists. “Jack wouldn’t–”

“He’s killed two people, Lena,” Kara says and at that, Lena nearly laughs.

“Jack would never hurt anyone,” she says, flabbergasted at the very idea of it.

“I’m not lying.”

“I don’t think you’re lying,” Lena says, standing up and moving over to the decanter of scotch on her counter. “I think you’re mistaken.”
“I’m not. During my investigation two whistleblowers were killed by a swarm of mechanical… somethings.”

“Kara, you don’t know what you’re saying.”

“Yes, I do,” Kara insists. “I was there when it happened. I saw the swarm - it was the same thing we saw at the press conference when he cut his hand.”

Lena’s brain starts to feel jumbled, her heart rate increasing by the second and she finds herself stammering to defend Jack despite how much she trusts Kara’s judgement. “That doesn’t mean it was Jack,” she starts and Kara huffs impatiently.

“You’re just defending him because he’s Jack.”

“Of course, I am,” Lena snaps, feeling her headache worsen and an instinctive desire to avoid any kind of reality at the moment. “You’re accusing him of something serious when he’s not even here to defend himself.”

“Because he’s dangerous, Lena.”

“You’re talking about a man that told me he cried when he had to dissect a frog in the sixth grade,” she says, almost laughing at the idea of Jack being dangerous. “He wouldn’t hurt a fly.”

“He’s not eleven anymore,” Kara insists. “And before this week, you hadn’t spoken to him in nearly a year.”

Lena turns and leans back against the counter to regard Kara with an arched brow. “And I’m supposed to think that a year’s absence has made him such a completely different man than the one I knew for nearly three?”

The room feels frosty, so much so that Lena pulls her sweater sleeves over her arms and keeps them close across her chest. Kara’s jaw is tight, her blue eyes focused and intent in a way that tugs something heavy and ominous in Lena’s gut.

Without another word, Kara pulls her phone out of her pocket and walks closer to Lena, holding it out as if in offering.

“What’s that?”

“My phone,” Kara answers.

“Yes, I see that. Why are you giving it to me?”

“Watch the video I have pulled up.”

Wordlessly, Lena takes the phone from Kara’s hands and does as instructed, her brow pulling down severely as an image of Jack starts to play on the small screen. “Biomax version 38,” Jack is saying from a seat at his desk. Lena takes in the injection gun in front of him with dread. “Human trial one.”

It’s heartstopping to watch Jack pick up the injection gun and hold out his own arm, to watch as he winces and pushes the syringe into his skin and then for his entire being to transform into the nano swarm. Her mouth goes dry and she doesn’t know what to do aside from hold her mouth in horror and blink up at Kara.
There’s a grim expression on Kara’s face along with a hint of worry around her eyes. “He faked the human trials – the ones on public record. That was what the first whistleblower approached me about and that’s what I’ve been trying to track down. Jack was the only human trial and he knew the nano swarm was dangerous from the beginning.”

All Lena can think is that she wants to talk to Jack, wants answers, wants to know why he did the one thing they agreed over and over again they’d never do.

“I need to talk to him.”

“Lena’s he’s killed two people,” Kara says, but Lena can’t believe that. It’s too hard to reconcile the accusation with what she knows of Jack.

“What do you mean he’s killed two people?”

“I said I’ve been investigating him,” Kara starts and before Lena can interrupt she puts a hand up to stop her. “A whistleblower approached me telling me the human trials on public record were being faked. The car we were meeting in blew up before he could tell me the entire story.”

“What?” Lena says, startled even though Kara had mentioned this just moments before.

“Then a second lead I followed led me to a guy that was supposed to have been one of the people in the actual trial. Snapper went to interview him and a huge swarm of nanobots ate him alive. I barely got Snapper out of there in time.”

There’s a bubbling indignation in the back of her throat as she tries to piece together why this is the first she’s hearing of all this. She ignores that in favor of focusing on the problem at hand. The easy connection here that Jack’s controlling the nanoswarm and that he’s used it to kill two people.

“Who else has seen this?” Lena asks, indicating the video on Kara’s phone.

Kara shakes her head, her hands on her hips. “Just us,” she says and then as if reading Lena’s mind adds, “but you cannot go talk to him until we get to the bottom of this.”

Ignoring that for the moment, Lena continues with simple questions hoping at least those will have simple answers. “How did you get it?”

Kara’s lips thin. “From his office. There aren’t any records of human trials like the ones filed in the official records. Just this video.”

Lena blinks, still trying to process as quickly as she can. “You broke into his office?!”

“Not technically,” Kara says, hands up defensively.

“What do you mean, not technically? I can’t imagine Jack just gave this to you.”

Sheepish looking, Kara’s eyes dart away. “Mon-El swiped his keycard when we were at dinner. That’s why we left so suddenly. I wanted to get to his office while I knew he was otherwise occupied.”

Pinching the bride of her nose, Lena shakes her head, exasperated. “Kara,” she sighs.

“I didn’t want to tell you anything until I knew for sure,” Kara says, shifting close enough that Lena can feel her warmth. “I know what he means to you. It’s part of why I wasn’t worried about leaving you alone with him - it’s pretty clear how he feels.”
Lena makes a short noise of surprise. Frankly, if that was so clear even to Kara in the few minutes she’d met him, Lena would have liked a little more heads up so as not to be so blindsided by his sudden confession at his office.

Nonetheless, that’s so far from what’s important now. “Then you know I have to talk to him,” Lena says. “At the very least maybe he’ll confess to me and then we’ll actually having something more substantial to go on.”

“I can’t let you do that,” Kara says quietly, her voice more like a plea than anything else. Lena feels her jaw go tight, bristling visibly enough that Kara backs off in the slightest. “Not without me.”

“You can wait outside, in earshot,” Lena concedes, knowing it’s the quickest way to get what she wants. A bit ridiculous considering in earshot likely means anywhere in the entirety of the city for Kara.

Lena expects a fight, expects Kara to protest and insist she stay home where it’s safe, but instead Kara nods, drops her hands from where they were perched against her hips. “Okay, yeah.”

“What?” Lena says before she can stop herself. “Just like that?”

“You’re right,” Kara says. “Maybe you can get him to confess.”

“You don’t want to encase me in bubble wrap first?” Lena asks. Kara sighs, looking down at the ground between them before she reaches hesitantly for Lena’s hand, where her watch rests.

“We agreed that we would take risks together, right?” Kara says. “Not apart. I mean, preferably no risks at all, but - it seems like we’re having trouble avoiding them.”

“Fair,” Lena says, watching Kara finger the face of her watch.

“There are laws, you know, about what being a mate means,” Kara says, softly. “It means you don’t have to be alone. Always, no matter what. You’re determined to talk to him, so I’ll be there.”

It makes Lena’s exhaustion flow away from her like water and a warm strength take hold of her limbs. “You don’t have to be alone either,” Lena tells her, locking on to soft blue eyes. “You should have told me about the whistleblower, about what you were doing. Even if it would have hurt me. I trust you.”

“I know,” Kara admits. “I’ll do better next time.”

“Good,” Lena says, feeling something fundamental click into place between them. It makes her feel like she could take on anything.

Kara takes a deep breath. “Okay. If you can narrow his location down, we’ll go when we’re ready.”

Lena nods in agreement, but when Kara makes to walk away she just steps closer and tugs her back into a tight hug, holds the embrace for long moments until letting her go.

Locating Jack is fairly easy. There’s a Spheerical owned lab on the outskirts of town that Lena’d heard Jack talk about before. After ruling out his offices and his hotel, it’s the next logical step. Kara flies them there swiftly and lands discreetly next to a back door into the large structure.
“Listen to me,” Lena insists, as stern as she can be as she rechecks the small device behind her ear that will record her conversations. “You do not come in there unless I’m in actual, real danger.”

“You’re already in danger just walking in there,” Kara points out, eyes like steel, her acceptance clearly coming up against the weight of her fear. It makes Lena want to press into her until both of them soften, but she takes a deep breath and focuses.

“You know what I mean,” she says, reaching out to circle her fingers around Kara’s wrist, the fabric of her suit feeling rough against her palm. The strength of her bracelet still presses up against her palm underneath it. “Let me get it all out of him before you get in there. We don’t have nearly enough information and if you come busting in there it might just lead to a fight.”

Kara looks determined to argue with her until Lena adds a soft, “Please. This is Jack. Let me just talk to him. I’ll let you know when I need a rescue.”

“Be careful,” Kara says, pulling Lena in close and kissing her firmly.

“Promise you won’t come in unless I absolutely need you to?”

Kara takes a breath, nods. “Promise,” she says before whispering I love you in Kryptonian.

- 

Jack’s looking through a microscope at something when she approaches and she calls his name out until he turns, a surprised look on his face. He’s clearly come straight here after their conversation, judging by the glass of whisky set out on the counter next to him and the frown on his face.

“Lena, what are you doing here?” He asks, looking behind her, a confused furrow in his brow. “How did you get in here?”

Declining to answer his question, she goes straight for the heart of it. “I know about the nanobots,” she says.

He looks taken aback, even more confused. “What about the nanobots?”


“What do you mean they’re faked?” Jack asks, looking offended now. “No. They’re not.”

“They are,” Lena retorts. “You’ve been trying to cover it up, but there weren’t any human trials. Not really.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he says, but Lena feels all the accusations come bursting out of her, incapable of stopping the stream of words.

“You injected that stuff into yourself,” she tells him. “How many times did we say we’d never do that? How many times did we talk about how dangerous this project was, how it could be used to control people? We agreed, Jack. I can’t -”

“Lena,” he interrupts, in a firm, desperate voice. “I don’t know what you are talking about.”

Jack’s expression hardly changes as he enunciates each word forcefully and the open look of innocence and confusion on his face is far too genuine for Lena not to believe him. “Oh my god,” she says, breathless as the truth starts to become more and more apparent. If Jack’s in the dark, that means someone else is controlling the nanoswarm. “You’re telling the truth.”
The second she says it, his face goes dead, a kind of lifelessness behind his eyes that terrifies her and a voice echoes behind her that has her fist clenching. “Miss Luthor,” it says and behind Jack steps Beth Breen, whom she recognizes immediately from the press conference, a glowing earpiece tucked on one side of her head and a smarmy look on her face Lena feels drawn to punch off her.

Her eyes dart back to Jack, to the blank look on his face as more and more dots connect.

“He can’t hear you,” she tells Lena.

“It’s been you the whole time,” she says for lack of anything better to say. Her brain starts scrambling around so quickly she can barely keep up.

“Keen observation,” Beth says dryly, coming to stand next to Jack’s stiff body. There’s a glowing blue earpiece in her ear that Lena’s seen before but is only now realizing the purpose of. It makes her want to kick herself.

“You killed those people,” Lena accuses her directly, wondering how long Kara’s going to wait before busting through a wall. A flash of blue appears in her peripheral, idling outside the large windows of the warehouse and Lena makes a motion with her hand as subtly as possible, hoping it staves Kara off just a bit.

“I didn’t kill those people,” Beth says with a quick tsk. “Jack did. He might not have chosen to, nor does he remember doing it, but...he did.” At the end of it, she touches her earpiece as if Lena can’t fucking see that’s what’s controlling the swarm. The skin of Jack’s face ripples with evidence of what he’s become and Lena feels like her heart might crack out of her chest.

“You’ve been controlling him this whole time,” she says, waiting for the opportunity to punch this bitch in the face.

“Well, not the whole time,” Beth admits, shrugging. “The bits where he was all moony-eyed over you were all him. Figured I’d let him make his shot. But now that you’re here, I can control you as well. Two massive titans of industry under my thumb.”

The skin on Jack’s face ripples with the nanoswarm’s presence as if sensing Beth’s intent. That’s probably exactly what’s happening, Lena thinks as she searches for a solution to her current predicament.

“And to think,” Beth continues, clearly committed to the whole supervillian monologue thing. God, it reminds her of Lex. “Poor sweet boy wanted to scrap the whole thing. All because of a pesky little side effect that removes free will. Said it wasn’t perfect yet.”

“Jack was right.”

“Jack lacks vision,” Beth corrects in a snap. “We’re about to make billions with Biomax in every home, hospital, school. Think of the military contracts. Only an idiot would turn down the possibilities.”

Beth looks Jack up and down, walks around him and runs a hand down his arm. It makes Lena’s skin crawl.

“You know it’s true what they say,” Beth starts with a smirk. “Behind every great man is a strong woman.”

“Oh I wouldn’t know,” Lena retorts, a snarky look on her face she’s sure. “I’ve never stood behind a man.”
“No,” Beth says, “You just clean up after your brother.”

The comment hits a bit, but Lena’s careful not to let that show.

“You’re an idiot,” Beth continues. “You walked away from the breakthrough of a century.”

“It doesn’t work,” Lena replies, mentally calculating all her options. Shut off the swarm, maim Beth, control the swarm, have Kara arrest Beth...

“See, I think it works beautifully. I have a brilliant figurehead that will do whatever I want, completely under my control.”

“You’re repulsive.”

Beth laughs. “You’re certainly one to talk.”

Arching a brow, Lena crosses her arms, feels the cool metal of her watch slide under her bicep. All she has to do is keep Beth talking until she can figure out how to save Jack. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“As if the world isn’t watching while you’re trying to get Supergirl under your thumb.”

It surprises Lena, and the shock must show on her face because Beth laughs again.

“I haven’t the faintest what you’re trying to say,” Lena says even as she can feel her heart start to race.

“Oh, please,” Beth says, condescension dripping off her. “Maybe other people can’t see it, but it’s almost pathetic the way you suck up to Supergirl to make up for the sins of your brother.”

The absurdity of it almost makes Lena laugh. She’d never once considered that angle before - that she’d work with Supergirl to improve a public image tarnished by Lex’s vendetta against Superman.

“I don’t suck up to Supergirl,” Lena says, amused despite the situation. It clearly irritates Beth, her lips pushing together in an angry line.

“Clearly not well enough or your little protector would be here right now,” Beth points out with a smirk.

Lena chuckles, unable to help herself.

“What’s funny?” Beth asks, brow furrowing.

“You know what they say,” Lena says, smiling and glancing towards the wall where Kara’s waiting, sure Kara can see and hear her clear as day. “Speak of the devil and all that.” As if on cue, a burst of breaking glass precedes Kara’s entrance to the warehouse and suddenly she’s next to Lena and slightly in front of her, hovering over the ground and hands at her hips.

It makes Beth flinch backward, cowering at Kara’s sudden presence and a wide-eyed look in her eye.

“Oh come on,” Lena taunts, knowing she needs to keep Beth – and the nanoswarm – occupied until she can find a way to deactivate it. “I showed you mine,” she says, nodding to where Kara’s hovered, a dangerous glow to her eyes. “Now you show me yours.”
Beth continues to level a steely gaze her way for a moment longer before tapping at her earpiece once. Jack’s hands move to his side, his chin lifted as a swarm of nanobots ascend out of his body.

“Keep them occupied,” Lena whispers for Kara’s ears only and though Kara turns to her as if to protest, she wisely says nothing else before zooming in front of the swarm and then away, leading them on a chase across the warehouse.

As soon as they’re away, Beth’s eyes glued to the chase, Lena makes for Jack’s body. She’s so intent on it, she doesn’t notice that Beth’s spotted the movement. It isn’t until she’s receiving a painful kick to her gut that she knows she’s been caught. It knocks the air out of her so hard she almost falls over, but she knows she can’t afford to. Especially not as Beth is mocking her with a, “Did I mention I’m a black belt?”

Lex was the first person to ever teach her how to throw a punch and so when she clenches her fist and rears back up to smack Beth across the face, she can’t help but reply, “Did I mention I was a Luthor?”

The hit knocks the earpiece out of Beth’s ear and it skitters across the floor away from them. Lena doesn’t pause, just smacks Beth as hard as she can until the other woman is slumping to the floor with a painful sounding thud.

Before she can do anything else – like maybe kick the woman in the face – Kara is zooming past them, the swarm hot on her tail until Lena can only watch, horrified, as the swarm catches up to Kara and pins her to a nearby structure.

Kara’s name nearly chokes out of Lena’s throat, a strangled, “Supergirl!” thankfully comes out instead.

For a heartstopping second, she freezes, her eyes caught on the way the swarm is enveloping Kara. The image mixes with that of Kara bleeding out under her palms and anxiety feels like it might take all the air out of her throat.

“Lena!” Kara yells out, snapping her out of her thoughts. It spurs her back into action.

A glance to Jack shows he’s still completely out of control of his body and likely his mind. Just behind him she spots a computer terminal and rushes towards it. Maybe if she can get into Spheerical’s mainframe she can try to override the nanobots.

Mentally crossing her fingers, she uses her old admin codes to login and can’t help but smile. “You should really change your passwords, Jack,” she murmurs to herself.

Just as she’s combing through the terminal, she hears shuffling behind her and turns to spot Beth, groaning in pain as she tries to move. Her aim is clear, and Lena nearly kicks herself for being so stupid. The earpiece lays dormant on the ground and just before Beth can reach for it, Lena scoops it up.

Beth falls back to the floor, defeated, but stays looking at Lena. “You can’t override the nanobots,” she tells her, as if knowing Lena’s aim. “It will destroy them, and it’ll kill Jack.”

Kara draws her attention away with a painful sounding noise, muffled by the swarm climbing up her face. “You don’t know that,” Lena says, scrambling for a way to save everyone.

“They’ve merged,” Beth says, pushing herself up to stand as if she’s regained the upper hand. “You kill them, you kill him.”
Lena’s fist clenches painfully on the earpiece in her hand and with lack of something better to do, she punches Beth in the face yet again, satisfied when it drives the woman back down the ground, blood coming out of her nose. Her knuckles ache with abuse, but she doesn’t care.

Looking back at Kara and then at Jack, Lena’s not sure what to do, but she knows she’s running out of options. Beth might not be trustworthy, but Lena knows enough about the technology to know she’s probably right. A full override of the nanobots might kill Jack.

A choice between Kara and Jack is painfully easy to make, but Lena doesn’t want to have to make it all.

So, she does the only other thing she can think to do. Her understanding of the nanobots may be outdated, but she and Jack got far enough for her to have an idea of how this earpiece might work. It’s worth a shot at least.

As soon as the piece slides into her ear it feels like her brain goes impossibly tight, stretching in on itself so quickly that she has to shut her eyes and rub her temples against discomfort.

A beeping sound resonates from the terminal by her side and she turns to look at a pop up window just as her brain feels like it unclenches.

*Authorized User Detected* it reads and she inhales sharply to see her own name written under it. “God, I love you, Jack,” she exhales, turning towards the nanoswarm holding Kara and needing only to think *get the fuck away from her* before they’re zipping off her body and rushing back towards Jack.

They hit into him so hard that he slumps to the ground, coughing with the force of it and gasping for air, his eyes going wide as he comes back to it.

“Jack,” she exclaims, falling to her knees next to him and gripping his cheeks. “Are you okay? You in there?”

His eyes are unfocused a moment before they stop on her and he grips one of her wrists where her hand is on his face. “I’m good,” he says even though he’s wincing and making a sound of pain as he sits up.

“You okay?” Kara’s voice comes from behind her and Lena shoots up, turns to rake her eyes over Kara’s form and check the same for herself.

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“All good,” Kara replies, equally soft as she reaches out to squeeze Lena’s wrist quickly. It’s a fast touch before Kara’s turning towards Jack and reaching out a hand to help him stand.

“Thanks,” he says, but it’s clear he’s having trouble supporting himself. Lena darts forward when it looks like he might fall and drapes his arm over her shoulders to keep him upright.

“I can take him,” Kara says, moving forward as if to take Jack from Lena, but Lena stops her with a jerk of her head towards the prone body nearby.

“Get her, we need to get them both to the DEO,” Lena says.

Kara’s eyes dart back and forth a moment, indecisive, before she finally agrees with a nod,
scooping Beth up and without any preamble zooming out of the broken window she’d entered through before.

“I think I’m okay,” Jack says, moving his weight off of her and leaning against the table behind him. “Just winded.”

“Sorry,” Lena says, scanning him with her eyes.

“Don’t be,” he replies, but his eyes go wide as he observes the scene and seems to start putting things together. “Christ, what’s happened?”

“Beth has been controlling the nano swarm,” Lena tells him, mindful of the shaky way he seems to be holding himself together. "She's been using it to control you."

Jack starts to blink at an alarming pace, his breath starting to quicken. “I killed people,” he says and Lena wonders if having control over the swarm herself has started to give Jack some of his memories.

“No,” she tells him, reaching out to touch his arm. “That was Beth.”

“It was me,” Jack says, his eyes wide and an all-consuming guilt covering his face. “I can see it happen. I can see myself doing it.”

“It was Beth,” Lena reiterates, shaking his arm to bring his attention to her. “Don’t think for a second otherwise.”

There’s a look on her face that Lena understands acutely - it makes her think of Lex and his warsuit, of knowing she’s had a hand in something terrible even if she didn’t orchestrate it.

“Jack,” she says softly, as soothingly as she can, but before she can say anything else, Kara’s zooming back into the building to land at Lena’s side.

“Ready?” Kara asks, looking to Lena.

“Yeah,” she tells her quietly and Jack makes a groaning sound.

“I don’t feel so great,” he admits and Lena can only watch as his eyes roll back into his head and he starts to slump forward.

Kara catches him before he falls over completely and hefts his body over his shoulder deftly.

“Let’s go,” she says to Lena, holding her free arm out.

Adrenaline is starting to leave her body and Lena’s feeling like she might faint right along with Jack. Kara must notice because she doesn’t wait for Lena to step forward. Instead, she moves herself, scooping Lena solidly into her side and looking down at her.

“You’re okay,” Kara says, kissing her forehead. “You did great.”

“Thanks,” Lena murmurs, allowing Kara to take all of her weight and grateful for the way she can sag against Kara’s body. “Let’s go.”

And with a slight bend of Kara’s knee, they’re up and off into the night.

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They put Jack in one of the many medbays across the downtown DEO base. Alex and Winn meet
them there, with Lena explaining the basics of what’s happened - the nanobots, their basic function, her ideas on how to solve the problem. Kara doesn’t stray too far from her side as she runs through simulation after simulation with Winn - and it takes hours, but they finally come to an agreement on their first steps.

She’s tasked with explaining their plans to Jack, who sits gamely through mentions of brain surgery and time under twenty-four hour watch and rehab before he glances to the window of his room, where Supergirl is standing. When Lena sets eyes on Kara, she disappears down the hallway with a small wave. Jack laughs a little.

“She’s Supergirl, isn’t she?”

Something heavy pulls in Lena’s stomach. “What? Who?”

Jack smiles, shakes his head. “Kara,” he clarifies. “She’s Supergirl.”

Doing her best to school her expression, Lena furrows her brow and tries for a quizzical smile. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

A moment passes, and Jack just stares at her, his smile knowing. “You should work on your poker face.”

“My poker face is fully operational, thank you very much,” Lena replies without thinking twice and Jack laughs, though it comes out sad.

“Not about her, it’s not,” he says, and Lena’s chest feels oppressively tight. “At least I know you’re throwing me over for the most powerful being on the planet.”

“Jack,” she starts, soft and worried, but he waves her off.

“The secret is safe with me,” he says, shrugging a shoulder. “Not that you’ve really confirmed it or anything.”

“She’s not – I don’t –”

“Honestly, Lena. I mean neither of you any harm, I’m just trying to inform you that you might want to practice a bit more neutrality when it comes to Supergirl lest people start to connect the dots.”

A certain kind of creeping anxiety starts to make its way up the back of her neck and it must show on her face because Jack puts his hand on her shoulder, warm and sure. “It’s okay,” he says in a low voice. “I’m sure it’s only because I know you so well.”

Her eyes go back to the window Kara’d just left and she tries to think of something to say. He laughs softly.

“It might also be because I’m especially sensitive to the way you look at other people,” he admits and she lets out a soft breath, but lets a tiny smile grace her lips. “I’m sorry about the way I acted before. I was hurt, but that’s not an excuse.”

Lena can read the sincerity there, feels closure on an important chapter on her life as a new one seems to open. “I’m willing to put it behind us,” she says quietly and he grins.

“I’m amenable to that,” he says. “Especially considering what you could do to me if I step out of line.” He gestures to the piece of tech she still has in her ear. She’d refused to take it off at the
DEO lest it leave her sight and put Jack under someone else’s control. If anything, he was her responsibility now.

“Don’t forget it,” she jokes and he puts his hands up as if in surrender.

“Oh I won’t,” he replies mirthfully.

Their laughter ebbs into silence as the control bug in her ear hums and Jack’s heart rate monitor pumps along.

“There’s something else I should tell you,” Jack says, the smile fading from his face. “About Biomax.”

Lena isn’t sure what could possibly be worse than her friend being permanently merged with a swarm of nanobots and her currently being in control of it, and she isn’t sure she really wants to find out.

“What about it?”

“If you look at our books, you’ll see numerous amounts of donations from various benefactors,” he says. “We had a lot of interest in the project.”

There’s nothing odd about that, but Lena can see something ominous forming in Jack’s expression. “I can imagine.”

“Yeah,” Jack acknowledges wryly. “The thing about it is...some of those donations never felt quite right.”

“What do you mean?”

Jack shakes his head. “I can’t really explain it. Just a gut feeling maybe, but I always thought…”

“Thought what?”

“There were big donations, Lena. Right after you left for National City, I suddenly had a mysterious benefactor. For a bit there, I thought it might actually be you.”

Lena starts to sense what feels so off to Jack, feels it coming like it’s in slow motion.

“I always felt a little off about Beth. Right from the beginning. I don’t know if you remember her, but I poached her from Luthor Corp.”

Lena has no memory of such a thing, but then again, Lena never really paid much attention to the company at large back then. “I didn’t know that.”

“When Lex was arrested and then when the company was moved, there were a lot of people that either wanted to stay in Metropolis or were looking for a change. Beth was doing low-level risk-analysis at Luthor Corp so when we offered her a promotion at Spheral she jumped at the chance.”

“What are you saying here, Jack?” Lena says though she can see it plain as day.

“Those donations? Lately, I’ve started to think they might be from someone we both know.”

Silence for a moment before Lena takes a breath. “Lex is in prison.”
“I know,” Jack says and it does nothing to make either of them feel better, Lena can tell.

A headache spikes between her eyes and Lena pinches the bridge of her nose against it. “Great,” she breathes out.

“Something to think about is all,” Jack says quietly and Lena almost laughs. She’s sure it’s the only thing she’s going to think about for the near future.

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It’s likely Jack will spend the better part of the next month at the DEO. Once she’s assured herself that he’s settled and under good care, she allows Kara to fly them both back to her apartment. Exhaustion has taken an even stronger grip on her brain and she almost weeps when she see the clock on her microwave glow a taunting 5:37 AM.

“Let’s go to bed,” Kara says, coming up behind her and pressing strong fingers into the tense muscles at her shoulder.

“Go to bed?” Lena jokes, sinking into the feel of Kara’s expertly working fingers. “I have to be at the office soon.”

“No,” Kara says, sounding firm as her hands retreat from Lena’s shoulders only to scoop her up and off the ground. “Neither of us are going to work tomorrow. We’re taking sick days.”

“I don’t believe in sick days,” Lena points out, her arms circling Kara’s neck on instinct.

“I know you don’t. That’s what you have me for.”

“Oh,” Lena says, feeling sleep pull heavily at her brain. “I knew it was for something.”

Despite a very real insistence on not playing hooky from work tomorrow, Lena succumbs to the fatigue clambering all over her body. “Set my alarm,” she manages to say before truly giving in and just as everything goes black around her she thinks she hears Kara laugh.

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The next morning, she wakes up hours past her usual alarm and only spends about five minutes berating Kara for contacting Jess without her approval to clear Lena’s schedule before giving into the desire to spend a lazy morning in bed, recovering.

By the time she makes it out of bed and into the kitchen, Kara’s already zipped off to get them donuts from a place they used to frequent on campus - a perfectly made bear claw is waiting for her next to a steaming cup of coffee.

It’s quiet and calm and rejuvenating to sit in the kitchen with Kara and let time pass by them. Kara idly discusses her plans for a blog post regarding Biomax - what to divulge and what to keep secret. It reminds Lena to check in with Winn and see how Jack is holding up at the DEO.

Eventually, she gets restless enough that she has to break away from the calm and actually do something.

“I might not be going into the office, but I still have work to do,” she tells Kara, taking a new cup of coffee into her office and sitting at her desk.

“Okay, well, I’m going to watch Netflix, so just let me know if you want to chill,” Kara calls out,
poking her head into Lena’s office for a quick second.

“"I will," Lena says on a laugh, waving Kara off lest she get distracted.

With a deep breath, Lena opens up her laptop and starts to work on her inbox. The first e-mail she has gives her pause. It’s from Lana and it’s seemingly benign, but Lena can read through the bland language.

It’s about the lead they have on the vault. Lana’s clearly uncovered something new and is eager to talk about it. That much can be gleaned from the fact that Lana’s sent her an e-mail at all.

It makes her think about what Jack had said. About the possibility of Lex having financed part of Biomax.

Her head starts to swim with what that could mean - with the implication that Lex is far more involved in her life than she’d ever realized. And just that thought alone sparks another memory that has her eyes drawing to the bottom drawer of her desk on the left side.

After a moment of hesitation, she stands up and walks to a bookshelf on the side of her office, looking for the right book and pulling it out to find a key she’d hidden within the pages.

The key unlocks the drawer and she maneuvers around until the false bottom pulls out.

There’s not much there, but the clean white envelope she’d put there months ago stands out starkly. After she’d taken it from the vault her mother had taken her to after abducting her, Lena’d mostly forgotten about it. Set it aside as a problem for another day.

As she turns it over in her hands, a creeping sensation pulses up her spine. The kind she’d gotten looking at Lex’s warsuit that day, or watching her mother throw a grenade at Kara that’d incapacitated her. It’s almost as if she can still see the radiating glow of John Corben’s Kryptonite heart.

It isn’t until Kara’s knocking softly on the open door that Lena realizes just how heavily her heart is beating.

“You okay?” Kara asks quietly, eyes darting to the envelope in Lena’s hand.

“I don’t know,” Lena admits, not sure what she’s about to find out - if she’s even about to find anything out. When it comes to Lex, she’s come to expect the unpredictable.

Kara seems to understand what she means, her face sympathetic as she leans against the door and keeps her eyes steady. “I’m here if you need me,” she says and Lena lets that simple statement steady the rapid thud of her heart.

Without any other discussion, she flips open the envelope to peer at what’s inside. When she finally gets a glance at its contents, she can’t help but think, oh Lex.

She pulls out the blank sheet of paper and laughs.
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