The Depth of Darkness

by RoLo_Renegade

Summary

Our heroes return to National City and the fight against CADMUS begins...
“They only let you be this happy if they’re preparing to take something from you.”

—Khaled Hossein

As elite agents of an intergalactic paramilitary force, members of the DEO were highly trained, uniquely specialized, and unwaveringly disciplined. Their work demanded of them secrecy, decorum, and reserve, as well as a level of detachment that would never allow them to indulge in the impropriety of emotional softness.

Therefore, something like the sight of Supergirl’s even more irrepressible happiness would never affect them in unallowably sentimental ways. They would simply go about with their duties, ignoring things like how, since Christmas, her boots barely touched the floor anymore or how their commanding officers indulged this behavior with expressions that noticeably bordered on joyful.

And when the agents sometimes let their attentions linger slightly too long or their expressions grow just a little less severe at the sight of their hero’s bliss? It was merely their way of confirming the continued positive status of her wellbeing—standard protocol for one of their own.

Just as it was completely standard protocol now for them to clear the deck the moment they heard the first decisive click of heels to hit the entrance tile—not that they feared the owner of said footwear. Inside the safety of the DEO, the woman they all knew publicly as the “Queen of All Media” shed the armor of that public image and willingly relinquished her weapons—sheathed her sharp tongue and dropped her shield of barbed words and withering glances.

Here, in this unexpected sanctuary for what was steadily growing stronger between Kara and her every day, the Queen abdicated to a version of herself that Cat had long thought lost in her perpetual need to be as many different people as possible before the end. This version of herself still held to that nascent notion of love that Cat had packed away after too much loss and heartbreak made the notion unbearable and unwanted. This version of herself, never allowed to grow bitter or hard but also never allowed to grow strong, terrified her.

And yet, all it took was the first sight of Kara, flipping over the edge of the second floor balcony and gliding excitedly across the foyer that agents left noticeably clear for her approach, to find the strength to keep that terror at bay.

Her face settled into a subdued counterpoint to Kara’s teeth-baring delight as she continued walking. The hero, however, knew there was a smile resting just beneath the surface of that beautifully unwavering poker face. “You didn’t have to get so dressed up just for me, you know.” Still not having landed, she floated backward in front of the CEO’s path before looping around her a few times in lazy circles. “Not that I mind, of course.” She allowed her gaze to shift appreciatively over the tailored amethyst dress that conformed perfectly to Cat’s body and the gray suede Louboutins that accentuated the impressive contours of her legs.

“While I am always delighted to bring a little color and couture to these drab institutional halls, I’m dressed this way for a meeting I have later at city hall.”
“Need a Super lift?” She waggled her eyebrows in a way that Cat knew would break her expression any moment if she kept watching.

“I have a more than satisfactory driver, thanks to Director J’onnz.”

In response, the hero spun another slow 360 around her, smiling as she did, “Yeah, but my way would make for a far more effective arrival.”

The CEO drew to a sudden stop, hands sliding up to settle high along the curve of her back in her familiar akimbo pose. “Floating around me like that, you’re like a sea otter in primary colors.”

The hero laughed while looping around Cat once more before touching down in front of her. Hands coming to rest on Cat’s hips, she replied, “Did you know that otters link paws, to keep from floating away from each other while they sleep?”

Cat could feel her lips twitch at the smile desperate finally to show itself. Of course Kara would know something like that. Instead, she forced her expression to remain neutral, throwing in an eye roll for good measure. Kara could see the warm golden glow in her eyes that would always betray her. “Truly the height of romance for furry creatures that perpetually smell like a rancid raw bar.”

Stepping close enough to feel the smaller blonde’s warmth mingle with her own, Kara wrapped arms completely around her and leaned in to gently nuzzle into soft golden curls. With a hum that shivered blissfully through Cat, she teased, “They are a bit limited in their access to body care products.”

Playfully poking a solid bicep, Cat looped her arms around Kara’s neck, drawing her flush against the hero. She smiled at the feel of Kara’s breath stuttering slightly. “You know how I feel about excuses, Kiera.”

Smile hidden in the smaller blonde’s thick tresses, Kara replied, “Of course, Ms. Grant. Excuses are a crutch for the ill-prepared, the poorly advised, and the improperly elected.” She trailed a line of kisses from clavicle to earlobe, smiling at the soft sigh she felt beneath her lips. “You taste delicious.”

Indulging in the moment, the CEO arched her neck to the side, humming contentedly at the feel of Kara’s continued exploration. “Coming from someone with as voracious an appetite as you, I’ll gladly accept the compliment.”

“You have no idea,” the hero murmured while swirling her tongue against the soft skin of Cat’s pulse point, a pleased smile crooking her lips at the feel of Cat’s shallow gasp.

Both knew the line of public impropriety that neither wished to cross, but there was something about this salacious level of contact they both craved unashamedly. “You’re going to get us banned from the DEO, darling.”

“Totally worth it,” she laughed, although it was enough to regulate her kisses back to something a little more appropriate to the setting.

Cat slid a calming hand down against Kara’s chest, taking a moment to breathe deeply for her own sake. Though not a fault of anyone in particular, the dearth of privacy between them since Christmas was definitely beginning to show its strain on both their patience.

An unexpected post-holiday return to D.C. to meet with Senator Crane’s cagey but ultimately worthwhile contact provided Cat with a jackpot of CADMUS financial revelations to confirm. However, it also led to delaying her return to National City until New Year’s Eve. By the time she
and Carter arrived home late that afternoon, Alex was waiting on the tarmac to take the Grants back to headquarters by way of their home, and Kara was halfway around the globe, helping her cousin on what Lois had already warned Cat was an ultimately disappointing holiday for Kryptonians and anyone involved with them.

*You’re going to grow to loathe fireworks* was all the Metropolis reporter texted her.

Cat quickly ascertained the frustrating limits of the word *loathe* as she listened to Alex direct Kara and Kal-El to the fifth and sixth fire outbreaks respectively in the half hour since the agent had brought them to the DEO. “I didn’t think it was possible to doubt humanity’s competence any further after people started chugging cinnamon and snorting condoms.” She glared at the string of alerts that continued to pop up on the monitor, indicating all the places with reports of fireworks-related conflagrations.

“It’s actually a pretty slow start compared to last year.” Alex knew without looking the unimpressed glare Cat was giving. “And Kara has alleviated a great deal of the pressure on Kal-El now that she’s available to help him blow out the fires and provide rescue assistance.”

The reporter bit back the sarcastic reply poised on the tip of her tongue, realizing that what she wanted to view as a personal affront against her by the universe was ultimately nothing more than an inconvenience for her—but so much more for all those whom Kara and her cousin could save.

With a resolute quirk of her lips, she slipped out her phone, fingers tapping across her keyboard one line: *New Year’s resolution: Take down fireworks industry before next New Year’s Eve.*

She smirked at the three bouncing dots on her screen before they revealed the response: *I’m in. We can start locally with July 4. You’re going to hate that holiday, too.*

As she prepared to put away her phone, Cat noticed the bouncing gray dots appear again and actually snorted at Lois’s final text: *Turnabout is only fair play, BTW. She is just as easy to tease as he is, although I don’t think I’ve ever seen him turn the color of his cape. Call me if you get bored. We can craft a new drunk text that would put our last one to shame—maybe even melt the Girl of Steel?*

Cat archived the offer with wicked glee, since boredom never set in that evening thanks to Eliza’s arrival and Alex’s constant supply of scotch and sarcasm, which Cat noted was almost as acerbic as her own particular brand. Winn happily took over the role of entertaining Carter with a video game tournament that spread across several of the DEO’s wall-sized monitors. The CEO noted, however, the nervous, pondering glances her former IT tech cast her way throughout the evening.

A part of her thrilled at the thought of goading him until he jumped and fidgeted in a manner she’d never confess to finding endearing. However, Carter’s enthusiastic taking to the nervous, fumbling agent was enough to keep her from doing any more than depositing a tumbler of scotch next to him on her way back to Alex’s station. The surprised, grateful stuttering she heard behind her was more than adequate to soothe her usual provocative pique.

As midnight in National City approached, Cat and Carter joined everyone on the roof. The top of the DEO headquarters provided a satisfactory view of the portion of the night sky that would soon hold court to the city’s fireworks display, though not nearly as perfect as the view from CatCo, she mused. She scanned the area for the best place to stand only to be surprised by Alex and Eliza handing her and Carter DEO-issue jackets.

The agent shrugged. “You’ll appreciate the extra warmth,” she explained, a wry grin quirking her lips. Without further explanation, she strolled back to where Maggie waited for her, having gotten
enough of a break from her own shift to enjoy a brief New Year’s respite with Alex. Eliza was just as reserved as her older daughter, offering only a knowing smile as she headed to join J’onn at the other side of the roof.

A thunderous boom sounded just off the horizon, followed by a rush of wind and the instant appearance of slightly sooty Kryptonians, reeking of gunpowder and barely able to suppress their matching brilliant smiles. Kara was first to float closer to the Grants, laughing coyly, “The coats work better when you actually put them on.” She tilted her head toward the sky. “It’s a little chilly up there tonight.”

Carter’s eyes widened so much his mother briefly worried about potential muscle strain. “We’re—we’re going to fly?”

Floating down to Kara’s side, Kal-El’s bright grin stood out even more prominently against a smudge of soot that Kara playfully wiped away with part of his cape. Cat actually laughed at the motion, noting how willingly Superman acquiesced to his cousin’s affectionate tending. With a subtle hitch of his brow and a quick clearing of his throat, Kal-El moved closer to Carter and rested a hand on the boy’s shoulder. “Absolutely, Carter—as long as it’s all right with your mother, of course.”

“As if I would say no to the Man of Steel.” Hand resting on a hip jutted at a subtle angle, Cat eyed him with a suggestive arch of her brow that caused Kara to smirk knowingly behind him. “You’re incorrigible,” the hero finally sighed after watching Kal-El help Carter into his coat and take once more to the skies, keenly avoiding eye contact with either woman as he did.

Cat remained silent for a moment, watching as her son ascended in Superman’s hold, his enthusiasm continuing to be audible even as they disappeared into the dark night. When she turned back to meet Kara’s gaze, she rolled her eyes at the way the hero was attempting to pull off a convincing glare. “My incorrigibility is one of my finer features, and you know it, Supergirl.”

She slipped quickly into her coat and even more quickly into Kara’s awaiting embrace, flinching instinctively and crinkling her nose at the acrid scent that permeated the hero’s hair and uniform. Kara caught the expression and the unexpected response, blushing apologetically. “Yeah, sorry about that. I think I’m going to need a week of showers to smell normal again.”

Fingers deftly slipping along the textured cobalt fabric along Kara’s sides, Cat offered, “Or perhaps all you need is someone else to help you scrub up.” She leaned closer, determined to ignore the triggering scent of gunpowder, and nipped firmly at the jut of Kara’s jawline. “I’d be more than willing to volunteer for the task.”

Anyone watching Kara’s takeoff at that moment would have observed a noticeable starboard list before she righted herself. Only Cat, however, was audience to the furious spike in body heat and audible swallow the smaller blonde’s comment evoked. “It’s not polite to distract your captain,” but beneath the chiding, Cat heard the want that thickened the hero’s voice.

Rising to a height just slightly colder than Cat would have preferred, Kara helped her shift so she could get a better view of the bay. And then she felt the heavy hug of Kara’s cape wrapping around her, cocooning her against Kara and collecting enough of the Kryptonian’s body heat to make her more than comfortable.

To their right, Cat caught sight of her son and Superman performing some kind of acrobatic feat that she knew better than to watch. Kara instantly understood. “I can tell Kal-El not to indulge him if you’d prefer.”
With a stilted shake of her head, she turned to meet Kara’s worried gaze with a grateful smile. “Carter’s enjoying himself, and I know where your cousin lives if he drops my son.” She leaned closer at the sound of Kara sniffing in amusement, deciding that listening to the heartbeat beneath her ear would be the best balm for her worry. Never mind the curiosity that flared at the thought of what it would be like to wake up hearing that sound unimpeded by clothing.

Kara felt Cat shiver again and wrapped her more snugly. The smaller blonde laughed to herself at the misplaced chivalry but put off any further thought at the sight of the first sprays of color to paint the onyx sky.

Backlit by the intermittent spark and sizzle of holiday pyrotechnics, Kara drew Cat close with a hand tangled in soft blonde waves. “Happy New Year, Cat.” This time, she knew what had caused the shudder that rippled through the woman in her arms as she ran her tongue along and then between Cat’s lips, the linger of scotch that awaited her sweet and familiar. She continued her exploration down to the sensitive skin of Cat’s throat long enough to feel the impatient growl that rumbled low and hungry beneath her tongue.

Hands unexpectedly grasping the hero’s face, Cat crashed their lips together, hissing at the solid contact with Kara’s deceptively pliant looking mouth. The copper tang of blood teased her taste buds but she pressed on, hell-bent on finding even a sliver of relief from the furious desire inside her.

Rolling her hips, she drew flush against Kara, a low keening slipping from her lips when Kara responded by sliding her leg between Cat’s thighs. Needful heat coiling deep within, she clung her eyes shut, the lower part of her body moving in time with her shallow breaths as she rocked against the supple steel of Kara’s thigh.

The air around her grew colder as she realized on some level that Kara had taken them higher for more privacy. The smaller blonde forced herself at that moment to take a deep breath, willing the sharp cold in her lungs to clear her thoughts. It was then she felt the tentative brush of Kara’s fingers against the clasp of her belt. Opening her eyes, she met Kara’s longing gaze, appearing almost lit by some sharp internal spark.

Releasing the intense grip she had at some point unleashed on the hero’s bicep, she took Kara’s hand in her own. She lifted it to her lips, kissing along the hero’s knuckles and giving each of them enough time to settle back down from what Cat knew she shouldn’t have so eagerly instigated.

When she looked back into Kara’s eyes, no longer quite as bright as before, she quirked her lips pensively. “I suppose it would make me villainous if I tried to keep you from leaving again.”

Kara laughed, a low vibration deep within her chest. “If being the villain to my hero is your kink, we can give anything a try once.” Her laugh intensified at the way Cat’s eyes widened at first before narrowing lasciviously. Leaning back in, she continued to lose herself once more to the tantalizing press of Cat’s lips against her own.

Kissing Cat Grant was just as transcendental as Kara had always imagined it would be—and she had imagined it more times than even she could recall. Whether soothing or feverish, swift or leisurely, each kiss was unlike any Kara had ever experienced with anyone else. Something shifted inside her with every kiss, making each one more intense than the last until Kara imagined she could actually feel even the smallest details of the lips coaxing the most desirous moans from her.

The click of an opening comm link filtered through her blissful fugue, followed by her sister’s voice, noticeably tinged with apology. “Hey, Kara, we just received report of a massive explosion down in Ensenada.”
With a heavy sigh of frustration, Kara tapped her earpiece in acknowledgement. “Be there in a minute, Alex.” The suddenly tense lines of the body in her arms was all she needed to feel to know she wasn’t the only one definitely no longer a fan of fireworks. At that thought, she realized that the fireworks display there in National City had ended at some point without either woman realizing it.

Touching down on the roof, she waited until certain Cat had her footing before relinquishing her hold. Carter instantly ran to greet them, Alex moving in behind him. “Mom! Superman is so cool!” He blushed as the words left his mouth, quickly adding, “I mean, cool but different cool from you, Kara.”

The hero started to laugh, but halted at the sight of a frosty wisp of breath twisting up from her lips. Her puzzlement only deepened when she caught Kal-El studying her with a look of unexpected comprehension and noticeable uneasiness. She watched him lean in to whisper something to Eliza and she wanted nothing more than to eavesdrop. Alex’s voice, however, forced her full attention onto her sister.

“I’m really sorry, both of you. Kal-El was going to take this one on his own, but when we saw the satellite surveillance—well, it’s bad.” She reached out to grip Kara’s shoulder, startling at the flinch of muscle she felt in response. “You okay, Kara?” She eyed her sister with concern. “You’ve been going full-tilt for a while. Do you need a break? Maybe more food?”

Squirming under the worried looks coming from both Alex and Cat, she waved dismissively while pointedly moving out of Alex’s reach. “I’m fine—just a little punchy, I guess.” She hovered up slightly from the ground, turning her attention toward her cousin. “,kahl,ehl, :dehdh vo uwedh.”

Cat watched in surprise as the Man of Steel fell instantly into place by Kara’s side. She noted as well how he kept looking peripherally toward Kara though pointedly avoiding making eye contact. “Ready when you are, Kara.”

With a curt nod, she glanced one final time at Cat before rising in tandem with Kal-El to a height safe enough to launch into full speed.

Alex looked over at Cat at the sound of the sigh that punctuated the familiar rush of wind and distant departing boom. Digging into one of the deep pockets of her cargo pants, she slipped out a flask and handed it to the smaller blonde. “For holiday emergencies only.”

Clicking her tongue but accepting the offer just the same, Cat took a healthy swig, grimacing at the feel of alcohol hitting the cut on the inside of her lip. “Where is Detective Sawyer?”

Black-clad shoulders hitched, but Cat recognized the tension that kept them from fully relaxing. “She only had a short break. She’s picking up for the colleague who took her Christmas shift.”

“And you’re here directing the international Kryptonian Blowout Tour.”

Alex smirked around the lip of the flask she’d accepted back from the CEO. “Someone has to keep them on track.”

Humming distractedly, Cat rubbed at the spot on her throat where Kara had most definitely left some form of mark. ”Who knew protecting the planet would be so sexually frustrating.”

Bourbon dribbled down Alex’s chin on the choked sputtering of a laugh she couldn’t contain. Without missing a beat, Cat clapped her on the back while admonishing, “Let’s not waste good alcohol, Agent Danvers. I believe it’s going to be the only thing keeping either of us warm this morning.”
As it turned out, however, the morning stretched into another full week of nothing more than stolen kisses as Cat and Kara each crisscrossed the skies, knowing that the ultimate “greater good” would always come first.

Cat tsked derisively to herself at the unintentional pun. Sometimes, she really hated puns.

With a resolute sigh, she rolled her neck to relieve some of the tension that seemed to have taken up permanent residence in the muscles between her shoulders. Stepping back from Kara’s embrace, she arched one brow knowingly before refocusing both their attentions on that morning’s order of business. “I appreciate your sister and Director J’onnz accommodating my last-minute scheduling of this meeting.”

“Of course. Must be something pretty big for you to have sent the request after midnight.” She studied the reporter hopefully.

Cat gave a small shake of her head. This was not something she wanted to divulge to Kara without her sister nearby. “In due time, Supergirl.” She smirked at the huff of disappointment while absently scratching at her left shoulder.

Instantly noticing where Cat’s fingers traced, Kara gave the area a quick X-ray scan. “You know everything is healed now from where Alex inserted the tracker, right? Your shoulder shouldn’t still itch.”

Flicking her fingers dismissively before lowering her hand once more to her hip, Cat replied, “Of course, I know it’s psychosomatic. It’s just taking some time to get used to being tagged like the focus of the latest Discovery Channel wildlife special.”

“Cat.” She immediately looked up at the sound of Kara’s voice, soft and anxious, meeting eyes that had catalogued the cosmos and still looked at her as if she were wondrous. “It—it makes me feel better, knowing that we can track you and Carter now.”

The smaller blonde acquiesced with a touch to the hero’s cheek, which brought an instant smile to her lips. She shifted slightly, her cape moving with an audible swish against the back of her boots. “I’d like you both to also have a way to signal me. Kal-El gave me the idea the last time he was in town—he reminded me of the watch he gave James back when they were both in Metropolis.”

“A watch?”

“Yes, but slightly more. Beneath the watch face is a button that, when pressed, activates a signal tuned to a frequency audible only to Kal-El and me—and possibly dogs,” she laughed, flushing slightly. “I’ve asked Alex if the DEO can design one for you and one for Carter.”

The casual shrug was all for show, of course. Cat knew she would wear the watch, wear whatever Kara asked of her if it would give the hero peace of mind regarding the safety of her son and herself. Still, she couldn’t resist asking, “But will mine come in Cartier?”

Laughing at what she knew was only a halfway teasing question, Kara began to respond, only to be cut off by the uninvited arrival and oblivious interruption that completely drowned out her words. “Kara, hey!”

“Mon-El.” Cat’s eyes narrowed at Kara’s voice, normally so bright and expressive, instantly flatlining at the utterance of the newcomer’s name. The hero glanced past him to the agent trailing behind the Daxamite, her smile a little more genuine. “Hey, Winn.”

“Hey, Kara.” He nervously waved at his former boss. “Ms. Grant.”
Before Cat could respond, Mon-El pushed on, “You’ve been avoiding our next training session.” He flexed his arms, a broad smile parting his lips. “Afraid of how it will look for Supergirl to be taken down by the new Superman?”

Watching how the lines on Kara’s face tightened the longer this unexpected intruder continued to speak, Cat placed her hands on cocked hips and hummed a tone of disdain that Kara knew instantly. Immediately, the hero turned her attention to the smaller blonde, a sense of excitement growing within her.

If indifference were a power, Kara was convinced that Cat Grant would be the greatest superhero in the universe. She watched in awe as the smaller blonde adapted the instantly recognizable dismissive expression she had witnessed Cat wield on many an occasion—equal parts withering and apathetic in a way that Kara could never quite figure how she balanced so perfectly.

“Montel, is it?” Before the Daxamite could collect himself enough to correct her, Cat moved on in her most unimpressed tone. “Allow me applaud the privilege that has made you impervious to the need for manners. It’s almost as stunning as all that sporadic facial hair. I’ll be sure to alert Abercrombie & Fitch that you’re available for their next brochure shoot.”

Mon-El’s expression shifted from confusion to indignation when he realized he had apparently been insulted enough that Kara and Winn both struggled to suppress amused laughter at his expense. However, Cat proceeded with no acknowledgement of his mood shift or the glare he now wore as he studied her.

“For the record, it’s impolite to intrude pointlessly when adults are conversing. However, allow me to respond to part of what you so arrogantly babbled. I’ve lived in both Metropolis and National City, which means I’ve enjoyed the privilege of protection from both our resident Kryptonians. I can say with full confidence that I have never once heard either of them refer to themselves in any sort of self-aggrandizing way. They simply see themselves as doing what they do because they can.”

She glanced over at Kara, her eyes raking appreciatively over her form in a way that made the hero blush in delight. “It’s part of their irresistible charm.” Her eyes shifted once more, pinning the Daxamite in place with a narrowed glare. “Needing to tell others you’re a ‘super man’ means you’ve actually not done anything that would lead others come to this conclusion about you themselves.”

She shrugged, waved one hand dismissively in his general direction. “I’m sure you have your own unique charms. Perhaps, though, you should spend less time trying to convince others that you’re impressive and more time learning how to actually be impressive. Oh, and investing in a razor. Feel how good it feels to shave.”

With a decisive quirk of her lips, Cat pivoted and departed, fingers surreptitiously gliding along Kara’s forearm as she passed. The hero’s smile grew, whether from the touch or from what she’d just witnessed, and she turned to watch the smaller blonde for several clicks of Louboutin heels. She knew many different Cat Grant walks by heart, and this one was Kara’s favorite: predatory with just enough suggestive sway to always leave Kara flustered and wanting to see more.

“I’m plenty charming,” the Daxamite finally managed to reply, clearly stunned by the way this woman had dared speak to him.

Winn shot him an amused look. “Yeah, okay.” He clapped the Daxamite on the shoulder. “You go with that, Mon-El.”
To Mon-El’s dismay, Kara didn’t even acknowledge that he had spoken at all. Without turning to either man, she instead waved in their general direction, muttering something about seeing Winn later before following after Cat, the pull of the smaller blonde too great even for her to resist.

“Who the hell does she think she is?”

“Cat Grant,” Winn replied, “knows who she is. I wouldn’t even bother trying to compete with her for Kara’s attention. You might as well be back on Daxam when she’s around, as far as Kara’s concerned.”

The Daxamite sneered. “But she’s human.”

Winn couldn’t suppress the frown at this sentiment. “First off, that’s probably not the tone to use when referring to the inhabitants of the planet you now call home. Secondly, there isn’t a snowball’s chance in hell that Cat Grant will ever give a damn what you think of her—but Kara will care. You might want to tone down that attitude if you don’t want to feel what it’s like to train with Kara at her full strength—because you know she holds back with you, right, Superman?”

The IT tech snorted in satisfaction at Mon-El’s glare before he strode away once more, pausing long enough to watch with a wistful smile as Kara caught up with Cat. The hero cheekily scooped up the smaller blonde and floated them both to the second floor conference room, Cat’s rather undignified squeak of surprise making Winn break into a genuinely happy laugh.

Inside the solitude of the conference room, Cat turned her narrowed jade gaze upon the face now perfectly level with hers. “You know how I feel about these unprovoked demonstrations of brute strength.”

Below the barest attempt at irritation, Kara heard the breathlessness aroused by the press of her biceps and forearms, still wrapped around lissome shoulders and beneath the bend of graceful legs. “Yes,” she conceded, “I do.” She nuzzled against the CEO’s neck, filling her lungs with the distinctive fragrance of the woman in her hold. “Which is why I keep doing them.”

Drawing the hero’s attention with a hard scratch of nails against her scalp, Cat sighed, “Put me down, Supergirl—unless you want to add exhibitionism to your repertoire.”

“Promises, promises,” she laughed while carefully setting the CEO back down to balance on those impossibly high heels.

The tangle of strong fingers in her hair halted the hero’s movement. Looking into Cat’s eyes, a private world built in the connection where cerulean sky met jade forest, Kara felt her mouth gape slightly at the intensity in Cat’s opalescent gaze. “Do I keep my promises?”

Licking at suddenly desert-parched lips, she nodded, voice tripping over the syllable switch of her one-word reply: “Always.”

“Best to keep that in mind then.” The words breathed directly into the hero’s mouth, lips following closely behind, to seal in the promise with a focused fire that flickered through her skin, turned her marrow molten.

Eyes fluttered in the darkness behind closed lids, Kara focusing on steadying everything that shuddered and shook within her under the attentions of the woman still wrapped in her arms. It often seemed unreal—had to be an illusion, a lie, a dim remnant of Black Mercy’s poison, finally reaching her brain. And yet the solid feel, the permeating heat, the intoxicating scent of Cat Grant engulfing her like the perfect storm she was somehow always made the unreal of it all make sense.
The comm line clicking open in her ear dragged her back into focus, J’onn’s voice sharp and clear in her ear. “Supergirl, please report to the loading dock. Agent Danvers could use your help to make it in time to our meeting with Ms. Grant.”

With a tap against her earpiece, Kara replied, “Be right there, sir.”

She smiled as Cat moved without comment from her hold and settled into one of the conference room chairs. “Duty calls, Supergirl” and she waved the fingers of one hand toward the door while pulling her phone from her bag with the other.

Kara moved close and leaned in for a kiss before floating back toward the door. A thought occurred to her and she rotated in midair to once more face Cat. “Coffee?”

The smaller blonde quirked her lips without looking up while flipping through her emails. “You know how I like it.”

She resolutely ignored the sound of the doorjamb cracking against Kara’s shoulder as the hero drifted into it, distracted as she was, less by Cat’s statement than by the licentious tone in which she stated it. She did, however, smirk at the sound of Kara muttering an apology, whether to her or to the splintered wood, before floating quickly out of sight.

Cat settled into the lull of the DEO’s silence, able to focus on the series of messages she had received since arriving. Several pertained to CatCo, including a response from James to her alert that she was in town and expecting to have something potentially newsworthy to share with him before the end of that day. Her lips quirked into what she would staunchly deny was a smile at how focused and responsive her acting CEO had become since her encouragement to him to focus.

While reading a message from one of her contacts with whom she would be meeting soon, she noticed the whisper of movement from the doorway. “I swear, I’m buying you a bell.”

A laugh, decidedly male, was the first thing to finally draw Cat’s full attention, followed by the appearance of a mug before her, billowing with steam. “Your coffee, Ms. Grant—scorching hot and absolutely no whole milk involved at all this time.”

The blonde’s head swiveled up instantly, gaze locked on the face of the DEO director. His expression offered no immediate revelations, but a sudden spark of red in his eyes that then morphed into Kara’s entrancing blue and back to the dark gaze of Hank Henshaw caused her breath to catch in her throat. “You must be a riot at parties, Director,” she finally murmured as she accepted the mug.

J’onn offered a controlled smile while taking a seat diagonal from Cat. “I’m sure I would be quite a hit. Too bad I’m not much for social gatherings.”

Cat hummed as she took a long pull from her coffee, reveling in its perfect burn. “So, was that also you behind that Supergirl parlor trick Kara pulled on me?” She quirked her lips at the ghost of a smile that appeared at her question. “Right. Well, you should really consider honing your impersonation of Kara Danvers. Mazel tov, though, on how well you worked the Super skirt.”

Cat succeeded in earning a full laugh from the Martian. “The skirt is surprisingly comfortable. However, I try not to make a habit of impersonating my operatives on a regular basis. Those were both instances of extenuating circumstances.”

“And what were the extenuating circumstances behind you bumbling through that abhorrent impersonation of my former assistant?”
“Kara was under attack from an alien parasite.” Pained memories tightened his expression. “We nearly lost her.”

Muscles rippled along Cat’s throat at J’onn’s blunt confession. “And how often have you almost lost her?” She frowned at the roughness she heard in her voice.

“Too often for my preference,” he conceded. Not wanting to dwell on the darker memories of that day, he pressed on, “I have to admit that having to go toe-to-toe with you that day was just the distraction I needed.” He huffed in amusement when Cat tipped her coffee mug in an imaginary toast. “You’re quite formidable, Ms. Grant.”

“That’s probably the nicest description I’ve heard in a while. Truth is, I’m—what I need to be, Director. Success isn’t handed to the demure in my business. And when you’re a woman who started out as a gossip columnist, the only things you are handed are insults and insinuations.” She cocked her head slightly, studying the borrowed face before her. “Then again, you’ve probably learned far worse about humanity.”

J’onn bowed his head slightly in consideration. “I haven’t always looked like this since my arrival on Earth. However, even in the short time I have assumed this form, I can attest that it has been—revealing. My experiences as Hank Henshaw haven’t been all negative, though. Besides, I have experienced and witnessed far worse in my time here. There is still much further for humanity to go, but things have improved.”

“How long have you been on Earth?”

With a smirk, he teasingly replied, “Long enough to have seen independence come to your shores.”

He smiled at the glimmer of journalistic pique he saw flare within the reporter’s gaze. “I suppose you wouldn’t be at all interested in sharing some of your stories with CatCo magazine, hmm?” She laughed at his amused smirk. “Can’t fault me for trying.”

“Perhaps one day. However, I believe Supergirl is a far better public face for the alien experience here on Earth.”

“Because she’s a pretty, young blonde?” Cat clicked her tongue in mock disappointment. “Et tu, Director?”

J’onn closed his eyes, concentrating on morphing into his true form. When he refocused on the woman across from him, he was surprised to see that her expression hadn’t altered at all at the sight. “You do have a most impressive poker face, Ms. Grant,” he teased, his voice now distinctly layered by his true vocal cords.

Cat shrugged her slim shoulders, lips quirked pensively. “I won’t insult you with some treacly Afterschool Special message about how all that matters is ‘what’s on the inside.’ We both know that if that were true, I wouldn’t spend nearly as much as I do to maintain all this,” she teased, gesturing vaguely to herself with a half smirk that caused J’onn to chuckle. “But right now,” and she gestured this time to the alien visage watching her, “all I see is the face of someone who has placed himself in significant peril to protect people we both care about a great deal.”

Silence passed between them for several beats as J’onn let Cat’s words settle—let the surge of her unspoken emotions wash over him. He had known her truth since that day, standing in her office, failing right away in his masquerade of a woman he realized too late that Cat Grant knew with an unanticipated intimacy of detail, and struggling to withstand the raging storm of frustration and confusion that churned within her each time he faltered in his ruse. And beneath it all, roiling and
wild, was the deafening roar of all he knew he should not—of her protectiveness, of her silent complicity, of her desire.

He’d known and he’d done the only thing he could—he’d forced her to push him away, unable any longer to learn so intimately what she was unwilling yet to accept. Instead, he’d retreated and, when Kara had recovered and returned to Cat’s side, he’d bid his time, accepting this was not his truth to tell. Sometimes, the worst part of knowing was the patience required to wait for the truth to finally come to light.

“I had two daughters once, many lifetimes ago by human standards. I lost them both in—in one of the worst ways a parent can ever lose a child. They can never be replaced within my heart, but the love that I never got to show them, I gladly give to Alex and Kara.”

The CEO tilted her head ever so slightly, her expression purposefully controlled. “All this time among humans hasn’t dissuaded you from investing emotionally in our insignificant mortality?”

The Martian allowed the thoughts behind her inscrutable countenance to fill his mind—the shame in her human frailty and the guilt in her inability to protect Kara from the sorrow that this finite fragility would ultimately bring her. “There is nothing insignificant about your mortality, Ms. Grant. The brevity of human existence fuels you all with a vibrancy to which those like me are drawn. Our longevity would be a sentence rather than a gift without it.”

“And what about the misery we inflict when our vibrancy burns out?”

J’onn watched the pain of deeper understanding flicker in gold and green. “No one is immune to the heartbeat of loss. Yes, those like me and like Kara must bear more because of our unique circumstances. However, the pain is temporary in comparison to what you leave us in return.” He observed her querulous frown. “What you think are fleeting moments will continue to brighten our lives long after the pain recedes.”

Her gaze shifted, voice lowered in penance. “It’s all so unforgivably selfish of us, though, isn’t it? To expect you to bear so much for what equates to nothing more than—than a day or two of your lives?”

“My wife and daughters are still the first faces I see whenever I close my eyes, and they have been gone from me for centuries.” He watched the weight of his admission settle within her. “You are already an integral part of her tapestry, Ms. Grant. Do not let anything dissuade you from making your mark as vibrant and bold as you can.”

At the sound of hard-soled boots landing against the floor outside the conference room, Cat straightened in her seat, swiping a knuckle surreptitiously beneath her eye. Clearing her throat, she softly stated, “I will take that under careful advisement, Director.”

The Martian merely nodded before focusing on the sound of the Danvers sisters now entering the room, heads bent close in laughter. At the sight of J’onn in his true form, however, both sisters faltered slightly, joy breaking across Kara’s face like sunrise while Alex blinked slowly, curiously.

After an inquisitive hitch of her brow toward the director, she quickly schooled her expression, but not before Cat caught the briefest flash of admiration shot in her direction. The agent slipped into the chair beside her sister, who continued to observe the director with a look of unchecked delight. “Something on your mind, Supergirl?”

Lips quickly pressing together to suppress the joy that rose in her throat, she adamantly shook her head, determined to play along. “Not at all, Director. Just—really enjoying the view today.”
The Martian allowed a hint of a smile, deciding in the moment to refrain from shifting back to his adopted human form. With a nod toward the reporter across from him, he indicated, “Ready when you are, Ms. Grant.”

Cat sat forward, interlacing her fingers atop the table, her expression noticeably hardening. “There’s a new complication: Maxwell Lord.”

“Lord?” Alex bristled. “He’s part of CADMUS?”

“No,” Cat assuaged. “He can be a smug bastard, but even he has higher moral standing than to collude with Lillian Luthor. Unfortunately, according to a rather obdurate confession on his part, he has been one of CADMUS’s recent targets. Two weeks ago, they succeeded in hacking into Lord Technologies systems and gaining access to everything—even information he kept under his highest-level encryption. Max did a magnificent job of hiding the attack from the media, mainly because of the implications. CADMUS now has all of his research, including things not officially supported by Lord Technologies.”

“Bizarro.” Alex inhaled sharply at the next realization, already being voiced beside her.

“Red kryptonite.” She turned her attention to Kara, whose panic levels she could see were already threatening to overwhelm her.

Alex swung around in her chair, grabbing hold of Kara’s hands and gripping them as tightly as she could. “Hey, hey, look at me, Kara. It’s okay.”

Fright-filled blue eyes already streaming with tears focused on the brunette. “No,” she argued, voice breaking sharply from trembling lips. “What I did—to you and to Cat—what I did was so horrible, Alex. I-I can’t—I can’t go through that again.”

“You’re not going to. We have the antidote to red kryptonite, remember? We have proof that it works. We will synthesize enough that every agent who goes on any mission with you will have access to it. We will not let you out there without someone being able to protect you, Kara. I swear it.”

The hero shook violently where she sat, Alex’s words lost to the cacophonous flood of disjointed memories and acrid guilt. “I destroyed so much.” She looked past Alex, not quite able to meet Cat’s gaze. “I could have destroyed everything.”

“Hey.” Her sister’s gentle voice made her feel even more undeserving. “We talked about this, Kara. None of that was your fault.”

“You’re right.” Kara finally struggled to meet the gaze of the woman across from her. More memories surged unbidden—of Cat’s body, so fragile and light in her grip, of Cat’s screams piercing the night on her rapid descent from her office balcony where Kara had stood. Watching. Calculating, while somewhere deep beneath the inescapable press of anger, she screamed in tandem with the voice her hearing kept in perfect volume the entire time Cat plummeted.

And now, as her focus blurred beneath flowing tears, she could see the resolute expression on Cat’s features: I will never blame you for what you couldn’t control.

Shame sparked deep and strong, drove her to her feet and launched her from the room in a Technicolor blur that left Cat breathless, searching pointlessly for traces of the now-gone hero.

“Goddammit!” The muted thump of flesh against granite jostled the reporter, drew her focus back inside the room. Alex stood now, both fists clenched against the conference room table, her eyes
bright with fury.

The Martian stood and gripped Alex’s shoulder, willing the brunette to regain her focus and center herself. “I will follow her, Alex. Don’t worry. I will bring her home.” Without waiting for her reply, J’onn slipped from the conference room, gliding down toward the bay doors through which Kara had just departed.

Cat silently watched the brunette circle between her and the conference room exit several times, rage radiating from her in almost palpable waves. When her fury was right at its breaking point, she reached for Cat’s now-empty mug, shocked at the feel of the reporter’s hand tightly holding her wrist. Tone warning but eyes full of compassion, she stated, “I am not in the mood to have ceramic shards removed from any part of my person, Alex.”

Alex ignored her first inclination to pull away, to let herself rage, to smash what she could because what she wanted to smash was intangible and inseparable from memories bright and good and kind of her sister—

“We have never been sisters. We don’t share blood.”

—now tangled with the crimson-tinged trails of taunting darkness—

“I can fly. I can catch bullets with my bare hands. And that makes you feel worthless.”

—and snarled thorns that left scars of sorrow across her heart.

“Deep down, you hate me. And that’s why you killed my aunt.”

Eyelids slipping shut in a desperate attempt to fight back the oncoming tears, Alex dropped despondently into the nearest chair. Giving the brunette a moment to calm down, Cat leaned her elbow against the table and rested her chin between her thumb and forefinger.

As she studied Alex’s broken expression, unbidden images from CatCo news coverage of that night rose in Cat’s mind: Supergirl hovering above an agent huddling against the wheel of a black SUV while protectively clutching her arm. That same agent shooting Supergirl in the back only to drop to her knees beside the fallen hero, leaning protectively over her prone body as though daring anyone to try to approach—to try to take the hero away from her.

“It was you.” At the responding look of confusion, she pressed on, “You were the agent J’onn revealed himself to save that night. You were the one who helped him stop Kara.”

Tears finally slipped from Alex’s eyes at the memories of that night—of Kara’s contemptuous words and merciless gaze, her veins pulsing with infectious red kryptonite as her eyes began to flare white-hot.

“Nothing on Earth can stop me.”

She could still taste the bitter rush of adrenaline, still feel her muscles clenching in fear of what it would feel like to be incinerated by the one person in the whole universe she loved and trusted the most.

“Kara—Kara was—she had almost completely lost control by then. She couldn’t fight what was happening to her.” She wrapped her arms protectively around herself, although Cat still caught the shiver that visibly shook the agent.

“I’ve never heard the full story on what happened to her.”
Alex shifted uneasily. “It’s—it’s pretty much all there in the DEO report on file.”

“I’ve not read that report.” At the surprise in Alex’s expression, Cat admitted, “It wasn’t something I was quite prepared to experience again.”

In nightmares that plagued her for weeks after that night, she’d done nothing but relive those moments—cold, merciless gaze, cruel curl of lips and wounding words, bruising grip and the petrifying roar of wind that devoured her screams as she plunged interminably.

Every night, she awoke, sweat-drenched, breathless, and clawing for the Lexapro she’d once more gotten in the habit of keeping on her bedside table. Not since the darkness of distant days sequestered in her home by anxiety that lodged beneath her skin like shrapnel had Cat relied so heavily on medicinal relief.

Blowing air between her compressed lips, the agent squared her shoulders and absently brushed away the tears staining her cheeks. “You know about kryptonite?”

The reporter gave a curt nod. She’d read everything in and linked to the report on the dual Metallo attacks—not to mention whatever she’d picked up while living in Metropolis. She bristled at the intolerable cruelty of a universe that would destroy a young girl’s whole world and then turn even the remnants of that world into another way to inflict suffering upon her. “I take it the DEO’s tracking and collection of real kryptonite is what led Max to try to synthesize it for himself?”

Fierceness flickered in Alex’s eyes at the mention of Lord, and Cat imagined if he were there at the moment, his head would already be well acquainted with the granite table before her. “He claimed it was to protect us from Non and his followers. There was a miscalculation in his formula, however, and instead of it weakening Kara on a cellular level like actual kryptonite, it—it altered her brain chemistry, removed all the fail safes that normally keep us from acting on our darker impulses.”

Cat clicked her tongue derisively. “I’m amazed the DEO didn’t hide Max’s body somewhere it will never be found after that.”

The reporter caught the faintest hesitation before Alex replied, “He actually created the antidote that helped us stop Kara.”

“How kind of him to help fix his fuck-up.” A small grin played along Alex’s lips. Beneath the anger and profanity, she saw once more the fierceness of Cat’s loyalty and care for her sister.

“As much as I am in agreement with you on this, I’m still indebted to Max.” A haunted cast darkened the brunette’s gaze as she looked down at her hands, once more clenched into fists against the tabletop. “Even with his antidote, I almost missed my chance to save Kara.”

“Kara hurt you that night.”

“She broke my arm.” She broke my heart. Alex pushed past the unspoken thought and resettled her attention on Cat. “She hurt you as well.”

Cat tried to brush aside the agent’s statement with her practiced flippancy. “She made me realize how idiotic it was for me to want to locate my company in the tallest building in National City.”

“Cat.” The severe way Alex spoke her name caused Cat to focus quickly on the brunette across from her. Her breath hitched at the sight of the message in that dark, haunted gaze: Do not dismiss this with me.
“Fine. She scared the hell out of me.”

At the sound of Cat’s admission, Alex relaxed her fists, pressing her palms against the cool granite beneath them. “You’ve never gotten the chance to talk with Kara about that night.”

Cat shook her head, catching Alex’s pointed emphasis. Maintaining the ruse of unknowing had never been more difficult for Cat than in the days following Kara’s return to work after her recovery. Every day was spent feeling Kara watching her constantly, her gaze dark with such self-loathing that Cat’s only desire was to do whatever it took to return as much normalcy as she could to the broken hero.

Eyes full of understanding, Alex conceded, “It's not an easy conversation—but I think it's one she needs to have with you. She hurt both of us, more deeply than she hurt anyone else while she was under the influence of red kryptonite. I know she still carries that guilt inside—that right now, even, she’s somewhere convincing herself that what she did to us makes her unworthy of our—compassion.” She flushed slightly at her noticeable hesitation.

“Well, then it falls to us not to let her.” Shifting the conversation back, Cat queried, “This antidote that Max created—you have faith it will protect her?”

The hard swallow was all the answer Alex didn’t intend to offer, but all that Cat needed—and feared. “Max left us with the formula, so even if it doesn’t work in its current form, we have what we’ll need to find a version that does work. I’m going to show it and the formula for red kryptonite to my mom and see if she can help me start to postulate a variety of alternative formulas.” Forcing assurance into her expression, she finished, “We will be ready for whatever Dr. Luthor is planning.”

“I hope you’re right, Alex—because Lillian seeking out red kryptonite specifically has damning implications.” An unsettling shadow darkened the reporter’s expression. “One of the things Colonel Harper told me when I met with him was that his attempt to transfer you and J’onn to CADMUS was mainly to lure Kara into saving you. Lillian was depending on two events happening the night of the transfer: that Supergirl would try to retrieve you both and be captured in the attempt, and that the people of National City wouldn’t care when Supergirl disappeared.”

Realization of why National City wouldn’t have mourned the disappearance of the Kryptonian at that point in time carved anger into Alex’s heart. “She’s going to turn the city against Kara again.”

“She’s going to try.” Hearing the spark of defiance in Cat’s voice, Alex nodded, resolution settling through her posture in the span of a slow blink.

Checking her watch, Cat rose, with Alex quickly following her lead. Dark eyes flickered toward the doorway as if wishing she could conjure Kara’s presence with a look. “I’m sorry she ran.”

The CEO waved aside the apology. “Kara already apologizes too much as it is. Don’t you start, too. She was understandably upset. We'll just need to work on her flight reflex later. I wish I could stay until she returned, but I need to make this appointment.”

“I'll keep her here when she comes back.” Cat smiled at the adamant statement, knowing damn well that if anyone could make good on it, it would be Alex.

The two women moved from the conference room together, but Alex paused at the top of the stairs. With a glance down at Cat's heels, she teased, “Do you need a lift back downstairs?”

The familiar Cat Grant temperament instantly flashed in golden flecks, but Alex could see the
amused curl of her lips. “Careful, Agent Danvers. I have outpaced Olympians in heels higher than these.”

Chuckling at the statement, Alex remained at the top of the stairs, watching in admitted awe as Cat maneuvered the steps with impressive agility, her staccato clicks echoing through the main hall in her wake.

Chapter End Notes

I will be adding archive and tag warnings as I proceed. Don't want to give anything away too soon. I also will place notes at the beginning of more explicit chapters, to give fair warning.

However, this was a steady entry back into National City--a bit longer than I anticipated. Cat had a bone to pick with me about New Year’s. Like it's my fault Kara can't resist helping people who need her.

Oh, one thing about J'onn's age: There is a discrepancy on the show between how long he said he has been on Earth in the first season versus the second season. For the purpose of this story, I opted to go with the longer amount of time, which had more weight for my needs.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

CADMUS Test Subject Interlude 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Test Subject CDS-17-009

Rusty rollers screeched in protest as the loading bay door dropped with clangorous speed, causing her to flinch at the jarring sounds. Pressing her fingers against the clusters of pain behind her temples, she closed her eyes and wished yet again that she hadn’t drunk quite as much champagne as she had during her latest “soiree.”

Then again, sometimes the alcohol was the only thing that kept her in high enough spirits to make it through schmoozing the rich and famous of National City out of however much she could convince them to wager on her intergalactic gladiators. And what used to be an effortless endeavor now felt like actual work—something she had prided herself in avoiding all these years—thanks to the interference of the city’s resident Kryptonian.

A sneer tugged at her upper lip as she considered yet again the enviable potential she would love to harness within the Girl of Steel—all the money and more to be had within that unbreakable body. If only she could convince the Kryptonian she was wasting all her incomparable strength and skills in protecting the unworthy—people who would turn on her without hesitation if she fell out of line with their rigid expectations.

Instead of playing superhero, the Maid of Might could be Roulette’s main attraction, not to mention her ticket to legitimacy. Supergirl would be precisely what she would need to bring her business out of the shadows, become something the masses would pay handsomely to devour. The marketing possibilities alone would be breathtaking.

Pipe dreams were a terrible indulgence, however, particularly on no sleep, no food, and a stomach awash in the bitter tang of too much champagne. Sighing audibly, she swung open her door for some air and rubbed more fiercely at her temples, her teeth gritting together against the pain.

At the distinct feeling of someone staring at her, she reopened her eyes and snapped at the figure moving toward her from the back of the loading bay, “Hurry up and get this thing unloaded. I’m in dire need of aspirin and sleep.”

“And more than one outfit.”

Eyes narrowing into a hard glare, she sneered, “Pass on the fashion advice from a man who looks like he’s auditioning for the all-cyborg Phantom of the Opera.”

With a feral snarl, Henshaw ripped away the covering that hid his mutilated face and the exposed endoskeleton beneath. At the sight of his ocular implant glowing blue, Roulette slid out of the van and moved directly into his line of fire. “Go ahead, Henshaw. Just let me live long enough to hear
your bungling attempt to explain to Dr. Luthor why you murdered her guaranteed supplier because you’re a thin-skinned bastard.”

“That will be enough from both of you.” Soft heels clicked languidly through the shadows before the striking form of Lillian Luthor emerged before them. “I don’t need to listen to either of your posturing this early in the morning.” She nodded toward the back of the panel van. “Is it the one I requested?”

“The Malacandrian, yes. He was one of my best fighters, mind you.” The sultry cadence of her voice only served to remind Luthor of how hard Veronica Sinclair tried at all times to invoke a particular persona—how even as one of Lena’s limited number of school associates (the girl never really made friends, which was one of the few tolerable traits about her), she always made certain to impress upon others an image that never quite fit as properly as the complementary wardrobe selections she made. “Not much can protect you against an opponent who can shoot venom.”

Luthor hummed in thought. “I would have preferred the Crilyan who can spit acid. I understand from witness accounts that he has extraordinary range and regenerative speed, but Supergirl had to interfere with that.” She slipped an envelope from her coat pocket. “And I assured you I would compensate you for your loss. I always keep my word.”

Accepting the envelope and glancing quickly at the bills packed within, Roulette smiled, “Don’t you want to check your merchandise before paying me?”

“You have yet to fail me, Ms. Sinclair. I doubt you will start now.” She waved toward Henshaw. “Get him secured in OR Three. We’re going to start right away.” She arched a questioning brow at the woman beside her. “I assume he’s properly dosed with what I gave you?”

“Every last drop. He won’t be waking up any time soon.” At the telling expression to morph Luthor’s features, Roulette smirked. “Or ever again, apparently.” Her shoulders rose indifferently. “A small bit of justice for the guard he took out before we could subdue him.”

The doctor smiled darkly. “His sacrifice was for an honorable purpose.”

“Care to share?”

The line of tolerance Luthor drew for Roulette moved ever closer, causing the doctor to grow noticeably impatient with her continued attempts at conversation. “Not at this present time, no.” She slipped a piece of paper from her pocket and extended it to Roulette. “However, I do have another request for your assistance. It’s a bit different from what you typically help me procure, but I have faith in your resourcefulness.”

Reading the name and location on the accepted paper, Roulette’s perfectly angled brows instantly drew together. “This sounds like a human name, and this is most definitely a humans-only location.”

“Very astute on both accounts, Ms. Sinclair.”

“You want a human currently checked into National City’s most private psychiatric facility.” Her laugh was completely humorless. “I’m a bit lost as to how you think I have the connections to pull off a breakout job like this.”

“I don’t want you to break him out. His latest medication adjustment is almost complete. I need you to wait for him to leave on his own before you capture him. Make a deal with one of your losing fighters that they can avoid coming to me if they bring you this man, unharmed.”
“This isn’t going to have the police seeking out my gatherings again, will it? I’m just starting to win back the trust of some of my more skittish but equally lucrative guests.”

Luthor focused on the rolling curves of the snake tattoo that wrapped around Roulette’s body, pushing back the irritation she felt rising within her. Breathing deeply, she finally replied, “Choose someone capable of discretion and you won’t have to worry about anyone noticing anything. Besides, only one person will be looking for an update on his status, which staff will satisfy once they release him. After that, he will need to make one more appointment and then he can disappear without anyone noticing for at least a month. By then? He will hopefully have already served me well.”

She removed another envelope from her coat pocket and handed it to Roulette. “And because I know this is a request well outside your normal level of assistance, I’m willing to double what I have paid you for the Malacandrian.”

Slipping the envelope from Luthor’s hand with a provocative grin, Roulette sighed, “Looks like I’m branching out in my services.” Sliding back into the cab of the panel van, she put on sunglasses and smirked at Luthor. “Be sure to give my regards to Lena.”

Waving to one of her guards to reopen the bay doors, Luthor smiled coolly. “I’ll be sure to let her know during our next mother-daughter lunch.”

With an amused huff, Roulette slammed her door shut and sank back into the passenger seat. Staring out the window at the surrounding emptiness reminded her just how far away from her condo—and, more importantly, her bed—she actually was. With a displeased sigh, she waved at her driver, “The faster you get me home, the larger your reward.”

As the van pulled away, Henshaw reappeared by Luthor’s side. “How does he look?”

“His vitals look normal and your assistants are prepping him for initial scans now.”

“Good. We only have a short amount of time to understand how his venom sacs operate and attach. I also would like to see if it is possible to stimulate faster regeneration of his venom reserves. It wouldn’t do for our gift to run out of juice before he completed his job.” She frowned as she considered the intricacies of what she was planning. “Hopefully, the similarities between Malacandrian and human physiology will outnumber the differences enough that this transplant will be even a short-lived success.”

Henshaw grunted in displeasure. “Is it really wise to waste time on a pet project like this?”

A cruel grin tightened her expression. “My methods are not wasteful. They are precise. And this is precisely how I wish to proceed.” She glared at the hybrid beside her. “You would do well not to question me again or you might find yourself my next ‘pet project.’” Soft heels clicked away, the striking form once more disappearing into the shadows.

Chapter End Notes

Whatever Lillian Luthor is up to, I'm pretty sure we can all agree: It's not going to be a good thing for our heroes...
Air currents slipped and whirled over him as he flew, and J’onn J’onzz breathed deeply, his modified body chemistry absorbing the oxygen he inhaled as if it were his native requirement. Then again, he mused, he’d been breathing Earth air longer than he’d ever breathed the air of his home world. His adaptation to his “new” home’s atmosphere was so long ago that he barely remembered the transition.

If only other things from his past could be quite as easy to release from his memory.

Soaring higher to avoid a passing flock of birds, he sighed in tempered delight at the feel of sunlight flowing over his true form. After so many years of hiding himself behind the façade of Hank Henshaw, it at times almost felt—unnatural to him to be as he was now, once more himself, once more enjoying the power of his unique abilities. How much longer would he have continued in the shadows, trapped behind the face of the man who had tried to capture him for CADMUS had it not been for Alex and Kara Danvers?

A true smile finally graced his lips at the thought of the two remarkable women who had so unapologetically changed his life. He had never considered, as he knelt beside Jeremiah Danvers, swearing to protect the dying man’s daughters as he had so unselfishly protected the Martian, that his oath of fealty would carry such life-altering consequences. Yet, he could not imagine ever choosing to give up the light that they had both brought to his world in abundance. How he had let his life grow so gray and cold during his time as Henshaw?

Whatever the reasons, he gladly relinquished the darkness for them—would do whatever it took to keep them both brightening his world for as long as possible. That thought propelling him slightly faster, he dropped lower and changed his trajectory, knowing precisely where he needed to head to find Kara.

Just as he knew he would, he spotted her finally, perched upon the edge of the landing pad atop CatCo Tower. Even recognizing the heavy slope of sorrow across her shoulders, the Martian couldn’t help but smile at how predictable Kara was whenever she needed comfort and solace that didn’t involve her sister.

“I can’t leave this place. It’s not just a secret identity to me.”

Although he couldn’t read her thoughts, he knew already the depth of truth behind her statement. This place had become Kara’s safety within the city. She’d found friendship and acceptance and the fierce, challenging protection of the woman to whom Kara was clearly devoted—a devotion the CEO vehemently returned without question.
Touching down on the rooftop, J’onn moved closer to where Kara sat cross-legged, her cape draped across her lap and tangled securely in her hands. She kept her head bowed and he could see the trail of tears that had dripped down onto the cape. “You didn’t have to follow me.”

J’onn frowned at the sound of her voice, so small and broken. He reached out and gently cupped her chin, urging her to look up at him. At the sight of the tears that blurred the intense blue of her gaze and coursed down her cheeks, he sat down beside her and opened his arms in invitation. With a barely contained sob, she folded herself into his embrace, the rhythm of his heartbeat steady and calming beneath where she rested her head against his chest.

The two aliens sat like that for several moments, J’onn marking the passage of time through the sniffles and barely stifled cries coming from the woman in his hold. Even with his inability to read Kryptonian thoughts, he could still sense the jagged edges of her pain. “You cannot punish yourself forever, Kara.”

“Why not?” She leaned back finally, her expression contorted by misery. “Why shouldn’t I be punished for what I did?” Her eyes begged him for answers before her shame forced her to look away once more. “I could have killed them both! And because of me, you had to reveal yourself—because of what I nearly did to Alex.”

She started to drop her head once more, unable to bear the weight of this confession. Instead, he caught her chin and redirected her gaze to meet his. “Kara, I am not sorry that I revealed myself that night. I would do it again and again, so long as the outcome always remained the same: that I could save both you and Alex.”

He sat taller, his smile slight but true. “In a way, you freed me that night.” He saw the protest flare in her expression. “Do not waste precious time on what if, Kara.” He moved his hand from her chin to her cheek, gently wiping away the trace of tears with his thumb. “Focus on what is.”

Any further argument disappeared at the flash his words conjured of bright green eyes and golden locks and hands impossibly tender and will unbreakably strong. J’onn caught the tiniest upward pull of Kara’s lips. “She is a force I believe could best us both,” he teased, and the pull grew even stronger as her lips finally parted into a full smile.

Leaning forward, she pressed a kiss against his cheek. “Thank you.” She floated smoothly to her feet, flipping her cape out behind her as she did.

With a small nod, J’onn rose as well. “I told Alex that I would bring you back with me.”

The hero gestured toward the stairwell access. “Actually, I kind of need to get back to work. But can you—would you let Alex and Cat know that I am sorry for the way I left.” She bowed her head briefly. “I just didn’t know how to deal with all the memories of that night.”

He tilted his head slightly, his deep-set gaze kind but resolute. “I will tell them you will be back soon.”

Nodding in understanding that this was hers to fix and not his, she hesitated before moving forward once more to wrap her arms around the Martian. She felt the soft rumble of laughter within him as he returned her embrace. When she pulled back, she relished the gentle smile he offered her before he once more lifted to the sky.

With a sigh, she located the set of clothes she always had hidden on the CatCo Tower roof and quickly changed from her suit, taking care when removing her glasses from one of the pockets along the top edge of her cape. She then carefully stowed her suit in the messenger bag she had
used for her civilian clothes and slung the shoulder strap across her before heading toward the roof access stairwell.

As she floated down the stairs, she checked her phone, frowning at the notification of three missed messages. Swallowing against the sudden dryness in her mouth, she pulled up her texts: one message from Snapper informing her that he had edits for her, one message from Alex checking in that she was okay and subtly dropping that Cat wasn’t upset with her for bolting, and surprisingly, one message from Maggie, asking her to call as soon as she could.

She frowned at the lack of any text from Cat—no voicemail either. Even though this didn’t actually surprise Kara—Cat was not one to shy away from confrontation, but the hero also knew she could be stubborn and standoffish when she so wanted—she did find herself disappointed by the lack of communication from the smaller blonde.

Then again, she chastised herself, she was the one who opted to shut down communication. And even though her sister had written that Cat hadn’t been upset with her, Kara knew she would at least be disappointed. She’d denied Cat the right of letting her in, even to this unforgivable darkness.

Landing with a sigh of disappointment, mostly in her own communicative failing, she smoothed back her hair, adjusted her glasses, and straightened the strap of her bag across her body—the nervous habits of ensuring everything to her human “costume” was in order—before slipping through the door and hurrying down the hall toward the elevator bank.

She quickly made her way through the bullpen, tossing smiles and quick greetings to those she passed, before making her way into Snapper’s office. The smell of black coffee and stale smoke assailed her upon entry and she grimaced slightly. Snapper only resorted to sneaking cigarettes when he was particularly stressed. “Hey, Chief,” she smiled, reveling slightly in knowing how her perpetual cheerfulness would grate on his nerves in just the right way.

As she knew he would, her boss glared at her over the top of his glasses, an inarticulate grumbling sound rising in his throat. Tossing several sheets of paper across his desk before returning his focus to what he’d been reviewing, he snapped, “New article, new round of edits, Ponytail. Get them back to me before tomorrow at nine sharp or you don’t get a byline in the next issue.”

As she sorted through the pages, she paused at one that didn’t belong to her story. “What’s this?”

“Your next article. It’s one of your pet alien assignments, although I hope your stomach is stronger than your spelling skills. Early this morning, NCPD found the body of an unknown alien species down on the riverbank. They think it’d been in the water a few days, but it was already in bad shape before the fishes had their way.”

Kara grimaced at the thought but realized this must have been why Maggie was trying to contact her. “I’ll go ahead and reach out to my contact at the precinct. She should have more on the case. And I’ll have this article back to you in plenty of time for deadline.”

With an impatient flick of his wrist he groused, “Spell check exists for a reason, Danvers. Figure it out.”

Knowing that was Snapper’s way of dismissing her, Kara slid the papers into her shoulder bag and headed once more out into the bullpen. She’d deal with the edits later, but first she’d find out what Maggie had for her.

Looking up, however, she caught sight of James heading into his office, focused on something on
his phone. The deep furrow of his brow convinced her that stopping in to say hello might be exactly the break they both needed. Striding quickly toward the office, she paused slightly at the sight of the name still outlined by window frosting on the glass door: “Cat Grant, CEO.” Even with the tumult of emotions within her at the moment, just the sight of Cat’s name brought her a sense of calm. She continued into the office, running her fingertips along the smooth letters of the name as she passed.

“Hey.” She smiled in relief when James looked up, his own expression brightening at the realization of who had come to see him.

“Hey, yourself.” He gestured to one of the couches. “You just passing through, or do you have time to visit?”

“Visit,” she agreed as she descended where James had indicated. She watched as he poured them some water before joining her. “You still haven’t tapped into Cat’s liquor reserves?”

He chuckled as she took her glass. “Nah, I think it’s enough she left me her company. I don’t want to push my luck.”

Her smile was equal parts amused and understanding. “You’re doing a great job, James.”

“I am now.” He frowned in chagrin. “I never meant to let her down the way I did. She placed so much faith in me and I nearly blew it. She had no reason to give me a second chance.”

“Of course she did. She believes in you, James. And Cat Grant does not like to be proven wrong in her beliefs.” She laughed at the way he shook his head, smile bright against his rich brown skin. Lowering her voice slightly, she queried, “Is your increased focus on CatCo why we haven’t seen much of the Guardian around National City?”

“Yeah, kind of.” The hitch of his shoulders failed at being quite as casual as he had hoped. He knew how Kara’s concern for his safety overruled her ability to see the good he had done as the Guardian, no matter how hard he tried to convince her. The fact that she was asking anything about his extracurricular exploits seemed at least like an olive branch offering.

However, none of it mattered now that he was completely invested in the task of running CatCo in the manner it deserved to be run. “Cat was right about me not having much—or any—time to myself while really running CatCo. This place can be unrelentingly demanding sometimes. I honestly don’t know how she ever found time to do anything other than work.”

He leaned back against the couch cushions, folding his arms across his chest. “She was also right about something else she told me during her visit: She said something big was coming and that she needed me to be ready to lead CatCo into whatever it was.” He slipped his phone from his pocket. “She just texted me that she’s got something big in the works on one of the council members.”

Kara furrowed her brow for a moment before nodding in realization. “That’s right, she said she had a meeting at city hall this afternoon.”

James drew up slightly in surprise. “Wait, you already knew Cat was back in town?”

Arms crossed then uncrossed, and then crossed again in a display of fidgeting that he hadn’t seen from Kara in quite a while. “I, um—I had a question—a word question. A writing question about words, and I didn’t want to ask Snapper—he’s been unmerciful enough about mocking me ever since I spelled ‘intrinsic’ with a K.”

She shoved her glasses up the bridge of her nose, genuine irritation pushing aside the strange burst
of nerves. “It has a K sound, why wouldn’t it be spelled with a K?” She was almost muttering to herself by this point, rambling in a way James realized he’d missed immensely.

“But then Cat’s name would be spelled with a K—like her mother’s name. Do you want to be the one to tell her that?”

Laughter resounded deep in his chest at the expression that crinkled Kara’s nose and the corners of her eyes, her lips drawing tightly together in a grimace. “Okay, so there can be exceptions to the rule.”

“Cat usually is the exception to most rules.”

“Yeah.”

The photojournalist froze, not at the word itself but at the way Kara’s expression softened with its uttering. He’d seen her make that same expression so many times before when talking about Cat that he almost didn’t think twice about it.

However, this time his mind shifted to the sight of Cat, standing behind her desk, sorting through photos he’d been reviewing for the Supergirl holiday issue of CatCo magazine. She’d gotten almost the same exact expression on her face when she’d come across and taken two images in particular.

He’d gone back to the digital files after she’d left and figured out which two photos she’d removed from the pile. Both were candid shots of Cat with Supergirl that were either slightly out of focus or slightly off-center enough to cause James to put them aside. Going back with the curiosity ignited by Cat’s selection of them, however, brought into sharp focus something he’d originally overlooked. Both photos captured moments of incredible intimacy between the two women.

As he studied the images—the way Kara’s hands conformed so comfortably along Cat’s waist as they drew apart from an obvious embrace, or the way Cat’s eyes sparkled mischievously as she pressed her finger against Kara’s lips in a hushing gesture—he startled at the feeling driving him to glare a little too hard at his monitor and grip his mouse just a little bit too tightly. Why shouldn’t they have shared a few moments of closeness after having gone four months without seeing each other? And why shouldn’t Cat want photos from their reunion, especially if she’d been as happy for the occasion as Kara had been?

He’d honestly been surprised by the joy that radiated from Kara when she’d returned from D.C.—mostly because he hadn’t realized how unhappy she’d become since Cat’s departure. He remembered hearing her laughter her first morning back as she stopped to speak with Eve before passing through his office long enough to deliver a tea and one of the two sticky buns she always bought herself for her second breakfast from Noonan’s. The sound made him realize he couldn’t recall the last time he’d heard her laugh so fully. He also realized he couldn’t remember when they’d last spent any time together other than during editorial meetings or other work-related interactions.

He hadn’t meant to pull away from her the way he had. True, her request that they return to being just friends had hurt initially, but when he looked past his bruised pride, he’d been able to see the truth in how they were better as friends. They would always love each other, but he recognized they would never be in love with each other. He was okay with that.

Then why wasn’t he okay with Cat being the one to finally make her happy again?

“So, we never really got a chance to talk about your trip to D.C.” He nodded toward the corner
where an enlargement of the holiday issue’s cover still sat atop an easel. The image he had selected
was one of the shots of Supergirl hovering next to the National tree, the White House providing a
striking backdrop to her pose. Even knowing the woman behind the crest as well as he did, he had
to admit to feeling a bit of hero worship strike him at the magnitude of the image. “I mean, I got to
see so many shots of the evening that I feel like I was there,” he laughed, delighted by the shy
blush to color her cheeks. “Still, I’d love to hear more about the evening.”

Ducking her head slightly, she teased, “I could try to play it off like it wasn’t amazing—but that’s
exactly what it was. And President Marsdin is every bit as awesome as you’d think she’d be. No,”
she immediately corrected herself, “she’s more awesome than you could possibly imagine.”

He smiled at the sight of the hero fangirling over POTUS. “I’m pretty sure the feeling is mutual.
There were quite a few great photos of you two together. You should look through the image
archive and see if there are any you’d like. I could enlarge and frame them for you.”

“Yeah?” Kara’s eyes sparkled with joy at the thought.

“Absolutely.” He tugged at an ear lobe. “You might like some of the ones of you and Cat, too.
There were several more than the two we used in the magazine.”

He watched her reaction carefully, noting how she struggled to maintain as neutral an expression as
she could. She couldn’t suppress the telling upward twitch of her lips and the increase of color in
her cheeks, however. “Really?”

“Yeah, there were a lot more of the two of you together, actually—almost as many as of you and
the President.” He cringed at the hollow sound of his forced laugh. “You must have spent a lot of
time with her for there to have been so many photos.”

Shifting uncomfortably where she sat, Kara adjusted her glasses, the most blatant tell of her
nervousness, and stammered, “Well, I mean, yeah, we did spend a bit of time catching up. But also,
we’re National City’s two most famous residents and we’re both linked to CatCo. Why wouldn’t
the CatCo photographer try to get as many photos of us together as possible?”

James nodded slowly, surprised by how adamantly Kara was reacting to his statement. “True. I just
thought you would be interested in seeing the photos of the two of you together.” He paused and
when he continued, it was in the most casual tone he could muster in the moment. “Cat’s already
taken two of them for herself.”

It was almost comical how quickly Kara perked at this statement. “Wha—when-when did—how.”
She stopped stammering long enough to take a deep breath, her cheeks flushing ever-deeper in
color. “Cat saw the photos of her with—with Supergirl?”

James hummed affirmation as he took a sip of water. “I had several shots out for review for the
magazine when she stopped in for our talk.” The memory of Cat’s surprise visit still made him
flinch a little.

“And she took two with her?” Not even the Girl of Steel could hold back the smile that spread
across her lips at the thought of Cat allowing James to see her doing something so irrefutably
sentimental.

The photojournalist realized far too late that the revelations Kara’s responses to this part of their
conversation were offering him were actually only making him feel worse. At some point during
their lapse in time spent together, James had missed an integral something in the hero’s life—
something that had shifted her relationship with Cat in ways James was finding difficult to
understand.

“Maybe you can pick out your favorites and give them to Cat when she arrives.”

Something about James’s tone was almost enough to distract Kara from what he’d actually said—almost. However, as soon as she’d processed his statement, she sprang clumsily from where she’d been sitting, startling both of them with her reaction. “Cat’s coming here?”

“Yeah, that’s why she texted me. She’s on her way from city hall right now.”

James was almost certain he saw a muscle twitch nervously beneath Kara’s eye as she slung her bag across her body and began gesturing toward the door. “I, uh—I should let you get back to work, then.” She smiled, but he could see the panic that tightened her expression. “I didn’t mean to distract you—I’m sure you’ve got a ton of things to take care of before she arrives.”

Unsure of what was happening, he reached out to stop her departure, but she pivoted away with a subtle boost of super-speed. “Kara, you don’t have to leave. I’m sure Cat would love to see you. And it sounds like whatever she wants to talk about has something to do with the Alien Amnesty law.” He laughed while gesturing toward the hero. “Who better to participate than the Ambassador herself?”

The forced laugh she offered in return made him frown curiously at her, but she continued to head back toward the bullpen. “Yeah, no, I’m good. I’ve got to head out and meet up with my police contact. Plus, I either finish my edits today or I miss Snapper’s deadline to be in the next issue.” She rolled her eyes genuinely at that statement. “So I’m just gonna—you know, get to work. Out there,” she finished while gesturing vaguely in any direction other than Cat’s office.

Without another word, she spun and scurried off, waving nervously over her shoulder and noting the utterly confused expression on James’s face. It couldn’t be helped, she thought, as she hurried toward her office, reaching out with her hearing just to be sure she couldn’t hear Cat anywhere in the actual building.

With a sigh that instantly filled her with guilt, she realized that Cat hadn’t reached CatCo Plaza yet. She still had time to grab some fresh notepads from her office and head off without seeing the smaller blonde. Lips downturned with disappointment in herself at the realization that she was once again running, she sighed, “Coward,” while shaking her head.

Coming around to the elevator bank, she stumbled to a stop at the unexpected sight standing ahead of her. “Lena?”

The woman in question pivoted quickly, her expression conveying an equal level of surprise at her summoning. Deep crimson lips quickly slipped open over brilliant white teeth, however, when she realized who had called her name. “Kara, I was just down at your office looking for you.” She blushed slightly. “I forgot, though, that reporters don’t work from their office all day. I thought I’d missed you to some big story.”

The hero nervously twisted one of the closure straps on her bag between her fingers, only releasing it when she felt the fabric begin to fray under the too-tight pressure of her grip. “Almost. I was just checking in with the bosses before heading out on a lead.” She nodded in the direction Lena had been staring so intently. “Someone catch your eye?”

Kara studied the hesitant way Lena glanced once more over her shoulder, a wary frown curving her lips. “Actually,” she finally laughed, “I think my eyes were just playing tricks on me.” She shrugged, mostly to herself, at the admission, before focusing her full attention on the blonde.
before her. “I hope you don’t mind that I just dropped in without any warning.”

Blue eyes narrowed slightly as Kara considered Lena’s words. “Seems like doing things without warning is kind of your thing, isn’t it?”

Lena bit nervously at her bottom lip, bowing her head deferentially. “I take it Supergirl had some choice words to share with you regarding our last conversation.”

“A few,” she conceded.

“I guess that would explain why I haven’t seen either of you since that night?” She tried desperately to suppress the disappointment and hurt in her expression.

Adjusting her glasses, Kara replied, “I-l can’t speak for Supergirl, but I’m not avoiding you, Lena. I promise.”

“So she hasn’t said anything to you about that night?” The CEO blushed at the memory of her cruel dismissal of the hero.

“She said she upset you.”

With a sad shake of her head, Lena waved aside the comment. “She didn’t upset me. I just didn’t expect—I didn’t expect it to hurt quite so much to hear her tell me the truth about my mother.” Kara caught the shine of approaching tears before Lena quickly blinked them away. “I never thought she could be this monstrous,” she breathed, barely loud enough for Kara to hear.

“If you’re worried that Supergirl blames you for any of what your mother has done, she doesn’t.”

“Why wouldn’t she? I’m a Luthor.”

“No,” Kara instantly replied, “You’re not. Not the way you mean. Lena, you are kind and strong and nothing like your mother.” Kara blushed slightly at the change in Lena’s expression, realizing too late how similar her words sounded to what she had said the last time she’d seen Lena while as Supergirl.

“It seems you and Supergirl both have a very imprecise opinion of me.”

“You know that’s not true. Lena, you prevented your mother from killing every alien in National City! That’s proof enough that you’re not like her. You just need to start trusting people more. You could have told Supergirl what you were planning. She would have helped you.”

“I didn’t want to involve her. This is my business, my family—my fight. I needed to stop my mother on my own terms.”

“But you didn’t stop her!” Frustration flickered in Kara’s azure gaze. “Your mother is out there again, free to continue to do all the horrible things she’s been doing. And she now knows you have aligned yourself with who she considers the enemy.”

“She won’t come after me.” Even Lena could hear the tremor of doubt in her voice.

Silence ticked by as Kara studied her. “She can come after you in other ways, Lena—indirect ways that would hurt you just as badly.”

Whatever response Lena had was lost in the dawning realization of what she saw in Kara’s eyes: fear. Not just fear for Lena or even fear for Supergirl. Instead, what Lena saw was a fear that could
only come from knowing. “Kara?”

The sound of Lena’s whispered summons was enough to shake Kara from the moment. Quickly adjusting her glasses, she stepped away from the CEO and mumbled, “I’ll-I’ll let Supergirl know you’d like to see her.” She readjusted her bag across her body, backing toward the hallway that led to her office and the roof access beyond. “Be careful, Lena.” She offered a sad smile before hurrying out of sight.

Notepads forgotten, the hero hurried past her office and straight through the stairwell entrance, lifting off the stairs before the door had even closed behind her. She just needed to escape—to fly from CatCo as quickly as possible. As soon as she once more reached the roof, she changed back into her suit, slinging the bag of clothes and work across her and smoothly taking to the skies. Without a second thought, she turned toward the DEO headquarters.

As she flew, she tapped her earpiece and announced, “Call Maggie.”

Two rings in and she heard the familiar playfulness in Maggie’s voice that let her know the detective was either off-duty or out on her own. “I was beginning to wonder when my favorite superhero was going to finally get back to me.”

Kara chuckled at the teasing. “I’m glad I can top that list, even if I suspect it is a short one.”

She warmed at the sound of Maggie’s laughter, easily imagining how the accompanying smile would deepen the dimples that bracketed her mouth. “No matter how long the list, you’ll always be my favorite.”

The detective rolled her eyes at the sound of Kara’s adorable stuttering at her comment. Supergirl thwarted by compliment. News at eleven. Finally having pity, she pressed on, “I was hoping to swing by the DEO to talk with you about why I texted earlier, but I’m heading out on another call right now.”

With a more serious tone, Kara asked, “Do you need any help?”

“Not this time,” Maggie replied, touched by the concern she heard instantly steal through Kara’s voice. “But I’ve got you on speed dial just in case.”

Satisfied with the response, Kara continued, “So I’m going to assume that your earlier message had something to do with the story lead Snapper gave me this morning? The body dump down by the river?”

A hint of Maggie’s more brusque professional tone hardened her voice slightly. “That would be the reason, although I’m not convinced it’s a local body dump. I think the body ended up here after traveling downstream from the actual dumpsite. There were significant post-mortem lacerations. I’m thinking blades from a boat motor—a pretty big motor from the size of the wounds.”

“I could check into the shipping routes and see what commercial vessels passed through within the past two days—in exchange for an on-the-record quote from an NCPD source, of course.”

“Smooth move, Super Sleuth,” the detective teased, earning a chuckle from Kara. “I think that’s totally doable. I’m also working on expediting the autopsy and toxicology reports. Our people are good, but I’m hoping Alex and Eliza will be able to see something we might not recognize. Also, I think you might need to look at the body, to see if you recognize the species.”

Kara swallowed convulsively before asking, “So you think—does it look—I mean, did the body look—was there damage beyond the post-mortem?”
Maggie could hear the pain and fear seeping along the edges of Kara’s voice and hated that she was about to give them both greater hold over the hero. “Yeah. I’m pretty sure this was a CADMUS drop. Again, we’ll need to wait for the autopsy report, but there were visible signs of experimentation similar to the Jorvanian case that Cat brought to our attention.”

“She’s getting closer.”

Maggie nodded to herself, knowing whom Kara meant even without saying her name. “She’s never going to get close enough to get to you—or anyone you care about. We’ve got your back.”

Vision blurring instantly at Maggie’s protective promise, Kara sniffled softly. “Thank you, Maggie.”

“Any time, every time, Dynamic D.” She cleared her throat quickly, smoothing the rough edge she heard creeping into her voice. “Tell Dangerous I’ll see her this evening—and both of you try to stay out of trouble, okay?”

“You, too, Detective.” The last thing Kara heard before the connection went silent was Maggie’s soft laughter.

With an unsettled sigh, the hero picked up speed and shifted toward the approaching DEO headquarters. Slipping through the bay doors before they had a chance to open completely, the hero slid to a halt inside the main hall, her cape settling around her with a heavy flutter.

She smiled nervously at the sight of Alex moving toward her as if she’d been waiting there for her sister’s return. “Hey,” the agent called, quickly wrapping the hero in a full-body hug and sighing in relief at the feel of Kara relaxing instantly into the embrace.

“Alex, I’m so sorry I left the way I did.” She felt her chin tremble but forced herself to remain in control. “I shouldn’t have run.”

Arms tightened around her with crushing force as if Alex feared she might try to flee once more. “It’s okay, Kara.” She held onto her sister for several beats, needing the reassurance just as much as Kara did.

Even after the sisters finally talked about Kara’s actions under the influence of red kryptonite—a nearly all-night affair that ended with them snuggled together under a blanket on Kara’s couch, emotionally drained and raw but so much stronger for the effort—Alex knew Kara still refused to forgive herself completely for all she had said and done.

And so it was Alex who made certain that, whenever the doubts or recriminations would rise within Kara, she was there to shove them aside with all the love she could offer. “Just always come back to us, ie te. That’s all that matters.”

Kara leaned into the embrace as much as she dared without fear of toppling Alex backward, drawing greedily from her sister’s strength. “I promise,” she whispered, her voice rough and low.

Lips pressed against her temple. “Good,” Alex replied, pulling back and swiping away stray tears from her cheeks before drying Kara’s tears as well. She frowned slightly as she studied her sister’s expression. “I’m afraid Cat isn’t back yet.”

“I know.” The hero blushed at the confession. “She’s at CatCo with James. Something about what she learned down at city hall set her off.”

“But you didn’t stick around to find out what.”
Hearing the lack of questioning in Alex’s voice, she shook her head, eyes downcast. “I kind of—ran when I heard she was on her way.”

“Well.” Alex blew air through compressed lips as she processed this information. Seeing the way Kara’s shoulders began to sag inward, she quickly pressed against the hero’s biceps. “Hey, it’s not that bad, okay? It’s not like you could have had any serious conversation at CatCo anyway. And she was clearly going there with a purpose other than confronting you.”

“Is she looking for a confrontation?” Kara’s eyes widened so much Alex could see white all the way around blue irises. “She is, isn’t she?” Her arms instantly wrapped across her stomach as if she were holding herself together, which Alex suspected she just might be.

“Cat isn’t angry, Kara. I promise you.” She smirked slightly. “I mean, I’m pretty sure she would stab Max Lord with a stiletto if she got the chance, but she’s not angry with you.”

“I disappointed her.” She hung her head and muttered, “I shut her out.”

Alex pulled her sister into another embrace. “You reacted to something that rightfully upset and scared you. Cat understood that. But you also need to let her in, Kara—even to the dark parts that you want to hide. Yes, it will hurt, but you know you can’t build a solid relationship on secrets. And you both deserve solid.”

Swallowing against the swell of emotion that Alex’s words were pulling up, Kara nodded against her sister’s shoulder. Holding on a few moments longer, she finally pulled back and offered a watery smile. “You’ve gotten much better at relationship advice since embracing your inner Warrior Princess.”

The amused snort Alex released caused several agents to turn her way in curiosity. “Oh, I’m so telling Maggie that comment.”

Kara offered a small smile, although it was tempered by what she had learned during her conversation with the detective. “Have you talked with Maggie yet today?”

Seeing the darkness settle in her sister’s gaze was all the answer she needed. “She’s pretty certain this is another CADMUS victim, and I trust her instinct. She also said that she has a contact—someone she’s sure is participating in Roulette’s new fight club. If she can convince this contact to cooperate, they might be able to find a backdoor into CADMUS through Roulette.” She gripped her sister’s shoulder tightly. “We’re going to get her, Kara.”

The hero nodded, finding strength in Alex’s certainty. “And we’re going to find Jeremiah. I promise you, Alex, we’re going to bring him home.”

The promise bit deeply into the agent’s heart, filling her with equal parts hope and dread. Ever since learning that her father was still alive, Alex had vacillated in how exactly to feel about this information. After all, it had been more than a decade since his disappearance. She couldn’t decide which thought was worse—that CADMUS had somehow been holding him against his will all this time, or that he had voluntarily stayed with them. Either scenario filled her with a rage that radiated through every cell with supernova intensity.

With a shaky smile, the agent pushed aside the thoughts about her father and CADMUS and wrapped an arm across the caped expanse of Kara’s shoulders. “For now, though, I told Cat I would keep you here until she returned, and I’m not about to get on her bad side. So you go change and let’s order some lunch. Today is the last day before your weekly deadline, and I have a hunch there are some edits in that bag you need to take care of.”
The hero rolled her eyes, the softness of her gaze betraying how much she loved her sister’s attentiveness when it came to so many things others would never notice. “You know I always work best after potstickers.”

Before Kara had even finished her thought, Alex had already hit the speed dial button on her phone programmed with the closest Chinese carryout. She huffed slightly at the feel of Kara squeezing air from her lungs with a sudden hug before speeding off to change.

Soon after devouring what Alex often claimed were more potstickers than that restaurant probably ever sold in a whole week before Kara discovered them, she settled down at the workstation next to Winn to begin her review of Snapper’s edits. She sighed at the sight of how her article practically bled from all his “marks and snarks,” as Winn called them.

She rolled her eyes at how particularly brutal he seemed with this article, although she was grateful for the distraction from worrying about Cat’s impending return. She still sighed to herself and mumbled in response to one of his snarkier edits, “No, Snapper, English actually isn’t my first language—jerk guy,” as she began setting her article right once more.

As she was wrapping up her final review, she perked at the sound of an alert from Winn’s news tracker. He glanced back toward Kara, a Red Vine dangling precariously from his lips as he scrolled through the alert’s text. “Looks like there’s a jackknifed eighteen-wheeler on the southbound side of the 909. No injuries, but they’re reporting a complete shutdown of the freeway until they can clear the scene.”

Alex spun in her chair where she had settled to review staff reports while Kara worked on her article, locking gazes with her sister. “That thing will snarl traffic all through the city for hours if you don’t help them.”

With a knowing sigh, the hero zipped to the locker rooms and back, once more in her suit. Quickly emailing her article to Snapper, she began floating toward her exit. “If Cat gets back before me, please don’t let her leave.” Seeing her sister’s nod, she rolled in midair and flew off in search of the accident—not that it would be difficult to find. Already, she could hear the sound of blaring horns and flaring tempers.

If nothing else, her time as Supergirl had taught her what short fuses humans could have—as well as what colorful profanity they could come up with when frustrated. She simultaneously chuckled and blushed at some of what she was hearing as she flew closer. She catalogued the more creative phrases to share later, knowing that Alex and Maggie both would appreciate the upgrade to their already impressive libraries of profanity.

When the commuters caught sight of the Girl of Steel approaching, they surprised her as well with their levels of gratitude, expressed that evening with raucous cheers and even more honking, which Kara swore sounded somehow happier than the previous horn blasts she’d heard on her way over. Landing near the jackknifed semi, she conversed with the first responders surveying the scene, coming up with a satisfactory solution to the problem that would get traffic moving again as quickly as possible. She would realign the cab and trailer and lift both to the shoulder while the tow trucks on the scene moved the seven cars that had collided with each other while trying to avoid hitting the semi.

In the end, the hero had moved not only the truck but also five of the seven damaged cars. She then carefully blew the pieces of debris to the shoulder as well before shaking hands with the responders and laughing at the sound of cheering from the commuters once more allowed to drive.

Lifting up into the evening sky with a smile and wave, the hero took a quick lap around the city,
listening for any other problems that might require her attention. However, she indulged in a small sigh of relief that things sounded relatively calm that evening.

As she approached the DEO once more, her heartbeat fluttered nervously at the sight of Cat standing on the second floor balcony, drink in hand and gaze locked on the approaching hero. Kara sighed at the inscrutable set of the smaller blonde’s expression, finding it more unsettling than any of Cat’s fiercest glares. Steeling herself with a deep breath, she dropped down to the balcony, her boots barely making a sound as they touched concrete.

Cat continued to stare out over the city for several unnervingly quiet beats. Just as Kara was preparing to finally break the silence, the CEO commented, “Not quite the same as my office balcony, is it?” She sipped at the drink in her hand, tilting it slightly forward. “Still a great view, though.”

“Cat—”

“If the next words you plan on saying are an apology, save your energy.” She turned toward the hero, light and shadows playing along her impassive features. “I already know you’re sorry. What I need to know is that you’re going to stay put so we can actually talk about what made you run.”

Kara fought to maintain eye contact with the smaller blonde. “I promise I won’t leave.”

“Good.” She punctuated the response with a sharp nod before turning once more toward the view of the city skyline. She raised her tumbler to take another sip, but paused and gestured out toward the distant trail of flickering brake lights leaving the city to the south. “The CatCopter picked up some great shots of you this evening.”

The hero flushed slightly at the comment, moving to stand at the balcony ledge near the smaller blonde. “I heard it hovering overhead while I was helping.”

Cat snorted at the choice of words. “I believe they were helping you, since I’m pretty sure you were the only one moving that entire tractor trailer, Kara.” She turned her head slightly to get a better view of the hero. “How do you do that? Lift an entire object without it becoming imbalanced?”

“My biomatrix. I’m able to extend it around any person or object I’m touching to distribute my strength evenly.” She shuffled slightly. “Alex has been working with me to hone my focus so that I can extend my biomatrix to objects and people beyond my touch.”

A Cheshire cat grin curved the smaller blonde’s lips as she recalled Alex’s delight in Kara’s increasing abilities—and how they were surpassing even the Man of Steel’s. “Alex is incredibly proud of you.” She turned to face the hero fully. “So am I.”

She watched the shadows shift along Kara’s throat as she swallowed roughly, watched the lines of her face tighten with emotions Cat wished she could purge from the hero’s mind—but knew far too well how damnable persistent they could be. Instead, she let the silence settle, waiting for Kara to calm down enough to start the conversation they needed to have.

After a few moments, the hero rested her hands against the cool concrete ledge. Cat noted how she stayed just out of reach, how her expression continued to grow more distressed by whatever thoughts were once more taking hold of her.

Concrete crumbled beneath fingers that clenched suddenly and tightly against the balcony’s edge. “I still hear it sometimes.” Head dropping forward, Kara let her hair fall around her face, unable to bear the thought of meeting Cat’s gaze. The CEO ached at the familiarity of this particular form of
devastation—how it hung so heavily from the hero’s frame, sloping every strong line. “Your heartbeat that night. I heard it the moment you realized—realized something was wrong with me.”

“You want to see what powerful really looks like?”

“I heard it the moment you realized you should be afraid of me.”

“You think I was afraid of you.” No inflection at the end—just a simple statement.

“Weren’t you?”

“Do you remember my three Ls?”

Kara stumbled at the abrupt shift in conversation. “Wha-wh—yeah, of course.” She smirked slightly, but relished the familiar, soothing comfort of reciting, “Lattes hot, lettuce wraps crisp, and Lexapro—although not always in that particular order.”

Cat hummed in amusement, but her eyes retained their stormy hues. “Do you know what Lexapro is?” The hero shook her head, shifting her weight nervously under Cat’s gaze. “It’s all right, Kara. I didn’t exactly make it something you would feel comfortable asking me about.”

“You always seemed so protective about anyone knowing you took it. I knew you were trusting me with something you didn’t let most people know, and I didn’t want to disrespect that.”

She remembered well the first time Cat had actually agreed to let her retrieve her prescription, from a pharmacy on the opposite end of town—how the CEO had struggled to maintain her nonchalant façade while her heart rate tripped and spiked in ways that worried the hero. The fragile fragments of trust she could see beginning to form within the slightly narrowed gaze, however, convinced her that discretion was the more valiant choice to satisfying her own curiosity.

“The hard lesson of fame is that there are far too many people out there who will use everything they view as a weakness against you at some point in your career. The harder lesson is learning to remain strong when they try to shame you for something that shouldn’t be considered shameful in the first place.” She frowned while taking a sip of scotch. “I shouldn’t care who knows that I take Lexapro. I should wear it like a fucking badge of honor. God knows I earned it.”

Kara noted how, as Cat spoke, she ran her thumb against the intricate lines and curves of the ring always on the middle finger of her right hand. The hero had been fascinated by this ring from the moment she realized it was the only piece of jewelry Cat ever wore with any sort of devotion—not that it wasn’t exquisite enough to want to wear every day. Kara honestly had never seen a ring quite so complex or unique. Her lips twitched into a private smile at how easily those descriptors could apply to both the ring and its wearer.

Whenever Cat lost herself to worrisome thoughts, as she clearly was now, she would seek solace in the feel of running her thumb along the narrow bar that connected the ring’s three segmented bands.

Breathing deeply to steady herself, Kara queried, “Why do you take it?”

Swirling the glass in her hand absently, Cat sighed while staring out over the city. “Sometimes things happen that—that get behind our defenses.” Her voice trailed away briefly as she took a longer pull from her glass. Kara could see, even in profile, the tension holding her posture painfully rigid. “Things like what happened during my time as a war correspondent—the things I saw and the things that happened to me.” She swallowed roughly and Kara could hear the shallow flutter of her increased heart rate. “That kind of darkness gets inside you and takes over, takes away so much
of who you are. It leaves you feeling—powerless.”

She turned and looked at Kara, needing the hero to hear her and to understand finally and completely why Cat would never accept apology from her for that night. “When I finally came back to National City for good after covering the wars in Rwanda and Bosnia, I couldn’t leave my home for weeks. I’d completely lost control of myself.”

A pained laugh jumped from her lips. “I don’t think I even understood anymore what it meant to be myself. Panic attacks and nightmares crippled me around the clock. Without any warning, my mind would conjure the worst of what I’d experienced and play it on auto-repeat with no respite at all.”

Even now, she shuddered at the memories, always there, always lying in wait for the chance to invade and conquer. “Anxiety altered my brain in ways I couldn’t stop, no matter how hard I tried to focus, to forget.”

“I know what happened wasn’t exactly my fault. My brain was altered.”

Setting her glass down on the balcony ledge, the smaller blonde moved toward Kara, cupping her face in her hands. “Yes, you scared me that night. It was the expected human reaction, even for a human as exceptional as me.” She warmed at the sight of the hero smiling even through the tears that sparkled in her eyes.

“But I was also afraid for you, Kara. You were experiencing something I know well—something terrifying and unstoppable—and I didn’t know how to help you, or even if there was a way to help you.” She ran her hands up through Kara’s hair, staring into a gaze so pained, she wanted nothing more than to break Maxwell Lord’s self-righteousness for causing this unforgivable expression. “I knew you were suffering, but, Kara, even when you were losing control, you still saved me. Even in the midst of what was happening to you, you still listened to your hero’s heart.”

She pulled Kara close enough to wrap her arms tightly around shoulders that now shook in time with the sobs that poured from her throat. “It’s all right,” she whispered, pressing her fingers hard against the trembling muscles beneath them.

The hero sank to the ground, the concrete fissuring in faint spider web patterns beneath her knees, her arms latched around Cat’s waist. She buried her face against the smaller blonde’s stomach, the harshness of her sobs barely stifled. No matter the reasons, it still felt wrong that Cat would offer her this gift of forgiveness so willingly—so undeservedly.

Her breath hitched at the feeling of Cat’s hands tugging her arms away from her, only to realize that she wanted the room necessary to lower herself down to Kara’s level. Crouching within the hero’s hold, the smaller blonde grasped her face in her hands once more, her jade eyes shining in the dim light. “I know, Kara.”

And somehow in the space of those three small words, Kara heard the vastness of Cat’s true understanding—of the shame that hooked in with unbreakable barbs, of the anger that no matter the strength in one’s body or the sharpness in one’s mind, there would always be this uncontrollable element within, white-hot and seething beneath it all.

Waiting. Always waiting to burn down the resolve, crash the defenses to the earth, and leave nothing behind but charred remains.

She heard, too, however, the promise, greater than all else—greater than Kara’s fear, greater, even, than Kara’s shame. Greater as only Cat Grant could be. “However you need to deal with this, it’s all right. We will deal with it together. I swear to you, I’m not going anywhere.”
“Why?” Kara’s voice caught in her throat even with this one word.

“Because I love you, Kara.”

The words settled wholly through the hero, silencing all else to a harmless whisper. Only those words echoed through her with the strong and steady rhythm of her heartbeat as she stared into the dark glitter of Cat’s jade gaze. Her lips parted, a tremulous breath the only reaction she could offer for several beats. And then the hero’s expression shifted, brightened with such pure joy that Cat’s eyes instantly glistened with tears.

Kara’s hold tightened around Cat’s waist enough to lift the smaller blonde and pull her flush against her once she floated up from where she had fallen. The smile on her lips easily the most dazzling Cat had ever seen, she finally replied, “I love you.”

Speaking the words aloud sent such a thrill through the hero that she instantly repeated them again and again between kisses, whispering them reverently against the soft, full lips that smiled beneath her ministrations. Cat’s fingers tangled tightly in her long golden waves as she slowly spun them in the air, and she reveled in the sensation of the smaller blonde’s strong grip tugging her close. She could taste the salt of her own tears on her lips, mingling with the sweet burn of scotch as she dipped her tongue into Cat’s mouth.

When finally they slowed the pace of their kisses, Cat whispered against Kara’s lips, “Do you have extra clothes here?”

Furrowing her brow, the hero nodded. “Go get them. I want you to stay with me tonight.” She responded to the nervous gaze with a soothing scratch of nails against the hero’s scalp. “I don’t want you to be alone tonight, Kara.”

Kara started to shake her head, fear dimming her previous elation as she once more touched her boots and Cat’s heels to the ground. “I—I’m probably going to have nightmares, Cat.” She blushed at the confession, hating how red kryptonite was still finding ways to rob her of her control.

Pulling the hero close for another kiss, this time slow and soothing, Cat replied, “Why do you think I don’t want you to be alone?” She locked onto Kara’s blue gaze. “Together means together through everything, Kara—not just the happy moments. Happy is simple, and if I wanted simple, I would have stayed with John Stamos.”

The hero snorted at the teasing, amusement shining in her eyes. Cat continued to run her fingernails along Kara’s scalp. “So go, Supergirl. Get your things and then—”

Before she could even finish her statement, Kara had gone and returned, shoulder bag slung across her body and shy smile curling her lips. “You were saying?”

The smaller blonde grabbed the strap of her shoulder bag and coaxed her close. “Super-urban chic,” she teased. “I like it.” She looped her arms around the hero’s neck and whispered, “Let’s go home, Kara.”

Not even bothering to suppress her smile, Kara wrapped Cat in her arms and ascended into the night sky, shivering in bliss at the feel of Cat hooking her leg around a boot-covered calf and snuggling comfortably into her hold.

Chapter End Notes
I am so sorry for the delay. Travel for a week, pay the price for double the time. Plus, I was trying to work through a couple of scenes with characters who wanted more time than I could give them in this chapter--so they politely declined to cooperate until I agreed to move them to later chapters. I hate to admit it, but I think they were right to protest. I've already worked through a large part of one of their longer scenes, and I'm really pleased with it.

I hope this chapter was worth the wait. I hope the revelation at the end was worth it as well. Cat kind of blindsided me with that. I typed the words before I'd even had a chance to really think about them. When I did, though, it just felt so--right. Cat Grant is a force of nature. You kind of just have to go with her sometimes and trust that she knows what she's doing.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

CADMUS Test Subject Interlude 2

Chapter Notes

Precautionary warning: Lillian Luthor has an incredibly dark soul, and she intimates some equally dark possibilities in this chapter. She's just warming up, really...

Test Subject CDS-06-583

Her movement through the darkened hallway stirred the air around her, the trace of dormancy sharp in her every inhalation. With a press of her hand against the biometric reader, she passed swiftly through the parting lead-lined blast doors that protected this inner sanctum of the facility. Lex had done well with the design of this outpost, structuring it in such a way that whatever research and development he oversaw within was well guarded from even the most powerful of prying eyes. Even at his weakest moments when it came to the ruse of friendship shared briefly with the Man of Steel, her precious son understood that secrecy was paramount when it came to his family’s causes.

As the doors slid back into position, she proceeded across the mostly empty staging bay, attention focused on the crates lined up neatly in the center. Each top rested slightly askew, informing her that her assistant had already opened and inspected the contents just as she’d assured the doctor she would do. She nodded in approval as she pushed aside one of the covers and peered inside, pleased once again by her assistant’s work.

She prized the young woman’s loyalty, first to her son and now to her. Even when tasked with assignments like the one that currently kept her from Luthor’s side, she excelled, as she had done with this delivery.

The branded stamp of L-Corp stood out starkly against the unvarnished wood. Lillian hummed softly in approval as she inspected one of the components. Lena might be a disappointment on many other levels, but she was more than adequate in the exactness of her work. Perhaps there was still hope, she mused, that Lena could one day properly fulfill her purpose.

Moving once more out into the main hall, she caught sight of one of the facility’s regular doctors approaching cautiously. “Dr. Luthor, I hope you found everything satisfactory with this delivery. Your assistant was adamant that she be left alone while taking care of it.”

“It’s exactly as I had hoped it would be, Dr. Sloane. We will begin the replacement process as soon as I have spoken with the patient. You’ve begun the drug regimen to wake him, correct?”

“Yes, we began as soon as you requested it. He is conscious and ready to meet with you. However, he will have no control of his motor functions.”
Nodding curtly, she gestured toward the blast doors. “Join me here with the others in twenty minutes so we can begin to transport the components to the OR. We’ll need to test them to be certain they are fully operational.”

Impatient to meet with the test subject, she moved swiftly onward before Sloane could reply. It had been nearly a year since her last check-in with this subject—not that it mattered. She’d gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure he remained unaware of the passage of time—isolated from reality until he could prove useful to her cause one final time.

Passing through the main hallway, she paused long enough to collect her tablet, slipping it into her lab coat as she moved stealthily past several operating rooms currently in use. Inside the patient’s sterile quarters, she watched as he slowly twisted his head in her direction, muscles in his neck clearly slowed by atrophy. His eyes, clouded still by the steady cocktail of drugs that had kept him in nearly constant stasis since his rescue, looked in her direction. She questioned how well he actually saw her.

“Dr. Danvers, do you remember me?”

Head lolled back against the pillow in an approximation of a shake no as he furrowed his brow uncertainly.

“It’s all right,” she placated. “It’s been a traumatic few months for you. I’m not surprised that you might be having some short-term memory lapse.” She filled a cup with water, gently slipping her free hand behind his head and lifting to help him drink. Once he had finished, she settled him back and re-positioned his bed so he was upright.

“How?” He forced back the new wave of coughing. “What happened?”

“No.” Luthor tilted her head slightly and explained with unerring calm, “You remember him saving your life because that is the memory he convinced you to believe. The truth from what we discovered when we finally located you and Director Henshaw’s corpse is that he attacked you both, throwing you into a ravine once he thought you were dead.”

“I’m afraid that the events in Peru happened six months ago, Dr. Danvers.” She watched the fear bleed into panic as he struggled once more to move something—anything—that would lift him out of the bed. “Please remain calm, Jeremiah.” He halted his movements at the soothing utterance of his first name. “I know you’re upset and frightened. Half a year is a long time to lose.”

“Do you remember encountering the Martian you went to Peru to capture?”

“Yes. He saved my life.”

“No.” Luthor tilted her head slightly and explained with unerring calm, “You remember him saving your life because that is the memory he convinced you to believe. The truth from what we discovered when we finally located you and Director Henshaw’s corpse is that he attacked you both, throwing you into a ravine once he thought you were dead.”

She settled on the edge of his bed, training her face to reflect a convincing level of empathy. “That is why you are currently paralyzed. The fall damaged your C2 vertebra and shattered the bones in your arms and legs so badly that, even if you could move, it would be agonizing.”

Clenching his jaw against the surge of emotions roiling within him, he asked, “Why have I been unconscious all this time?”
“There were complications from the TBI you also suffered in the fall that went unnoticed during your return trip to the States—massive hemorrhaging that caused severe intracranial swelling. You went into shock during transport and slipped into a coma. You only started to wake up a few weeks ago. We’ve actually had several conversations about this, but you never remember any of them the next time you wake.”

“And what about my family? Do they know I’ve been waking up? When can I see them?”

“Dr. Danvers, there’s more. While trying to locate and rescue you and Director Henshaw, we weren’t able to focus on finishing your mission to capture the Martian. We lost track of him long enough for him to escape. When we finally relocated him—well, I’m afraid we were too late to stop him. Based on the information you told him about your family, he was able to find them.”

Eyes too long dimmed by drugs cleared with startling speed as Dr. Luthor’s words pierced into his heart. “He’s with my family? My wife and daughters?”

Struggling not to react to the use of the plural in reference to his daughter and the alien he apparently still considered worthy of his affection, she pressed on, “He has assumed your identity completely.”

“No, that’s not—how is that possible? He might be able to look like me, but he can’t be me! Eliza would know—she would know it wasn’t me.” Luthor heard the sluggish uncertainty in his voice, regardless of how desperately he wanted to believe his own words.

“He is telepathic, Jeremiah. Human brains are no challenge to him.” She paused to allow her emphasis to register.

“What about Kara?”

“Kryptonian minds are impervious to Martian telepathy.” She waited for the sign of hope sparking in his deep brown eyes. “There has been an unforeseen complication with her, however.” She watched his hope deflate with silent satisfaction.

“What has he done to her? Is she all right?”

“You should be far more concerned with your actual daughter, Dr. Danvers, rather than the alien infiltrator you and your wife allowed into your home.”

“She’s a child.”

“Not anymore.” She slipped the tablet from her lab coat, pulling up an image before turning the device for inspection. “This is your Kryptonian child now.”

Jeremiah stared incomprehensibly at the image of a now-grown Kara, dressed in the black bodysuit she wore during her time under the infectious control of red kryptonite. The shot, pulled from video coverage of her attack on NCPD officers, showed her hovering above a patrol car in flames, cops scattering for cover beneath her.

“We’re uncertain how, but the Martian accelerated her physical growth as well as her powers. What you see in this photo is what happened to her within the span of a few days. The cost, however, is that the process left her severely unstable. We captured this image the night she lost control and attacked National City. The Martian was able to stop her, but we fear it’s only a matter of time before her combined strength and instability become more than anyone will be able to control.”
Jeremiah’s eyes shifted along the image on the tablet, his gaze softening with regret. “She must be terrified,” he finally mumbled, searching the strong features of the woman within the photo for traces of the young girl he’d last seen. “She’d been doing so well, adapting so quickly, thanks to Alex.” His mouth fell into a lopsided grin. “She adores Alex.”

“She dislocated your daughter’s shoulder and fractured her arm in three places the last time she was in your home.” The revelation instantly sobered and silenced him.

Luthor leaned in, eyes shining dangerously beneath drawn-together brows. “Do you understand what your family is going through right now because of your refusal to see these creatures as the dangers they are? Alex faces months of physical therapy to regain what might only be partial strength and dexterity because of what the Kryptonian did to her. And the Martian is deceiving your wife into believing it is you in her home—in her bed. He is reading her thoughts and convincing her that it’s you she is sleeping with—you she is touching—”

“Stop!” Luthor watched as his hands twitched by his sides, betraying the drug-induced ruse of total paralysis. However, he was worked up enough by this point that he didn’t seem to notice the movement.

“Do not be so naïve. Right now, two aliens are destroying your family while you lie there in the bed that one of them placed you in! Would you still defend them? She injured your daughter. He tried to kill you and now he is rewarding himself with your wife.” She narrowed her eyes cruelly. “And what happens if he decides to expand that reward to include Alex?”

With a harsh swallow, he dropped his head back against the pillows propping him up. “Why isn’t the DEO stopping him?”

“Because he has infiltrated the DEO as well. As far as they are concerned, Hank Henshaw came back from Peru with a renewed fervor for hunting and capturing alien life on this planet. Those of us who know the truth fear that what he’s really doing is gathering together as many of the most powerful Fort Rozz prisoners as possible through his telepathic scanning, so that he can lead them against us. We simply don’t know who to trust to help us stop him. It’s taking enough of a toll trying to keep you hidden from him.”

“What about Superman? What is he doing to stop this?”

The ensuing silence enraged him in a way Luthor had not anticipated—but deeply enjoyed. “Answer me! What is he doing to protect my family and save Kara?”

“He can do nothing, Jeremiah. The Martian made quick use of the kryptonite kept at the DEO. Kara is now the only Kryptonian left on this planet, and she answers only to the Martian now.”

The noise that fractured from his throat sounded almost feral, almost enough to pierce the armor of her derision toward his kind—alien sympathizers who would betray humanity for the cause of acceptance.

Betray their own family out of fealty for an outcast from the stars.

“You switched out the isotope. You made the virus inert.”

“I did. And I called the police.”

Almost—but not close enough.

“How can I save Eliza and Alex?” She paused at the sound of his question. Never had she believed
that muddying the waters of his bleeding heart sentiments would ever actually affect his loyalties. It was merely an entertaining diversion in which she decided to indulge before proceeding with her plans. Hearing him now, wavering in his devotion to one of his pet Kryptonians, filled her with a satisfying sense of surprise.

“We can help you, Jeremiah. We have the technology to fix what the Martian did to your body—we can rebuild you with the strength and speed necessary to help you stop him from what he is doing to your family. However, I will not waste my time if you possess any doubts. We need someone willing to see this through to completion.”

Uncertainty stretched across his features. “How do I know any of this is the truth?”

“You don’t. Everything I’ve just told you could all be lies. For all you know, outside the walls of this room, Superman could still be alive, the Martian could be a hero, and your daughter could be working for the DEO.”

Jeremiah scowled in frustration. “You disrespect my family with your flippancy, Doctor.”

With a conciliatory bow of her head, she replied, “I apologize.” She met his gaze, schooling her expression once more into one of more suitable empathy. “As a mother, I understand your doubts—just as I understand that I would do whatever it took to protect my own. Are you willing to do the same?”

Rising to her feet, she adjusted the flow of fluids into his IV, intent on ensuring that he would once more succumb to sleep. “Rest and think about what we have discussed. We still have time, Jeremiah—but not much. However, I want you to be certain in whatever choice you make.” Her eyes narrowed slightly as she observed the medicated fog once more beginning to cloud his gaze before she turned smoothly and departed.

Once more in the hallway, Luthor smirked at the sight of Hank Henshaw leaning against the wall outside the room. The half-smile that showed from beneath his mask as he fell into step beside her let her know that he had been listening for a while. “None of that was necessary.”

“Of course it wasn’t. But everyone needs a hobby.” Her eyebrow arched as Henshaw barked a rough laugh at her response. “Besides,” she continued, her expression hardening, “why shouldn’t I take a little pleasure in toying with Jeremiah Danvers? He and his wife harbored for years what, by right, belonged to CADMUS. All the research we could have collected, all the advances we could have made for the protection of humanity while they played nuclear family with that actual living nuclear arsenal. And now she wants to become another sanctimonious demigod, like her cousin? Turn another one of my children into one of their personal playthings?”

Luthor sneered viciously at the thought. “Never again. I will break the Girl of Steel, and if I get to break those who have protected her from me for this long in the process, all the better.”
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Supergirl: Hero of National City or Economic Burden? Spencer Graves moves forward with an announcement of troubling portent for the Girl of Steel and other aliens within National City...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The palette of her dreams rarely changed. The primary color had always been red: the spires of Argo City bathed in Rao’s light, the crystal staircases of Sedenach reflecting the solstice suns, the rivers of Fr‘ahxos teeming with schools of crimson olivahn.

And then the angry floes of molten lava, bleeding life from her home’s dying core, ripping open unstitchable wounds that fractured and fissured and finally shattered outward in blinding, breaking brutality, silent except for the screams she never realized she released until she heard them in her dreams—replaying without remorse the moment her whole life burned to ash and began anew.

The only color she saw in the inescapable darkness of vrrosh :dokhahsh was the red death of her world.

On Earth, the palette shifted. Red remained dominant, still haunted her in nightmares of unrelenting destruction and loss or, worse, the colors of home and family, sentenced to live only in ephemera. Now, though, the palette retained the black, swirling void of nothingness that sometimes still wrapped around her, held her captive to the crushing oblivion of blank infinity.

In time, blues began to join the palette—of clean, clear waves undulating beneath her, of brilliant canopies of cerulean sky. And then came the rich cinnamon of her sister’s eyes or the bronze glow of Eliza’s skin—sometimes even the onyx of Jeremiah’s hair, shining and sleek in the warm midday sun. The palette grew slowly, the colors of her waking world sneaking into her dreamscapes with comforting familiarity.

It was years, though, before the new color began to wend its way through her dreams, verdant and bold. She noticed it moving in slowly at first—slipping along the azure coasts to form turquoise seas, or flowing over scorched, cracked ground and leaving behind soft meadows speckled with amber flowers.

The evening of her first day back at CatCo after defeating Livewire was the first time the color moved from her dreams and into her fingers. Once back home from work, she swirled and mixed paints endlessly, searching to finally capture the elusive shade that for some reason that night burned inside her bright and present.

And then she was sketching on her canvas, ovals and circles and soft curves and arches—filling in with creams and whites and flaxen spirals and the rubicund bow of full lips and the tinted sculpt of high cheekbones.

And jade.
Bright jade engulfing the pinprick dot of pupils and sharpened through with shards of amber that
glowed in the light spilling through full-length windows.

When she finished, she stepped back to meet the enigmatic stare of Cat Grant, just as she had
looked that morning, uttering words both promising and terrifying to the hero.

“There’s a lot I don’t know about you, and that should probably change.”

Something in Cat’s gaze that day burrowed into Kara’s mind, seeping jade and gold through her
dreams with even greater frequency.

She hid away the painting she’d done that night, uncertain of everything about it other than the
inappropriate significance of its presence in her home. Then again, what was the inappropriate
significance of hiding said painting beneath her bed?

Whatever the implications, after that, she became finely attuned to how often jade swept through
her dreams—how it soon dominated the palette of her nightscapes on many a night, its soothing
balm overcoming even the crimson stains of her unabated mourning.

Even in Cat’s absence, the color didn’t fade. Instead, it appeared with greater frequency, flooding
Kara’s dreams and reminding her constantly of how Cat’s departure drilled deeply into her bones,
its ache sharp as shards of kryptonite. Every morning she would awaken, the phantom image of
those eyes fading so rapidly from her mind, she barely had time to prepare for the ache that would
remain in their stead.

On this morning, however, she knew there would be no ache, no emptiness, no loss. Instead, she
opened her eyes, lips instantly pulling up into a smile broad and bright, to the sight of that stunning
gaze watching her from beneath sleep-heavy lids. “Good morning.”

Cat shuffled closer with a contented hum, warm, smooth skin sliding against the hero’s open arms
and bare legs. When she felt Cat’s body relax once more against her, heard her breathing even out
to soft sighs that whispered across her skin, she thought the smaller blonde was returning to sleep.

However, she surprised Kara by snuggling more deeply into her embrace and whispering, “Thank
you for this morning.”

“Of course.” She pressed a kiss against the crown of tousled gold curls as Cat’s hold tightened
around her waist. “Thank you for trusting me.”

The smaller blonde shifted so she could prop herself up enough to meet Kara’s gaze, resting her
free hand against the hero’s chest. “I don’t want to hide anything from you, Kara. This is part of
who I am. I can’t change it. I can only control it as best as I can.”

Kara instantly lifted a hand to rest atop the one on her chest, entwining their fingers as she did. “We
can control it.” She smiled in reassurance when she heard the nervous flutter of Cat’s breath in her
throat. For someone who lived under the excruciating blaze of public scrutiny, Cat was vehemently
possessive of her private life. Kara knew the struggle and significance of what she was letting Kara
see.

The nightmares had come as predicted, only they chose to cast themselves into Cat’s darkness
rather than Kara’s. The hero awoke to the sensation of Cat’s body jerking within her hold, her
fingers clawing in an unyielding grip around one of her biceps. Kara stilled her every movement,
barely even breathing as the smaller blonde jolted again, much harder this time, a grunt of pain
shuddering through her.
She focused her hearing on the mumbled words tumbling chaotically along on the shallow breaths Cat struggled to take. It only took a few moments for Kara to understand—with a certain degree of relief, she realized guiltily—that Cat wasn’t dreaming about anything pertaining to the ordeal with red kryptonite. Instead, unfamiliar names surfaced amidst the barely articulate flotsam of unconscious mutterings.

Her heart rate intensified with alarming speed and her whole body began to shiver even as perspiration soaked her skin. Kara startled at how quickly she pushed away with a pained cry and desperate gasps for air.

“Cat, it’s all right.” The hero’s hands trembled as she tried to comfort and then to wake the smaller blonde from whatever visions tormented her so mercilessly. For several beats, all she could do was run her hands along painfully taut muscles, her words thick with her own fear as she tried to pull Cat once more to the surface.

Body jolting one final time, the smaller blonde’s eyes shot open, wide but completely unfocused, breaths gasped and gulped in such a desperate way Kara feared she would begin to hyperventilate. The hero softly entreated, “Cat, can you look at me?” She thought at first she would need to repeat her request, but slowly she could see the determined effort within green eyes now turned toward her. “You’re safe. You’re in your home. You’re with me.”

Only a shaky nod was her response, her breathing still a struggle she seemed unable to right. Turning, she reached clumsily toward the nightstand and the small pill bottle she’d deposited discreetly before climbing into bed. Kara’s gaze followed the movement, instantly understanding.

“Okay, it’s all right, Cat.” She levitated up and over enough to extend her reach beyond Cat’s, gathering the pill vial and the bottled water next to it. She floated into a kneeling position next to the smaller blonde, encouraging her to sit up against the headboard and tapping two pills into her palm. Cat gulped down the pills, finishing the entire bottle of water before relinquishing it to Kara and dragging suddenly weary legs up against her chest to wrap equally fatigued arms around them.

Kara watched as the smaller blonde rested her forehead against her knees, eyes shut tightly and jaw clenching around the still-erratic rhythm of her breathing. Fearing she might be crowding too closely, she began to shift away, startled by a fierce grip on her forearm. “Stay.”

The word rasped like gravel and Kara fought the urge to pull Cat into her arms right then. Instead, she shifted carefully so she was sitting beside Cat, close enough for her presence to be known while maintaining a respectful distance. She could feel the vibrations of tension still passing through the woman beside her, hear the brittle gasps—even smell the tang of fear and adrenaline on her skin.

In time, however, her breathing settled into its normal pattern and her body slowly unfolded itself from its impossibly tight curl. She flexed her fingers and toes as though trying to regain feeling in them and turned eyes dulled by exhaustion toward the hero.

Kara began to speak, but her jaw instantly clicked shut at the sight of Cat adamantly shaking her head, already knowing she had no energy to talk about what she’d just endured. Instead, she pressed against Kara’s shoulders, settling her against the pile of pillows behind her, and slid once more into the hero’s warm, protective embrace.

After that, Kara had remained awake, eyes closed as she focused on the rhythm of Cat’s heartbeat, which thankfully maintained a steady, resting pace. No more nightmares came, the rest of the smaller blonde’s sleep deep and still.
“I’m here to listen if you want to talk about it.”

Throat muscles jittered under a nervous swallow, but Kara could see the grateful shine in Cat’s gaze. “Not this time,” she finally stated, her grip tightening on Kara’s fingers. “I’m sure the opportunity will arise again soon enough though.”

At the confession of frequency in Cat’s statement, Kara wondered at all the mornings the CEO had arrived, physically impeccable as always but emotionally frayed in ways Kara knew only she would really notice. How many days had Cat struggled to hold herself together after nights shred apart by the shrapnel of her dreams?

“Whatever you need, I’m here” she smiled, offering back the same support Cat had given her so freely the night before.

The smaller blonde leaned close, tucking her head against Kara’s shoulder. Kara watched as she untangled their hands, lifting thin fingers to trace along the arcs and dips of her collarbone. The feeling was diffused, but she couldn’t pull her gaze away from the sight. At the end of her clavicle, fingers diverted along the broad sweep of her opposite shoulder, down along the undulation of her deltoid and bicep, past the corded lines of her forearm to the fingers she now splayed across her stomach.

“So safe,” Cat whispered, turning to press a kiss against Kara’s cheek. Kara felt her breath stutter slightly, felt tears begin to blur her vision at the softly uttered benediction. Even after enduring the darkest of her actions, Cat still saw her as security, as protection. Of all the gifts Cat could ever bestow upon her, that was the most precious.

Something shifted in the sensation of Cat’s fingers, now tracing up along her sternum. When she closed her eyes, in fact, she was almost certain she could focus enough to now follow the path of Cat’s fingers without actually seeing them—outlining the hollow of her throat, reversing along her sternum, gliding slowly around the curve of her ribcage and curling against the hard lines of her obliques.

Her hearing surged unexpectedly, making her acutely aware of the way Cat’s heartbeat was now playing erratic timpani within her chest. Opening her eyes once more, she fell instantly into the darkness of untamed pupils traced in jade. Fingers tightened in unanticipated detail against her side. “I love you so much, Kara.” Cat watched curiously the laughter Kara clearly swallowed back. “What’s so amusing?”

Arms encircled the smaller blonde’s waist as a shy, delighted smile curled the hero’s lips. “I’ve—I’ve wanted to say that since you woke up,” she finally confessed. “I just—I don’t want to say it so much, you get tired of hearing me say it.”

The fleeting thought that Cat might actually possess her own level of super speed flashed through Kara’s thoughts when, with surprising swiftness, she found herself suddenly looking up into green eyes fiercely glowing beneath a furrowed brow. The more pressing realization, however, quickly became how Cat was now straddling her waist, knees locked against her sides and hands curled around the strong arc of her shoulders.

Kara swallowed, focus filled by the suggestive press of Cat’s body, the distinctive spice of her scent, the way the loose top of her pajamas hung precariously open as she leaned over—and, oh, if only she would just move ever so slightly lower…

“Kara Zor-El, eye contact, please.” The hero’s gaze shifted at the statement, instantly falling prey to the focus of Cat’s leonine stare. The shadow of knowing flickered briefly in her gaze before she
continued, “If you decided right now that the only words you would ever again speak to me were those three words, you would never say them too many times.” She stretched out and lowered herself so she was flush against the hero, gaze never wavering. “I will never tire of hearing you say them, so long as you always mean them.”

The insinuation of her final statement struck fury in Kara’s heart at any who had dared betray Cat so cruelly. She watched the shift of Cat’s eyes, studying the lines of the hero’s face, expression a skirmish of hope and apprehension. “I will never dishonor such a sacred promise, Cat.”

Rigid lines relaxed throughout the smaller blonde’s posture and Kara sighed joyously at the way her words had clearly soothed the smaller blonde’s fear. Her brow instantly crinkled, however, at the hasty press of Cat’s fingers against her lips when she attempted a kiss. “I do love you, darling, but love does not cancel out morning breath.”

The gasp of surprise that followed filled the hero with impish delight as she floated and rotated enough to flip Cat quickly back onto the bed. She laughed at the smaller blonde’s look of surprise before leaning in and quickly pressing a kiss against the strong pulse point beneath Cat’s jawline. “I love you, morning breath be damned,” she teased, her lips forming the words against Cat’s soft skin.

The smaller blonde’s softly breathed scoff held no sting as she wrapped her arms around her hero’s shoulders to pull her closer. She watched as Kara settled along her side, realizing that she was refraining from resting her full weight against the smaller blonde. At the questioning quirk of her eyebrow, Kara shyly explained, “My musculature and bone density make me very—sturdy. I’d rather not squish you.”

The throaty laughter her comment drew from Cat tingled through her as the smaller blonde kissed along the strong line of her neck and nipped playfully at her jaw. “Somehow, being ‘squished’ by the Girl of Steel doesn’t sound all that terrible.” Her tongue traced the strong jut of Kara’s jaw, eliciting a delightfully unexpected shiver through the hero, but a sharp series of pings from her phone halted her movement.

With an elaborate roll of her eyes, she sneered at the offending device on her nightstand. “At least it’s not your earpiece. I swear someone at the DEO calibrated that thing to go off at the most inopportune moments imaginable.”

Kara laughed at the smaller blonde’s irritation. “It only feels like that sometimes. Besides, I don’t have it in right now.”

Cat hummed skeptically. “I didn’t think you took it out.”

“Only when I sleep. Alex knows to call my phone if they really need me then. I wear it all other times, though, since it’s how the DEO can track me in addition to tracking my powers.” Her lips twitched into a pensive twist. “It’s how Alex was able to find me so quickly when CADMUS had me.”

The statement instantly caught Cat’s attention, her brows knitting together at the reminder of Kara’s capture. Kara translated the look easily enough and drew the smaller blonde closer with a soft press of lips to her forehead. “Alex found me,” she repeated. “Alex will always find me.”

“How did she do it this time?”

“She realized almost as soon as I was gone. I never arrived where I said I was heading and I never reported in. She knew something was wrong and, when she couldn’t get in touch with me, she
instantly had Winn triangulating my location based on the last readings from my earpiece before CADMUS destroyed it. The DEO systems had gathered enough information from it to pinpoint within a 15-square-mile radius where I ended up. From there, Winn scanned the area for traces of non-Terran elements, since we knew CADMUS was stockpiling alien weaponry.”

She shivered at the memories of her time under Dr. Luthor’s captivity—of how the last time she’d felt so terrified or so alone had been at her arrival on Earth after witnessing the destruction of her planet. As she had huddled against the bars of her cell, weakened and in pain from her solar flare and blood loss, she felt the hot stream of tears against her skin. The realization that she could die there before anyone found her filled her chest with a tightness that made it almost impossible for her to breathe.

Arms instinctively closed around Cat more tightly, the smaller blonde swallowing back the huff of discomfort she felt at the hero’s slightly too-tight grip. She understood well enough the fear driving Kara’s need for the reassurance of physical contact. She let her own arms wrap around Kara’s shoulders and waist, pulling her as tightly against her as she could.

The persistent pinging of alerts coming from her mobile on the nightstand was finally too much for Cat to tolerate. With an irritated noise that bordered on a growl, she slipped away from Kara and grabbed for the offending device, instantly sitting up as soon as she read the first headline.

“That fuckwitted cockwomble,” she snarled, her knuckles blanching under the intensity of her grip.

Kara drew up in surprise at the slur that surpassed even Cat’s usual arsenal of creative insults. “Who? What’s wrong?” The hero twisted to get a better view of the screen she was certain Cat would have melted by that point, if she had heat vision.

“Spencer Graves. He’s called a press conference for this morning. The Trib is reporting that, according to an unnamed source from his office, he’s announcing his call for a mandatory alien registry.” Checking the time, she slid quickly from the bed, storming out of the room with hurricane-force fury.

Kara caught up only with a slight boost of super speed, as Cat tuned in the CatCo News broadcast coming live from outside city hall. Graves was settling in at the podium, offering the crowd of journalists before him a smile that Cat instantly dubbed “shit-licking smugness.”

“Oh, ew,” Kara groused, eyes squinting in disgust at the vivid imagery.

“Thank you all for joining me at such short notice this morning. As you are aware, President Marsdin recently signed a law granting total legal amnesty to the aliens who have found their way to our planet and have made our country their home. She, in fact, signed this law right here in National City, under the protective watch of our own most famous illegal alien, Supergirl.

“In the nearly six months since the law went into effect, however, the federal government estimates that only forty percent of aliens in this country have actually registered for amnesty. In our great city? Only twenty percent. Not even the Girl of Steel has officially registered here.”

Kara frowned at the accusation. “President Marsdin granted me amnesty when she named me her Ambassador!”

“He doesn’t give a damn about the facts, Kara. He’s simply stirring up his most rabid supporters. He knows they won’t ask questions and will always believe what their side tells them to believe.”

“Instead,” Graves continued, “she and the majority of the aliens calling National City home
continue to benefit from all the resources the rest of us pay for. They are an economic burden to every upstanding, legal tax payer here in National City."

“I damn well pay my share of taxes,” the hero muttered, the crinkle between her eyes deeper than Cat had ever seen it.

“You also came to work for me with all your appropriate documents in order—however you managed that should remain a secret from CatCo Accounting, by the way.” She smirked at the sheepish way the hero bit her lip.

“This is doubly true for Supergirl, whose arrival here has been nothing but a damage control nightmare to this city, especially to our infrastructure. In the short time since she came out as the ‘Hero of National City,’ she has poisoned our water, harmed our aquatic wildlife, nearly toppled skyscrapers, and generally wreaked havoc on so many roadways and bridges that our crews and our budget cannot keep up with the repairs.”

He stared directly into the bank of cameras before him. “No more. Today, I am calling on my fellow council members to help me establish a mandatory alien registry within National City. If aliens wish to live here, then they need to contribute here as well. We cannot continue to sustain the damages Supergirl and others like her bring to National City without an increase in incoming funds.”

The laugh Cat exclaimed was anything but amused. “He’s using the threat of a tax increase to secure support for this defilement of your rights.” Tendons in her wrist tensed starkly with her grip against her phone. “And how does he expect aliens to pay taxes when not that long ago, he wanted to punish companies that would consider hiring you and protect companies that blatantly discriminated against you?”

Kara frowned, worry creeping through her features. “This is exactly what the Infernian who tried to kill President Marsdin said would happen with the Alien Amnesty law—that someone would use it as a way for the government to track us.” Her eyes widened. “He’s basically tagging us for easy CADMUS location and collection.”

The reporter shook her head, golden curls swaying fiercely. “This insufferable fuck trumpet’s malevolence is staggering.”

She hurled her phone toward the nearest sofa cushion and stalked toward the hall, the string of curses and insults tumbling from her lips causing the blush in Kara’s cheeks to deepen by the second. Ignoring the rest of the press conference, she hurried after the smaller blonde, stumbling to a halt at the sound of her phone buzzing from the bedroom.

Zipping back just in time to catch it before it went to voicemail, she flinched slightly at her sister’s contemptuous roar through the open line. “Are you hearing what this shit pouch is saying about you?”

Sighing while brushing back a stray curl of hair from her face, she replied, “You and Cat are like the gurus of scarring language this morning.”

Alex huffed at the comment. “Shouldn’t you be outshining us all right now? Kara, he’s trying to make you sound like some kind of Kryptonian wrecking ball who hasn’t done anything but cost National City tax money! You saved the whole fucking planet from brain-liquefying death!”

By that point, Kara had once again found Cat as she was signing into her laptop in her home office. Alex’s final statement came through with such emotive volume even the CEO could hear it
“Through Kara’s phone. “Goddamn right,” she responded, plucking the device instantly from the hero’s hand. “This piss weasel wants to quantify her protection? There isn’t enough money on the planet to cover that debt.”

A deeper ferocity glinted like quicksilver in her gaze. “But he’s just stirred the wrong pot with this announcement,” she all but growled. She paused, listening to Alex. “Oh, I’ve got him dead to rights and he doesn’t even know it. Yet.”

Kara felt an unexpected heat in the concave of her abdomen, spreading through her body like twisting tendrils of smoke. She already was keenly aware of how Cat Grant in her natural element was undeniably sexy. Getting to see Cat Grant in her natural element while she still wore pajamas? Kara wasn’t prepared for how much that was affecting her.

The smaller blonde shifted the phone in her grip at the sound of another incoming call. At the name on the ID, she interrupted, “Hold on, Alex. Eliza is calling.” She switched to the other line, instantly declaring, “He is not going to get away with any of what he’s threatening toward Kara and those like her. When I’m finished burning him to the ground, they’ll have to ship him back to CADMUS in a tea strainer.”

Not the least bit nonplussed to hear Cat answering her younger daughter’s phone, Eliza chuckled. “I see I don’t have to worry about Kara getting worked up too much over this.”

A dark smile curved the reporter’s lips. “Oh, Eliza, I don’t get worked up. I get the last word.” Her gaze shifted, locking onto Kara with unshakeable intensity. “He is about to learn a thorough lesson in the difference between fake news and hard facts.” Cat’s brow arched and Kara felt a shiver lick at her spine. “Alex is on the other line, so let me wrap up with her and I’ll have Kara call you back.”

Switching back to Alex, the smaller blonde caught her in the middle of a string of profanity that definitively notched up her respect level for the brunette significantly. As Alex’s invective ended, Cat snorted at the mortified look to cross Kara’s face. “Thunder what?”

Before Cat could even take a breath to respond, the hero began to back away, hands rising to her ears. “Actually, no, please don’t repeat that.” She raised her voice so her sister could hear her. “Why would you even need language like that?”

Alex’s laughter danced through the open line, mingling with Cat’s own as Kara shook her head and moved toward the kitchen. She was definitely going to need food to prepare for any more of her sister and Cat’s unexpected tag team tirade.

Hearing Cat’s phone ringing with Carter’s “Chewbacca growl” ringtone as she passed through the living room, she quickly scooped up the device and answered the FaceTime request. “Hey, buddy,” she smiled, instantly noting the worry imprinted upon his fair features.

“Kara, what’s going on down there? My CatCo app has been blowing up with news alerts about Spencer Graves announcing a mandatory alien registry. And he’s trying to blame Supergirl for destroying the city?”

She drew in a steadying breath, knowing that she needed to present a calm front for Carter, to keep him from working himself up. “He’s trying to stir up trouble here, that’s all, Carter. It’s not that bad.”

The sound of another string of blush-inducing language roared down the hallway before Kara could mute her side of the conversation. Carter, however, just rolled his eyes. “Not that bad, huh?
Mom’s already reached DEFCON 1 with her cursing.”

“Please tell me there’s no DEFCON 0,” Kara cringed, which elicited a soft laugh from Carter.

“I think this is as bad as I’ve heard her in a while,” he admitted. “I can’t say I’m surprised. I’m pretty pissed, too.”

Kara felt her lips twitch slightly at the sound of Carter timidly testing the waters his mother so expertly navigated on a daily basis. “Language, young man,” she teased. “I don’t think I’m prepared to handle two foul-mouthed Grants.”

She sighed in relief at how his expression finally relaxed into something slightly less severe. “I know you’re worried, Carter, but we’re okay. *Supergirl* is okay. Spencer Graves is seeing how much he can rile up his constituents—that’s all. He’s found something that works for him and he’s sticking with it.”

She watched as the young man bit pensively at his lower lip, finally conceding with a jerky nod of his head. “You’re right. He was a nothing politician before he started banging the anti-alien drum. Most people still don’t understand how he won his council seat. *He* even seemed surprised that he won.”

“What do you mean?” Kara could feel her journalistic curiosity rise at Carter’s statement.

The young man shrugged one shoulder. “It was his first attempt at running for a spot on the city council. In all the primary polls, he always came in last—but then, on Election Day, he ended up winning by a solid double-digit lead over all his competition. The *Trib* made special note of how, in his own acceptance speech, he called his win a ‘modern-day miracle.’”

“And he’s been insufferably self-righteous as only the *miraculous* can be ever since.” Kara turned to watch Cat continue to stalk down the hall, her eyes locked on her son’s image. She reached up to adjust Kara’s grip on her phone so she could better see the screen. “And why exactly do you know all this about Mr. Graves?”

“I pulled up his Wikipedia page while watching the presser,” Cat’s lips lifted fondly at the sound of Carter’s adept use of journalism slang. “Can he actually do all the things he’s saying with this registry?”

“He’s going to try,” Cat conceded, refusing to gloss over anything with her son, especially since it concerned Kara. “But I’m going to do everything I can to remind the people of National City of the truth—something Spencer Graves clearly abandoned at the same time as his moral compass and his fashion sense.” She tempered her expression, her next statement calm but firm. “I want you to stop looking up information on Spencer Graves, Carter.”

“But he’s—”

“He’s going to be called out for his deceptions and his hypocrisy, in due time. I promise. But I need you to distance yourself from what’s going on here in National City. Do you understand?”

Kara observed the silent standoff between mother and son, and she swore she could hear Carter methodically sorting through his thoughts for an adequate rebuttal. However, she saw, too, that he recognized the worry tightening his mother’s stare. With a concessionary nod that dropped a dark curl down onto his forehead, he finally sighed, “I understand.” The hero saw the instant release of tension in the set of Cat’s shoulders. “Just—keep *Supergirl* safe, okay? And-and maybe let her bring you up to visit when you can?”
“I promise on both counts, Carter.”

“Okay.” His eyes shifted back and forth between Kara and his mother, finally noticing the fact that they both were in their pajamas. Only the playful shine in his gaze outdid the sudden flush in his cheeks. “I didn’t mean to interrupt your sleepover.”

At the surprised gasp from the woman beside her, Cat clicked her tongue, shooting a poignant look at her son. “You’re never an interruption, darling. An instigator, maybe…”

As she watched him laugh at her teasing, she felt the familiar ache of muscle memory through her arms at the desire to hug him close. “I love you, Carter. Always have—”


Waggling her fingers in response, she replied, “Bye, buddy.”

When the FaceTime session ended, Kara handed back Cat’s phone, surprised by the feel of warm fingers instead looping around her wrist. She looked into the pensive green gaze focused on her, counting once more the flecks of gold she could catalogue with her microscopic sight. “He’s never let someone get as close to him as quickly as he’s let you in.”

The words fitted around Kara’s heart, slotting perfectly into place alongside the words Cat had placed there the previous night and again that morning. “You know I love him, too.” The speed in which Cat diverted her gaze let Kara know this was not something she should leave to assumption. Gently cupping Cat’s face with her free hand, thumb brushing against the soft skin of her cheek, Kara stated, “Carter is zrhythrevium to me, Cat—a member of my House, as close as blood kin to my heart.”

Moments passed on the steady rhythm of Cat’s heartbeat as she studied the hero before her. “zrhythrevium,” she finally repeated, pride shining in her gaze at how closely she was able to match Kara’s accent. “And what am I to you in your language?”

“khuhp i aorghuhs waila.”

Even without understanding the words, Cat felt her breath stutter at the raw honesty blazing in Kara’s eyes as she uttered them. Without a second thought, she raked her fingers through sleep-tousled gold, drawing the hero close enough to press their lips together. Mouths moved in perfect rhythm before Kara could no longer suppress her smile. “I thought—”

Cat silenced her with another kiss before repeating the hero’s earlier sentiment: “I love you, morning breath be damned.”

Laughter bubbling from deep within, Kara wrapped her arms tightly around the smaller blonde, lifting and spinning them in her exuberance. Cat rolled her eyes while relishing the warmth of Kara’s body against hers and the now-familiar tingle of the hero’s biomatrix along her skin.

Ringing from Cat’s phone once more interrupted, a surly snarl tripping from the CEO’s lips as she begrudgingly took the device back from Kara. Leaning her head against the hero’s chest, she muttered, “Down, darling,” before answering the call.

Touching down once more, Kara released her hold as she heard James’s voice filter through Cat’s mobile. “Ms. Grant, I assume you watched Spencer Graves’s announcement?”
“Unfortunately, yes. It ruined what could have been a far more promising morning.” She quirked a brow provocatively toward Kara before turning and moving once more toward her office. “We’re going to need a series of articles covering the truth behind all of his rabid accusations and exaggerations: the actual economic impact aliens have had on this city, the availability of work for aliens versus the businesses that aren’t willing to hire them instead of humans, and, yes, even an article on the infrastructural damage we’ve sustained due to Supergirl’s battles throughout National City. I’ll handle Lucas when it comes to the piece on Spencer Graves. It’s been too long since I heard him call me ‘puff princess.’ I need to bring him up to speed on what I’ve been working on anyway.”

Kara ceased paying attention to the conversation, replaying instead Cat’s comment about the “far more promising” morning she’d hoped for instead. The suggestion hummed within her, like sunlight charging her cells, and she couldn’t resist laughing giddily to herself at the thought.

An expectant rumbling in her stomach reminded her of her earlier mission to find food. Glancing back down the hall and hearing Cat launching into further instructions for James, she decided they both were going to need a satisfactory breakfast to prepare for the morning ahead. Hurriedly, she returned to the bedroom, heading into the attached master bathroom, which Kara noted was about half the size of her whole apartment.

Trying not to get distracted by all the body care products Cat kept in plentiful supply, the hero rushed through a shower, slipping swiftly into her suit and out the doors to the balcony attached to Cat’s bedroom. Her first stop after a blissfully quiet morning circuit around the city was Noonan’s. After slipping into the civilian clothes she kept stashed in the alleyway behind the restaurant, she placed an atypically large order, even for her. The wait staff watched in awe and amusement as she collected all the bags in one hand and the two carriers of drinks in the other, smiling with the same easy joy she always did.

Back in her suit, she swung by the DEO, scanning the building as she passed and warming at the sight of Alex and Eliza together in her sister’s lab. She dropped off their favorites—black coffee and cinnamon crunch muffin for Alex and Earl Grey tea and lemon blueberry scone for Eliza—along with kisses, hugs, and assurances that she was all right and that Cat was taking care of her. On her way back out, she hurried to leave a sticky bun on Winn’s desk before his arrival and several boxes of donuts in the break room for the rest of the agents.

The return flight to Cat’s was swift, bringing her back to the balcony doors just in time to see Cat exiting the bathroom in a black silk robe while gently towel-drying her hair. Both women startled at seeing the other so unexpectedly, with Kara fumbling to maintain her grip on the remaining coffees and bags in her hold. “S-sorry,” she stammered as she entered, her throat muscles rippling as her eyes drifted along the bare length of Cat’s legs. Her gaze caught at the hem that passed along the middle of the smaller blonde’s thighs, eyelids fluttering in a barely perceptible way at the tantalizing sight.

Very little, however, ever passed without the reporter’s notice. With a pleased smile, she draped her towel along the back of the chair at her makeup table and sauntered the rest of the way across the room to where Kara stood, frozen in place. She looked at the contents of Kara’s hands. “I didn’t realize balcony delivery was an option.”

The hero’s mouth moved several times before clicking shut, words lost beneath the deafening roar of blood through her veins. Taking the coffee carrier from Kara and placing it on the dresser, Cat sidled closer, encouraging the hero’s now-empty hand around her waist. “What’s in the bags, darling?”
Voice catching somewhere between her throat and tongue, Kara closed her eyes, surprised by how the move seemed to make her even more aware of the length of Cat’s body pressing against her. With a hard clearing of her throat, she forced herself to reply. “Pastries and croissants. A selection of muffins and some slices of banana nut bread and zucchini bread. Sticky buns, but those are probably just for me since they’re so sweet. I-I know you don’t like too much sugar.”

At the sound of her finishing, Cat slid a hand up along her suit, gliding over the crest with an appreciative thoroughness that nearly caused the hero to crush the bags in her unsteady grip. “Sounds delish.” Kara shuddered at the feeling of the words breathed against her ear. “You wouldn’t believe how hungry I am.”

With a gentle tap of fingers against the crest beneath them, the smaller blonde shifted out of Kara’s hold, plucking up the towel and heading once more toward the bathroom. “Why don’t you change into something less super and set everything out in the kitchen. We can eat at the island. I’ll be out in a moment.”

Even after the bathroom door closed completely, Kara stood rooted in place, mouth slightly agape. Her skin hummed with vibrancy, mind buzzed with color, and the palette now was only jade and gold.

Her breath tumbled across her lips in unnoticed icy puffs, her attention too focused on resisting the urge to use her X-ray vision in what she knew was a wholly inappropriate way. With a nervous laugh to herself at the thought, she shook her head while setting down the food bags and searching for her change of clothes. “Get a grip,” she mumbled while purposefully turning her back to the bathroom.

Leaving her boots and cape behind and wearing a light blue button-down and a pair of boyfriend jeans over the rest of her uniform, she transferred all the bags and the coffees to the kitchen. By the time she had found plates and utensils, poured orange juice for both of them, and was getting ready to heat Cat’s latte, the woman in question arrived.

Immaculately styled as always, the smaller blonde wore a red ochre V-neck sweater with sleeves long enough they covered her knuckles, and dark denim skinny jeans. Kara noted her makeup was far more subtle and her hair softer, with more natural curls than she normally allowed for the office. She arched an eyebrow at the sight of Kara poised with her head bent over her latte, eyeing her nervously. “Well there’s that mystery solved,” she ribbed. “And to think of how critical I was of Ms. Teschmacher for never bringing me a latte as hot as the ones you always brought me.”

Kara smirked at the too-true statement as she shot a double dose of heat vision into the latte. “She’s actually quite adept at her job, you know. James always says what a great assistant she is.”

The CEO tsked as she accepted the latte. “He only thinks she’s so great because he never had the pleasure of having a truly exceptional assistant.”

Blushing slightly but finding herself still buzzing with strange energy from before, she mumbled, “And he never will.”

Cat’s eyes narrowed at the bold intimation, her lips pulling back into a scandalously pleased grin. Placing her coffee down on the kitchen island, she reached out, hooking her finger into the collar of Kara’s shirt and guiding the hero close enough to press a brief but invigorating kiss against her lips. “Boldness out of the uniform really does suit you well.”

Giddy smile once more adorning her lips, Kara watched Cat slip onto one of the stools around the kitchen island and slid the zucchini bread toward her. “Your vegetable serving for the morning.”
The smaller blonde accepted the bread with the faintest glare. “I happen to enjoy zucchini bread, thank you.” She pulled off an edge while gesturing to the two sticky buns Kara had moved in front of her. “I’d need to keep insulin at the office if I ate even half as many of those as you do.”

Kara laughed at the comment while slicing off a piece with her fork. “You wouldn’t need it if you had my metabolism.”

“How many calories do you need each day?”

“Depends on my level of effort throughout the day. Before I came out as Supergirl and I wasn’t using my powers at all, I still needed to consume at least triple the daily allowance for a human woman.”

“Well, that’s rather impressive.” Her brow furrowed slightly. “But don’t you need more than just the empty calories from things like sticky buns? Don’t you need nutrients and vitamins?”

“Not like a human,” she shrugged. “I mean, I enjoy foods like that—but I don’t need them and, unfortunately, they don’t satisfy my high caloric needs. I get all I need nutrient-wise from the sun.” She laughed as she swallowed another bite of sticky bun. “Barry’s friends all think it’s hilarious that he had to go all the way to another universe to find someone who can actually surpass him in daily caloric requirements.”

“Barry? Mr. Allen and his alluringly tight red leather onesie?” She chuckled at the way Kara sputtered some of her coffee out at her comment. “He’s from another universe? So the multiverse theory is true.” At the sight of the hero gaping incredulously at her, she stated, “Kara, I’m in the know. Get used to it.”

With an amused shake of her head, Kara continued, “Well, then, yes, the multiverse theory is true. Barry is from Earth 1—we’re Earth 38, by the way, if you didn’t already know.” She quickly caught the piece of zucchini bread Cat tossed at her, popping it in her mouth with a cheeky grin. “Barry ended up here accidentally the first time, but he came back on purpose back at Thanksgiving to ask for my help. His Earth was facing an alien invasion and they needed an alien to help defend them.”

“You went to another Earth? And Mr. Allen has figured out a way to find you purposefully?”

“Yep and yep,” she laughed. “Not only that, but his friend Cisco designed an interdimensional extrapolator that allows me to communicate with Barry’s Earth and open small breaches between our worlds whenever I want.” At the instant shine of curiosity in Cat’s gaze, the hero smirked. “I can see that ‘CatCo Exclusive’ look in your eyes already.”

With a dismissive flick of her fingers, Cat retorted, “I wouldn’t want to exploit Mr. Allen and his world. I wouldn’t mind visiting it, though.”

“To see what Earth 1’s Cat Grant is like?”

“Well, yes, of course—although I’m sure she’s just as fabulous as I am. I’d like to believe there are certain universal truths that even the multiverse can’t contain.” She smiled at Kara’s amusement. “Weren’t you just as curious while you were there?”

The hero’s smile dimmed slightly. “I—um. No, I didn’t—I didn’t think to ask.”

“Because not asking means that, in Barry’s universe, Krypton might still be there.”

Kara dipped her head, embarrassed by how utterly transparent she was to the woman across from
her. “It’s not like we had a lot of free time while we were getting our asses handed to us by the aliens that were attacking.”

She looked up suddenly, worry furrowing her brow. Before she could speak, however, Cat reached out, quickly taking the hero’s hand in hers. “Kara, there is absolutely nothing wrong with wanting to believe that, in another universe, Krypton still exists. In an equation of infinite possibilities, I’m absolutely certain that it still exists in multiple universes.”

Nodding slowly, Kara worked her bottom lip between her teeth for a moment. Staring down at her fingers interlaced with Cat’s, she finally replied, “In whatever other universes where Krypton lives, I do hope I am happy among my people. In this universe, I know I will always miss my home and wonder what might have happened had Krypton survived. But I know, too, that this is where I am meant to be—not just here on Earth, but here, right now, with my family and my friends, and especially with Carter and you.”

Blinking quickly against the emotions Kara’s words drew, Cat tightened her hold on the hero’s hand, bringing it to her lips to kiss each knuckle. “So, tell me about this journey to Mr. Allen’s Earth. And are there any future plans for him to return and attempt to abscond with my hero again?”

Relishing Cat’s territorial teasing, Kara launched into explaining the events on Earth 1. Cat listened rapturously to Kara’s enthusiastic telling of the events, trying her best not to react too much at the thought of Kara under the Dominators’ mind control. However, at the fourth mention of flirtatiousness toward the hero, she chimed in, “Am I going to have to ask CatCo Legal to look into restraining orders against Sara Lance and Mick Rory?”

“Cat, they’re in another universe,” she laughed, knowing the CEO was only partially joking.

“I hire the best lawyers for a reason, Kara. If I tell them to place a restraining order on the Easter Bunny, it’s their job to see it through.”

A look of honest distress shadowed Kara’s expression. “Who would want to put a restraining order on the Easter Bunny? He brings you chocolate and candy.” Without waiting for a response, she sprang from where she sat, scooping Cat into her arms before the smaller blonde even had a chance to consider a protest. Giggling, she continued, “Besides, you have nothing to worry about. Whatever Earth I’m on, I’m always Team Cat.”

With a poorly affected hum of disinterest, the smaller blonde toyed with Kara’s collar while glaring playfully into her eyes. “As it should be. Now, either put me down or transfer me to my office. We both have work we need to start on.” She tapped her hand against Kara’s shoulder and smirked, “Chop, chop.”

Acquiescent smile brightening her features, Kara lifted gently off the ground, floating them back toward Cat’s office. “As you wish.”

“Call me Buttercup, Kiera, and I will end you.”

Cat felt the ripple of Kara’s laughter through her muscles as the hero carried her to her office. Gently depositing the smaller blonde next to her desk with a quick kiss, Kara zipped out and back, carrying her work laptop and notes for the article she was investigating with Maggie.

Having checked her work email while patrolling the city earlier, she was admittedly disappointed that Snapper had decided not to assign her any of the articles inspired by Spencer Graves’s announcement. However, she knew, too, that identifying CADMUS’s work would bring them one
step closer to shutting down Lillian Luthor and finding Jeremiah. Besides, she suspected Snapper would have been unmerciful toward her “pro-alien slant” on a subject to which she was literally way too close. Better to stay away from that round of alien articles. With a sigh, she sat cross-legged on the couch opposite Cat’s desk, flipping open her laptop and spreading out her notes while peripherally watching Cat slip on a pair of glasses and settle into reviewing her own notes.

After several minutes of shared silence, Kara heard Cat shifting position and looked up in time to see her swing her legs up to rest on the edge of her desk. The hero smiled at the sight, remembering how Cat would often sit like that during CatCo editorial meetings. Usually, she would have a pen in her hand, pressed against her lips as she listened to her staff pitching stories.

Now, however, Cat had only her tablet in one hand, the other absently running along the collar of her sweater as she read. Kara watched those fingers, always so elegant and nimble, slide across fabric that shifted against soft, smooth skin. She watched in fascination as the collar tugged and gaped to expose the exquisite lines of one clavicle. She could see the glint of light against the necklace Cat wore as it pulsed in time with the smaller blonde’s heartbeat.

And then, she could hear the sound of Cat’s blood as it flowed through her veins in time with that heartbeat, now almost too loud for Kara to hear anything else. She wanted more than anything in that moment to reach out, feel the thunderous pulse beneath her fingertips or, better still, beneath her lips. If only she could run her tongue along the delicate slope of Cat’s neck—

—or along the muscled slope of her thighs. She shivered at the unexpected shift in thoughts, of how Cat would sound from her leaving a trail of insistent kisses and nips along her thighs, moving upward to where Kara ached to touch, to kiss, to tease, to worship.

Lips parted, a soft gasp escaping into the ether as she tried desperately to stop these thoughts. Shutting her eyes, she bowed her head and focused on silencing her mind, which she realized was being overrun by the ambient sounds of the city around her. She could feel a heat growing between her thighs, feel a tightness coiling in the pit of her stomach. Shifting in her seat, she felt the rub of her uniform against her skin in a startlingly intimate way.

Before she could consider the sensation, however, a hand tightly gripped her shoulder, Cat’s voice entreating with equal parts softness and concern, “Kara?”

Kara instantly sprang to her feet, laptop tumbling to the floor with her hasty retreat from the smaller blonde’s reach and her heat vision flaring intensely for a three-count before dissipating. Both women stared at each other, shocked into silence. Cat finally forced herself to speak when she saw the raw terror in the hero’s expression. “Kara,” she repeated more firmly this time, “what’s wrong?”

Shaking her head violently, she stammered, “I—I don’t know. I don’t—I’ve never felt—” but she gasped at her final word and the sudden realization it brought. Without thinking, she tore off her civilian clothes, leaving them in a shredded pile as she stumbled away from Cat. “Something’s wrong. I need Alex—something’s wrong,” she repeated before staggering out of Cat’s office and zipping toward the bedroom balcony, grabbing her boots and cape on the way and nearly smashing through the doors with her frantic exit.

Chapter End Notes

First off, thank you to all who have been following this story up to this point and have
chosen to continue reading. I value each one of you, and I respect the importance of every ship within this and all other fandoms. The heart of the fanfic community is the pleasure of building our own stories and seeing all the shades of possibility within these characters.

This chapter became something completely different from what I originally anticipated. However, when certain things began happening, I realized we were heading in a fun direction, so I just let it free-flow for a while. I believe I made the right decision. Plus, it allowed me to bring Carter back for a check-in. I've been missing him this story.

I promise, however, that the direction this chapter starts to head at the end will continue in that same direction. Cat will not let it be any other way at this point...

With the last chapter, I altered Jeremiah Danvers's story arc significantly from the show's. Keeping that in mind, part of what I wrote in this chapter addresses how Kara escaped CADMUS if Jeremiah wasn't there to help her. I found it deeply troubling that the show writers decided that Alex wouldn't be tossing the universe sideways trying to find her sister if she didn't show up where she said she was heading, didn't check in to explain why she didn't show up, and didn't answer any calls. The *laissez-faire* response to all this they wrote for Alex was so antithetical to her and to her relationship with Kara. So I fixed it.

Oh, and the Kryptonese Kara speaks to Cat when she asks what she is to Kara in her language is my stilted attempt to write, "My whole universe."

I hope you enjoy!
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

CADMUS Test Subject Interlude 3

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter starts right off with what basically becomes an impromptu mini-autopsy. It only lasts for the first few paragraphs, but if you're not a big fan of horror, you might want to skip down a little bit.

Test Subjects CDS-17-035, -036, and -037

Flesh parted beneath the scalpel blade with very little resistance, the epidermis of the Ortrexian already losing its natural durability post-mortem. Inserting a retractor on either side of the incision, Luthor studied the muscles she revealed, humming in fascination. “Look at how the vocal folds are aligned in triplicate. Plus, it looks like she had double vestibular folds as well. No wonder her phonation sounded so beautifully layered.”

“You mean while she was screaming?” Henshaw remained close to the OR door, the sound of the Ortrexian’s agonized cries still circulating inside his brain.

Luthor shrugged as she leaned in for closer inspection. “I can disable the next test subject’s vocal cords if it will provide comfort to your delicate sensibilities.” Without acknowledging the glare Henshaw shot her, she continued to examine the elaborate components of the alien larynx. “Imagine this vocal intricacy within the throats of our greatest singers—the complexity of sound they could produce. Such exquisite possibility.”

She removed the retractors, dropping them on the tray by the operating table. “The potential that we can discover by studying these creatures clearly extends beyond just military purposes.”

Disgusted by the sight of the empty chartreuse stare and jaw frozen forever in a rictus of pain, Henshaw finally moved close enough to toss the surgical sheet up over the corpse’s face. “And which singers do you think would subject themselves to your experimentation?”

She scoffed at his question. “I can think of several I would gladly volunteer for my trial attempts.” Snapping off her gloves and tossing them onto the body, she then removed her rubber smock and dropped it to the floor. It squelched loudly where it landed, the Ortrexian’s blood bright and thick against the dark material.

“I had hoped she would have been a bit more resilient. Her epidermal thickness wasn’t nearly as impressive as I thought it would be.” She headed out into the hallway, following it toward her office.

Henshaw was quick to fall into step beside her. “The next piece of your pet project arrived while
“you were studying the Ortrexian to death,” he sneered. “Roulette’s delivery slug brought him in half an hour ago. They’ve been waiting in your office.”

“Nice of you to let me know before now.”

“I tried to tell you during the Ortrexian’s agony aria. Her phonation was too loud.”

Amusement tugged at the corners of her mouth. “Ms. Sinclair comes through yet again. We have an empty containment cell, correct? I have a feeling our guest won’t be willing to play nicely with us just yet. We’ll need to detox him first.” She caught the growl coming from Henshaw. “Do you wish to voice your disapproval yet again?”

“You’re punishing an innocent human in the name of revenge.”

With an amused huff, Luthor coolly replied, “I’m freeing an innocent man and giving him back control of his life. And if he chooses to use the gifts I give him to seek revenge on the woman who has kept him chemically controlled all these years, then who am I to stop him? Also, I don’t remember you stepping up so eagerly to defend Jeremiah Danvers’s innocence before I ‘punished’ him.”

Henshaw frowned but remained silent as they entered Luthor’s office. The doctor crossed gracefully to her desk, a benevolent smile on her face as she studied the man seated on the opposite side. “Mr. Rieger, my name is Dr. Lillian Luthor. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

The man eyed her warily, fingers fidgeting with the baseball cap he held. Luthor observed the flat lay of his hair and the pallid pallor of his skin. His eyes shifted nervously inside sunken sockets ringed by dark circles. “A doctor? Wasn’t expecting that after dealing with your freakshow hit man back there,” he jibed, chucking a thumb toward the alien Roulette had sent to collect him. “You part of Glendale Manor? This some new check-in I have to do? I just saw my parole officer and got the refresher course on all the rules from her, but she didn’t mention this.”

“No, Mr. Rieger, I’m not with Glendale Manor. I actually brought you here to offer you an alternative to your treatment there.”

“I don’t understand.” He tossed his head to one side, flipping a limp strand of hair from his forehead. “I thought Glendale was my only option when my meds needed adjusting. You know, part of my parole.”

Luthor slid into her desk chair, her expression one of patient amusement. “Do you really think National City Police has the budget to cover private institutionalization as a part of their parole?”

She reached into the top drawer of her desk, removing a photo and a thick stack of envelopes bound together by several rubber bands. The image, a black and white publicity shot from what was no doubt considered a lifetime ago in celebrity years, was dog-eared and tattered, with rambling declarations of devotion scribbled along the edges. She slid the photo toward the man sat across from her.

His reaction was instantaneous as he pushed back in his chair so hard it rocked up briefly on two legs before slamming down once more with a loud clatter. “I haven’t gone anywhere near her in years,” he yelled. “Not since—not since that day they caught me. I wasn’t well that day—I-I hadn’t been well in a while. But I am much better now.”

“Are you better, Mr. Rieger? Or have you simply fallen in line with the lies she has ensured you’ve been fed all these years?” Seeing his confusion, she tapped the photo and continued, “She is the
one who has been covering the costs of your stays at Glendale Manor.”

“What?”

She smiled, her head cocked to one side as she observed his increasing bewilderment. “That’s correct. She has been the one paying to have you incarcerated and medically subjugated, Mr. Rieger.”

“No!” He adamantly shook his head in rejection of Luthor’s words. “That’s not—she’s been paying for my treatment all these years?” He pulled the photo closer, his index finger hovering as though he wanted to trace the line of her jaw, before moving instead to try to wipe away some of the barely legible writing that looped up over her head. When all he did was smudge the words with his sweaty finger, he pushed the photo back slightly across the desk. “Where did you even get that? The police took everything I had with me that day, including that photo.”

“It was your favorite photo of her, wasn’t it?” She shrugged nonchalantly at his startled glare. “I’ve seen the evidence photos the police took of your apartment after they arrested you. You had more copies of this shot than any other on your walls, and this was the only photo of her you had with you that day. Did you want her to see this photo? See all you’d written about her on it?” Luthor pushed the stack of envelopes onto her desk. “Just like you wanted her to read all these letters?”

Rieger swallowed roughly while gripping the arms of his chair as though terrified of what might happen if he reached out for the letters. “Where did you get those? And why are you doing this?”

“I had an acquaintance retrieve some of your belongings from the NCPD evidence archives. I thought you should have them back. As to why? I want to help you, Mr. Rieger.” She leaned closer, resting her arms against the desktop and calmly interlacing her fingers. “I think it’s time you got back all you’ve lost because of her—starting with these letters. I’ve read them all. It’s very clear the passion you had for her. Quite romantic, really. Tell me, do you still feel that way toward her?”

She could see anger twisting its way through his posture, the curl of his lip cruel and wild, and she felt a twinge of hope rise within her that there was still something within him worth salvaging. “How I felt back then was wrong—it was dangerous. What you’re saying to me right now is dangerous. I’m not—I don’t want to talk about those days anymore—not the way you want to talk about them.”

“But I’m telling you that how you felt back then—how you might still feel once we free you from the shackles she’s placed on you—”

“Stop it!” He rose swiftly from his seat, wiry limbs stiff with fury as he slammed his fists against her desk. Before he could make another move, he felt himself forced back down into his chair, groaning in pain at the crushing grip against his shoulder. When he looked up, he gasped in fright of the partially skinned face glowering down at him, one eye flaring electric blue beneath a furrowed brow.

“My colleague doesn’t particularly enjoy sudden movements or loud noises, Mr. Rieger. Please keep that in mind as we move forward.”

“Why are you doing this?”

Though he spoke the words while still gawping upward at the horrific sci-fi movie nightmare beside him, Dr. Luthor understood the question was actually for her. “As I said, Mr. Rieger, I want to help you. And I can.” She offered him another thin-lipped smile when he finally turned back to
face her. “I can help you get everything you wanted back then and more. If you let me, I can make it so no one can stop you from taking what is yours. You can have her, Mr. Rieger—every bit of her, exactly as you describe in your letters. Just let me help you.”

She listened as he wiped roughly at his face, fingers scraping against his eyelids and downward against the dry stubble along his jaw. He still shook his head, but the forcefulness was fading. “No,” he repeated once more, now with nothing more than a hoarse whisper. “She—she’s been helping me. Even after what I tried to do to her, she—no, I won’t hurt her.”

“You won’t be hurting her, Mr. Rieger. You’ll be saving her.” She nudged the letters closer toward him. “You said it all in your letters. You wanted to save her from the life that trapped her in front of the cameras. She’s still trapped in that life, Mr. Rieger. She still needs your salvation.”

She watched him quietly for several moments, content to wait as he processed all she had told him. He rubbed his shoulder, his crumpled posture making him look brittle and twisted. His face contorted as he struggled to process all she had said before she finally saw it—the tiniest spark of possibility within his slowly clouding gaze, begging her to fan it back into full force. “I promise you, I can give you the means to finally give her everything you wanted to back then—everything you wrote about, everything you were prepared to do that day if they hadn’t found you first. I can help you make her yours. All you have to do is tell me you trust me, Mr. Rieger.”

“I-I don’t want to hurt her,” he repeated.

“Of course not.” Rising from her seat, Luthor nodded once toward Henshaw. The cybernetic hybrid grabbed Rieger’s shoulders, lifting him to his feet. The man yelped in pain and shock at the feeling, quickly cowering away from Henshaw’s reach as soon as the hybrid released him.

Luthor’s mouth quirked into a half-smile as she studied the man now pressed against the edge of her desk. “I do understand your concerns, Mr. Rieger, but you need to understand mine. I’m on a tight schedule, and I don’t really have a lot of time for emotional placation. My colleague is going to take you to a holding cell now. You will stay there until the poison she had you pumped full of at Glendale Manor is once more gone from your system.”

At the sound of this declaration, he finally sprang once more to full awareness. “No! I need my meds! I don’t want to go back to what it was like without them!” He suddenly pivoted around the side of the chair opposite from Henshaw, scurrying rapidly toward the door. “This isn’t right,” he yelled, nearly making it to the office entrance.

Luthor watched in awe as Roulette’s fighter stepped forward at the sight of Rieger trying to leave. His skin, a sickly shade of beige, glistened with a sticky sheen of mucus, but his movements were what captured the doctor’s full attention. Fingers stretched outward from extended arms and reaching hands—and then continued to stretch even farther as they morphed into twisting, twirling tendrils that easily caught Rieger in their ceaseless, seamless extensions. Luthor marveled at how the alien digits tangled around flailing extremities, looping and cascading and leaving viscous trails everywhere they touched.

It was then that Luthor realized how quickly the flailing ceased, how Rieger seemed to lose control of his movements until his arms simply slumped in the alien’s encircling grip and his legs buckled uselessly. “Your skin produces a paralytic secretion.”

Her needful, greedy tone betrayed her intentions to Henshaw, who didn’t even bother to suppress his responding grin. Roulette’s fighter, however, simply responded to her statement as he continued to hold Rieger in his tangled grip. “It is my people’s way of protecting our skin from the harsh conditions of our home world. It only has a paralytic effect on some alien species, including
humans.”

Luthor’s eyes narrowed at the fighter’s reference to humans as the alien species but deferred to her curiosity rather than her disapproval. “How long does the paralytic effect last on humans?”

“Between thirty to sixty of your minutes, depending on the resilience of the human.”

Luthor hummed appreciatively. “And your fingers—how are you able to morph them the way you do?”

The alien glanced down at his hands, uncertainty flickering in his heavily lidded eyes. “I do not know. It is a natural ability of my people.”

“No worries,” she grinned, tapping her fingers against the edge of her desk. “However you are able to do it, thank you for doing it now. You’ve been incredibly helpful—”

The alien responded to Luthor’s unspoken request by uttering a string of syllables far more complex than she could ever be bothered to attempt—although it gave her a chance to watch his tongue elongate and twist in ways similar to his extended fingers. Then, he shrugged and finished, “But people on Earth call me Tony.”

“Thank you, Tony. If it wouldn’t be too much trouble, would you please provide a little more help by escorting Mr. Rieger to his holding cell? My colleague will show you the way.”

The alien inclined his head in agreement and looked toward Henshaw for direction. The cybernetic hybrid gestured out the door and gruffed, “To the right.” Tony started immediately in the specified direction. Henshaw turned before leaving, indicating with a nod that he already understood Luthor’s wishes.

Luthor smiled possessively at Henshaw’s insightfulness, already anticipating the tests she would run on her newest acquisition. She would deal with Roulette later—perhaps increase her next payment enough to soften the blow of taking yet another of her prized fighters. In all honesty, the doctor didn’t exactly care about preserving the sanctity of Roulette’s little fight club if it meant missing the opportunity to explore the utter treasure that had just walked out of her office. “He’ll make a wondrous test subject,” she muttered, fingers twitching in anticipation.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

With understanding comes release...

Chapter Notes

Not a warning, per se. Simply an acknowledgement that this chapter is pure indulgence for our heroes (and possibly warrants an increase from "Mature" to "Explicit"? I don't know; maybe just to be on the safe side). Okay, there's some exposition at the beginning and at the end, but the rest? Let's just say I owed Cat and Kara both for their patience up to this point. If you'd rather skip the afternoon delight, National City-style, then read the scene at the DEO and I'll see you in the next chapter...

“Alex!”

The DEO agent sat up from the test she was running, worry creasing her brow at the sound of her sister’s cry. Through the glass-paneled wall of her lab, she watched Kara fly up from the main floor and settle on shaking legs in front of her.

Seeing the terror in Kara’s eyes, Alex hurried to her side, reaching out to steady her in place. Kara, however, quickly moved out of reach, shaking her head vehemently. “No, don’t. Something’s wrong. Something is wrong with me, Alex. Everything feels wrong.”

Concern burned in the pit of her stomach as Alex watched Kara’s deepening distress. “All right, Kara, it’s okay. Whatever is going on, we will figure it out.” She fought against the urge to hug her frightened sister, realizing that contact of any kind was one of her biggest taboos at the moment. “You did the right thing coming here. We’re going to get you whatever help you need.”

Kara nodded, the fear retreating just enough to steady her stance. Whatever was wrong, Alex would fix it. “Thank you.” Her voice trembled in a way that always reminded Alex of the frightened young girl she was when she first arrived on Earth.

“You’re not alone, Kara. I’m here and we’re going to figure this out together. I promise.” Taking a chance, she held out her hand, breathing a sigh of relief when Kara reached out and tentatively took it in her own.

The blonde seemed surprised at first, but she quickly shifted to relief as she pulled Alex in and held her as tightly as she knew she could. Alex was just as fast to wrap her arms around her sister, making sure she put all her strength into her hold. She could feel tears soaking through her uniform top where Kara had buried her head against her shoulder.

Heart aching at the fear her sister was feeling, Alex guided her farther into the lab, helping her down onto one of the stools around her workspace. Glancing at the entrance, she decided they needed privacy for whatever conversation they were about to have. With the press of a few buttons
on her workstation, the doors slid shut and locked under her Alpha-One clearance. Privacy guaranteed.

Taking a seat opposite Kara, Alex reached out and took one of her hands in her grip, squeezing to regain the other’s attention. “Hey, so fill me in, okay? I need to understand what’s going on so I can figure out how to proceed. You said everything felt wrong, and you didn’t want me to touch you at all when you first arrived. Why?”

The blonde sniffled, eyes still reflecting the fear coiling inside her. “Something—glitched with my sense of touch. I could feel things.”

“Like how it feels when your powers blow out?”

She shook her head emphatically. “No. More. Kind of like how I could feel on Krypton. It—it felt like what it was like to be touched before I arrived on Earth.” Alex’s breath caught at the sight of her sister’s sorrowful gaze. Even with all she did to make sure Kara felt as much from her hugs and touches as possible, her sister’s words were a reminder that it would never be the same.

“It’s okay, Kara. This is very helpful. So your sense of touch became amplified. And it was clearly still that way when you arrived.” Kara nodded, grimacing at the memory of the wind scrubbing her skin raw as she flew as fast as she could to the DEO while remaining subsonic. “But now it’s back to normal?”

“Yes.” She chewed at the inside of her cheek, debating her next words. “There was something else. My heat vision—it—it popped without me activating it.”

“Popped?” Understanding grew stronger with each new fact Kara provided. “And was this at the same time that your sensation of touch increased?”

“Yes, almost simultaneously. The heat vision was much less severe though. It just flared slightly before I could bring it back under control.”

With a knowing nod, Alex asked, “Have you noticed any kind of fluctuation in your sense of touch or your power control before today?”

Kara’s first inclination was to say no, but even cursory reflection on the question brought up several memories of lesser but still significant instances. “Yeah,” she finally admitted, flinching at her sister’s responding smirk. “I haven’t experienced anything as-as pronounced as what happened this morning—but, yeah, there have been other instances.”

“When was the first?”

“Midvale.” She halted, a pensive frown tugging at her lips. “Actually, no. D.C. My freeze breath and heat vision both triggered slightly on their own, and flying home felt like a less painful version of flying over here today—raw and abrasive.”

“And you had similar things happen in Midvale?”

“Yes, only that time I lost control over my hearing, and my X-ray vision triggered very briefly.”

“And Clark pointed out to Mom that you lost control of your freeze breath on New Year’s Eve, and you felt me grip your shoulder that night, didn’t you?”

Kara’s mouth dropped open in surprise, instantly flashing to the sight of Kal-El whispering something to Eliza and the uncomfortable way he behaved around her as they were leaving
National City. A more pressing awareness, however, began to settle in the deep-set crinkle between her eyes. “Every instance has been around Cat. Alex, is this some kind of reaction to her?”

“Oh, you’re definitely reacting to Cat,” Alex teased. She quickly reeled in some of her amusement, however, at the distress growing in her sister’s expression. “Hey, Kara, it’s all right. Listen to me, okay? There is nothing wrong. You’re fine and Cat’s fine.” She chuckled while adding, “Probably frustrated as hell by this point, but fine.”

“But—”

Alex gave Kara’s hand a strong squeeze before interlocking their fingers. “Kara, I swear to you, you are all right. I know what’s happening, but I need to ask you something—and it’s probably going to embarrass you, but I need your honest answer.”

Muscles twitched along Kara’s throat. “Okay.”

“In all these instances, including this morning, were you experiencing physical arousal?”

All the confirmation Alex needed came in the way Kara’s expression shifted, her eyes instantly widening at the accuracy of her sister’s question and her skin flushing the same color as the sigil on her chest.

Alex nodded at this final confirmation. She’d been anticipating this conversation ever since her mother had pulled her aside a few days after New Year’s Eve. She’d shared with Alex Clark’s observations of Kara that night and what they would mean regarding this exact conversation. To be honest, she was amazed it had taken this long for Kara to finally come to her like this.

“Do you remember when Mom had ‘the talk’ with you?”

Kara blanched at the memory. Eliza had been patient and kind, but she also had been purposefully honest with Kara regarding the many limitations that she faced concerning any kind of intimate relations with humans. She had tried to place things in as positive a context as she could, even mentioning how Kal-El had been able to find a suitable human partner. Kara remembered the way Eliza blushed slightly as she sidestepped any of the details of what she described as mostly successful attempts at an intimate relationship. “The only thing that could have made that talk worse would be if Kal-El had given it to me himself.”

“He wanted to.” Alex smiled at the shocked look Kara shot her. “He thought it was something that should come from another Kryptonian. Mom stopped him—said that it would be more appropriate for her, as this was traditionally a mother-daughter conversation on Earth. Really, she just wanted to save you both from even more embarrassment than necessary.” Kara sighed, making a mental note to thank Eliza the next time they saw each other. Alex continued, “Do you remember, though, what Mom told you about what intimacy might do to your senses?”

Kara’s expression shifted at the realization slowly growing in her brain. “She said it would sharpen my senses. I didn’t really understand what she meant, but I was so mortified by the conversation that I didn’t ask.”

Alex rubbed the base of her neck. “I can explain it to you.” She smirked slightly at Kara. “Mom made a lot of notes in your medical file, which, before you start to panic, is sealed for highly limited access. Dr. Hamilton and I are the only ones who can access it in its entirety—not even J’onn can do that.”

“I strangely don’t feel better about this,” Kara sighed.
“Then you probably don’t want me to point out that the information I learn from this conversation is going to have to go into your file as well.”

“Alex!”

“Kara, we need to keep as complete records as we can on you. You are the only female Kryptonian left.”

“So, what’s the point? It’s not like anyone will need them for future reference after I’m gone.” Kara felt terrible the minute she snapped the words at Alex, even before seeing her sister’s pained expression. “I’m sorry. That was—I just—I’m sorry, Alex.”

Tightening her hold on Kara’s hand, Alex replied, “You have every right to be upset, Kara, but it’s still important for us to document as much about you as we can. Also, there is the possibility that if Clark ever has children, he might have a daughter. She would be half Kryptonian, which means that anything we learn from you could be beneficial in her care. Okay?”

Kara nodded in acceptance and offered a sad smile when Alex leaned over to kiss her forehead. “So,” she joked, “let’s hear your version of ‘the talk.’ I’m not grading on a curve, so expect no leniency, Dr. Danvers.”

“Dork,” Alex chuckled. She then steadied herself with a deep breath, preparing herself for a conversation that she knew was going to cause Kara a great deal of embarrassment. “According to Clark, his sense of touch became extremely sensitive when he experienced sexual arousal. ‘According to Clark, his sense of touch became extremely sensitive when he experienced sexual arousal. Dad ran some tests and determined this was a physiological response that correlated with vasocongestion.’

“Vaso-what now?”

“Swelling caused by increased blood flow. It’s the same for Kryptonians and humans: One of the physiological responses to sexual arousal is an increase in blood flow and localized increase in blood pressure to genitalia to enable things like erections and lubrication.”

She rolled her eyes at the discomfited face Kara pulled. “For Kryptonians, however, something about the vasocongestion causes a significant spike in tactility. It doesn’t decrease your skin’s tensile strength at all, but it would cause you to feel pain, say, if you took a bullet while being turned on.”

“Well, that’s good to know: Cancel those fantasies of letting Cat shoot me as foreplay.”

“Okay, that was borderline TMI.”

Alex was pleased to see that Kara’s smiles were becoming more relaxed and genuine, signs that her sister was steadily calming down and becoming more comfortable. “What about the issues with my powers flaring on their own?”

“Clark reported similar issues with his powers. However, the good news on this is that it’s not actually triggered by anything physiological. It’s more of a divided attention issue. Clark reported that with practice, he was able to increase his focus on controlling his powers while also focusing on—other things.”

“Okay, that is TMI.” Her frown melted into a full laugh at the sight of Alex nodding in agreement while making a similarly exaggerated face.

“So, there you go. You’re not glitching out. You’re just horny.”
“Alex!” Embarrassment flooded Kara’s cheeks with the deepest red Alex had ever seen her sister turn.

The brunette continued laughing even after Kara punched her in the arm with just enough force for it to sting. Even through the blush, Alex could see the amusement in Kara’s expression at her teasing. “So, I’m just going to assume that, beyond you apparently making a habit of flying off whenever something spooks you, things are still going really well between you and Cat?”

Her sister’s expression softened so beautifully at the question her breath caught at the sight. “Last night, she told me she loves me.”

Without hesitation, Alex pulled Kara into as tight a hug as she could manage from where she sat, her laughter warm and bright. “Let me be the first to inform you that you two are disgustingly adorable together.”

The hero responded with her own laughter, mingled with tears of joy and worry that Alex instinctively wiped away and soothed. “Hey, hey, it’s going to be all right, Kara. You’re going to be okay, I promise.” She kissed her sister’s forehead. “Cat isn’t going anywhere, and the two of you are going to work through this and be even stronger and more disgustingly adorable than ever.”

Rising and nudging Kara’s shoulder playfully, she finished, “So why don’t I run a few quick tests on you, just to be on the safe side, and then get you back to Cat before she ends up calling in presidential favors to hunt you down?”

The brunette rolled her eyes in amusement at Kara’s sheepish grin before grabbing her hand and leading her back toward the medical bay. Gesturing toward one of the bio beds, she teased, “Okay, Cosmic Casanova, lie down and let me hook you up. We’ll make sure nothing’s spiking abnormally, get some fresh baseline readings for you, and then you’ll be good to go.” She smirked mischievously. “Just try not to screw up the readings with horndog thoughts, okay?” Chuckling at Kara’s glare, she finished, “Think of Snapper—that should keep your libido in check.”

The feigned choking noises coming from her sister shifted her chuckle into a full-throated laugh as she finished attaching electrodes to Kara’s temples and chest. “I’ll be back in ten minutes,” and with a playful punch to her sister’s shoulder, she headed back to her lab to clean up the test she was running when Kara arrived.

The sight of the flashing message indicator on her phone set her on alert, aware immediately of who would have called. Without even listening to the message, she simply pulled up the last number to call and hit redial. Before the second ring began, she heard the cleanly clipped query from the other side: “Is she with you?”

“She’s here, Cat. I’m sorry I missed your call. I was setting her up for some tests.”

“Tests?” Alex heard the CEO’s tone shift from its previous disquiet to full-blown worry. “What’s wrong, Alex? Is Kara okay? Should I come there?”

Alex quickly interrupted to calm Cat’s escalating worry. “Kara is all right, I promise.” She took a deep breath, understanding that Cat was not one for wasting words or time, and started right in. “Our mom explained to you about Kara’s sense of touch—how it’s diminished by her skin’s impenetrability. Under certain circumstances, this can change. That was what frightened her earlier—why she left so quickly.”

Cat nodded to herself, recalling how her touch to Kara’s shoulder had set off her panic. “Perhaps
“you could elaborate on what these ‘certain circumstances’ are so I can be better prepared next time she wooshes out of here like I threatened her with kryptonite.”

The CEO listened, her curiosity spiking dangerously high as Alex took another calming breath. “One way, of course, is when Kara loses her powers. The other is—the other is part of her body’s autonomic response to physical arousal.”

Silence prevailed through the line for several beats as Cat processed her myriad responses, comments, and questions before finally managing a soft, “Oh.” Her heart beat so fiercely in that moment that she could feel each pulse in the pit of her stomach.

With a subtle clearing of her throat, she quickly added, “This is a startling reminder of your sister’s alieness, by the way, considering she was reading shipping route schedules at the time of this unexpected libido lift. Should I try train schedules next and see what happens then?”

Alex couldn’t help the snort of laughter at Cat’s jest. “My mom knew from tests on Kal-El that this would be a normal physiological response, but it’s never happened to Kara before. She didn’t know what was happening. That’s why she panicked and left the way she did.”

“Never?” Cat shook her head at the confirmation of what she already suspected to be true. “I will allow that the cardigans do nothing to help her, but surely someone has tried.”

“That sexual frustration of yours really puts you in high snark spirits, Cat.” She chuckled at the huff that passed through the line before sobering slightly as she formulated her next words. “And it’s not that no one has tried or that Kara is puritanical—contrary to your past opinions about her cardigans.”

She rolled her eyes at the sound of Cat muttering “Past opinion?” rather pointedly beneath her breath.

“You understand that Kara keeps tight rein on all her physical powers, all the time.”

After a moment of silence, Cat sighed, “She’s reticent about letting herself go enough to try intimacy.”

In confirmation, Alex responded, “Kara broke her date’s toes just while dancing at her junior prom. When she was a senior, she broke another guy’s wrist when he tried some unwanted moves on her in the back seat of his car.”

Her fist flexed instinctively at the memory of Kara softly telling her this as they sat together on the roof outside their bedroom window. It was Thanksgiving and Alex’s first time home since starting at NCU. She knew the guy in question—knew what a sleaze he could be and knew the only reason Kara had agreed to go out with him was because she hadn’t been there to warn her sister away. As she listened to Kara explain things like any of it had been her fault, she found herself plotting how she could pass by his house on her way back to National City and break what Kara actually should have broken. Instead, she pushed down her anger and drew her sister into her arms, hugging her and reassuring her that she had done nothing he hadn’t deserved.

“She’s broken guys’ noses just from kissing them too excitedly,” she finally continued. “And the more she learns to control herself, the more she realizes how dangerous she could be to a human if she ever let that control slip.”

“She’s afraid she’ll hurt me.”

“Cat, she’s terrified she could kill you. It’s—it’s not just her strength in question here.”
“She loses focus on controlling her powers when she’s turned on.” She heard the surprised inhalation through the line. “I am an investigative journalist, Alex. I have mad observational skills when it comes to noticing things like when Kara’s eyes do more than just figuratively light up at certain times. I also believe the first time I kissed her, it ended up feeling slightly like getting CPR from Jack Frost.”

She sighed, thinking to herself how nice it would have been if a certain Metropolis reporter had given her a bit of a heads-up on this particular Kryptonian secret. Words, she decided in that moment, most certainly would be exchanged with Lois.

“How much longer will you be running tests on her?”

“Not much. I can send her back to your place as soon as I’m finished.”

“No. Send her to her apartment. She’ll feel more at ease in those surroundings, I think.” Alex warmed at how attuned Cat was to even the smallest detail of her sister’s needs. “I’ll have Agent Hawthorne drive me there to meet her.”

“There’s a painting in the hallway, on the wall opposite her apartment, of a cat.” She smirked at the realization of why her sister probably (definitely) chose that particular painting. “Lift it away from the wall and you’ll feel a key taped to the bottom left side of the canvas. That will let you in if she’s not there by the time you arrive.” She playfully added, “And if you forget to return the key to its hiding place, I’m sure Kara wouldn’t mind.”

Cat hummed at the information. “I’m going to head to her place now. Agent Hawthorne is a delightful young man, but his driving speed is comparable to that of a pot-addled sloth.”

Alex laughed at the vivid visual. “Cut the poor kid some slack, Cat. He’s probably terrified. I’m pretty sure Supergirl mentioned to him that it would be in his best interest to make sure nothing happened to you. Be glad he hasn’t tried to bubble-wrap you before letting you outside.”

“Well, Supergirl either has another talk with Agent Hawthorne or I’m breaking out the Jag and driving myself to and from the DEO—and I will expect valet service.”

“You can give me those keys any time—but you might never see that pristine machine again if you did.”

“Keep it up, Agent Danvers, and I’m going to put in a special request with your boss that you be my new chauffeur.”

“Hmm, hand-to-hand combat with aliens that spit acid or driving the Queen of All Media through National City traffic.” She paused for a beat. “I don’t know—that’s a tough call.”

She chuckled at the sound of Cat clicking her tongue dismissively. “While you consider your options, finish whatever mad scientist prodding you’re doing with your alien sister and send her on her way. Chop, chop.”

Alex snorted into the phone. “Did you—did I just receive an infamous Cat Grant ‘chop-chop’? Be still my heart.”

“Careful,” Cat warned. “You did just establish with your professional medical opinion that sexual frustration causes increased snark levels. Based on that supposition, I might have to draw conclusions about you and Detective Sawyer if you keep up this line of conversation.”

Nervously clearing her throat, Alex stammered through a hasty goodbye that left a victorious grin
slipping along the smaller blonde’s lips.

Once she’d finished her tests on Kara, the brunette drew her sister into one final hug. When she drew back, she smiled mischievously and teased, “I’ve got the aliens handled here, so time for you to go get your girl. She’s waiting for you at your place.”

With a furious blush and a hug slightly too tight, Kara zipped off in a blur of color, still able to hear her sister’s teasing laugh well after she’d launched herself from the DEO bay doors.

Making it home in record time even by Kryptonian standards, the hero slipped through the living room windows she always left slightly ajar, sliding to a stop in front of her sofa. Her smile, equal parts nervous and relieved, lit her face as she took in the sight of Cat, there in her apartment. At some point, the smaller blonde had tossed her heels beside the coffee table while she curled up against one side of the couch, thumbing through the latest issue of *CatCo* magazine.

“I have found three layout errors already, and I’m not even out of the first twenty pages. I’m fairly certain that’s already three times as many errors in one issue than you ever allowed to pass your reviews the entire time you helped me proof layouts.” The CEO tossed the magazine onto the coffee table with a vexed quirk of her lips. When she focused fully on Kara, she finished, “You wouldn’t by any chance be interested in using your super speed to double as quality control and a cub reporter, hmm?”

The hero laughed even as she toyed with one of the thumb straps on her suit. “Snapper doesn’t strike me as the kind of boss who would be willing to share my time with another division.”

“No, I suppose not.” She slipped off her glasses, gesturing toward Kara with one of the temple tips. “Why don’t you go change? It might help you feel a little more comfortable.” She glanced pointedly at Kara’s fingers, now tangling with the thumb loops on both sleeves.

With a brisk nod, the hero breezed to her room and back with breathtaking rapidity. Cat sniffed in amusement as she slid her glasses onto the table. “You’re more ‘hummingbird’ than ‘little bird’ with those moves.” She watched with relief as Kara smiled at her comment, relaxing somewhat into the conversation.

Gesturing toward the hero’s loose-fitting striped button-down and faded jeans, she sighed, “I’m afraid I had to throw away your clothes from earlier. I never realized how wardrobe-demolishing all those quick changes into your suit must be.”

Kara’s cheeks flushed. “I—um, I usually don’t completely destroy my outfit like I did earlier,” she confessed. “Although I did learn very quickly to leave several spare sets of clothes around CatCo—just in case.” The blush deepened as she thought of several “wardrobe malfunctions” early in her endeavors as Supergirl where she nearly outed herself to several people, including Cat. “You were particularly displeased the afternoon I had to wear one of Winn’s cardigans.”

Cat wrinkled her nose, instantly recalling the drab, ill-fitting sweater in question. “It made you look like you’d raided a frumpy Lilliputian’s wardrobe,” she smirked, eyes glittering at the giggle her comment drew from the hero across from her. She shifted her legs up under herself, slinging her arm across the back of the sofa. She tapped her fingers against the cushion beside her, arching her brow in Kara’s direction as she did.

With a noticeable swallow, Kara nodded and sat beside the smaller blonde. She instantly bowed her head and clasped her hands together in her lap as a preemptive against the next bout of fidgeting she could already feel ready to burst from her fingers. At the sensation of Cat’s hand wrapping around the base of her neck and massaging firmly, Kara finally redirected her attention
up, blue eyes narrowed slightly in worry. All she found in Cat’s gaze, however, was a quiet
reassurance that surprised Kara by how deeply she needed to see it.

Leaning in, Cat used her hold on Kara to draw the hero close enough to press a kiss against her
cheek. “Are you all right?”

Kara pressed her lips together, nodding her head adamantly before stammering, “I—I didn’t mean
to leave like that—again.” She hung her head once more. “I keep doing that. I know it’s wrong—
I’m shutting you out. I don’t mean to. I don’t want to shut you out.”

Realizing that Kara was working herself up unnecessarily, Cat tightened her grip enough to draw
her attention. “You were scared, Kara. To be completely honest, what happened and your reaction
to it startled me, too. You were experiencing something you didn’t understand, and your first
response was to find the person you knew could help you.”

“But that should—”

“That shouldn’t always be me, Kara,” Cat quickly interrupted, before changing her statement
slightly. “That can’t always be me. As well-versed as I am in many things, even I acknowledge I
have limits—few though they may be.” She nudged Kara’s shoulder playfully, pleased at the hint
of a smile she elicited for her effort. “There are going to be times when we can’t be everything for
each other, and there is nothing wrong with that. You needed Alex to help you understand what
was happening to you this morning, and she was able to do just that, correct?”

Embarrassment flared in Kara’s cheeks at Cat’s question. “Y-yeah,” she stammered, voice barely
audible.

Cat tilted her head minutely, taking in the sight of the woman beside her for several moments
before deciding this particular conversation was going to require a more—unique perspective. With
swift, smooth moves, she pivoted her position so she was straddling Kara’s lap, knees on either
side of the hero’s hips.

The sight of Kara staring slack-jawed at Cat’s unexpected position change lit amusement in the
smaller blonde’s gaze. She laced her fingers behind the hero’s neck and leaned down to kiss her
forehead. “I thought this might be the best way to make sure you stay put,” she teased, enjoying
the shy hint of a smile she saw glide along Kara’s lips right before leaning in to chase it with a kiss.

Using her position to her advantage, she pressed down into the kiss, savoring the sensation as Kara
willingly opened her mouth and met Cat’s tongue with her own. The muscles slid and slipped
against each other briefly before Cat decided to shift her focus. Kara gasped and obediently looked
up at the unexpected feel of Cat’s hand tangling in her hair and tugging sharply. The hero shivered
at the glint of dominance burning gold and dangerous within Cat’s gaze. With a decisive breath,
the smaller blonde tightened her grip, nails digging into Kara’s scalp as she pulled the hero into a
kiss firmer than any she had previously attempted.

The response was a needful whimper that Cat consumed voraciously, her lips already feeling the
bruise of crushing against Kara’s mouth. Nothing mattered, however, except for the feel of Kara
responding to her touch, allowing herself to succumb to the direction of Cat’s grip holding her in
place.

The sensations were too much, too full and Kara never wanted to stop the overwhelming responses
Cat was somehow drawing from her body as she moved her attention lower—Cat’s lips against her
pulse point, Cat’s teeth scraping against her jaw, Cat’s tongue tracing the contour of her neck,
dipping into the hollow of her throat. This mouth from which Kara had heard all variety of words
selected with the precision to elicit all variety of emotions was now eliciting pure intensity from her without a word.

It was only when Cat felt the familiar twitch of her hips, aching to seek more contact against the firm body beneath her that she slowed. Pushing Kara back against the couch cushions, she pressed herself more deeply into the hero’s lap, the movement sparking heat low in her abdomen. She watched Kara swallow hard, desperately trying to calm herself. The consuming darkness of her pupils told Cat the hero’s attempt was far too late.

The smaller blonde reached out her fingers, running them along Kara’s cheek and watching curiously as the woman shuddered helplessly beneath her touch. “Tell me what it feels like when I touch you.”

“It feels…real.” She reached up and pressed Cat’s hand against her cheek. “You feel so real.”

Her vision blurred through a sudden haze of tears as she held Cat’s hand against skin once more open to the sense she hadn’t felt fully since her final moments on Krypton. She laughed through the sob stuck somewhere in the back of her throat, her heart racing, her thoughts falling silent beneath the slow, steady swipe of Cat’s fingers, so electric, so alive it was almost painful.

Bringing both hands to Kara’s face, Cat gently caressed her forehead and temples, down her cheeks, along her jaw, tracing the strong arch of her neck and the sharp lines of her collarbones. With every stroke, she watched each beat of Kara’s pulse beneath this tantalizingly awake skin, finally leaning close to feel once more the strength of the hero’s heartbeat against the swirl of her tongue.

The shocked inhalation grew to a series of distracting gasps when Cat dropped her hands lower, carefully palming both of Kara’s breasts. She smiled in surprise at the realization that Kara wore nothing beneath her shirt. With impressive ease, she flicked open two of Kara’s shirt buttons—just enough space though which to slide one hand while threading the fingers of her other once more through the hero’s thick blonde mane of hair.

With a decisive steady pull against the locks tangled in her grip, she watched Kara relinquish control, allowing Cat to expose the arch of her neck. As the urge struck her to do, she lavished the long line of golden skin with her mouth while teasing delicate strokes along the soft curves and hardening peak within her other grasp.

Moments passed on sharp breaths caused by the achingly light tease of Cat’s fingers and nails before she pressed her lips against Kara’s ear and asked, “You feel it all, don’t you? Every little touch.”

The sensation of Cat’s words, breathed so intimately against her skin, zipped straight through nerves that jittered and hummed and set light to every last neuron and synapse in Kara’s body. A moan, low and desirous, slipped between her jaws as the hero’s hips pushed upward between Cat’s thighs.

The smaller blonde, however, noticed only clenched fists held at trembling angles away from her body. Sliding her hand from inside Kara’s shirt, she grasped a fist gently. Tugging at fingers Kara curled fiercely into her palm, she coaxed, “Relax your hand, darling.”

She read and understood the hesitation in suddenly rigid lines. Raising Kara’s hand, she cradled it against her chest while stroking the hero’s jaw. “You know, it’s traditional on Earth that both lovers touch each other during shared intimate moments.” She arched a brow in punctuation while bringing Kara’s still-clenched fist to her lips.
The hero snorted slightly, but her expression betrayed the terror that refused to abate within her. “I don’t want to hurt you.” Her voice shook as tears began to gather in eyes she quickly shut in embarrassment.

Even already knowing the hero’s fear, the sound of Kara’s fragile confession pressed the breath from her lungs. “Oh, Kara.” She rested her hands on either side of Kara’s face, thumbs softly wiping at the now falling tears. “Look at me.”

She smiled at how quickly Kara obeyed, always so eager to please. “Put your hands on my waist, Kara.” At the hero’s hesitation, Cat pursed her lips in a way that conveyed perfectly that she would not accept refusal. Slowly, Kara assented. Cat’s expression gentled into a warm smile. “Good. Now, hold me more tightly.”

“Cat—”

“Hold me more tightly, Kara.” Another pause passed before Kara acquiesced once more, increasing the pressure of her hold on Cat’s waist. “More.” At this hesitation, Cat put her hands over Kara’s and asked, “Do you not trust me?”

The hero’s eyes widened as she quickly stammered, “Of—of course I trust you! I trust you with everything I am.”

The smaller blonde raised her hands to cup Kara’s face once more. “Then trust me right now. I know your strength. I know what you could do to me. I’m not afraid.” She stroked a thumb against soft skin. “I trust you with everything that I am, Kara Zor-El.”

With a harsh swallow, Kara finally nodded. Slowly, she increased her grip on Cat’s waist, pausing often to make sure she was allowing the smaller blonde enough time to react. Finally, Cat exhaled an uncomfortable sigh, her hands once more over Kara’s to steady them. The hero had already released her grip, barely letting her hands ghost the curves of Cat’s waist.

Breathing deeply to collect herself, Cat looked into Kara’s eyes with a gentle smile. “See? No harm. You know me, Kara. Have I ever had a problem voicing my thoughts on anything?”

She quirked her lips in mock disapproval at how quickly Kara smiled at this question. “I promise I will always let you know my limits, just like now. I promise this will always be about total honesty and communication.

“But,” she emphasized, her fingers tangling in Kara’s hair, “I need the same from you. Never feel you need to keep anything from me, especially your worries.” She pressed her lips gently against Kara’s. “Whatever it is, tell me and we will work through it together.”

The hero nodded once, transfixed by the irridescence of Cat’s eyes. She took a steadying breath, soft gaze instantly giving away her emotions. With a knowing smirk, the smaller blonde teased, “And, yes, I love you, too, Girl of Steel.”

The playful curve of those full lips was more than Kara could resist. With a subtle shift, she raised her knees enough to slide Cat closer, capturing the smaller blonde’s mouth with her own before she was even finished gasping in surprise.

Kara smiled into the easy glide and slip of their mouths, feeling every vibration of breath passing between them. Folding her hands as delicately as she could against Cat’s waist, she focused on the easy rhythm that Cat was once more setting with her hips, each grind slow and firm against her.

The strong beat of Cat’s heart picked up steadily until finally she pulled back, green gaze dark and
rapacious. “How far do you want this to go, Kara?” She held the hero in check with a stare so certain Kara felt as though she might never be able to pull in enough oxygen again. “I have no intention of pushing you faster than you are ready to go—but,” she warned, “I’m willing to take this as far as you can handle.”

As she spoke, she continued to rock her own hips invitingly against Kara. To accentuate each word, she scraped the nails of her thumbs against nipples tightening in arousal beneath her touch once more.

Body arcing obediently into Cat’s tortuous teasing, it was all Kara could manage to breathe out, “Take me as far as I can go.”

With an elated grin, the smaller blonde slipped from Kara’s lap, offering her hand to encourage her to follow. The hero surprised her by floating to her feet but remained decidedly grounded as she took Cat’s hand and led her toward where she slept. Shifting the privacy curtain, she allowed Cat to pass first.

Purpose momentarily forgotten, Cat stepped further into the space, mouth slightly agape and gaze locked on the painting that hung before her. The canvas, the same width as Kara’s bed and at least three feet high, bore an image borne solely from the heart of its painter: an alien city of shimmering spires and glittering glass shattered out across a fiery sea that surged and broke against the opposite shore, the familiar silhouette of the Danvers homestead in the distance. Two suns—one clearly Earth’s star and the other, Cat presumed, Rao—consumed the free space in the sky, and the whole painting burned crimson and garnet, vermillion and rust, with highlights of gamboge and tangerine along the alien spires and cresting waves.

The image was breathtaking and heartbreaking in equal parts—a merging of loss and salvation, pain and remembrance. She stared at how seamlessly the two worlds blended yet retained their unique qualities—how they could share the same space while never completely being a part of the other.

Kara watched nervously as Cat studied the painting. Other than Alex, no one else had ever seen this particular piece. Part of the reason she kept it hidden from visitors was because of its clearly alien landscape. However, the greater reason was how personal it was to her and how few people in her life could ever truly understand its deeper meaning.

“It’s you.”

The breath Kara drew shuddered in her chest as she looked into the certainty and awe reflected in Cat’s gaze. And then an impossibly bright, grateful smile lit her features. Of course, Cat would see. At the responding smile from the smaller blonde, Kara stepped forward, pressing a kiss to Cat’s lips that she hoped conveyed her joy at Cat’s perception.

Before the kisses intensified too much, Cat pushed the hero back and stepped completely out of her reach. The smaller blonde unfastened the button fly of her jeans and wiggled them down her legs with a sway of her hips that Kara’s gaze devoured hungrily. Tossing the jeans onto the back of a nearby chair, she curled her fingers around the hem of her sweater and lifted it over her head in one graceful sweep.

Breathing failed to register as a necessity in that moment as Kara took in the sight before her—of sapphire lace lingering along delicate curves of alabaster skin Kara trembling to touch. Sensing the hero’s desire, Cat stepped forward enough to wrap her own arms around broad shoulders, the length of her barely clothed body warm and inviting.
A pleased sigh resounded in the otherwise silent room as she felt Kara’s hands finally settle along her hips. With persistent teasing of lips and tongue, she slowly worked her way along Kara’s neck until she was able to nip playfully at her earlobe. “I want to make love with you now, Kara. I want to make you feel cherished and desired and completely safe in my arms.” She flicked her tongue along the outer curve of Kara’s ear before finishing, “I also want to fuck you so completely, you cry my name like it’s your last hope for salvation.”

She pulled back to look into Kara’s eyes, wide and unfocused by the mesmerizing promises offered so resolutely. “Will you let me?”

The stuttering breaths that swept across her skin grew noticeably cooler as Kara stood silently before her. Finally, the hero forced herself to nod.

With a salacious smile and purposeful moves, Cat unfastened Kara’s jeans, letting them slink down long legs with a heavy denim thump. Cat quirked her lips appreciatively at the sight of blue boy shorts slung low across sharp hip bones and powerful abdominal lines that left Cat dry-mouthed and suitably wetter elsewhere.

Kara fidgeted slightly with the waistband of the shorts. “They give me a little more modesty when I’m tumbling through the air in my Super skirt.” She offered a shy grin. “They match the suit well, too.”

A low, throaty laugh unwound between them. “As Supergirl’s staunchest PR advocate, I approve of your respect for total image branding.” Her laughter shifted to a curious growl as her fingers dipped low, trailing along the soft and noticeably wet fabric between Kara’s legs. “Mmm, I approve of this even more,” she purred while leaning into her languorous strokes.

Kara’s grip tightened slightly against her hips and Cat smiled at the instinctive way she had begun to rock against the teasing touch of Cat’s fingers. At the feel of Cat pressing more firmly against her center, Kara’s head dropped forward against the crook of the smaller blonde’s neck. Cat listened to the pleading whisper of a foreign tongue as Kara desperately sought to find a satisfying rhythm against the friction Cat offered.

When she withdrew her hand and leaned back, her smile grew at the sight of the aggrieved pout that instantly struck the hero’s features. “Get on the bed, Kara,” she directed, impressed by how quickly Kara floated backward, resting on her elbows and watching Cat with eager curiosity.

The smaller blonde slowly crawled up the bed until she was between Kara’s bent knees. Settling back against her heels, she trailed her nails along Kara’s legs, from ankles all the way up to along the tops of her thighs. She noted as she lingered with rough carresses along Kara’s inner thighs the instinctive roll of the hero’s hips and how naturally she responded to Cat’s attentions, seeking more contact that Cat purposefully refused to offer.

After a few more long strokes of her nails to tease Kara’s heightened tactility, she stilled her hands and waited for the hero’s full attention. With a cunning curl of her lips, she reached around, unclasping and dropping her bra to the floor with casual ease.

Gaze intensified noticeably at the sight of Cat’s breasts before Kara quickly closed her eyes, swallowing roughly. She felt Cat’s hand stroking a soothing pattern along her cheek but she continued to keep her eyes shut. “S-sorry,” she finally managed to husk, embarrassment tinting her cheeks.

Leaning forward, Cat pressed a kiss against the corner of her mouth, softly entreating, “Tell me what’s happening, Kara.”
“My X-ray vision.” She swallowed again at the sound of her voice’s rasping cadence.

“I’m already almost completely naked, darling. There’s not much more you need that particular ability for at this point.”

The sound of Cat’s words, delivered in a teasing honeyed tone, finally encouraged Kara to re-open her eyes. The sight of Cat’s amused expression finally set the hero at ease. Gaze flitting appreciatively over the gentle slope of Cat’s breasts, accented by the dark blush of perfectly pert nipples, she reverently sighed, “You’re exquisite.”

Single brow arching in response, Cat watched in delight the rosy flush that spread from Kara’s cheeks to below the open neckline of her shirt. “Smooth talker,” she intoned as she lowered herself fully against Kara’s body while trailing kisses along her jaw and neck.

Fingers made quick work of the rest of the buttons on Kara’s shirt and Cat growled appreciatively when the clothing fell open to reveal smooth skin over ripples of firm muscle. Ghosting her fingertips along Kara’s ribs, she watched the blonde shiver helplessly once more at the sensation of Cat’s touch.

It was the sounds, though—the mewling whimpers that Kara exhaled with each press of lips or stroke of fingers against her skin—that crashed all Cat’s reason into the ground. All she needed to know was in those sounds and in the writhing that now constantly lifted Kara’s hips upward in desperate absolution of her aching need.

The sight and sound of the wanton hero beneath her struck something feral within Cat, who descended upon one of Kara’s breasts with worshipful lapping and nipping. She traced rough swirls around the sensitive areola with her tongue and noted as she teased bites along the firm outer slope how her teeth unsurprisingly left no marks on bulletproof skin.

Switching to now focus every lick and flick of tongue against Kara’s luscious nipple, Cat wondered at the strength of Kara’s fevered upward thrusts and if perhaps the hero might end up floating them both off the bed. Some fleeting part of her curious to see what it would take to make that happen, she sucked Kara’s nipple into her mouth with far more force than she would normally use, moaning into the feel of the hero quivering and groaning wickedly at the rush.

She set to work on teasing Kara with dexterous fingers and nails against her other breast, each stroke and tug against stiff pink flesh arcing fiercely through Kara’s body. The entirety of Kara’s torso lifted from the bed under the unrelenting sensations, desperately seeking more—more contact, more touches, more lips and teeth and tongue, more of everything she needed to feel.

The sounds pouring from Kara’s throat intensified to a cadence of shallow grunts forced through clenched jaws, and Cat suddenly noticed the feeling of something electric in the air around her, like the sensation of lightning on the horizon. She slowed her mouth’s unforgiving rhythm, halting completely when she glanced up toward the hero’s face. Pressing up lightly on bent arms, she stared down in slack-jawed awe. Kara’s eyes—normally that exquisite cerulean that Cat could conjure in her mind’s eye with practiced ease—coruscated white hot, sparking in time with Kara’s erratic breathing.

It was then that Cat noticed each breath Kara exhaled puffed out in a chilled mist—her freeze breath, slipping unbidden past her lips. Pressing a calming hand against the hero’s flushed chest, Cat leaned closer, knowing on some level that if Kara lost control of her heat vision, the power would obliterate Cat Grant from existence. However, the smaller blonde also knew that she trusted the hero implicitly. “Kara, your powers—is this too much? We can stop.”
No hesitation slowed the shake of Kara’s head, the glow of her eyes diminishing with renewed focus. Cat’s mouth hovered just above Kara’s, the smaller blonde feeling the tingle of her breath, cold as a winter morning, against her skin. “Then tell me what you need, Kara.” She leaned close and kissed Kara’s lips, marveling at the chill that lingered. “Tell me,” she whispered again, against the curve of Kara’s mouth.

The darkness of Kara’s pupils sparked brightly once more. Her words stuttered out in desperate icy huffs. “Ne—need release. Please, Cat.”

Cat needed no further prompting from the woman beneath her, writhing against her with every touch, looking into her eyes with fathomless need and longing. Fingers dipped beneath the fabric of Kara’s boy shorts, slipped instantly through delicious wetness. A gasp rose in Cat’s throat as she ran her fingers through Kara’s slick heat, feeling delicate ridges along the length of her labia.

Eyes widened slightly at the discovery, her surprise tempered only by the flicker of worry she saw shadow Kara’s expression. With a decisive stare, she spread her fingers so she could run them along both ridged sides at once. Kara convulsed at the sensation, inarticulate cries tumbling from her lips as Cat’s fingers danced tortuously along and against the increasingly sensitive undulations of flesh.

When their gazes finally met, Cat smiled possessively and growled, “Mine,” as she pressed in and dragged her fingers along more firmly than before. The sensation summoned the most guttural of sounds from Kara and sent her eyes rolling upward in vibrant ecstasy.

Hips rose of their own accord, craving more of Cat’s ministrations. Desperation furrowed the hero’s brow and Cat noticed how she held her arms out at rigid angles once more, hands clenched into bone-crushing fists. The hero was coming completely unraveled beneath her, and Cat couldn’t think of any sight more exquisite. Trailing a hand once more downward, she began to press two fingers inside of Kara in the hopes of finally giving her the release she required.

Surprise caught her breath in her throat at the feel of a slightly too tight hold suddenly on her wrist, stilling her hand. She looked into Kara’s eyes, seeing the pulsing flicker of her heat vision subside slightly. “N—not—not inside,” she stuttered, barely able to maintain her focus on Cat’s face. “Too s—strong. I c—could hurt you.”

Nodding in understanding, Cat pulled back, dragging slicked fingers up once more along those tantalizing ridges, which Cat swore she could feel pulsing in time with Kara’s heartbeat. Thoughts of running her tongue along those ridges filled Cat with a sensual heat, but she knew Kara wouldn’t last much longer. All it took, in fact, were several more hard swipes against the ridges and a perfectly timed press of her palm against the swollen rise of Kara’s similarly ridged clit to send her soaring into consuming oblivion.

With one massive uncontrollable shudder and a cry that nearly surpassed the human range of hearing, Kara’s entire body fell still. The smaller blonde gently slipped her hand from between the hero’s thighs, contentedly running her tongue along fingers slicked with Kara’s wetness. She hummed appreciatively at the flavors—salty-sweet with hints of sandalwood and something decidedly umami.

Curling against Kara’s side, the smaller blonde sighed in satisfaction at the sight of the pleasure-decimated hero. “Talk about exquisite.”

Delicate lines of red crept up through Kara’s cheeks, a slight nervous twitch of her lips causing Cat to frown. “I—I probably should have warned you about the—you know, that I’m—that I’m different.”
“Kara?” Silenced by Cat’s inquisitive tone but unable to make eye contact, Kara instead closed her eyes while turning her face slightly away from the smaller blonde. Cat, however, would have none of it. Settling one hand firmly against Kara’s cheek, she pressed with enough force to let Kara know that she would brook no refusal. “Hey,” she sighed when she once more had Kara’s full attention. “You are not to be embarrassed by anything about yourself with me.”

She leaned in, capturing the hero’s lips in a slow, enrapturing kiss. It simply would not do for Kara to feel any doubt about how utterly beautiful she was, and if Cat had to kiss that doubt away each time it arose, then she would do so gladly.

“Kara, you are beautiful in your uniqueness, and I wouldn’t want you to be any other way.” She reached up to twirl a lock of the hero’s hair between her fingers. “Besides, feeling you and hearing what I was doing to you as I stroked your ridges? Immeasurably hot.”

“Yeah?” Her smile was sweetness and light and stoked the delicious pain that had settled in Cat’s chest not long after she’d first met Kara Danvers.

Leaning closer, she kissed Kara’s nose, which crinkled adorably. “Yeah,” she teased. Stretching against the length of Kara’s body, she lazily draped a leg across the hero’s thighs. Fingers idly began tracing along the line of Kara’s sternum. Cat feasted upon the sight and sound and scent of arousal she was already conjuring again with these simple moves. “We really should work on your control, Supergirl. I’d hate to be the cause of you scorching a hole through your ceiling.”

Kara shut her eyes, breathing slowly in through her nose and out through her mouth a few times to center herself. When she opened them again, she was met with a grin that was equal parts smug and alluring. “Somehow I get the feeling that you would actually be pretty proud of yourself if I did laser through my ceiling.”

Cat hummed, her fingers now stroking along the lower line of Kara’s abdomen. She felt the solid muscles ripple at her touch. “Goddamn right,” she replied, the cocky glint in her eye growing brighter as she shifted to straddle Kara’s waist. Reaching down, the smaller blonde lifted one of Kara’s hands. Seeing the partially formed fist, she entreated once more, “Relax your hand, Kara.” The hero’s fingers uncurled, and Cat couldn’t resist the temptation to take one deeply into her mouth. Stuttering, cold breath across her cheek was her reward as she pulled Kara’s finger slowly past her lips, teeth scraping along skin that Cat found intoxicatingly responsive.

She pressed her lips against Kara’s palm. “Do you want to touch me?”

An electric snap of light in her eyes was all the answer Kara needed to give. Wrapping her fingers gently around Kara’s wrist, Cat guided her down between her legs, where she cupped the hero’s hand against soaked lace.

“Feel what you do to me.” She leaned forward and ran her tongue along the shell of Kara’s ear, savoring the hero’s tremble under her touch. “This isn’t the first time you’ve made me this wet, Kara. So many times before, I’ve wanted you—ached for you.”

Slipping the hero’s hand past the thin barrier of fabric left between them, Cat softly entreated, “Please, Kara. Take away this ache.”

Fingers flexed involuntarily before Kara slid them through intimate curves and dips, savoring the silken slickness she found. There was no resistance as two fingers slipped deep inside, Cat’s growl of desire reverberating through her entire body at the feeling. Hips already starting a tantalizing rhythm against Kara’s hand, the smaller blonde whispered in Kara’s ear, “Third time’s a charm, darling.”
It took Kara only a moment to understand before she slipped a third finger inside Cat, receiving a thoroughly obscene moan against her neck in reward. “Oh, fuck, Kara.” The words, hissed directly into Kara’s ear, sent a shudder all the way to her toes, her own groan of pleasure echoing in her throat.

Shifting her position, Cat leaned up, back arching into a provocative curve, Kara now able to see the muscles of her lithe body undulating as she ground harder against the hero’s hand. She slowly trailed her nails up her thighs, over her stomach, and along the undersides of her breasts, leaving quickly fading lines and visible chills along her flesh. Tilting her head enough so she could see Kara from beneath half-lidded eyes, she then slowly drew her fingers upward to tease taut nipples between her forefingers and thumbs.

The sights of this stunning spectacle astride her consumed every last one of Kara’s senses. Her hearing was attuned solely to the sounds of Cat’s pleasure, to the thunderous beat of her heart, and the profane word combinations that surpassed even Cat’s bluest office language. Instead, this was language of raw need and raging desire, every word and moan driving deeper the longing that was growing once more between Kara’s legs. Her skin sang with the searing sensation of every lust-soaked press of Cat’s heat against her, the scent of Cat’s arousal like ether leaving her dazed and lightheaded.

Unable to withstand any more passive observation, Kara sat up, shifting Cat into her lap. The smaller blonde never lost rhythm, but her eyes now stared intently into Kara’s, wide pupils barely traced in jade. Cat’s full lips parted, hungry gasps caressing Kara’s face, and that was more than the hero could take. “Put your hands behind you, Cat.”

The smaller blonde shivered at the steel in Kara’s command and crossed her arms behind her, her obedience causing fire to rise in Kara’s core. She reached around and locked Cat’s wrists against the small of her back with her free hand. Her grip was gentle but immovable, and Cat relished this sensation of releasing control to the hero between her thighs.

Leaning forward and never losing eye contact, Kara positioned her mouth over one of Cat’s nipples, already hard and swollen from the smaller blonde’s fevered ministrations. A devilish glint sparked in those piercing blue eyes right at the moment she flicked out her tongue against the taut peak.

Cat shivered at the wholly unexpected icy sensation against her heated skin. Kara released another gently chilled breath along her tongue before flicking it against Cat’s other nipple, receiving a similarly enthusiastic response from the woman riding her hand with delicious abandon. For several moments, Kara alternated her attention between Cat’s breasts, focusing on using her chilled tongue to tease the smaller blonde into keening ecstasy.

The sensations flowing through her were steadily short-circuiting everything else in Cat’s mind beyond Kara. Her back arched uncontrollably, her weight borne by Kara’s unyielding hold on her arms. She was already slipping over the precipice when Kara timed the moment precisely to tease the rigid pink peak in her mouth with a scrape of teeth and curl her three fingers inside Cat upward, stroking just the right spot in just the right way. Words finally and utterly falling away, the smaller blonde let her head fall back with a sinful moan as every muscle of her body tightened in revelation. Kara never relented, her fingers and mouth moving Cat from pleasure to pleasure with perfect precision, her eyes filled with need and wonder.

When Kara saw that Cat could take no more, she slowed the pace of her fingers before gently removing them and taking them between her own lips. She closed her eyes, committing to memory the flavor of Cat Grant as she licked away every trace of her essence.
At the feeling of Kara’s fingers slipping out, the smaller blonde fell forward against her, sweat-slicked and utterly exhausted. Releasing her grip on Cat’s wrists, Kara wrapped her in her arms, gently settling them both down onto her bed.

Cat curled into the hero’s embrace, humming contentedly. Several minutes passed before she could locate the ability to speak once more. “You continue to exceed all expectations in meeting my needs, Kiera.” She smiled at the feeling of Kara chuckling beneath her. “But tell me, are there any other side effects of Kryptonian arousal that you’re not sharing with me?”

Kara frowned in confusion. “No. I mean, not that I know of, no. Why?”

Leaning to the side, Cat propped her head up with a hand so she could meet Kara’s gaze. “The way you held my arms and took control.” She paused at the thought, enjoying the shiver that rippled through her. Kara could hear the increase in her heart rate. “What inspired you to do those things?”

“I don’t know, really.” She crinkled her brow. “It just felt right in the moment.” Suddenly worried, she quickly asked, “Was I wrong?”

Cat moved her free hand to rest on Kara’s chest in a calming gesture. “No, not at all, Kara. It was—exactly the right thing to do.” At the sight of Kara’s bemused expression, Cat explained, “There are times when I like letting go of control. There are times when I like someone else taking control. But it’s not something I indulge in often. It takes a great deal of trust, and that’s something I haven’t invested into a relationship in quite a while.”

The implication of Cat’s words rolled over Kara with an understanding that was equal parts wondrous and terrifying. “You trust me that much?”

“I told you, Kara: I trust you with everything I am.” Knowing what was forming the doubt in Kara’s expression, she gently cupped the hero’s cheek, urging her not to look away. “I know you’re still struggling with the guilt inside you for the things you said and did the night you were losing control. I know one conversation is not going to completely remove that guilt—but I also know that wasn’t you. No matter how scared I might have been, I never doubted that. And I have never lost my trust in you, Kara.”

Muscles rippled along Kara’s throat as she swallowed, her eyes filling with tears. Cat pressed upward on her arms so that she could kiss the hero’s trembling lips. When she leaned back once more, she smiled to see the tiniest inkling of belief growing in Kara’s gaze. That was enough for Cat for now. She would just need to make certain that inkling continued to grow. “So again I ask, is there something else to your Kryptonian sexy time powers that I should know about? Like does really hot sex make you telepathic?”

A burst of surprised laughter bubbled out of Kara’s mouth, her cheeks flushing beautifully. “My Kryptonian sexy time powers? That’s an exposé I hope I never see in CatCo magazine.”

“I suspect I would have to shut down the magazine after that, since I would never ever be able to top the sales of that issue—especially if we included a centerfold of you draped in nothing but your cape.”

Kara knew her cheeks were as red as said cape at that moment, but she couldn’t help but laugh at Cat’s lasciviousness. “You’re scandalous, Ms. Grant.” She laughed at the feel of Cat swatting her arm. “As for my super sexy time telepathy, I honestly don’t know. I guess I could ask Kal-El.” She grimaced immediately after the words left her mouth.

“That sounds like a whole lot of awkward.”
“Unfortunately, my resource pool is limited in this matter—and even that is limited further by the fact that Kal-El is, for lack of a better description, more human than Kryptonian regarding certain developmental and biological issues.” She furrowed her brow, another thought coming to mind. “I suppose I could ask my mother.”

Cat hummed in agreement while twirling a curl of Kara’s hair between her fingers. “Talking with Eliza about this would probably be a little less discomfiting.”

She narrowed her eyes curiously at the way Kara shifted and bit her lip for a moment. “I meant my real mother—well, not real as in real.” She blushed in awareness of the rather nonsensical statement.

Huffing out a breath, she clarified, “My parents included an interactive A.I. program in my pod. The interface is in my mother’s image and it contains all the information captured from her memory.” She frowned, swallowing against the surge of sadness that always plagued her regarding the Alura A.I.

Curiosity flickered brightly as Cat processed this new information. “From her memory? You mean like a cyber-consciousness?”

“Somewhat. She—*it* possesses all my mother’s knowledge and memories, but without any emotional context for any of them. It’s just collected information disseminated on request.”

Without hesitation, Cat wrapped herself as closely around Kara as she could, feeling the sorrow that trembled through the hero. “I can’t imagine how painful it must be for you to see her that way.”

She felt Kara’s listless shrug, heard the crumbling edges of her voice. “It’s better than not seeing her at all. Sometimes—sometimes I talk with her as I would if she were really my *ieiu*. Sometimes pretending is easier than—than remembering the truth.”

With a slight turn of her head, Cat pressed her lips against the few tears that had slipped along Kara’s cheek as she spoke. Running one of her hands soothingly through the hero’s hair, she replied, “The day I signed the paperwork officially incorporating CatCo, I maxed out what was left on one of my credit cards to buy the best bottle of single-malt scotch I could find and a box of Davidoff Escurio Gran Toro cigars. That night, I took the bottle and one of the cigars to the building where I was renting office space at the time. I sat on the roof and drank and smoked one of those goddamned disgusting cigars my father loved so much, and I talked with him about everything I hoped to achieve with CatCo, just as if he were right there with me.”

She blinked rapidly, this pain still so vivid, so raw no matter how much time passed. “Every single momentous occasion in my life since, I’ve marked in similar fashion, only now it’s usually on my office balcony at CatCo.” She looked into the azure depths of Kara’s eyes and agreed, “Sometimes pretending is easier.”

Too moved by what Cat had just shared to trust her voice, Kara instead leaned forward enough for their lips to meet. The kisses were purely for comfort this time, Kara aching to show Cat how grateful she was for what the smaller blonde had revealed.

After several moments, Cat drew back slightly and offered a small, impish smile. “The last time was to tell him all about staking my claim for CatCo of this amazingly good-hearted though slightly bumbling superhero whom I just so happened to also name. Maybe you’ve heard of her?”

Said hero laughed in delight at the teasing. “You’ve told him about me?”
“Have you told your mother about me?”

The instant dip of Kara’s gaze set a decidedly pleased smirk on Cat’s lips. “Could I ‘meet’ her? This A.I. of your mother?” At the sharp inhalation from the hero, she quickly added, “Unless you’d rather keep your time with her private. I would understand that.”

The hero was quick to shake her head. “No—I mean, yes, I usually spend time with her on my own. Alex is the only other person who has the credentials to access the room that stores the interface.” She blanched at the antiseptic sound of that statement.

Cupping the hero’s cheek, Cat locked gazes and softly stated, “I would love to meet your mother, Kara. Even if it’s only a hologram, I would love to at least know what she looked like—see whether you have her eyes or her nose.” She drew her fingers down along Kara’s jaw. “Besides, I think a hologram is far better than what you have to deal with when it comes to mothers of significant others.”

At the sight of Kara’s mock shudder, the smaller blonde dug a knuckle into a taut oblique, wincing slightly at the unyielding sensation. It was the unrestrained sigh of pleasure that slipped from Kara’s throat, however, that greatly piqued her interest—and more.

Another swift shift and Cat sat astride her hero, sheet twirled lazily around her waist, hands curling once more around the hard lines of those obliques Cat was certain she would never tire of grasping. She let herself drop forward while slowly sliding her hands up, nails grazing the steadily reawakening flesh beneath them, until she was positioned with her mouth just above Kara’s.

The icy tickle of breath that trickled from the hero’s mouth lifted Cat’s lips into a devious grin. “Now,” she sighed, hips shifting with just enough promise that Kara swallowed audibly. “I believe we still have some work to do on your control, Supergirl.”

At the feel of Cat’s tongue once again swirling unmercifully against her pulse point, Kara felt the familiar burn of her heat vision flaring and moaned once more in unabated anticipation. “Whatever you say, Ms. Grant...”
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

While Cat and Kara take a break from the main action (for a completely different kind of action), Detective Maggie Sawyer steps up to keep the momentum going against CADMUS...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At the sight of the familiar shadow casting across her desk, Maggie Sawyer turned her gaze upward with a languid smile. “Hey, babe.” Her heart beat a little faster at the responding soft grin that pulled at Alex’s lips as she sat in the chair next to Maggie’s desk. “What an unexpected surprise.”

Alex huffed an exasperated laugh. “This whole day has been full of ‘unexpected.’”

“You?” Maggie leaned back, enjoying the satisfying way her back popped at the change in position. Worst part of being a detective was all the chair time spent filing reports. “I’ve been jockeying this desk for too long. You want to walk with me to Noonan’s for a break?” The responding smile was exactly what Maggie was hoping to see. Out of her chair and into her jacket in record time, she held out her hand to help Alex up. They both knew it was an unnecessary gesture, but one Alex happily accepted.

Once they were outside, Maggie breathed in deeply, replacing the stale precinct air in her lungs as quickly as she could. She turned to see Alex watching her quietly, that secret smile that Maggie realized she reserved solely for her still curving her lips. Without hesitation, the detective reached out to slow Alex’s pace and tugged her down to kiss that adorable smile. Not giving the brunette time to overthink the moment, Maggie released her hold with a grin and started walking once more.

“So, what’s up?”

“Uh, yeah.” Clearing her throat, Alex paused to regain her stride next to Maggie, her grin now slightly goofier and even more adorable than before. “Well, let’s see: So far today, I have had to calm Kara down from a massive panic attack, run tests on her, have a really uncomfortable conversation with her, and have an equally uncomfortable conversation with Cat that made me feel like some kind of—Supergirl mating consigliere.”

It took Alex several strides to realize that at some point Maggie had stopped walking and was staring at her with puzzlement and a slight bit of awe. “Sometimes I think I’m prepared for whatever it is you’re going to say—and then you always prove me wrong.”

Alex chuckled. “Glad I can continue my streak a little longer.”

“So you finally got to have ‘the talk’ with Kara.” A laugh, deep and melodious, rose in her throat. “I gotta admit, I never would have pegged Cat as being this patient. National City might not survive the Queen finally getting her Supergirl.”

Alex rolled her eyes at the joke. “Part of me is worried Supergirl might not survive.” She sobered slightly. “This is such a huge step for Kara. I just want her to—to—”
“I want you to have a good life. I want you to find love and be happy.”

At the feel of Maggie’s tethering touch against her forearm, she finally sighed, “I want her to have all she wished for me and more.”

The detective nodded, her hand slipping away with a firm squeeze. “And she will, but, Alex, you know you deserve the same amount of happiness as Kara, right?”

In response, Maggie saw a flash of deliberation in warm mahogany eyes that disappeared almost as soon as it had come. Whatever the brunette had tried to work herself up into saying, she had failed, if her sudden slouch and defeated expression were adequate bellwethers. “Hey,” she called, smiling warmly when Alex turned in response. “Everything okay?”

Lithe shoulders shrugged once, leather creaking in response to the movement, and Maggie watched her force a reassuring smile that was anything but. “All good,” she lied. Pivoting the conversation, she quickly asked, “So, other than paperwork, what’s on tap for today, Detective?”

Maggie rolled her eyes even as she filed away this blatant deflection for later examination. “Not a whole lot at the moment. I thought I was going to finally snag a new meeting with someone who knows about Roulette’s revived fight club. One of my regular informants has a cousin who works setup for her pop-ups, but he decided at the last minute that he didn’t want to roll on a good gig.”

The brunette’s expression dropped instantly at this news. “That sucks.”

Maggie’s shoulders lifted in a lethargic shrug. “At least I got to hang out with M’Gann for an hour at the bar while waiting for him not to show.” She jolted suddenly at a remembered bit of information. “That reminds me: Your Daxamite friend is a pig and a mooch.”

Not even hiding the disdain in her expression, Alex countered, “First off, he is not my friend. He’s the intergalactic gigolo the DEO inherited by default. Second, you have not provided me with any recon I didn’t already figure out on my own.” With an exasperated sigh, she finished, “Is he giving M’Gann problems? I can make up some medical malady and order him confined to headquarters if it will give her some relief from him.”

“Nah,” she snickered, always enjoying glimpses of Alex’s quickly scheming mind. “M’Gann can handle him.”

“So what’s he doing?”

“According to M’Gann, he shows up at some point almost every day and sits at the bar nursing a beer until he can get someone to buy him more drinks and then take him home with them.”

Lip curling into a sneer, Alex groused, “He’s supposed to be using the stipend we gave him to purchase clothes and whatever he might need to find a job.”

“Yeah, he tried to get a job at the bar.” The detective thrilled at the glare of disbelief Alex shot her. “M’Gann said that even without being able to fully read Daxamite thoughts because of their Kryptonian ancestry, she could still pick up that all he really wanted was free access to the liquor and better access to potential—partners.”

Alex stifled her first reaction as Maggie’s revelation about M’Gann drew her attention. “Did M’Gann mention picking up anything else worth noting when she read his mind?” At the curious arch of Maggie’s brow, she shrugged. “J’onn read his mind when he first arrived. It was all chaos and confusion like he expected—but nothing that set off any warnings. He said he won’t go probing for anything further unless I can give him more reason than I think he’s bothering Kara.”
“Woah,” Maggie reached out for Alex’s forearm, her fingers digging slightly into the leather of her jacket sleeve. “He’s messing with Kara? What the hell’s he doing and how do we make him stop?”

Maggie’s instant overprotective response softened Alex’s edge. “I’m not sure exactly,” she finally confessed. “Kara hasn’t mentioned anything specific, and I can’t seem to ever catch him when he interacts with her. I understand from Winn, though, that Cat gave him one of her infamous dismissals not long ago, which would explain why he moped around the DEO for several days, pouting like someone stole his puppy.” A glint of amusement broke her dark expression. “I’m kind of disappointed I missed Cat in action.”

Maggie nudged her playfully in the side. “I bet she’s quite the cunning linguist.”

The detective grabbed onto Alex’s arm to steady herself as she stumbled into the unexpectedly immobile brunette. “Please,” Alex finally sighed, “please tell me you didn’t just make a terrible pun about Cat Grant’s oral prowess.”

“I absolutely did,” Maggie replied, dimples deepening with her laughter. “And you know you’d find it hilarious if she weren’t right now prowessing your sister.”

With a visible shake, Alex quickly started walking away, tossing over her shoulder, “You know prowessing isn’t even actually a word.”

“It is now,” she replied, jogging to catch up. Beneath Alex’s steadfast scowl, she could see the amusement she refused to release. “So, anyway,” she continued, deciding to be merciful in her teasing for the moment, “I’m back to nothing with my attempts at finding someone willing to canary on Roulette’s whereabouts.”

“Did you ever figure out what happened to the Malacandrian?”

Maggie shook her head, the uptick in her concern almost palpable. “From what I can gather, no one has seen or heard from him in almost a month. I even put out feelers to some contacts I have at precincts in neighboring cities. None of them has seen an alien matching his description, and the DEO has all the alien corpses that have shown up within a 300-mile radius with CADMUS-type antemortem surgical damage—nothing matching him there either.”

She shuddered at the thought of the last time she’d come to the DEO, to check for the Malacandrian among the latest arrival of bodies to join the corpses already amassed in the morgue. She’d found Alex locked in the refrigerated room—which the agent had recently requested be outfitted with lead partitions—under security clearance Kara didn’t have. The tight expression on her unusually pale face told Maggie all she needed to know. Dr. Luthor was growing increasingly more active and more disturbing in her tests by the signs left on the bodies disposed of by CADMUS. Nothing Maggie could think of to say in that moment could alleviate the clutch of cold terror squeezing Alex’s heart.

“You don’t think he skipped town with his latest winnings?”

“Highly unlikely. You don’t walk away from winning—especially when you’re making that much money for someone like Roulette. My informant’s cousin did share that he was in attendance at the Malacandrian’s last fight before he disappeared. He said Roulette was clearly in a mood about something. Every time he won, she apparently grew more insufferable.”

“Maybe she’s the reason he ‘disappeared.’ Maybe she struck a deal with Dr. Luthor to turn him over to her even though he was winning?”
“Must have been a hell of a deal.”

“But why would Dr. Luthor want him so badly? What is so special about him?”

Maggie shrugged. “He can shoot venom with apparently alarming accuracy. There are several alien species who can do similarly, but he was the only one left in National City who could do that, thanks to the DEO now holding the Crilyan at Desert Containment. He could only produce enough for one solid shot a fight, but apparently that was all he needed.

“I did a little research on venom types and from what my informant’s cousin told him happened to opponents when hit, the Malacandrian produces something close to a cytotoxic-neurotoxic hybrid: Wherever it hits, it doesn’t just burn away the flesh, it induces an instantaneous necrotic response through the surrounding tissue as it makes its way to the blood stream, which inevitably leads to a shutdown of muscle response. And, of course, when that happens, it’s game over for his opponent.”

Maggie couldn’t help the somewhat pleased grin that slipped along her lips at the impressed arch of Alex’s brow. “Not a bad medical breakdown from a cop, huh?”

The brunette snorted at the statement, a lock of hair slipping out from behind her ear as she shook her head. She quickly shifted once more to a disturbed frown. “So he can disfigure and paralyze in one shot. I really don’t want to think about what Lillian Luthor has in mind for abilities like that.”

Finally reaching Noonan’s, the women ended their unsettling conversation long enough to order coffees, both black and both to go. However, seeing an empty table, Alex asked, “Hey, want to just sit for a moment and try to have a conversation that doesn’t involve Daxamite douchebaggery, evil doctors, or sadistic fight club runners?”

The detective laughed at Alex’s attempted levity while following her to the table. “Sure, a bit more time away from the precinct sounds perfect.” She sighed as she settled into the seat opposite Alex. “I swear, I’ve been spending so much time filing reports lately, I think my desk chair is permanently imprinted with the shape of my ass.”

She watched the dusting of pink rise in Alex’s cheeks at her comment. “Not a bad imprint,” she muttered behind the lip of her cup before taking a long sip of coffee.

“You been checking out my ass, Danvers?” Maggie snickered as she watched the appearance of the adorably quirky smile she swore made the brunette’s lips even more tantalizing than normal. A lighthearted Alex Danvers, she realized in that moment, was a sight she wasn’t seeing nearly enough lately.

In truth, Maggie had always recognized a constant tension within the brunette—a current always flowing beneath the surface of Alex’s skin, strong with her desperation to bring home her father. The initial CADMUS briefing with President Marsdin and Cat had allowed that tension to surge. Eliza’s relocation into DEO protective custody had it threatening to breach all of Alex’s walls, and every alien corpse dumped like so much garbage by CADMUS gave it all it needed to grow strong enough to drown.

And even though Alex had yet to break her silence on the matter, Maggie already understood how desperately she struggled against the dangerous rip tide of her emotions. She knew the fear and anger that now lived constantly within the brunette—felt it in the rigidity of her lean frame; saw it in the striations of worry that painted shadows beneath her eyes; heard it in the jagged sharpness whenever she spoke about the latest agony Dr. Luthor had inflicted upon someone whose only crime had been being an off-worlder with powers Luthor craved to possess.
It wasn’t merely Kara endangered by the imminent threat of CADMUS—it was the entirety of the Danvers family. Maggie knew that Alex had sworn, if only to herself, that she would not let her house fall to the likes of Lillian Luthor. If that meant placing herself in the line of CADMUS’s fire, then it was what she would bear to protect those she loved.

To Maggie, then, fell the duty she gladly accepted: to protect the protector—to care for Alex in all the ways she knew the brunette would never care for herself; to support her in all the ways she would never ask of another; and to stand beside her when the time came, stronger together in their determination to take down Lillian Luthor and unite the Danvers family once more.

In the interim, however, she would drink coffee and flirt cheesily and do whatever it took to rouse that adorable, goofy grin that lit mahogany eyes with russet shimmers.

With a low chuckle, Alex settled back in her seat, fingers toying with the cardboard sleeve around her to-go cup. “Just being thorough in my surveillance of potential threats.”

Expelling a disbelieving noise with exaggerated emphasis, the detective teased, “The only threat my ass imposes is to your ability to focus on actual surveillance.” All she needed was to wait a few seconds before Alex surrendered to the accusation with a gentle laugh. The sound moved through Maggie in ways she had grown so used to refusing. She internally chastised herself once more for nearly denying herself all these small joys that combined into the overwhelming delight of Alex Danvers.

With a slight shift in her position, she leaned forward, pulling Alex’s undivided attention with her gaze before asking, “So, what were you trying to work yourself up to telling me earlier?” She let a slight comforting smile slip along her lips at the sight of instant panic in Alex’s eyes, knowing the brunette loathed being called out on those moments when her innate discretion failed her.

She watched as Alex sobered noticeably even as she attempted to shrug off the discomfort she obviously felt. “It’s—it’s nothing,” she finally stammered, knowing how unconvincing the words were even before she heard them leave her mouth.

A low hum filled the silence. “I know I still have limited experience in the matter, but I’m just going to put out there that that was the least convincing lie you’ve told since you were a teenager.”

The comment stoked the brunette’s ire in such a playful way that she couldn’t help but snort in faux offense. “I disagree,” she countered. “I haven’t lied this badly since I was at least ten.”

Maggie gave in quickly to the laughter Alex’s response inspired. “Whatever, Danvers. We both agree that was a shit lie just now.”

Rather than laughing, Alex’s expression shifted hard and determined as she stated, “Last night, Cat told Kara she loves her.”

Trying to make the statement sound as casual as possible, Alex frowned at how awkward and competitive it still ended up coming across.

Catching the unspoken undertone, Maggie opted for the path of least resistance in her reply. “Why do you sound so surprised? I mean what the hell isn’t there to love about Dynamic D?”

The look her query earned bordered between confusion and insult. “No one can resist loving Kara,” she conceded. “I just—it was—”

She blew air through tightly compressed lips, frustrated more by her self-perceived pettiness than her stammering. Kara’s news was anything but surprising. After all, Alex knew—hell, anyone with
eyes knew how Kara and Cat had always shared a complicated bond that constantly shifted and surged and sometimes stumbled, but also connected them more completely than any relationship Alex had ever witnessed. She was also certain the moment Cat had made the decision to take on CADMUS was the moment she finally accepted how deeply she loved Kara.

Why, then, was she taking this latest progression for Kara’s relationship so—personally?

The answer studied her even now with eyes that constantly guarded the totality of her true feelings within their dark depths. Alex wondered what hurt had driven Maggie to cage her emotions so fiercely from outside eyes. She wondered how much longer she would need to wait before Maggie finally let her in from the outside.

With a soft sigh, she finished, “It’s not important.”

Maggie tilted her head slightly, eyes shifting as if seeking an answer within Alex’s features to an unspoken question. Before she could respond, however, she flinched and quickly huffed in frustration at the trill of an incoming call. A glance at the caller ID caused the frustration to slip quickly into concern when she saw it was her captain. “Sawyer.”

“Detective.” The deep voice boomed through the phone at eardrum-vibrating levels. “You feel like staying out of the office a little while longer?”

“Sure, just as long as you’re okay with my reports being late.”

She grinned at the terse, “Whatever, Sawyer. When do any of you slackers ever get me shit on time?” She heard the creak of his desk chair as he shifted in search of the ever-elusive comfortable position in a seat two sizes too small for his imposing frame. “Lena Luthor is asking to speak with one of the officers who responded to L-Corp the night you and Super Blondie stopped Mommy Dearest’s robot from stealing that murder isotope.”

The detective swallowed back her surprise. “Why does Lena Luthor want to speak with NCPD?” She caught Alex’s hardening glare at the name.

“Apparently she has something she wants to ask—or maybe confess. With a Luthor, who the hell knows?” His growl of frustration morphed into a wet cough that Maggie knew should have been checked out months ago.

Cringing at the vivid sounds, she checked her watch. “I’m about ten minutes from the precinct. I can grab my ride and be to L-Corp in another twenty.”

“Why don’t you just have that hot piece of ass I watched you leave with take you there herself? Give you a little more time to do whatever it is your kind likes to do in parked cars.”

“Christ, Garrick, you looking for more fantasy fodder already?”

His snort shook through her grip on her phone. “Please. We both know that’s all I’m getting from this. I have as much shot at you or your hot girlfriend as I do bagging that bouncy little blonde alien we inherited as our city mascot.”

“I’ll let the bouncy little blonde know you’re interested the next time I see her. I’m sure she’d love to share her response with you.”

Deciding that was the perfect end to her conversation, Maggie hurriedly hit the end button just as she heard the beginning of another round of thick coughing.
“Do I even want to know what he said about my sister this time?”

Dimples deepened with Maggie’s grin. “It was actually tame in comparison with what he said last time. He called you a hot piece of ass though.”

Alex inhaled in mock offense. “And you didn’t defend me?”

“From what? The truth?” Her eyes sparkled playfully as she watched Alex’s lips twist into a disbelieving smirk. Slipping her phone back into her pocket, she threw back the rest of her coffee and slid from her chair.

Alex quickly did the same, falling in line behind Maggie as she headed for the exit. Back outside the restaurant, the brunette shoved her hands into her pockets, tugging the jacket more tightly around herself. When she continued to stare off into the distance, Maggie gently cleared her throat and stepped close enough to redirect Alex’s gaze with a hand firmly pressed to her cheek.

Under the instant scrutiny of Alex’s curious expression, Maggie felt her resolve grow stronger. Head tilting ever so slightly to one side, she spoke calmly and clearly, never allowing her eye contact with Alex to falter. “I’m not there yet, Alex.” She knew Alex understood her meaning, her eyes widening briefly before she composed herself. She also knew her words carried hardness, but anything less than the truth would be a betrayal to the woman before her.

“I love being with you in all the ways we’ve allowed ourselves to be together. I love how comfortable we are around each other—like we’ve known each other for years. I love the way we complement and contrast each other in the best ways and accept each other’s imperfections without judgment.”

She slid her hand from Alex’s cheek to wrap fingers securely against the back of her neck. “I love the rhythm our bodies have found when we make love. I love how we’ve learned so much about how to bring each other pleasure and how to make each other feel safe.” Tugging, she encouraged Alex to lean down, allowing her to press a firm kiss against the brunette’s lips. She felt the sharp groan of desire as it slipped from Alex’s mouth into her own, causing her to almost lose herself to the sensations Alex could conjure within her with just one sound.

Instead, she forced herself to pull away, instantly shifting her gaze to meet Alex’s. “I—I’m not there yet,” she repeated, “but I love that I can see myself being there soon enough.”

Worry began to narrow her eyes as she watched Alex divert her gaze for several beats. When she did look up once more, however, Maggie swallowed down a sigh of relief at the hopeful shimmer she saw in her warm gaze. “I—I’m not there yet, either,” she finally confessed, voice soft and so vulnerable. Maggie ached in a way she knew signaled another step closer in her total surrender to the remarkable woman before her. “But I want to be—with you.” She ducked her head slightly, leaving Maggie breathless at the struggle she knew such openness was from this woman for whom so much depended on constant secrecy.

Relinquishing herself to the moment, Maggie pulled the brunette in for another kiss, equal parts comfort and promise, refusing to restrain her pleased sigh at the sensation of strong hands conforming to the curve of her hips and pulling her closer. When she leaned back, she couldn’t fight the teeth-baring smile that overcame her at the sight of a blushing, delighted Alex Danvers.

“You are going soft on me, Danvers.” She smiled into another quick kiss before releasing her hold and beginning to back away. “You have plans for this evening?”

“Kara and I were supposed to have sister night tonight but—I’m just going to assume that’s on
temporary hiatus,” she chuckled, with an exaggerated eye roll.

“Shoot her a text—much later today—and offer to bring them dinner.” She flashed a ferociously mischievous grin. “Kara’s going to need a lot of food after a whole morning and afternoon spent being prowessed by Cat.”

She laughed at the expression that flinched across Alex’s features at her teasing. “Text me when you hear anything,” and she spun gracefully and headed back to the precinct, the smile on her lips lasting all the way through her drive to meet Lena Luthor.

As she strode through L-Corp’s main entrance, she clenched her fists tightly once before relaxing and brushing them quickly down her thighs. The last time she’d been to L-Corp, Hank Henshaw had injured several members of her team and blasted her across the foyer. She still caught herself flinching at bright flashes of light, the memory of that pain sharp and searing.

Quickly showing her badge to the security guards monitoring the front entrance metal detectors and announcing her destination, she nodded in appreciation when they waved her through and headed for the elevator bank. Hopping the awaiting car, she found herself exiting onto the executive level in a matter of moments.

Before the doors had even finished sliding shut behind her, she found herself the full focus of Lena Luthor’s executive assistant. With a practiced smile, the young woman began, “Detective Sawyer, I’ve let Ms. Luthor know you’re here. She’s finishing up a conference call and should be free within the next five minutes. May I get you anything while you wait?”

“Ah,” Maggie shifted her weight unconsciously as she studied the assistant in confusion. “How did you know my name?”

“The officer who checked your credentials told me when he called regarding your arrival. Ms. Luthor likes to be able to greet visitors by name whenever possible.”

“Right.” She sniffed softly while rubbing the back of her neck. “I’m fine, thank you.”

With a slight nod, the assistant replied, “Please let me know if you change your mind.”

Once the assistant returned her attention to her computer screen, Maggie took a seat on the edge of a plush couch cushion, intent on not allowing herself to get too relaxed. After a few moments of sitting in silence, she idly shuffled around the stack of magazines on the table in front of her. She noted with a knowing grin the issue of CatCo magazine with Kara’s feature story on Lena’s plans for reforming the former Luthor Corp.

“Detective Sawyer?” Dark eyes shifted upward to track the assistant’s movements from behind her desk toward the double doors to Maggie’s left. “Ms. Luthor has just signaled she’s ready to meet with you. Please, follow me.”

Maggie caught up just as the assistant swung open one of the doors, signaling with a sweep of her hand for Maggie to precede her. Moving from the waiting room into Lena Luthor’s office left the detective blinking rapidly against the distinct contrast of muted light and somber colors versus an office awash in full mid-morning sunlight gleaming against brilliant white and glass surfaces all around.

Her eyes adjusted in time to watch the office’s occupant rise from her desk and move gracefully toward her. Eyes a startlingly translucent green shifted briefly as she addressed her assistant. “Thank you, Jess. Could you please bring us some coffee?” She glanced toward Maggie and
continued, “I typically need a bit of a caffeine boost around now, but would you prefer something other than coffee?”

Waving away the offer casually, the detective replied, “Coffee is fine, thank you.”

Jess acknowledged the request and left, pulling the door shut behind her. The CEO refocused on Maggie, her resplendent smile outlined in a shade of red the detective knew only a smattering of women could actually make work.

Lena Luthor more than succeeded.

When Maggie took the hand extended toward her, she noted cool, smooth skin and a satisfying grip. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Detective Sawyer.” The suggestion of an accent slipped musically along the edges of her words.

“Likewise, Ms. Luthor.” She smirked somewhat self-consciously. “I would have introduced myself the last time I was here, but I was a bit busy being turned into target practice.”

A grateful smile brightened Lena’s features instantly. “Sounds like we had similar experiences that evening. Please accept my gratitude, Detective, for all you and your team did to stop Hank Henshaw.”

Expression shifted, bright white teeth biting into a deep claret lip nervously. When she finally spoke, Maggie noted her voice lacked all authoritative steadiness, instead giving way to unexpected uncertainty. “I honestly was surprised to see NCPD that evening. Usually, it’s dark-clad mystery agents shadowing Supergirl. Do you often work with her? I mean, I figure, she must offer to help you all out as well—what with being so invested into being, you know, Super.”

Before Maggie could even formulate a reply, Lena released an embarrassed huff while closing her eyes and pressing two fingers against her right temple. “I have never sounded more like a fangirl in all my life.”

The detective laughed earnestly at the CEO’s statement, her eyes conveying an understanding Lena recognized as reassuring rather than derisive. “It’s hard not to be a fangirl,” she offered, “especially when she’s saving your life.”

Thankful for Maggie’s kindness, Lena gestured toward the couch along the wall opposite her desk just as Jess re-entered with a coffee service. She placed the tray on the table in front of the couch where the detective and Lena were now sitting. “Thank you, Jess.” She smiled at her assistant’s succinct nod and swift departure. Pouring two mugs, she glanced at Maggie inquisitively. “I predict you’re a coffee purist.”

With a surprised arch of her brow, Maggie accepted the mug. “On-point prediction,” she acceded while taking a tentative sip of the coffee.

Leaning back with her own black coffee, Lena turned her body toward the detective, crossing her legs at her ankles. “Lucky guess,” she countered.

With an appreciative hum for the beverage that tasted far better than anything she’d ever find at the precinct, Maggie opted to respond to Lena’s earlier query. “Supergirl, by the way, does help us out whenever she believes her assistance will be more of a help than an intrusion. She doesn’t like making us look bad, though—at least that’s what she told me once.” She grinned at the memory of Kara’s teasing comment. “She has a bit of a playful side I don’t think many people get to see.”

Lena’s lips twitched into a regretful smile. “I’m afraid I may not get to see that irreverence any
time soon. I believe I’ve proven myself to be a bit of a disappointment to Supergirl.”

“Oh?”

The CEO narrowed her gaze slightly, considering her next words. “I reacted very poorly toward her the last time we spoke. She relayed information I—I wasn’t ready to accept as truth.” Her head dipped forward slightly. “Having her tell me somehow made it all the worse.”

“It was something about your mother.”

“She confirmed my mother’s role with Project CADMUS.” She expelled a shaky breath. “My unacceptable response during our last encounter aside, I consider Supergirl a friend. It was difficult to hear her tell me that my mother not only heads a project that dissects aliens in the name of ‘protecting’ humanity, but also that she harmed Supergirl—and would have done far worse if given enough time.” She blinked back the sudden shine in her eyes. “I suppose a part of me didn’t want to believe that my mother could be capable of such abhorrence.”

The memory of her father’s expression of stony disappointment as he shut her out of the home where she was no longer welcome flooded Maggie with almost unbearable clarity. “Sometimes parents fail us.” Once more, Lena saw only kindness and a recognizable understanding in the detective’s gaze. “It’s up to us to learn from the failure and never duplicate it in our own lives.”

“Which brings us to why you are here, Detective.” The CEO pushed aside the mélange of personal emotions threatening to break surface, her face falling into impressive impassivity. “There has been a theft involving property L-Corp helped design, and both the level of sophistication behind the theft and the missing property associated with it lead me to believe CADMUS is responsible.”

Maggie withdrew a notebook and pen she carried in her jacket’s inside pocket. “Okay, so you want to file a report with NCPD?”

“No. The theft didn’t actually occur at L-Corp. Honestly, it didn’t even occur in National City, and where it did occur, they have their own security team to investigate.”

Incredulity was not something Maggie made a habit of showing civilians with whom she interacted while on duty. The struggle to keep to that personal rule was, indeed, real at the moment. With a deep breath pulled in through her nose and held for a three-count, she stated, “So you called NCPD because you don’t want to report a theft that didn’t happen in National City and that some other task force is taking care of investigating.” She paused for Lena’s reaction, which was a satisfactorily contrite expression. “Please explain what I’m missing, Ms. Luthor. Why am I really here?”

Grip tightening so noticeably around her mug that Maggie could see her skin blanching from the pressure, Lena replied, “You’re here, Detective Sawyer, because it’s hard not to be a fangirl when she’s saved your life.” Understanding softened Maggie’s glare. “I didn’t really know another way of delivering a message to her. It would seem my normal means of communication have gone radio silent.”

She barely hid the flinch of disappointment in her expression before finishing, “I need Supergirl to know about this theft. I knew I needed to tell someone she trusts, someone she might still be willing to listen to. Trying to find an officer from that night seemed easier than tracking down any of those mystery agents who shadow her.”

Maggie nodded her understanding. “Whatever you tell me, I promise you, I will relay to Supergirl, Ms. Luthor.”
With a tense, sorrowful smile, Lena replied, “One of L-Corp’s recent contracts is with a highly classified office deep within the CIA—so classified, I can’t even tell you how classified. I also can’t tell you exactly what’s gone missing.” She flinched apologetically at the pointed stare this earned from the detective.

“What I can tell you is that what went missing uses an alloy we synthesized specifically for this project. This alloy is virtually indestructible—by human standards.”

“And what about Kryptonian standards?”

“Neither L-Corp nor our government client is interested in creating a means of harming or overpowering Supergirl. I would have refused to allow L-Corp to participate in the creation of anything that even hinted at such a desired end result, and I would have told her immediately.”

She turned her head slightly to look out her office windows as if searching the sky for some sign of the Girl of Steel. “I know your loyalties are far better directed toward Supergirl than toward anyone bearing the name Luthor, but please believe that I will never condone what my mother is doing with CADMUS.”

When the CEO turned her incandescent gaze back toward Maggie, the detective felt her chest tighten at the pain and insecurity that swirled within. Steeling herself for refusal, she tried anyway. “Lena, help me give Supergirl proper warning of what she might be facing. What did CADMUS take?”

Silence stretched just long enough that Maggie tensed in anticipation of refusal. And then the answer came, barely a breath of a sound. “Bionics.”

Emboldened slightly by the sound of the word finally spoken, she finished, “Bionic-enhanced artificial limbs. Latest generation tech designed by our client using an endoskeleton built from our customized alloy and sheathed in synthetic skin we reinforced with a crystalized compound of this alloy.” She breathed a sigh of relief, her shoulders relaxing noticeably.

Maggie leaned back in her seat, her mouth slightly agape as she processed this information. “Okay.” She blew out a cleansing breath and repeated, “Okay. So bionic body parts? And they’re gone.”

“Yes. We shipped the parts two weeks ago to our client’s R&D lab in Ojai. My shipping supervisor confirmed successful delivery and our contracting officer confirmed receipt and examination of the parts. However, at some point between then and last night, the parts—disappeared.”

“Are they sure they’re really gone? And why did it take them so long to realize they weren’t there anymore?” She couldn’t fight the smirk that tipped the corners of her lips. “Seems like something you’d be extra careful not to misplace.”

“Each bionic part has a tracker embedded into it. L-Corp designed these trackers to be resistant to virtually all external interference. The trackers also would have activated a warning subroutine if anyone had tried to tamper with them. We discovered that, instead, someone tampered with the reader, reprogramming it into a feedback loop using previous readings from the trackers.

“No one noticed because the readers indicated the parts were still there. It wasn’t until they were ready to use the parts that someone discovered they were gone.”

She bowed her head in contrition. “I don’t even know how my mother knew about L-Corp’s involvement with this project.”
“Ms. Luthor, the theft didn’t occur here. Perhaps it wasn’t through L-Corp’s involvement that she learned of these parts.” As she slipped her notebook back into her pocket, she pointed out, “CADMUS has contacts all through the government. Perhaps through one of them she learned about the delivery. L-Corp’s connection might be coincidental.”

Even as the words left her mouth, Maggie knew how unlikely they were to be true. Still, Lena offered her an appreciative smile. “Thank you for trying to placate my fears, Detective. However, I think we both know CADMUS is not in the business of coincidence.”

Maggie nodded in understanding. “Did your mother have server access here when Lex was in charge of the company?”

“Yes, but I’ve reconfigured and enhanced all the security protocols since taking over. There’s no way she could still have access.”

“Are you certain?” Seeing the flicker of doubt in the CEO’s sea foam gaze, Maggie tugged absently at her ear as she considered her next offer. “I might know some of those dark-clad mystery agents. They’ve got some fierce tech and programmers of their own who might be able to lend some help in figuring out if and how your mother is accessing your servers.”

“That would be very appreciated, Detective. I’m happy to turn over or give them access to whatever they might need.”

The detective reached into her pocket, pulling out a business card she offered to Lena. “I’m going to relay your information to Supergirl, Ms. Luthor, as well as the agency she works with. I think they might be able to help you with this. However, if you can think of anything else, or you or your tech team discover anything else before you hear from me again, please call me, okay?”

As both women rose from the couch, Lena accepted the card with a small yet grateful sigh. “Thank you, Detective. I’m indebted to you.”

Light skimmed long dark tresses as Maggie shook her head. “The information you’ve shared is thanks enough, Ms. Luthor. I will be in touch as soon as possible.” Shaking hands once more, the detective made her way out of L-Corp, slipping out her phone as she headed to her car. She knew Alex would want to know about this conversation as soon as possible. However, a waiting text from M’Gann instantly drew her attention and concern.

*Been overhearing a lot of conversations and emotions here today. Alien protest rally possibly in the works. Spencer Graves really stirred the shit with his press conference this morning. Will keep you posted as I learn more.*

A tired sigh hissed from her lips as she texted back her appreciation. She was always grateful at how willing the White Martian was to accept her and help her in the ways she did. They shared a silent understanding that strengthened with time, their status as outsiders to the world’s oftentimes cruelly enforced notions of “normal” binding them into a unique friendship each woman proudly and fiercely protected.

Hitting Alex’s number on her speed dial, she huffed in amusement at how quickly the brunette answered. “How’d your date with Lena Luthor go? Did you devastate her with your dimples?”

A low chuckle vibrated through the line. “You’re twisted, Danvers.” She took a moment of silence to absorb the sound of Alex’s amusement before continuing, “Lena Luthor might actually prove to be the exception to the Luthor rule.” She quickly summarized her conversation with the CEO, understanding all too well the stunned silence that followed for several beats.
“Well, shit,” Alex finally managed. “A government-funded bionics program? That’s a little unnerving.”

“Says the government-funded alien hunter,” Maggie instantly shot back, reveling in the sound of Alex clicking her tongue in mock annoyance. She regretfully shifted the mood. “You think this means Henshaw’s getting an upgrade?”

“Who the hell knows?” Maggie could hear the concern lancing through the gruffly clipped words. “I’m going to update J’onn on all you’ve just told me. Can you—would you mind—I know this is technically an NCPD case since Lena called you in specifically—”

“Only because she couldn’t figure out any other way to reach Supergirl,” Maggie quickly deflected, knowing what Alex wanted to ask. “I officially turn this over to the DEO. As far as Garrick is concerned, Lena Luthor was simply trying to get in touch with Supergirl for non-police business, and this was the only way she could think of to do so.”

Alex’s sigh of relief barely registered through the line. “Thank you, Mags.”

The detective felt her lips twitch and her fingertips tingle at the sound of Alex’s nickname for her. “Always willing to keep you owing me one, Danvers.”

“You know I’m good for it.”

Maggie stumbled her steps at the unexpectedly sultry timbre of Alex’s voice. “You’re good for a lot of things,” she replied, “and if you keep teasing me with that sexy voice of yours, I’m going to come collect now.”

Warming at the soft, excited sound she heard from the brunette, she whispered, “Later, Danvers,” and ended the call with a swift flick of a button.

Back in her vehicle, she decided to take a quick run to check in with a couple of her more reliable informants. M’Gann’s warning weighed heavier within her thoughts the more she considered it. She knew the dangers that many within the alien community navigated on a regular basis. Some, like Kara, were “lucky” in that they had the option of passing among humans. Others—those with differences too distinct to allow them the choice of blending—faced rejections, refusals, and sometimes violence simply for the assumed crime of those differences.

Hands gripping her steering wheel painfully tight, Maggie pushed back against the memories of broken hearts and split lips and too much anger and self-loathing for several lifetimes. Instead, she focused on checking in with the community she’d sworn to protect from the moment she’d first discovered their presence in her new home city: yet another group whom society had deemed unworthy of protection.

She had lost count of the number of times she’d been forced to swallow back tears and fury at the suffering within both her own excluded community and this adopted alien one—suffering inflicted by small minds that equated “different” with “dangerous.” And now Spencer Graves wanted to make the targeting even easier. If she could, she’d be right at the front of whatever protest landed squarely in his lap—hopefully with a solid punch right where he deserved it most.

Instead, she made her way to each of her most trusted contacts within the alien community. She offered support as best she could, offered a sympathetic ear and more understanding than she wished she needed to give. She dropped subtle warnings about not being able to protect anyone who decided peaceful protest was not their preferred style. She also gave adamant confirmation that she would help file charges against anyone who decided violence was their preferred counter-
protest. Human or not, her oath was to protect and serve all within her city’s jurisdiction, regardless.

Returning to the precinct, she went directly to Garrick, briefing him on the rumors she’d spent the afternoon confirming. His sigh, damp and distressed, bothered her for many reasons. “Graves has already been on the phone with the commissioner about this, Sawyer. He’s demanding full police support in disbanding any rallies that try to form.”

He held up his hand to stop her argument. “He’s saying that most of the aliens who want to protest this proposed law aren’t yet registered as citizens, so the laws protecting the right to protest don’t actually apply to them. Sounds like some hinky bullshit if you ask me, but we need some legal speak geek to confirm that before we can refute it. We’re working on that right now.”

Maggie relaxed moderately at this final statement. “Thanks, Garrick.”

He gave a massive shrug while eyeing the door to his office. “Whatever, Sawyer. Get the hell out and get me those fucking reports you owe me.”

With a slightly amused quirk of her lips, she headed back toward her desk, retrieving her phone as she felt the buzz of an incoming message. She laughed softly, loving how easily she could hear Alex’s tone even through her texts.

_Heard from Kara. Finally. Dinner is a go. According to her, she’s already STARVING. She wants us to meet at her place at 6. I’ll wait for you out front._

The detective continued to smile as she tapped out an affirmative before slipping her phone back into her pocket. She spent the next few hours completing her reports, finishing with plenty of time to walk to Kara’s apartment. As she rounded the block for her final approach, she couldn’t help the appreciative quirk of her lips at the sight of Alex already waiting for her. The brunette stood in profile in a swatch of streetlight, hands slipped into her back pockets, eyes closed, and head tipped back slightly as though listening for something in the distance.

Hearing the soft hum of acknowledgement as she continued to approach, Maggie realized she was listening—for her. “You pick up that super hearing from your sister?”

“Maybe she picked it up from me,” Alex teased, finally reopening her eyes and shifting her gaze to meet Maggie’s. A soft smile traced along her lips as she reached for Maggie’s hand and leaned in for a quick kiss. “Hey.”

Returning the smile in her inimitably dimpled way, Maggie laughed, “Hey, back. How was the rest of your day?”

“Mildly frustrating. Ran some tests that didn’t give me the results I was hoping for. How was the rest of your day?”

The detective sighed at the question. “Something’s coming,” she finally allowed. She knew the threat of alien protests would upset both Alex and Kara, for different and similar reasons. “I’m hearing chatter about alien rallies against today’s announcement.”

Alex wiped a hand across her features, weariness suddenly tightening her expression. “Kara’s not going to take that news well at all.”

Alex could still recall with perfect clarity the expression of surprise and delight on her sister’s face the first time she’d set foot in the alien bar. It was the first time since her arrival on Earth where she’d been surrounded by more aliens than humans—and not one of the aliens within the bar gave
a damn that she was the daughter of Alura Zor-El. None of them wanted revenge on her mother, none of them wanted to harm her or challenge her—none of them really even paid her much notice at all, not even when she shyly snapped the cap off Alex’s beer with a flick of her thumbnail. The only one, in fact, to notice that move had been M’Gann. She flashed Kara a private smile while holding out her hand for the slightly bent bottle cap, and the Kryptonian had breathed a sigh of relief that Alex felt had been caught somewhere in her chest for nearly thirteen years.

Kara had spent the entirety of her time on Earth passing as a human. She’d spent the bulk of now almost two years as Supergirl earning and re-earning the trust of the humans who inhabited her new home world. How would she respond to the possibility of finding herself at odds between those same humans and the aliens who had given her back some of the sense of belonging she’d lost with Krypton’s demise?

With a slight tilt of her head, Maggie replied, “So let’s not tell her—at least not tonight.” At the sight of hesitation crossing Alex’s features, she tugged on the brunette’s hand and started toward the entrance to Kara’s building. “Let’s just feed her and let her bask a little while longer in the glow of being prowessed most of the day by Cat.”

She laughed unabashedly at the grimace and grumbled “That’s still not a word” her comment received while continuing to pull Alex along behind her.

Outside Kara’s apartment, Alex gave the door her normal series of quick raps. When no sounds moving toward the door followed the brunette’s knock, she turned questioningly toward Maggie, who shrugged. “You’re sure they were here and not at Cat’s place, right?”

“Yeah, Cat told me to send Kara to her apartment after I finished with her tests.” She cringed slightly. “You don’t think they’re still—”

At the question left unfinished, Maggie laughed, “Okay, your sister might be an alien, which who knows what that means for her libido, but Cat isn’t. Even royalty needs to rest.”

Reaching into one of her jacket pockets, Alex removed her key to Kara’s place and swiftly unlocked the door.

A cursory glimpse of the loft’s open floor plan revealed nothing out of the ordinary minus the lack of expected occupants. The familiarly intimate sounds coming from the sleeping area hidden behind the privacy curtain, however, froze both women in mid-stride.

Maggie was certain Alex couldn’t possibly turn a shade darker than she was at that moment. She was fairly certain, in fact, that she was blushing as well, especially when they heard Cat exclaim rather explicitly about a particularly talented part of the Kryptonian’s anatomy. Without thinking, Alex inhaled sharply, her eyes seeming to nearly double in width.

The startled squeak they both heard from behind the curtain informed them Kara’s clearly distracted super hearing had finally picked up on their arrival. Cat, however, either had not realized this or gave zero fucks as she growled, “Kara Zor-El, don’t you dare stop!”

Maggie laughed to herself, suspecting it was most definitely the latter answer. Without pause, she latched onto Alex’s arm and began pulling the brunette from where she had apparently been turned to stone by shock.

It wasn’t until they were back outside and heading aimlessly in the first direction to take them away from what they’d just overheard that Alex finally snapped back into reality. “What the ever-loving hell just happened?”
“Uh, I think that’s pretty obvious, babe.”

“What happened to ‘even royalty needs to rest’?”

Unashamedly laughing, Maggie conceded, “I royally underestimated her.”

“You are having way too much fun with this,” the brunette huffed, the irritated scowl on her face somehow only making her more adorable to Maggie.

“Come on, Danvers. It’s their first time together.” Moving closer, she lowered her voice. “It’s Kara’s first time ever. She’s finally found someone she wants badly enough to overcome all those fears she’s been carrying around inside for years.” She bumped playfully into Alex’s arm, her expression teasing and kind. “You couldn’t possibly relate to that, though, right?”

Maggie watched as her words settled slowly into the space between Alex’s shoulders, the tense line finally relaxing. With a soft sigh, she shrugged. “I do get it. I just don’t want to actually witness any of it.”

“Point understood.” She reached out and grabbed hold of the brunette’s forearm, tugging her out of the way of other pedestrians. Standing on the balls of her feet, she leaned up to kiss Alex’s lips, which quickly abandoned their pensive frown for a shy, quirky grin.

As they separated slightly, Alex jolted at her phone buzzing in her pocket. Already feeling her cheeks flushing in embarrassment at seeing the alert was for a text from Kara, she unlocked her phone and read the message, immediately laughing.

“What is it?” Maggie peered over the brunette’s shoulder so she could read the text as well.

_Your sister claims she is dying, apparently of both embarrassment and hunger. If you could humor her on the latter and bring back food now, I will humor her on the former and be on my best, quiet behavior. There is a small window of opportunity for this offer. I cannot be held accountable for what happens after that window closes._

With a shake of her head, Alex quickly tapped out her response: _Food is on the way. Please keep the window open as long as possible. I don’t know how much more about my sister’s sex life I can handle in one day._

Both women watched the gray dots bounce along for several seconds before Cat’s words once more filled Alex’s screen: _Normally, I would make no promises. However, I believe Kara’s need for food has reached critical mass. She is chanting for potstickers. CatCo has a standing account with Jade Dragon. I’m letting them know we need the regular order for Kara Danvers plus whatever Maggie and you want—just add it to the order when you arrive._

With an amused sigh, Alex responded with a quick thanks and confirmation that they were on their way. Destination now set, she tugged Maggie along. The detective couldn’t help but point out as they walked, “Cat Grant has a standing regular order at Jade Dragon specifically for Kara.”

“Yeah,” Alex chuckled, knowing the depth of this simple statement.

It wasn’t until they saw said “standing order” that Alex began to truly laugh, realization overwhelming her in the most delightful way. Maggie quirked an eyebrow in her direction as they gathered the multiple bags and made their way back outside. “What’s so funny, babe?”

Alex lifted the bags in both her hands. “This,” she replied. “Cat Grant not only protected what could have been the biggest story of her entire career but she also fed her an abundance of
potstickers on an apparently regular basis.” The brunette felt a surge of affection within her at the thought.

Once back at Kara’s, the hero surprised them by swinging open the door before Alex even needed to kick it with her boot. “Hey,” she called, eyes shyly diverting as she stepped aside to let them enter. Maggie’s dimples deepened instantly with the smile she offered the blushing blonde.

With a playful eye roll, Alex chided, “I thought you said it was okay to come over at six.”

“It was! But then we kind of got carried away,” she added in a barely audible voice, dipping her head and smiling in a way Maggie found unsurprisingly adorable.

Emerging from behind the privacy curtain to Kara’s bedroom, Cat padded softly over to the hero’s side. Maggie marveled at how easily she could make a sweater that was clearly hers and a pair of ribbed-cuff sweatpants that were clearly not hers work with enviable panache.

Feeling Cat wrap her arms around Kara’s waist, the hero instantly leaned into the touch, allowing Cat to press a soft kiss against her jawline. Shifting her attention, the smaller blonde stated, “Thank you both for bringing much-needed sustenance—and for returning after earlier, which I’m not supposed to mention.”

The rosy suffusion that fanned out through Kara’s cheeks was one of the most delightful things Maggie had seen all day. Shaking her head, she began to unpack the bags she had carried while watching Alex do the same. She could tell the brunette struggled hard to suppress her amusement at Cat’s teasing of her sister.

At the sound of a chagrined huff from the hero, Cat slid one of the containers away from the stacks, flicking open the lid and quickly popping one of the potstickers into Kara’s mouth. With a knowing smirk, she turned away from the hero’s rapidly darkening gaze and continued to help open containers.

Once they finished sorting the dishes—and Kara had consumed two of the potsticker orders in the unpacking—the women headed into the living room, opting to spread out around Kara’s coffee table rather than sit at the more formal dining table. Kara halted before sitting, however, smiling at the smaller blonde in a knowing way. “Your usual drink with your chicken and vegetables, Ms. Grant?”

With a subtle hitch of her eyebrow, she sighed, “That would be acceptable, Kiera.”

“One Jane Bond, coming up,” she smiled, nudging her sister in the side before she could start eating. “Come help me, Alex.”

Acquiescing at the mention of alcohol, Alex quickly hopped to her feet, querying as she did, “Jane Bond?”

“Martini made with pre-chilled vodka and stirred gently rather than shaken with ice. A shaken martini, according to Cat, is a ‘diluted travesty.’”

Cat hummed disapprovingly at even the mention of a shaken martini. “All that unnecessarily bludgeoned ice, melting into good vodka. James Bond can’t even be trusted with a drink choice, but we’re supposed to believe he’s capable of saving the world? Please.” The eyebrow arched even more provocatively as she shot a look toward Kara. “Leave the world-saving to the women, I say.”

Lost for words, Alex merely shook her head while falling in line behind her once-again blushing sister.
Settling into her meal, Maggie couldn’t help but watch the CEO as she tucked her feet under herself, deftly wielding her chopsticks to pick vegetables out of her container. The detective loved the moments she was afforded glimpses of Cat’s natural form—of soft curves and gentle gazes rather than the jutting angles and narrowed stares of the persona she projected to the industry she ruled. This woman whose media reign spanned the world curled contentedly into herself, barely taking up the space of one couch cushion.

“What exactly are you detecting right now, Detective?” Maggie startled at the softly spoken tease, instantly captured by the curious jade gaze across from her.

With a dimpled smile, she shrugged nonchalantly. “Honestly, how weird it is to see the Queen of All Media look so—unassuming.”

Cat clicked her tongue at the comment, her lips twisting to the side to hide her amusement.

“Should I call up my acting CEO and verbally eviscerate him to reinforce my reputation? Perhaps bark some orders at my former assistant for old time’s sake?”

“Pretty sure we already heard you do that earlier,” Maggie teased, receiving a delightful touché grin from the CEO.

“Yes, well, some things deserve to be seen to completion. Besides,” she finished while casting a sideways glance to where Kara was mixing drinks, “apparently Kryptonians are insatiable when it comes to learning new skills.”

With a knowing smirk, she watched Kara fumble and nearly drop the bottle of vodka she was using.

Beside her, Maggie hummed, her brow furrowed in thought as she swirled her chopsticks through her vegetable stir-fry. “Actually,” she finally offered, “I think that might be a Danvers thing. Alex has quite the similar—insatiability.”

At the sound of the bottle of vodka actually hitting the counter before Kara could catch it, Cat snorted in amusement. Alex glared curiously at her furiously blushing sister for a second before catching the sight of Cat and Maggie bumping fists in what Alex was learning was a steadily strengthening and unnerving solidarity.

As she headed toward the two women with drinks in hand, she felt her own cheeks burning slightly with the knowledge that whatever they had just been discussing had to be the reason for her sister’s flustered fumbling.

“Are Kara and I going to have to keep you two separated whenever we’re not around?”

Behind her, Kara huffed in chagrined amusement as she brought Cat’s drink to her. “Good luck there. Cat Grant does not capitulate to those who would try to silence her.”

The smaller blonde flashed one of her more mischievous grins as she set down her food and accepted her drink with one hand while stretching the other along the cushion where Kara was preparing to sit.

As the hero leaned back against Cat’s arm, she stiffened at the sound of discomfort Cat released at feeling Kara press her shoulder back at a wider angle.

At the soft hiss of pain from Cat, Alex looked up in concern and queried, “Are you okay?”

The question instantly drew another fierce blush to her sister’s cheeks and a roguish twist to Cat’s
lips. “I’m quite fine, thank you.” She tangled her fingers into Kara’s hair, scratching a soothing pattern against her scalp. “We’ve simply discovered there is a learning curve when it comes to Kara’s strength at certain moments.”

Concern instantly far greater than embarrassment, Kara softly entreated, “Maybe Alex should take a look—just to be sure it’s only a bruise.”

The smaller blonde’s initial response was a subtle eye roll. However, the worry in those deep blue eyes was more than even she could feign indifference toward. With a slightly too-dramatic sigh to deflect from the hero’s guilt-laden concern, she set her drink down and shifted her sweater’s neckline enough to expose her right shoulder.

Alex struggled to control her response, although she noted Maggie’s soft breath of surprise at the sight of dark bruising Cat revealed. It took both women only a moment to realize the pattern was conspicuously hand-shaped.

“Yeah, ah, that’s definitely one hell of a bruise.” She kept her expression firmly in check as she leaned closer, fingers probing the areas along Cat’s clavicle and scapula as gingerly as possible. She noted with admiration the control Cat wielded over her responses to what the brunette knew was still painful examining regardless of her attempts at being gentle.

“Doesn’t seem like there’s any other injury though,” she offered, noting peripherally the flinch of guilt in Kara’s expression. Turning toward her sister, she gently asked, “Have you used your X-ray vision?”

Before Kara could reply, Cat huffed in dismissal. “Trust me, I have been X-rayed multiple times today, the end result always being the confirmation of what I have repeatedly told your sister: Nothing is broken.” She shooed Alex away with the flick of her fingers. “The bruises aren’t even that bad. They just look like they are because of my alluringly fair complexion.”

The brunette knew the lie instantly. The bruising on Cat’s shoulder looked like it went deep into the surrounding tissue. Alex had been the recipient of many bruises like that in her years with the DEO, and she knew they hurt like hell.

“You are pretty damn pale,” she finally conceded. Kara instantly gaped at the comment, but Cat’s expression softened in gratitude at Alex’s willingness to follow the smaller blonde’s lead. “Whenever you make it back to the DEO, we’ve got a great gadget in the med bay that Dr. Hamilton uses to shorten healing time. Until then, icing it should help.”

Before the words were even completely out of Alex’s mouth, Cat was reaching up to clamp a hand against Kara’s lips. “Kara, if you keep blowing your freeze breath on me, I might succumb to hypothermia.”

Knowing the sting of her chiding, the smaller blonde quickly pivoted to face Kara directly. Lacing her fingers through the hero’s hair, she locked gazes and finished, “I am fine, Kara. I do not want you taking on this mantle of guilt every time we make love.”

Catching the nervous shift of Kara’s gaze, she laughed while kissing the tip of the hero’s nose. “Darling, I’m pretty sure the Cat is literally out of the bag on this one. Your sister and Maggie know we’ve been having sex today.” Her lips curved into a disconcertingly smug smile. “In fact, I’m pretty sure the tenants of this and the neighboring buildings know plenty of details about what we’ve been doing here thanks to your delightfully surprising verbosity.”

Kara let out a flustered sigh at the sound of Alex and Maggie both not even bothering to hide their
laughter. “Get it, Dynamic D,” Maggie teased, amusement dancing in her dark eyes.

Smiling shyly at the detective’s teasing, she finally shifted her full attention back to Cat when she felt the smaller blonde’s hold tighten against her neck. “You didn’t do anything wrong at all today. I told you I would always let you know if you were going beyond my limits. You didn’t. This,” and she tugged the neckline of her sweater down slightly, “and the other bruises, which your sister is not seeing unless she has plans to become my new primary care physician, all fell within my range of tolerance.”

Alex cleared her throat conspicuously. “Definitely passing on that,” she whispered, earning an amused side-eye from Cat.

The smaller blonde sucked her bottom lip between her teeth for a moment as she weighed her next words. “Clearly, we both need to make some adjustments. I will be more mindful that my limits should not extend to a point where I allow bruising this extensive. Alternately, you will accept that sometimes I will bruise.” She shrugged nonchalantly. “In exchange for what I receive in return, I will gladly accept them. And I want you to do the same.”

“But I’m hurting you.”

“No.” An unanticipated firmness seeped into her voice and in the suddenly hard set of her jaw. “You bruised me, but you will never hurt me, Kara. I have absolute faith in that.”

Kara heard the underlying insinuation of something far darker threading beneath the smaller blonde’s words. However, she also heard the certainty of Cat’s belief in her, soothing and reassuring. With a jerky nod, she finally settled back against the couch cushions, smiling at the feel of Cat melding perfectly against her, drink once more firmly in hand.

Taking a sip and sighing in approval at Kara’s mixology skills, the smaller blonde glanced between the detective and the agent. “So, what have we missed during our all-day debauchery?”

Maggie chuckled while finishing a bite of Alex’s spring roll. She focused on Kara and teased, “Well, I spent some time with your BFF this morning.”

“Lena?”

Maggie hummed affirmation while reaching over and snagging the rest of Alex’s spring roll from her plate. The brunette huffed incredulously. “You’re just as bad as Kara.”

With a snort of laughter, Maggie popped the rest of the spring roll into her mouth. “Uh, I have watched Kara consume a whole tray of cookies in under five minutes. I don’t come anywhere near that level of awesome.”

Kara blushed profusely at the statement, much to the delight of the women watching her. With a decisive clearing of her throat, she pressed on. “Why did you see Lena? Is everything okay?”

“All—*weird,*” Maggie huffed, leaning back against the couch arm so she could face Kara and Cat. “First off, your bestie is heartbroken that Super you doesn’t visit her anymore—and I got the distinct impression she doesn’t think things are much better with her friendship with *you*.”

The sigh Kara released at Maggie’s statement sounded utterly disconsolate. Alex finished her mouthful of food before pointing her chopsticks toward her sister. “You haven’t seen her since the night she stopped her mother from successfully releasing the Medusa virus, have you?”

The hero sighed. “She finally came to me. She showed up at CatCo yesterday morning.” She
frowned at the memory of their conversation.

“Why are you avoiding her?” Alex paused, troubled by the silence she received in reply. She leaned down to catch her sister’s line of sight. “Kara, do you think Lena’s involved with CADMUS?”

Cat felt Kara stiffen instantly at Alex’s direct question. “No!” Her voice ratcheted up an octave on her response and Cat caught the slight curl of her fingers inward toward her palms. “She’s not like the rest of her family, Alex. I trust Lena.” Voice and expression softening in equal measure, she finished, “She’s my friend.”

“Okay,” Alex acquiesced. She knew the futility of fighting with Kara’s fierce protectiveness of her friendship with Lena, even with her own deeply seated doubts about the youngest member of the Luthor family. “Then why are you avoiding her?”

“I don’t want her getting involved in this. She’s stubborn and unpredictable, and I can’t protect unpredictable.” She took a calming breath. “But she’s not involved with CADMUS. I know she’s not.”

“Well,” Maggie offered, “she might not be involved with CADMUS, but she is pretty certain that CADMUS now has something L-Corp helped the government design.” At the perk in attention from both Kara and Cat, the detective finished, “Lena taught me today that, apparently, the federal government is in the bionics business.”

Three sets of eyes instantly shifted toward the hum of confirmation Cat released as she sipped her drink. “OSI’s had a bionics program for years, headquartered in Ojai.”

Maggie laughed in disbelief. “Lena said the shipment’s last known location was a lab in Ojai.”

Kara shifted to get a better look at the reporter. “How do you do that?”

“What? You think that wall of awards in my office came with the décor?” She nudged Kara’s thigh playfully with her foot. “I know things. It’s another one of my superpowers.”

Maggie turned to face Cat fully. “So what’s the OSI?”

“Office of Scientific Intelligence. They’re another one of those tricky government secrets like the DEO. Their agents specialize in finding and acquiring the latest and greatest in global technological advancements—including rescuing a lot of it off the black market or the deep web.”

She tipped her glass toward Alex. “I’m willing to bet a lot of the tech toys you enjoy have come from OSI’s efforts.” She ran her thumb pensively along the side of her glass. “Their bionics program has been mostly successful, but in recent years, some of their attempts at technology upgrades have run into—problems. What did Lena say L-Corp was doing for OSI?”

“According to Lena, they created an alloy that, and I quote is ‘virtually indestructible by human standards.’” She focused solely on Kara, a comforting expression drifting across her features. “She was incredibly adamant in stressing that she would never help create anything stronger than you.”

“How would she know?” Cat arched a brow at the looks aimed toward her. “Is there a Supergirl fact sheet of which I’m not aware that details the specifications of your abilities?”

Alex sighed in frustration as the thought hit her. “Maxwell Lord.” She saw fury flinch through Cat’s body at the sound of Lord’s name. Without hesitation, the smaller blonde reached out and wrapped her hand tightly around Kara’s forearm, unconsciously willing the hero to refrain from
taking flight as she had done during the last conversation to feature the insufferable Maxwell Lord. “He collected information on Kara’s powers.” The agent furrowed her brow. “He doesn’t strike me as the type of person willing to share that kind of information with the government, though. He distrusts them more than Supergirl, I think.”

“What about General Lane’s readings from my encounters with Red Tornado?” Kara’s shoulders slumped slightly. “He would even have readings on my limit before I blow out my powers.”

Seeing the worry threatening to overpower her sister, Alex quickly shook her head. “Doesn’t matter either way, Kara.” She waited for blue eyes to refocus on her. “You have grown so much stronger since either one of those incidents. Whatever readings they think they have on you? You’re lightyears away from them.” She breathed a sigh of relief at the sight of Kara nodding after several beats. “So if the OSI is using any of this old data and Lena is telling the truth, you shouldn’t have anything to worry about.”

“No,” the hero huffed. “We just have to worry about what Lillian Luthor is planning to do with bionic—what?” She looked questioningly toward Maggie. “What exactly did L-Corp help build?”

“Um, bionic body parts.”

Cat instantly perked at this information. She slipped from the couch and stalked to where she’d left her phone. “I have an excellent source who knows all about bionic body parts. I know they’ll be able to help provide further information. In fact, I’m willing to bet my contact will know all about this alloy L-Corp created—they might even have firsthand experience with it.” She narrowed her eyes in thought.

While Cat continued to mutter to herself, Alex refocused on Kara, amazement gleaming in her gaze. “You know she’s a little frightening, right?"

The instant noise of incredulity from behind her caused Alex to startle slightly. Cat moved back toward the couch, deftly avoiding the coffee table as she tapped out a text. “You insult me, Agent Danvers.” She pinned Alex with a feigned indignant glare. “Ask any of my employees: I’m much more than a little frightening.”

Lips pressed together to suppress the smile that ached to lift her lips, Alex was quick to tease, “Oh, I’ve heard all about what a holy terror you are in the office.”

The pillow that whipped through the air thwapped into her face before the brunette could even register Kara’s movement. Toppling backward with a soft grunt, she instantly began laughing at the shock on her sister’s face. “You’re so on clean-up duty for that,” the hero grumbled, even as she caught Cat’s amusement from the corner of her eye.

Holding up her hands in surrender, Alex sat back up, still chuckling. The quartet finished their meals while focusing on lighter topics of conversation. Both Alex and Maggie, however, couldn’t help but notice how Cat and Kara continued to gravitate closer to each other where they sat, their focus unconsciously shifting toward the other solely for longer and longer stretches of time.

Sharing knowing smiles, the two rose, barely noticed by the two blondes on the couch, and began to collect empty containers and glasses. As Alex finished washing the last glass, she turned slightly at the chuckle beside her. Her own smile growing at the sight of an amused Maggie, she sighed, “What’s so funny?”

Without saying a word, the detective nodded once toward the living room. Alex shifted her gaze, eyes instantly widening even as she felt her cheeks burn warm at what she saw. Cat had shifted to
sitting in Kara’s lap, her hands tangled in long golden locks. Kara leaned her head back against the couch cushion, eyes closed as she succumbed to Cat’s attentions. The smaller blonde shifted her focus from trailing kisses along Kara’s neck to whispering words into the hero’s ear that left her gasping icy puffs of breath into the air.

Alex saw the nervous tremble of Kara’s hands, one curved along Cat’s waist, the other spread wide against the center of Cat’s back. Fingers flexed rhythmically as she fought to maintain focus, all while Cat breathed what Alex suspected were promises worded to incite this level of response she was clearly enjoying from Kara.

At the sound of the soft, pleading whimper to finally break free from Kara, Alex quickly hung up the dishtowel in her hand, pointedly tugging Maggie’s sleeve to encourage the detective to follow her toward the exit. Cat was the first of the pair to catch the movement, lazily shifting her gaze from Kara to the steadily retreating duo. Alex and Maggie both noted the onyx shine of Cat’s eyes, dark and telling even from that far away. An appreciative grin lifted her lips even as she leaned once more against Kara’s ear, this time whispering to alert the hero to the departure taking place.

Maggie barely stifled her gasp at the white glow of Kara’s eyes as they slid open. The hero was quick to calm her vision back to blue. Her cheeks, however, remained rosy and flushed as she smiled sheepishly at her sister and the detective. “Sorry,” she finally stammered, voice noticeably rougher than usual.

Without missing a beat, Maggie laughed while slipping into her jacket. “Kara, _never_ apologize for wanting to get laid.” She rolled her eyes at the surprised choke she heard from Alex while watching chagrin and amusement battle in Kara’s expression. Without giving either Danvers sister any further opportunity to overanalyze what she’d said, she tangled her arm with Alex’s and tugged toward the door. “Have fun, ladies.”

Once the apartment door clicked shut behind them, Maggie continued to lead Alex toward the elevator. At the sight of the brunette’s discomfited scowl, Maggie soothed, “Come on, Danvers, don’t tell me you’re queasy about a little display of desire?”

“Invoking my little sister, yes,” she quickly countered. Then, with a flinch she couldn’t quite contain, she muttered, “I didn’t need to ever hear her make _that_ noise.”

With the arrival of the elevator, Maggie focused on ushering Alex quickly through the opening doors. Hearing the soft release of breath from the brunette as she connected with the back wall of the elevator car, Maggie moved close and pressed the length of her body against her. Lips hovering close to Alex’s ear, Maggie whispered, “And what kind of noises can I get you to make tonight, Alex?”

She nipped a series of rapid bites along the column of the brunette’s neck, feeling a low vibration against her teeth and tongue as she did. Leaning back, she jabbed a finger against the lobby button on the elevator keypad before returning to the trail she was leaving along Alex’s skin.

Pausing mid-bite at the feel of the elevator finally lurching into motion, Maggie’s lips pulled back into a wicked grin. “Just so you know, this won’t be the only time you’re going down this evening, Danvers.”

The needful groan the brunette released sparked fire low and intense within Maggie, and she knew there was no way she was letting the evening end without coaxing _that_ noise out of Alex as many times as possible.
I am so sorry for how long it took me to post a new chapter. Work totally vampired me of any free time or energy to write for way too long. And, yes, I used vampire as a verb. If Maggie can do it with prowess, I can do it with vampire.

I switched things up a bit, doing another "regular" chapter instead of a CADMUS chapter. This chapter occurs at the same time as the previous chapter, so it made more sense to keep them together. Dr. Luthor returns in the next chapter.

I really hope you all enjoyed this chapter. It's longer than normal, but I couldn’t resist spending as much time as possible letting Maggie lead the way for a while. I very much loved listening to Maggie's voice for this chapter. I also am so in love with the continuing Brotp she and Cat share. Those two are going to be the death of the Danvers sisters yet...
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

CADMUS Test Subject Interlude 4

Chapter Notes

More of the same from our dear Dr. Luthor, with a little serving of insight on the side. This chapter isn't quite as graphic as the previous visit to CADMUS, but it does have its moments.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Test Subjects CDS-17-009 and -036

As it turned out, Malacandrian and human physiologies were unsurprisingly dissimilar in innumerable ways. So dissimilar, in fact, Dr. Luthor suspected Thomas Rieger’s body was already in the beginning stages of rejecting the nearly nineteen-hour transplant she and her team had just completed.

She stared down at the still-sedated human, not quite ready to let the nurse transfer him for observation. She watched the steady rise and fall of his chest and absently readjusted the ventilator mask that covered his nose. The straps came close to touching the bandages taped along his jaws and neck.

She could see the Malacandrian’s body peripherally, sallow skin split apart along both sides of his neck, and the shocking gape of an incomplete face from where she had removed his lower jaw.

She’d never performed a mandibulectomy before, but the need for more space while removing his venom ducts and canals demanded she learn quickly. She was fairly certain the result shouldn’t have been a mandible cracked in two pieces by haste and carelessness.

She was also certain it didn’t really matter. The next stop for the Malacandrian’s corpse was the incinerator. This wouldn’t be another CADMUS calling card, deposited for discovery by the DEO and NCPD. This would be her secret kept, if only for a little while longer.

Checking Rieger’s vitals, she shone a light into his mouth and noted the clean suture work performed by her team. They’d seamlessly connected the Malacandrian’s venom ducts to Rieger’s parotid salivary glands, attaching the corresponding venom canals along the insides of his cheeks. She nodded at the clean alignment of the canal openings along each side of his mouth, where the venom would exit when projected.

Once the Malacandrian’s venom ducts began working in conjunction with Rieger’s salivary glands, they would begin the process, hopefully, of converting his saliva into venom. She noted in his chart that the doctors and nurses responsible for his care would need to be careful at that point to irrigate his mouth to prevent buccal ulcerations or accidental ingestion of any significant amount of
venom. She also noted that he should receive his first dose of cevimeline to stimulate increased salivation as soon as they could bring down the inflammation in the surgical areas.

Everything about the transplant looked nearly perfect. True, it would pose problems that they didn’t have enough time to transplant and articulate the muscles that would have allowed him control over things like when and how far he could shoot his venom—but she was far too resourceful to allow something like that to deter in any way.

Rather, her daughter was far too resourceful, even if still stubbornly resisting the call of her higher purpose as a Luthor.

It benefited Lillian at these times that CADMUS employed tech staff with slightly more IT savvy than even L-Corp could attract. With just a little effort, her tech agent had retrieved from L-Corp’s servers the solution she needed not only for how to help Rieger control the projection of his venom but also for how she could control Rieger’s venom ducts herself, should he prove at the last minute to be uncooperative or unable to follow her orders.

Lillian backed away, signaling to the attending nurse to proceed with moving Rieger to recovery. Now it was all a matter of hoping his body would allow the transplant to take root, even moderately—a process of immunosuppression she’d already begun through gene therapy she engineered using the Malacandrian’s immune cells. She knew even all these steps meant little in the face of cross-species transplantation, but she had to try.

She stared down at the ashen features beneath the bandages and mask, noting the pained furrow of his brow even while still unconscious. “I don’t need you to survive long, Mr. Rieger. I just need you to have one good day.”

Slipping off her gloves and surgical cap, she finally left the OR for the first time in almost twenty-four hours. She felt the lengthiness of this latest surgery deep in muscles that throbbed with still-unreleased tension. With the medical transplant (hopefully) successfully behind her, she knew she was still a long way from her end goal. Too much still remained unknown for her to relax or even hope that this would all work out the way she envisioned it.

No. Hope was for the naïve. She preferred to rely on determination and skill to guide her to her goals—even one as admittedly personal as this one had always been.

She would never confirm Henshaw’s suspicions regarding what drove her in this particular quest. She couldn’t, however, ignore the voice in the back of her thoughts, suspiciously the same timbre as Lionel’s, accusing her of an impractical level of melodramatic intensity.

He’d chastised her similarly for her responses to each Daily Planet article that had begun to pull back further and further the curtain to Luthor Corp’s more questionable dealings. While she had wanted Lionel to take action, be it legal or not, he had seen the articles more as a pathetic distraction rather than something to be feared. Lionel never seemed to care about the damage being caused to the Luthor name by someone he dismissed as too disreputable to be taken seriously.

After all, who would give legitimacy to the words of a gossip columnist? It wasn’t until the article that revealed details of a deal rife with illegalities that even the most deeply bought Metropolis politicians could not ignore, that Lionel realized he should never have dismissed the tenacity of that gossip columnist desperate to be something more. By then, however, it was too late to take care of the threat he had waited too long to take seriously.

As she had watched her husband’s legacy dismantled, too far beyond salvation by that point, she had sworn she would never make the same mistake of underestimation he had made.
Moving through the quiet halls that led through the facility, she came to a stop outside Rieger’s cell. Flickering light from a now-silent television broke across the flotsam he’d created during his short stay. She could see words scrawled across the once-pristine publicity shots she had returned to him, could see the crumpled remains of letters he had once more attempted to pen.

She suspected she should feel some level of contrition for how easily she had reversed the medicated equilibrium Glendale Manor had spent the better part of a month helping him reach. It had taken only one full day from when Luthor had begun withholding his medications before Rieger began showing withdrawal symptoms. It took only two more days after that before he began showing signs of his returning psychoses. Four days after that, he had begun falling back into the patterns she suspected were worn deeply into portions of his memory long hidden beneath years of chemical fog.

That was when Luthor ordered the television placed within his cell, playing a continuous loop of the talk show she knew had started his obsession. She had selected episodes she knew he would have watched while writing his screeds of love and devotion or formulating the plan that would bring him so close to his goal. So close and then so far away.

Luthor’s cool gray gaze focused on the screen—focused beyond the superficial physical differences between then and now and focused, instead, on the same emerald fire within the eyes, the same determined elegance within movements that likened the figure on the screen to her namesake.

Luthor knew that fire and determination were now focused on unearthing CADMUS in ways similar to the focus that had led to Luthor Corp’s near-dissolution. She had enough contacts throughout D.C. to know all about the months spent so far, sorting through secrets, building cases and alliances, lining up all the proof needed to finally bring an end to the project Lillian had given so much of her devotion and talent.

She knew better than to discredit the tenacity that had already placed her husband in the cell where he ultimately died and contributed to the fissures that would one day lead to the complete breaking of her son’s control. She would not be fooled by the royal façade behind which that same rabidly obdurate reporter still lived. Her lips twisted into a cruel smirk at the idiom that came to mind about felines and unchanging spots.

Truthfully, all Luthor should have spared for this particular nuisance was the effort it took to have someone pull a trigger. Instead, she had focused on the long game, feigned ignorance long enough to learn who among CADMUS’s former and current supporters needed to be marked for swift silencing. The list she’d compiled was both admittedly impressive and disheartening.

She had expected more loyalty, particularly from her former Army ally. Surely, the father of Superman’s most brainwashed advocate would have ample reason to want CADMUS to succeed. How quickly his loyalties had shifted, though, after the events of Myriad, blinded, no doubt by the lies of salvation once reserved for the Man of Steel—lies perpetrated globally by National City’s messenger of misinformation and promoter of false deities.

If she needed more proof of the danger of the mainstream media’s biased influence, she needed only point to those whom the *Daily Planet* laughably passed off as legitimate reporters. Now, the *Planet*’s most infamous alumna spread alien propaganda not only from coast to coast but also all around the world.

Neither Metropolis nor National City could be trusted to provide honest reporting on the Kryptonians they willingly harbored and praised rather than reviled as the threats to humanity they truly were. And as long as these alien allies continued to control the message so subjectively, the
world would never know of the darkness these demigods harbored within.

It fell, then, to patriots like Luthor to remove from the playing board those who would betray humanity, including the Queen herself. Just as it was in chess, Luthor knew the importance of sometimes sacrificing the queen for tactical intentions. If done correctly, the sacrifice of this Queen could prove to be the move that would finally lead to the capture of the most valuable piece left on the board. Remove the Queen and the Hero of National City would lose her most ardent public protector. Destroy the Queen and the Hero of National City could lose far more, including the voice of her defense when the people of National City saw once more the violence roiling beneath the Kryptonian’s superficial layer of heroism.

Sacrifice of this caliber, Luthor realized, deserved spectacle—and what better spectacle than one that would finally demonstrate to the world CADMUS’s skills and willingness to do whatever it took to protect humanity from those who would betray it to the alien conquerors?

Turning away from Rieger’s cell, Luthor allowed herself a nascent sense of satisfaction. If successful, Rieger would herald the end of CADMUS’s silent defense of humanity in all the ways Metallo had failed. John Corben had been an interesting diversion into genetic engineering that proved durable but disappointingly unable to fulfill his purpose.

Rieger would be the first true demonstration of how boutique alien hybridization could empower humans in the ways necessary to defend Earth from alien invasion. He would be first proof of the true value of the aliens already hiding in wait: as ways to enhance human genetics, both for defense purposes and improvement of the species. Introduction to the public of cross-species transplantation and genetic engineering could lead to a new breed of human that would prove invincible throughout a galaxy ready to be conquered.

His success could signal a greater acceptance of CADMUS methods and finally move the project out from its undeserved secrecy. A project as valuable as CADMUS deserved honest funding rather than the backroom deals Luthor forged in begrudging silence. It deserved praise, or at the very least, gratitude, and Luthor was ready to see to it that CADMUS received everything it deserved.

Equally, she was ready to see to it that CADMUS detractors received everything they deserved as well. The added bonus to all this would be that, through Rieger’s attack, Luthor would return in kind the message his target had taught Lillian so well during their shared time in Metropolis: Secrets and lies will always find their way to the light, no matter one’s wealth or influence.

As she passed once more out toward her office, she stopped a passing attendant. With a controlled smile, she stated, “Please go disconnect the television in Mr. Rieger’s cell. We have no further use for Cat Grant here.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much to every single one of you who continues to follow this totally unexpected journey I’ve been dragging you all on. I seriously never intended this to become what it has, but it’s been the best kind of surprise on so many levels. And I appreciate every single word that each of you has written to me here, more than I can ever express. Thank you for taking the time to share with me your thoughts and incredibly kind words. I love your feedback. You all are incredible.

I went a bit into the weeds with the med-speak with this chapter. We’ve been watching
a lot of *Grey's Anatomy* lately at Casa de RoLo. I think it's wearing off on me. Plus, I kind of like pretending to know what I'm talking about ;-) Hope it didn't go too deep or get too confusing.

I also decided it was time to give Lillian Luthor a bit more meat to her motives. I mean just being evil isn't really a bad motive (sometimes my favorite villains are the ones who don't really have true motives at all--they just want to be evil). However, I wanted to add some layering to Lillian's brand of evil. And what could be better motives than galactic conquest and good old-fashioned revenge?
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Kara and Winn pay visits to Desert Containment and L-Corp in an effort to boost security against CADMUS intrusion while National City deals with the effects of Spencer Graves's alien registry announcement. Lucy shares some Lane insight with Kara about Cat and gets some unexpected news from her father.

Chapter Notes

Okay, so if you're not on board for Cat/Kara sexy time, then go ahead and skip the end of this chapter, starting right after Cat's phone conversation in her home office. You'll know when it starts. TBH, I wasn't planning this ending, but it kind of just...happened. I've honestly never had a story take the reins away from me as often as this one has. It's both fun and frightening.

As the floor came up hard against him once again, he tried to remember what he was supposed to do to lessen the impact, to make it so he could recover more quickly, get up faster, and keep going. Instead, all he could think was how the pads in this training room were less like a buffer against the hard concrete beneath them and more like a cruel joke to any agents not fast enough to avoid being slammed into them repeatedly.

His grunt of pain quickly turned into an exhausted groan as he came to a rest and collapsed into a pile of aches and unhappiness. Even with his eyes shut tightly, he could feel her hovering presence and knew without needing to look the disapproving smirk she wore. “Is this how you plan on defending yourself out in the field? Just lying down and moaning?”

“No,” he grumbled. “I plan on staying behind my keyboard and letting the real agents get their asses handed to them.”

He heard her sigh, felt the toe of her boot dig lightly into his ribs, nudging him to roll over onto his back. “First off, you are a real agent. Second, no agent I’m responsible for training ever gets their ass handed to them. You are not going to be an exception to that rule.”

With a deep breath, Winn cracked open his eyes, looking up to see Alex holding out her hand to him, her expression only slightly giving away her amusement. “I think you enjoy bouncing me off these mats way too much.” He reached up, inhaling sharply at the feel of Alex yanking him to his feet. “Ow,” he muttered, rubbing at his shoulder. “Even Kara is gentler.”

Sniffing in amusement, Alex shot back, “Kara has to be gentler or she’d rip off your arm.” She walked over to the edge of the training area, grabbing the bottles of water she’d brought with her. Tossing one to Winn, she quickly snapped hers open and downed half the bottle.

“You’re getting better,” she offered as she watched him drink. She could see his disbelieving smirk
even before she finished. “I mean, you’ve got a hell of a long way to go still, but at least you’re no longer curling into a ball and yelling ‘Uncle.’”

“One time, Danvers! I did that one time!”

“Like I said, you’re getting better.” She moved toward the training room’s exit so Winn couldn’t see her caring grin and called out, “I think we’re finished for today.”

“Great.” Alex side-eyed the IT agent as he jogged to catch up with her. “I still don’t understand why I need to go through hand-to-hand training. I’m a programmer, not a fighter.”

“No, you’re both now. And when you’re out in the field, all bets are off. Even our most carefully planned missions can go south in a second.” She stopped walking, laying a hand on Winn’s forearm to stop him as well. “You know I will always have your back—and so will Kara. But sometimes things will happen and we might not be able to protect you right away. I need to know you can protect yourself.”

Feeling a flush creep up through his cheeks, Winn deferred with a quick quip. “You almost sound like you care.”

He flinched instantly at the feel of Alex’s fist connecting with his bicep. “Kara cares. I just hate all the paperwork associated with agent injuries.”

“Right.” He couldn’t refuse the goofy grin that spread across his features but decided to leave well enough alone.

The brunette shifted topic as they headed back toward HQ Ops. “So how long do you think Desert Containment will take today?”

“Probably not too long. I did a complete system recalibration not long after I first started, remember? I just need to get into the system and make sure all the doors and windows are still locked, so to speak. The system readings from Lord Tech’s recent CADMUS breach helped me immensely in outlining what I should focus on with our security protocols. By the way, how the hell did you convince Maxwell Lord to turn that information over to the DEO?”

Alex shrugged but the shine in her eyes conveyed her true admiration. “Cat convinced him.”

Shaking his head, Winn chuckled, “Ms. Grant is the unstoppable force and the immovable object.”

“Irrefutable truth,” she agreed with an equally affable grin. She glanced kindly toward Winn. “So, how are you doing with Cat being around the DEO the way she is now?”

“You mean how am I doing with Cat being with Kara the way she is now, don’t you?” The joy in his expression diminished only slightly, recognizing the understanding Alex conveyed in her watchful gaze. “It honestly wasn’t really a surprise at all. I mean, were you surprised?”

A knowing twitch of her lips her only response, Alex switched back to the previous topic. “I’m asking about Desert Containment because I’m going to need you to do double time today. After you finish there, I’m sending you to L-Corp. According to Maggie, there’s a possibility CADMUS has breached their security systems as well. Lena Luthor reported a theft outside of L-Corp that she’s certain her mother spearheaded and knew about because of L-Corp’s role in the development of what was stolen. We need to make sure it’s not because her mother has found a way back into the company’s servers.”

“And I thought I had parental issues,” the tech muttered.
Alex huffed softly, nudging into Winn with her shoulder. Her attention, however, strayed toward the figure crunching his way through a bag of chips as he ambled across the foyer and disappeared around the opposite corner. “Hey, what do you think of Mon-El?”

Winn shrugged, his lips quirking into a dismissive smirk. “He’s okay, I guess. He is definitely a party boy—doesn’t really seem all that interested in much beyond having a good time.”

“Has he ever said anything to you about Kara?” At the shrug that this time came across more like a nervous twitch, Alex shifted closer. Her voice adopted a threatening cadence even as she raised her index finger in front of his steadily widening eyes. “Winn?”

“He-he asked James and me once if Kara had ‘chosen a mate’ here on Earth, which made for really awkward conversation all the way around.” He frowned at his next thought and continued, “He’s also kind of become obsessed with Ms. Grant ever since the day she went all ‘big words and bigger attitude’ on him. I even caught him listening to the computer read to him all her articles on Supergirl. Oh, and he got, like, irrationally offended when he learned she’s called the Queen of All Media.”

“Really?”

Winn squinted slightly at the memory. “Yeah, it was intense. He started ranting about how she had no respect for the true lineage of royal power. Guess it touched some nerve from his palace guard days.”

Alex rubbed absently at her neck, dark eyes narrowing as she considered Winn’s words. “Maybe. Have you had any more luck in accessing the rest of his pod’s data beyond navigational logs?”

With a sheepish shrug, he shuffled slightly out of range of Alex’s reach. “I, uh, haven’t had the chance to go back to that.”

The brunette smirked at his weak response and whispered, “Well, now that it seems The Guardian and the Geek has gone on hiatus, your chance has arrived.”

“What do you come up with rude comments to save for the perfect moment, or do they just come that naturally and quickly for you?”

Alex shrugged with airy nonchalance. “I have finely trained reflexes all around.” As they neared Ops, they both noticed Kara sitting at one of the stations. She held an open bottle of water in one hand as she stared blankly into the middle distance. Even with as close as they were, the two agents could tell the hero had yet to notice their approach.

Alex snickered at the sight. “Looks like Supergirl’s already gone a few rounds with her arch nemesis this morning.”

Stepping closer, Winn reached out for Kara’s arm, jokingly asking, “Has Snapper finally broken the Girl of Steel?”

At the unexpected and all-too-real feel of Winn’s hand on her bicep, Kara shoved back from the table, nearly knocking it and herself over. Water dripped from her nose and chin from the water bottle she’d crushed in her grip.

Winn stared in surprise and confusion, wiping water from his own face where he’d caught some of the spray. “Kara, I’m so sorry! I thought you heard us!”

The surprise that Alex shared with Winn slowly morphed into understanding. Kara was avoiding
all of Winn’s attempts to help her dry off—to try to touch her in any way.

Reaching out, the brunette steadied his hand. “It’s all right, Winn,” although she was making an effort to catch and hold Kara’s gaze. “We’ve got this.” She gestured toward her sister. “Come on, Supergirl. Let’s get you dried off.”

The arch of her eyebrow and poignant avoidance of actually making contact with Kara caused the blonde to blush furiously. With a mumbled apology to Winn, she skulked past Alex and down the hall. Alex shot Winn a slight smile before falling into step behind the swift swish of Kara’s cape.

Once the doors to the special room where Kara could train slid shut behind them and Alex engaged the privacy lock, the agent watched her sister slump down on the edge of the dais and drop her head into her hands. Every line of Kara’s body was tense and she seemed to shudder with every breath.

Alex knelt in front of her, reaching up and gently grasping one of her hands. She heard Kara’s sharp inhalation at the touch, but the blonde quickly returned Alex’s grip. She did, however, continue to refuse to make eye contact. “This is so embarrassing.”

“There’s nothing to be embarrassed about—other than dousing yourself in water and nearly dumping yourself out of a chair and onto your ass.” When Kara finally glanced up at her sister, Alex smiled cheekily. “Who knew Winn could have such an effect on you?”

Kara groaned at the horrible joke, but Alex was relieved to see her sister smile in return. Still holding Kara’s hand, she eased onto the dais next to the blonde. “I guess I don’t need to ask who you were thinking about just now.”

“So totally embarrassing,” she huffed once more, letting her head fall forward so she could hide behind her hair.

Alex leaned into her sister’s strong shoulder. “Looks like the Danvers sisters are quite the pair yet again.”

Kara looked over in confusion, surprised to see Alex blushing and smiling shyly. “Wait. You—you’ve been—you have thoughts like this at work?”

“Well, yeah,” she shrugged. “I just don’t have a Super tell to rat me out.” She bumped into Kara playfully. “It’s normal, Kara. I’d be a little worried if you weren’t thinking about Cat all the time right now.”

Something sobered in Kara’s expression as she shook her head. “I shouldn’t be allowing myself to get distracted like this.”

“Unh-unh,” Alex immediately disagreed. “With everything going on right now? This is the perfect time to enjoy some happy distractions. Kara, I have no doubt in your focus or your devotion to stopping CADMUS and bringing home my dad. But you’re also entitled to enjoy every last bit of what’s going on with you and Cat.”

Chuckling at Kara’s sniff of protest as she wiped water off the hero’s nose with her cape, she probed, “So, you’re feeling okay—with your powers and your control?”

The embarrassment that worked its way up Kara’s neck and cheeks nearly matched her cape. “I—I guess. My powers are still—a challenge sometimes.” She could feel Alex’s stare boring into her. “I might have almost lasered holes in my ceiling a couple of times yesterday.”
“Woah. Seriously?” At the weak nod Kara offered in response, Alex whistled softly. “Did that scare Cat?”

Kara snorted. “Are you kidding? I didn’t think anyone could look that smug!”

The sisters both dissolved into laughter at the comment. In betweenbreaths, Alex queried, “Is there anything that can faze her?”

“Getting stuck next to the Fox News table at the White House correspondents’ dinner.” Kara shuddered at the memory. “It happened once by mistake. I swear I heard one of her molars start to crack all the way back here in National City.”

Alex wiped at her eyes while affecting her own shudder at the thought. “I’m pretty sure I’d react the same way under that kind of duress,” she joked.

At the feel of Kara leaning into her, Alex wrapped an arm around her sister’s shoulders and hugged her close. Planting a kiss against her temple, she smiled, “You two really are great together, you know.”

“Same with you and Maggie,” the hero quickly rejoined, giggling at the goofy grin the comment drew to her sister’s lips.

“Speaking of Maggie.” Kara shifted slightly at the serious edge that suddenly sharpened Alex’s words. “She and I had a conversation this morning, and she’s asked me to do something for her today—involving you.”

“Me?” She laughed nervously and Alex noted the way her brow crinkled in worry.

The agent released her hold on Kara’s shoulders, instead taking both her sister’s hands in her own. “How much news have you seen or read since Spencer Graves’s press conference yesterday?”

The shy shrug she received in reply made Alex snicker slightly. “Right. So no news for the randy reporter then,” she teased, delighting at the way Kara narrowed her eyes in response. In truth, Alex was relieved Kara was still in the dark about the stirrings throughout the alien community. “Maggie learned through several of her contacts yesterday that a large portion of National City’s alien residents are going to rally today outside city hall, to protest Graves’s announcement yesterday.”

Concern instantly tightened Kara’s features. “What? When?”

“It doesn’t matter when.” Alex squeezed her sister’s hands firmly to keep her attention. “Kara, you cannot go anywhere near this or any other protest or possible counter-protests.”

“But, Alex, I could help! What if something happens and things get out of hand? I could—”

“NCPD is going to be onsite, Kara. Maggie has already put together several teams to police the rally at city hall, and the department has called in officers for extra duty to increase police presence throughout the city.”

“Then I could help Maggie. I could help make sure nothing happens to her or her teams.”

Smiling at her sister’s protectiveness of the detective, Alex replied, “Maggie’s been doing this gig for a while now, Kara. She and the other officers know how to keep each other safe. Besides,” she pressed on, seeing the argument already forming in Kara’s mind, “Maggie is the one who asked that Supergirl stay away.”
The brunette couldn’t help flinching at the sight of Kara’s expression crumpling with hurt. “She doesn’t want me to help?”

Brushing back a lock of hair from Kara’s forehead, Alex soothed, “She doesn’t want you in a position that Lillian Luthor can use against you, Kara. If Supergirl shows up at today’s rally, no matter what you do, CADMUS could figure out a way to spin it against you. Dr. Luthor would love nothing more than to turn National City against you again. It would be just the cover she would need to come after you without the fear that anyone would notice—”

“Or care,” Kara finished softly.

Pressing her palms against her sister’s cheeks, Alex coaxed blue eyes up to focus on her. “So we keep you away and we keep you and your status as the Hero of National City safe. Maggie’s already worked with her COs and NCPD’s spokesperson to put out a press release that the department has asked Supergirl to remain on the sidelines today so they can show their willingness to stand by you in protecting all of National City’s population, regardless of origin.” She smiled at the way Kara’s lips parted in surprise. “Like I said, she knows how to keep her own safe, Kara.”

“Have I told you lately how much I love Maggie?”

“I’ll be sure to pass along your adoration the next time I talk with her,” Alex laughed, relieved to see Kara relax finally. She released her hold on Kara’s face and continued, “In the meantime, we’ve got an assignment for you and Winn.”

She grinned at the way her sister visibly perked at the mention of working with her friend. “J’onn and Lucy are concerned that, in light of the Lord Tech security breach and now a possible L-Corp breach, Desert Containment might become a future CADMUS target. They’d like Winn to come check the systems to make sure everything is as secure as possible.”

Kara’s brow crinkled in confusion. “What will I be doing? I don’t really have any mad programming skills.”

The mischievous glint in Alex’s gaze instantly piqued Kara’s interest. “Well, I thought you might enjoy getting to see Lucy and all the other agents.”

“And?”

“And I think this would be an excellent opportunity to induct Winn into the Super Squad Flight Club.”

The smile that parted Kara’s lips was breathtaking in its exuberance. “Oh, I think you’re absolutely right.” She slipped from where she sat, bouncing on the balls of her feet at the thought of her sister’s proposition. “When do we leave?”

“Hold on, Girl of Zeal.” She warmed at the annoyed huff her pun earned. “You might not like the next part of our mission for you today. When Winn is finished out at Desert Containment, we need you to take him to L-Corp.”

She saw the hesitation on Kara’s face. “Maggie’s already been in touch with Lena. She’s more than willing to let the DEO come in and confirm that her mother hasn’t regained access to L-Corp’s servers. And who better to help Lena than Winn, right? All you need to do is drop him off and then leave. You shouldn’t spend too much time around Lena as Supergirl anyway. Okay?”

Her expression still far more subdued than previously, Kara finally nodded in agreement.
Alex quickly rose and, wrapping her arm around Kara’s waist, started guiding her sister back out toward HQ Ops. “Good, then let’s get Operation: Gone with the Winn started.”

As the sisters exited the training room together, Kara groaned, “You know how terrible that was, right? Like, I’m an alien to this culture and I’m even telling you how awful that pun was.”

Laughing together the rest of the way back out to the Ops stations, they found the tech agent packing a bag with the equipment he would need for his task at Desert Containment. Alex noted from the slightly damp hair at his temples and his fresh change of clothes that he must have hurried through a shower while she and Kara talked.

“Hey,” he smiled, somewhat sheepishly, “I’m sorry again for startling you, Kara. I kind of didn’t realize that was something I could ever do.”

With a wave of her hand, Kara offered him a slightly embarrassed grin while continuing past him. “You’re fine, Winn. I just got a little carried away with my thoughts, that’s all.”

“If you two are finished chit-chatting,” Alex interrupted, “maybe you’d like to get ready for your assignment?” She shot a pointed look toward Winn.

“All set,” he grinned while slinging his equipment bag across his torso. “Who’s my ride?”

Winn almost missed the look that passed between the sisters, but he most certainly did not miss the devilish curl of Alex’s lips or the rakish cock of her brow as she raised her hand and playfully waved to him. Brain suddenly unable to process all the arguments against what was about to happen, all he had time to do was gasp in protest as he felt two arms slip swiftly around him and hoist him off his feet and out the bay doors.

The flip-flop tumbling feeling that rose within his stomach tamped down any scream he might have thought to voice, which he later would realize was a good thing. However, it didn’t stop him from desperately latching onto the arms around his midsection, fingers clinging with such a tight death grip, his skin blanched bloodless beneath the pressure.

“You’re safe, Winn.” He could hear the amusement in Kara’s voice, breathed directly into his ear as she leaned closer. “You know I’m never going to let you fall.”

Her words reverberated through him, soothing the spikes of panic and allowing him finally to settle into the hero’s strong hold. Certain that he was once more calm, Kara began to divert from the straight path she’d maintained to let him adjust more smoothly into the rhythms of flight.

Careful not to cut her turns quite as sharply as usual, she maneuvered them through National City’s skyline, weaving between buildings and laughing as Winn excitedly identified where they were flying. Soon enough, they’d left behind the concrete and glass jungle for rolling mountains and hills and open sky as far as Winn could see. He felt Kara lean close to his ear once more. “Want to go faster?”

Without really giving the question thought, he nodded, his grip only briefly tightening against her forearms before relaxing once more. And then they were off, wind rushing past and sunlight rolling along the flutter of Kara’s cape as she rose and dropped and pivoted and dipped—Winn squeaked only slightly when she threw in a single roll—and glided on the strong currents that filled the air around them.

When they finally landed outside the main bunker of Desert Containment, Kara released Winn when she was certain he had his footing, surprised when he instantly spun around to face her. Eyes
bright with exhilaration, he grabbed Kara’s biceps. “Kara, that was amazing!”

He let go, spinning around to look back up into the sky from where they had just come, and laughing. “Is that what it’s like all the time?” He looked over his shoulder at her again, joy uncontained across his features. “Like, that free? And fast, and wide open?”

Finding his delight contagious, Kara laughed and took one of his hands in her own. “Pretty much,” she conceded. Her expression shifted with the hint of nervousness. “So you aren’t mad at me? For kind of just—sweeping you off your feet like that?”

Winn chuckled at the wording while adamantly shaking his head. “I trust you, Kara.” He squeezed her hand, smiling at the flush of color that rose in her cheeks. “Besides, your sister has been threatening some kind of big hazing for a while now. I just never thought you’d be it.”

The hero rolled her eyes in a way that struck Winn as incredibly Cat Grant. He quirked his mouth to the side to hide his knowing grin. “You know she picks on you so much because she likes you, right?”

“She must really like me then,” he huffed, but a pleased light shone in his eyes. Straightening out his shirt and hair a little, he and Kara proceeded into the main bunker.

It had been far too long since the hero had come to the desert outpost, but nothing pressed this truth home more for her than the delighted greetings she received from every agent the moment they saw her. She called each one she knew by name, met the new staff and quickly set their nervousness at ease with a warm smile, and spent as much time as she could reacquainting herself with the people and the location (bats be damned).

As they approached the main operations deck, Kara’s face lit up at the sight of Vasquez rising from her post and taking an at-ease stance. “Welcome back, ma’am,” she intoned in a way both familiar and always slightly unnerving.

“Sabes que no tienes que llamarme así, Susanita,” she teased, smiling at the mirthful smirk she earned from the agent.

“Whatever you say, ma’am,” she replied, this time allowing a hint of playfulness to trace along her lips.

“Who let these intruders into my outpost?” Kara and Winn spun in unison toward the imposing voice, faces mirroring their delight at the conversely diminutive but no less fierce agent heading their way. “Because I sure as hell don’t recognize them as Desert Containment staff, do you, Vasquez?”

Before Vasquez could even start to play along, Kara shot forward and scooped Lucy Lane into a massive ground-clearing hug.

Several agents turned in surprise at the sound of the CO’s burst of laughter as the Girl of Steel spun them both in the air. “All right, all right! Put us down, Supergirl,” the major finally eked out in between laughs, even as she hugged back fiercely.

Landing once again, Kara relinquished her hold with one of those patented sunny smiles Lucy was convinced only the hero could ever pull off with sincerity. “It’s great to see you back here, Kara.” She glanced around the blushing hero. “You, too, Agent Schott.”

She warmed instantly at the sight of Winn’s goofy grin. Whether at CatCo or the DEO, Lucy had always liked the affable albeit slightly insecure techie. She couldn’t help but notice, though, how
much more self-assured he had become since joining the DEO. Being an agent agreed with him in the most flattering of ways. “Tell me, is Agent Danvers still giving you shit for being the newbie?”

Scratching the back of his neck, he shot a playful side-eye toward the hero. “How do you think I ended up flying the friendly skies on Kryptonian Air?”

Lucy snickered at Kara’s sheepish pout before nodding once toward the wall of monitors and workstations behind her. “So are you ready to make sure your handiwork is up to resisting CADMUS intrusion? Because I have no desire to have to face off with any of the aliens sitting in containment due to Lillian Luthor scratching one of her sadistic itches.”

Instantly switching into work mode, Winn removed his bag and headed toward the station next to Vasquez. “By the time I’m finished, CADMUS’s chances of breaking into this system will be lower than a potsticker’s chance of surviving game night at Kara’s.”

The major shook her head at the sight of Kara’s pout deepening while she tugged the hero over to the seats adjacent to Winn’s position.

“There is nothing wrong with being an enthusiastic eater,” Kara grumbled, much to the amusement of the trio of agents within earshot. As much as she missed her friends out at the desert outpost, she hated the location’s isolation from food.

Hopefully, Winn would be finished well before her second breakfast wore off or she’d have to resort to eating the MREs and energy bars usually reserved for away missions. Even the prospect caused her to shudder slightly.

As if reading the hero’s thoughts, Lucy teased, “Don’t worry, Supergirl. I picked up some donuts on my way in this morning, so you’ll have enough energy to get back to the city. They’re not Noonan’s level, but they’ll do.”

A look of total adoration overcame Kara’s features. “I could kiss you right now.”

Lucy gasped, lowering her voice so only the other two nearby agents and Kara could hear. “Does Cat know your affections are so easily swayed?” Her whole expression brightened at the way Kara stammered adorably in response to her question.

“And with that fortuitous segue,” the major continued in a voice so full of conspiratorial glee Kara instantly forgot about food, “hearsay is fine as a last resort, but now that you’re here, I need as many first-person details as possible about what it’s like to be with Cat Fucking Grant.”

Eyes widening at the petite brunette’s directness, Kara caught herself before she began to fidget with the edge of her cape. She knew Lucy would waste no time in sussing out the information she wanted. One of the things she loved about Lucy was her lack of pretense. However, the awareness she felt at who else would be hearing her response froze her with indecision.

Catching the nervous glance Kara shot toward where Winn worked, Lucy nudged the hero’s shoulder and stated, “You do realize that Winn is my most prized HQ informant, right?” She chuckled at the look of surprise to pass across Kara’s face. “He’s the first person I reached out to after watching you and Cat at the debriefing.”

Sensing the hero’s gaze on him, Winn turned and defensively squeaked, “What? A superior officer asked me a direct question and I answered. Chain of command, Supergirl—some of us have to obey it.”

Kara sniffed dismissively, although her posture noticeably relaxed. “You’re just still sore that Cat
caught you so off-guard after she and President Marsdin briefed us.”

The tech agent shrugged, but the gleam in his eyes revealed the truth behind Kara’s accusation. “No, I just think a little bit of a heads-up from my friend would have been nice instead of letting Ms. Grant ambush me.”

The hero’s laughter rang out through the cavernous work area, catching the attention and subdued smiles of several agents. “She so did not ambush you!”

“No,” he agreed, affecting a demonstrative shiver. “She did worse: She stared.”

The CEO had, in fact, stood at Winn’s workstation in scrutinizing silence, hands perched on perfectly angled hips, lips quirked and eyes narrowed in ways that Winn suspected Cat would trademark if it were at all possible. Needless to say, that particular power pose worked on him at the DEO even more effectively than it had ever worked at CatCo.

A few seconds into her silence had him stammering and nearly falling out of his seat in a desperate effort to make her not notice the fact that before he had realized she was present, he had called Kara by her real name while she was dressed as Supergirl.

It wasn’t until Kara finally placed a calming hand on his shoulder that he stopped long enough to breathe. “Winn, you do realize Cat is standing in the DEO. I think my cover is blown.”

The subsequent eye roll Kara’s sentiment earned from the CEO had calmed him with its familiarity—more, almost, than the realization that whatever had brought Cat Grant to the DEO (with President Marsdin, of all people), he knew two truths already: It had everything to do with Kara, and Cat wouldn’t rest until she saw it to completion.

He still at times was surprised at how unsurprising he found Cat’s dedication to helping them protect Kara from CADMUS. He had worked for the CEO long enough to understand and respect her fierceness—but this level of personal devotion? It was merely the most recent piece of a long trail of evidence he had been mentally cataloging in his “Before Kara” and “After Kara” observations of his former boss.

“The point is,” he continued, “it’s okay to talk about you and Cat. I want to know my friend is happy—and it’s so obvious you two make each other incredibly happy.”

His eyes crinkled at the corners slightly in response to Kara reaching out and squeezing his hand. “It just seems right,” he continued. “You and Cat—you work. You’ve both always somehow made each other better versions of yourselves.”

Lucy nodded while adding, “And, according to Lois, apparently Supergirl was all the inspiration Cat had been missing for writing again.”

Kara tilted her head at Lucy’s phrasing. Memory of Cat’s words that day in her office, when Kara had declared her desire to be a reporter, instantly sprang to mind.

“You inspire me, Kara. I can see the hero within you.”

“What do you mean, Luce?”

The major leaned back in her chair, turning her full attention toward Kara. “You know Cat didn’t write anymore, right? I mean you had to have noticed while you were her assistant that she never carried a byline in any of her publications.”
Kara frowned at the statement. “She was the managing editor of several of CatCo’s periodicals including the flagship magazine. She wouldn’t have had any time to write on top of that.”

“But that didn’t stop her from writing the first article on Supergirl—every article on Supergirl, in fact, while she was CEO. That first one though? The ‘Millennial Falcon’ article?” She snickered at the perturbed huff she got from Kara at mention of Cat’s debut article for the new hero.

“According to my sister, that was her first significant byline since before she started her talk show.

“Lois was surprised as hell when she realized Cat had been the one who wrote that article about you.” The major shrugged slightly. “She made some joke about sending Cat a can of WD-40, since she had to feel rusty at writing again.”

She sniffed in amusement at the massive eye roll her comment earned from Kara. “She was even more surprised when that article ended up finally losing her the Siegel Prize for Women in Media.”

The major reconsidered saying anything more about Lois’s response to Cat’s win that year. Lucy knew it had included a massive bouquet of tiger lilies delivered to Cat’s hotel room in Metropolis and Lois sharing a bottle of Cat’s favorite scotch with her later that evening at the hotel.

Lucy had never understood her sister’s relationship with Cat—then again, she didn’t really understand Lois’s relationship with her either—but she knew it was unique and private between the two of them. If Kara were to know about it, she knew it should be Cat who explained it.

“I had no idea,” Kara finally sighed. “Although it does explain how over-the-top tense Cat was about writing that first article.” She laughed at the memory of Cat trying to type while wearing two sets of glasses. “It sure didn’t show in the writing though. Everything about the article was brilliant. A little bit nasty,” she added, her nose wrinkling slightly with the word, “but brilliant.”

“It might have had harsh overtones,” Lucy agreed, “but even Lois said it ‘reeked of subversive hero worship.’ And this is from someone who would know all about kissing Kryptonian ass in articles.”

“Lucy!”

The major released a loud peel of laughter that earned laughs from the other two agents in the group. Kara blushed dramatically while shaking her head. “Hey,” Lucy finally continued, “that’s no implication against Cat, you know? We all know Cat Grant doesn’t kiss anyone’s ass. Now, other things she might kiss—”

Kara’s hand moved in a blur to cover Lucy’s mouth, the rest of her lascivious comment muffled by the hero’s palm.

Lucy swatted playfully at Kara’s hand to move it, her whole face alight with roguish delight. “Oh, you so owe me details now, Girl of Steel.”

After that, their conversation fell into an easy pattern while Winn worked on checking and enhancing the outpost’s security protocols. Kara answered most of Lucy’s questions, demurring on the ones her Kryptonian sense of decorum insisted were too personal—not to mention her protectiveness of Cat’s privacy. Lucy, of course, teased her endlessly but with a kindness that made Kara miss her regular interactions with the diminutive brunette all the more.

As she settled back in her chair and finished her fifth donut from the box Lucy had retrieved out of sympathy for the massive growl of hunger the Kryptonian’s stomach released, she sighed. “I’m really sorry I haven’t made more effort to come out here to see you, Luce.” She shot a glance toward the agent beside Winn. “You, too, Susanita,” she teased.
Vasquez simply shook her head in silent amusement. Lucy, however, nudged the hero’s arm with her knuckles. “It really is fine, Kara. You’ve had a pretty full plate these past few months, with dealing with CADMUS and finding your footing in a new job—which you’re kicking ass at, by the way. I re-upped my CatCo subscription just so I could read your articles.” She rolled her eyes at the way Kara crinkled her nose at the sentiment. Her gaze then softened with understanding. “And I’m sure it was even harder to settle into your new rhythm without Cat there for you.”

Kara nodded, swallowed quickly against the unexpected knot of emotion that rose in her throat. She hated how easily the painful memory of Cat’s absence from her life could still overwhelm her. She hated more the darker emotions that roiled below the surface of that pain—the fear she tried her hardest not to give power to, but that still lived within her, thunderous and strong.

She’d already lost Jeremiah to CADMUS and had nearly lost her sister and J’onn. Hell, she’d almost lost herself—but none of what Lillian Luthor had done to her while in her custody could compare with the uncontrollable terror she felt at the thought of what Luthor could do to Cat.

Sensing the dark path down which her statement had unintentionally pulled her friend, Lucy reached out and rubbed Kara’s bicep to draw her attention. “Hey, none of those crinkle-inducing thoughts, okay?” She poked playfully at the line that had deepened between Kara’s eyes in a way that instantly reminded the blonde of Alex’s teasing. “I mean, I know working for James after you drop-kicked his heart must be difficult and everything, but it can’t be that bad.”

The major relaxed at the way her tease was enough to draw Kara back to lighter thoughts, especially ones that could inspire such a lovely blush to her golden complexion. “You owe me details on that, by the way,” she continued, much to Kara’s chagrin. “Ugly, brutal details that, even if they aren’t true, will be enough to keep me warm out here all alone in the desert.” She flashed a brilliant stripe of white teeth toward the hero before turning to snag her phone from the workstation where it had just pinged with an incoming message.

Lucy’s soft gasp from beside her instantly drew Kara’s attention. “What’s wrong?”

“My dad just texted me: Colonel Harper’s dead.” She finished reading the message and turned toward suddenly wide blue eyes. “He apparently had some kind of seizure last night. By the time they got him to a hospital, he was unresponsive. They couldn’t save him.” She swiped a hand through her hair, blowing air pensively between her lips.

Before she could respond, Kara heard the familiar signal of an incoming call in her earpiece. A quick tap and Alex’s voice instantly filtered through. “Hey, we just picked up news that Colonel Harper—”

“Is dead,” the hero quickly interjected. “I know. Lucy just found out from her dad. She said it was a seizure?”

Alex instantly picked up on the doubt in Kara’s voice—the same doubt ringing loudly through her own thoughts. “J’onn is reaching out to President Marsdin, to see if there will be a full autopsy. According to the medical files I just pulled up on Harper, he had no previous history of seizures. He barely even caught colds throughout his service.”

“Y-you don’t think this might have been something caused by what—you know—”

She heard the soft, disgruntled sigh through the line. Neither sister wanted to believe that the Martian could have caused something that led to this death. However, they both knew that J’onn had experienced trouble controlling his abilities the first time he’d used them fully since becoming Hank Henshaw. Maxwell Lord’s security officer never did regain his memories and still struggled
to retain new ones—a truth both sisters knew J’onn carried heavily in his heart. What if he’d had similar troubles with Colonel Harper that simply took more time to evince themselves? “I don’t know. More reason to call for an autopsy, though, right? We’ll figure it out, Kara.”

“Yeah.” Switching gears, she asked, “How are things there? Any problems?”

“Everything’s fine here,” the agent assuaged. She knew how hard it was for her sister to remain away from the city if there was even the hint of trouble she could help contain. “Maggie called a little while ago to report that the rally has been going on without any problems at all. There are some counter-protesters, but she said even the aliens were surprised by how many of the humans who came down to city hall were there to stand with them.”

She heard the soft gasp from her sister. “It’s a little hypocritical to be anti-alien when you live under the protection of one,” Alex teased. She sobered and softened her tone for her next words. “There are way more of us here in National City who know the truth, Kara, and we’re not going to ever forget it—or let anyone try to deny it. Don’t let people like Spencer Graves convince you otherwise.”

The sound of Kara quickly clearing her throat let Alex know her words had reached her sister in the way she hoped. “I won’t,” the hero promised.

“Good. So, how much longer do you think you’ll be out there? Mom and I were going to try that new Mexican place over in the SoMa. Maybe you can join us after you drop off Winn with Lena?”

The thought of Mexican food instantly made Kara’s stomach growl in a disconcerting way. She heard snickering beside her, followed by a donut waved in front of her. Smirking at the petite brunette staring at her in amusement, she still gladly accepted the confection. “I’d like that. But don’t wait too long for me.”

“No worries. Mom is wrapped up in a test right now that she can’t stop. You’ve got time. Love you, sis.”

“Love you, too, Alex.”

As Kara clicked to disconnect her earpiece, she caught the envious side-eye shot her way by Lucy. Realizing she’d been caught, the major partially teased, “Would it be petty of me to wish I were a Danvers instead of a Lane?”

Kara gave Lucy’s forearm a reassuring squeeze as they settled once more into friendly banter and attempts to distract Winn while he worked.

“Your evil plot to distract me has failed,” he finally declared with a flourish of demonstrative keystrokes and a victorious sigh. “And Desert Containment is now safer than ever before.”

“Thank you, Agent Schott. I will be sure to pass along my commendations to your supervisor.” She winked playfully. “Maybe it’ll buy you a break from her hazing.”

“I doubt that,” Kara laughed. “She’s having way too much fun.” She glanced at the now pouting tech agent. “Ready to fly?”

“Take me away, Supergirl.”

After hugs shared with Lucy and Vasquez and promises to get together at some point soon for a long overdue game night, Kara and Winn headed once more to the launch bay.
Before taking off, however, she stilled his movement with a hand to his forearm. “I’m going to have to just drop you off at L-Corp and leave.” She frowned apologetically. “I can’t spend too much time around Lena as Supergirl.”

He nodded in understanding, lips hitching into a mischievous smirk. “That’s okay. I’m pretty sure I won’t end up part of some diabolical Luthor plan to trap you or anything.”

The look on his face showed he was only partially kidding. Kara huffed in dismissal. “The most diabolical thing Lena might do to you is try to get you to follow her Stranger Things Tumblr.” The hero quickly looped her arms around his midsection, pushing off before he had a chance to ask if she was serious.

Detouring slightly on the way back, she flew them out over the neighboring mountain range for some scenic gliding before circling back around and cutting through downtown toward L-Corp. She opted to land them on Lena’s office balcony, remembering only after the CEO had noticed their presence Lena’s words regarding the use of this doorway.

“Supergirl!” The hero felt some of the tension that had surreptitiously seeped into her posture relax at the relieved way Lena watched her.

As the CEO stepped aside to allow the hero and her companion to enter her office, she caught the slight contrition in Supergirl’s gaze. “I know this door isn’t an entrance—”

“For you, it is,” Lena instantly asserted, hoping this would be the beginning of clearing up all the misunderstandings between them. “And any guests who might accompany you,” she finished with a teasing lilt.

She glanced more closely at the man beside the hero, eyes instantly narrowing in recognition. “You—you were at my fundraiser for the children’s hospital. You helped me with my field generator.” They both smiled cheekily at each other and stated in unison, “The induction coil.”

Winn extended his hand toward the CEO. “Winn Schott. I’m, uh, I work for—I mean, I work with Supergirl.”

“I didn’t realize you were at the party with Supergirl.” She bit her lip pensively, eyes shifting between Winn and the hero. “I actually thought you were there with Kara Danvers that evening.”

Wincing at the sound of his voice cracking slightly, Winn pressed, “I do know Kara. We-we used to work together at CatCo.”

“However,” the hero interrupted, “Kara has always bragged about how capable Winn is with computers. I knew his talents would be invaluable at the department I assist, so I helped recruit him.”

“Hero and head hunter. Is there anything you don’t do, Supergirl?”

Kara offered Lena a reserved smile, careful as always to be aware of her expressions and body language when in the presence of her friend while Supergirl. “Unfortunately, one thing I can’t do at the moment is stay. You’re in excellent hands, however,” she added. “The best, in fact.”

The tech agent fumbled with his bag briefly at the unexpected compliment, his eyes bright with gratitude.

Kara turned once more for the balcony door, making sure to stay far enough in the sunlight to backlight her features against scrutiny. With her hand on the door handle, she paused. “Thank you,
Lena.” She glanced at the CEO. “For what you told Detective Sawyer and what you’re allowing us to do with your servers. It means a lot to me.”

“Of course, Supergirl. I want to do whatever it takes to help you stop my mother—even if that means needing to remind myself that there are people out there worth trusting.” She made a move to step closer. Instead, she crossed her arms in front of her, smiling hesitantly at the hero. “I do trust you.”

Stunned into silence by the raw vulnerability in her friend’s voice in that moment, Kara fought the urge to wrap her in a hug meant to protect her from everything she possibly could. “I trust you, too, Lena.”

Turning quickly away, she called over her shoulder, “Whenever you’re finished here, Agent Schott, let me know and I’ll swing by to pick you up.”

Without waiting for a reply, Kara lifted into the air, snickering to herself at the sound of Winn stammering in his adorably awkward way about hoping for a better movie selection on the return flight. She could almost envision the look the comment must have earned from Lena: eyes slightly narrowed but glimmering with pleasure at the silliness of the statement.

Aiming once more for the DEO, the hero picked a slightly meandering return path, looping and slipping between buildings with playful ease. Though temperature was never a worry for the Kryptonian, she enjoyed the feeling of the bright midday sun against her skin and the comforting, deep vibration she felt within her cells as they recharged.

Not even bothering to land once she was through the bay doors, she instead scanned the nearby areas, redirecting her flight path toward Alex’s lab where she could see both her sister and foster mother. “Hey,” she called out as she floated finally to a halt behind them. She noted with private amusement how mother and daughter turned toward her with nearly identical movements and matching pensive expressions on their faces.

“Hey, you,” Eliza greeted, reaching out and pulling her younger daughter in for a hug. “Did you have fun terrorizing Winn for your sister’s amusement?”

Alex shrugged innocently while watching her sister gape at her. She reached out to press Kara’s mouth shut with her forefinger under the hero’s chin. “Worst. Poker. Face. Ever.” She chuckled at the feel of Kara swatting her hand away gently while rolling her eyes. “You do have great timing, though. We’re just finishing up here. Ready for lunch?”

The responding roar of the hero’s stomach put both Alex and Eliza on warning that Kara was more than ready for something more substantial than the donuts she’d eaten at Desert Containment.

“Okay,” Alex replied, dragging out the word with exaggerated surprise. “Change and we can go.” Then, with a quick grip on her sister’s arm to still her before she zoomed away, she asked, “Do you want to see if Cat wants to join us?”

Touched by Alex’s thoughtfulness, she shook her head. “Cat is in writer lockdown mode right now. She said she was finishing up a ‘killer expose’ today and doesn’t want any interruptions. She even asked that I not text her at all.”

She flashed back to her conversation with Lucy, the smaller blonde’s manic behavior while working on an article now far less confusing. “Maybe we can all get together for dinner sometime this week?”
“I’d like that,” Eliza agreed. “It’s been too long since I saw Maggie or Cat—or spent any serious time with my daughters,” she added, pleased by the instant subdued looks her comment earned from both Danvers girls.

With a quick dash to the locker rooms to cover her uniform, Kara joined Alex and Eliza on their way to the garage. The drive to the restaurant was swift, even for weekend traffic. Soon enough, the trio was sitting at an outside table with a pitcher of sangria and the largest order of nachos offered, conspicuously positioned right in front of Kara.

“Think that’ll be enough to hold you over until the entrees?”

Eliza nudged her older daughter in lighthearted rebuke. “Don’t tease your sister, Alexandra. She needs to refuel after carrying out your latest hazing.”

With a huff of feigned petulance, the brunette scooped a nacho from the stack, eyebrow quirked in defiance toward Kara. “If carrying Winn wore you out, I’m officially rescinding that ‘Maid of Might’ nickname.”

The two continued to provoke each other as only sisters could, Eliza enjoying the role of silent audience to their mutual pestering. Though nowhere near ideal, her current need to be in National City under the protection of the DEO was at least affording her the unexpected opportunity to observe her daughters in a way she’d thought unfeasible now that they were grown and on their own.

Even the small moments she had been able to steal with either or both since her arrival filled her with joy at how resilient their bond continued to grow. It also helped mildly alleviate some of the remorse she still harbored within for how hard she’d always been on Alex regarding her protection of Kara. Eliza could see how that protectiveness was now not only completely ingrained but also shared between the sisters, an extra variant in their DNAs that, human or Kryptonian, connected them in unbreakable ways.

More than that, however, Eliza could barely contain the pride she felt in watching both her girls, stronger and braver than she had ever anticipated they would be. And getting to work beside Alex finally was a revelation Eliza had longed to experience in full ever since they’d worked together on the Medusa virus. In the span of time she’d been at the DEO, she had confirmed once more that her daughter was brilliant in ways Eliza had regrettably overlooked for far too long.

“Okay, Eliza.” The scientist snapped back into focus at the sound of Kara’s beckoning. Impossibly blue eyes sparkled as they studied her. “Your expression is far too serious for sangria and nachos.”

With a slightly melancholy smile, she mused, “Ever since you told me about Jeremiah still being alive, I haven’t been able to stop thinking about how I can’t wait for him to see what amazing women you’ve both become.”

In truth, most of the time, she couldn’t bear to think or feel anything regarding the possibility that her husband was still alive and in the custody of someone like Lillian Luthor. She couldn’t bear the sorrow that compressed her heart or the fear that seeped into her joints or especially the anger that boiled the marrow within her bones. And the thought of once more seeing him? Facing him with the knowledge that he had survived more than a decade under CADMUS control? She had no idea how to process that possibility—but, instead, she focused on this, on the hope that he would soon get to see his daughters once more and know that all he and Eliza had done to help guide them had more than succeeded.

Both sisters felt the instant sting of tears at Eliza’s words. Kara was first to find her voice, low and
sharp along the edges. “You won’t have to wait much longer. I swear it to you both, we’re going to bring him home.”

Distrusting her own voice in the moment, Alex reached out and took one of Eliza’s hands, smiling at how quickly her sister did the same. Eliza relished the feel of each of her daughters’ hands: the calloused grace of Alex’s and the strong, smooth steel of Kara’s. Tightening her grip affectionately, she smiled fully at both her daughters. “All right, less emotion and more sangria.”

“And nachos,” Kara offered while looping a giant string of melted cheese around the stack she pulled from the plate.

Somehow navigating the entire cluster into her mouth, the hero happily crunched away while Alex rolled her eyes and wiped away a stray dot of salsa from her sister’s nose. “Can’t take you anywhere,” she ribbed and Kara let the unspoken affection wash over her with a content smile.

Halfway through their entrees, the click of an incoming call instantly creased Kara’s brow. Flicking her ear piece, she heard Winn stammer, “Uh, yeah, uh, Supergirl?” The hero understood that Lena was nearby. What concerned her more was the nervous cadence of Winn’s voice. “We’ve got a bit of a problem.”

Blue eyes instantly locked onto the curious gaze of her sister. “I’m here with—your CO.” She hesitated to say Alex’s name, in case Winn was close enough to Lena for her to hear her voice. “What’s the situation?”

“CADMUS has definitely been inside L-Corp’s servers after Lena’s security enhancements—which are actually quite impressive, and which makes CADMUS even scarier that they’re able to get through these kinds of defenses.” He sighed. “I’ve found evidence that they were inside the mainframe as recently as last week.”

At the sound of Winn’s sudden silence, Kara prompted, “Does Lena know what they found?”

“I, um. I think it’s something she should explain to my CO.”

Kara’s brow furrowed as she stared at Alex. “What? What is it, Kara?”

The blonde instead responded to Winn. “Do you really think that’s necessary, Winn?”

“Yeah. I do.”

Eliza and Alex exchanged worried expressions at the sight of Kara rubbing her forehead nervously. “Okay. I’ll let her know. She’ll be on her way soon.” Conversation ended, she focused on Alex. “CADMUS breached L-Corp,” she whispered, “and apparently got hold of something Lena wants to speak with you about.”

“Me?”

“Winn said she wants to talk to his CO, and he seems to believe it’s serious enough to agree with her.”

“Kara!” Alex’s voice, barely passing as a whisper at that point, crackled with frustration. “She’s met me! At your apartment! She knows I’m your sister, and she thinks I’m with the FBI!”

“I know!” Kara grimaced, her eyes brimming with apology. “Maybe we can ask J’onn to go instead?”
“You mean the Martian who currently looks like the cybernetic nightmare who nearly killed Lena?”

“He could change his appearance!” She closed her eyes at the sound of panic in her voice, her whole expression altering under the guilt slowly seeping through her. “I didn’t mean to complicate things like this. I didn’t think that my friendship with Lena—I didn’t—I just didn’t think. I’m sorry, Alex.”

At the sight of Kara shrinking into herself, Alex immediately reached out to clutch her sister’s hand tightly. “Hey, it’s all right, Kara.” She shrugged. “I’ll go. It’s okay,” she reiterated at seeing Kara’s brow crease even more. “It’ll be one less lie between you and Lena.”

Alex refrained from stating that it would also give her a better chance to observe Lena Luthor without Kara present, to better gauge if, indeed, this was a Luthor worth trusting. She glanced at her mother and smiled. “I can swing by the DEO to drop you off there or I can take you back to where you’re staying. Either is on the way to L-Corp.”

“Actually,” Eliza replied with a curious grin, “I think I’d like to hitch a ride with your sister.”

“But I didn’t—oh. Oh!” Kara instantly perked at the realization of what Eliza was asking. “Really? You want to—to—?”

Eliza placed a calming hand on Kara’s forearm, utterly enamored of her younger daughter’s uninhibited enthusiasm. “If you’re up to it, I heard this morning on the news that there are several migrating gray whales along the coast right now. Up for a little whale watching?”

“Absolutely! We can go a little ways upcoast, where I’ve seen the whales passing before. It’s farther out to sea, so it’ll be a little less conspicuous that I’m traveling with a passenger.” She thrilled at the feel of Eliza tightening her hold on her arm, her eyes shining with anticipation.

Alex nudged her sister with her boot under the table and stated, “So don’t keep Mom waiting, Supergirl. Get out of here. I’ve got lunch this time.” She shared a knowing glance with her mother as Kara shot up so fast, she barely cleared the table. Kissing her sister on the cheek and watching as Eliza did the same, the two blondes began for the nearest alleyway where Kara could pull a quick change, waving to Alex as they disappeared. The brunette turned her gaze toward the west, catching the flutter of Kara’s cape several minutes later as she accelerated toward the shore.

Sighing at the far less fun afternoon she faced, the agent spent the entire 20 minutes it took her to reach L-Corp plotting the next hazing for Winn in retaliation for dragging her back into Lena Luthor’s orbit so unceremoniously. Though admittedly unhelpful in the end, the mental exercise had served to distract her from the more worrisome thoughts about what it was Lena insisted on telling her face to face.

As she pulled to the curb outside the building, she caught sight of Winn standing nearby. Sliding out of the Denali, she slipped her sunglasses atop her head and sighed. “Why am I here, Schott?”

Instead of flinching as he often did when she referred to him by his last name, he grabbed her arm and began hurrying back inside. “Lena will explain.”

Pulling back sharply, she whispered, “Lena Luthor knows who I am, Winn, so this better be worth it.”

“What?” The agent’s feet tangled together as he turned in mid-stride to face Alex, nearly tumbling him to the ground. “What do you mean she knows who you are? How?”
“She’s friends with Kara, that’s how! She saw me at Kara’s apartment once and recognized me from the day John Corben tried to topple this building we’re about to enter. She thinks I’m with the FBI, but she knows I’m Kara’s sister.”

Pausing at the entrance, Winn bowed his head. “I’m sorry, Alex. I didn’t know. But—I think you’re going to want to talk with her directly about what we’ve discovered.”

“It’s really that bad, huh?”

The tech agent shuffled nervously as he finally pulled open the door. “Some of it is actually amazing. Add in Dr. Frankenluthor and the rest of it’s—not great.”

Breathing deeply in a way that never really worked to calm her, she let Winn lead her up to Lena Luthor’s office. They found the CEO steadfastly typing at her laptop. Without looking at the two entering agents, she offered, “I think I’ve found the coding interjection you were looking for, Winn. It was actually buried in a subroutine—” but her words stuttered to a stop when she looked up, her crimson lips slowly slipping into a confused frown.

“Ms. Luthor.” Alex stepped slightly ahead of Winn, patiently awaiting the CEO’s next statement.

“You’re Kara’s sister.” She rose from her desk, her weekend attire and hastily gathered ponytail making her look more like an undergrad than a billionaire CEO. “Special Agent Alex Danvers with the FBI.”

With a slight tilt of her head, she agreed, “All true, minus the FBI part. I’m actually with the Department of Extranormal Operations. We monitor and defend against extraterrestrial and metahuman terrorist threats.”

Leaning against the edge of her desk in front of Alex, Lena pensively drew her bottom lip between her teeth. The agent could see new information aligning with old in eyes the shade of shallow Caribbean tides. “That sounds unnervingly like something my mother would say her project does.”

“Probably because Project CADMUS grew in the shadow of the DEO. The first general charged with overseeing the department put together CADMUS in the hopes of learning how to defend against the extranormal powers some of the aliens brought in by the DEO possessed. However, soon it became about figuring out how to recreate and weaponize their abilities for military personnel.”

The agent tilted her head to the side, brunette hair fanning away from her face. “The DEO is partially to blame for CADMUS, so it’s now our job to stop what never should have started.”

Lena stared in silence at the woman before her, eyes bright with doubt. Alex observed as the CEO crossed her arms tightly across her chest, gripping her upper arms in a way Alex recognized as an attempt at reassurance. The sight made Lena seem even younger and the doubt she bore even older.

“Supergirl and Kara both trust you.” The words came across as not a question, not quite a convincing conviction. Alex could tell the CEO was struggling to place faith in someone who had already lied once to her—and had made her best friend silently complicit in that lie. “I’m working on my trust issues even as we speak,” she continued as if sensing the agent’s thoughts.

“I understand, Ms. Luthor.”

Unnervingly bright gaze focusing inward for several beats, the CEO finally looked back up at Alex. “Please call me Lena.”
Nodding in acceptance, Alex took a less formal stance, hands instantly perching on her hips. “Winn informed me that you’ve discovered something troubling about what your mother accessed on the L-Corp servers?”

“Yes, although it was something I had my CTO secure from the main server with AES algorithms and real-time monitoring, which we thought would be platinum-level security.”

“Which also means whatever was in there was going to be the Holy Grail to your mother.” Alex took in the regretful slump of shoulders and the small nod. “What were you protecting so vehemently?”

“A virtual work space that I share with a former business partner.” She flushed slightly, her gaze darting briefly away from Alex’s. “We met in college and continued to work together after graduation on an idea that started as a way to combat cancer without damaging healthy tissue. After five years, the idea had grown into a new form of nanotechnology that had virtually unlimited promise—if we could only solve an algorithm issue that would allow us to link the A.I. sentience of the nanobots.”

“Sentience? You’ve created sentient nanotechnology?”

The CEO nodded, a glint of pride in her gaze. “Theoretically, yes. We’ve only run computer simulations so far. We’re light years away from clinical trials, but the programming itself is sound and so close to completion.” She shot a glance toward the tech agent behind Alex. “Maybe we just need a fresh set of eyes to review our work.”

Before Winn could respond, Alex held up a hand in a silencing gesture. “We are happy to avail you of Agent Schott’s assistance at a later time. Right now, though, the more pressing concern is this breach.” She glanced at Winn. “You’ve confirmed this is the same hacker who attacked Lord Tech?”

Nodding adamantly, he explained, “I found signs of the same variation of PowerShell command used on Lord Tech’s servers. The version they used here was heavily modified from that version.” He glanced admiringly toward Lena. “Your servers were way more difficult to hack than Maxwell Lord’s. However, the base elements of the code were the same.”

“And have you confirmed what else they accessed beyond the nanotech information?”

Lena sighed at the question. “Winn confirmed that CADMUS accessed the information I told Detective Sawyer about. They even pulled schematics on the tracking devices, which explains how they were able to reprogram the reader so easily.”

“The secret, though,” Winn added, “is that the warning subroutine the trackers carry isn’t a part of the primary design, so it’s not part of the schematics. It was something Lena had added right before shipment.”

The CEO’s lips hitched slightly upward at Winn’s excitement. “Sometimes it pays to be paranoid.”

Alex’s eyes shifted quickly between Lena and Winn, fighting back the urge to smirk at the tech agent knowingly. “So if CADMUS tries to alter the trackers in any way, the subroutine will alert you?”

“Better than that,” Lena corrected, “Winn thinks he knows a way to use the subroutine to actually backtrace the trackers. Even if CADMUS has figured out how to deactivate the trackers, the subroutine will serve as the re-ignition.”
Eyebrows hitching high on her forehead, Alex turned to face the techie. “You can do this?”

Struggling not to succumb to nervous stammering, he dug his nails into his palms and stated, “Yes. I, uh, I think so. I might need Lena’s help, but I think together we can find a way to do this.”

“You can really track us all the way to CADMUS’s location?” The agent struggled to suppress the surge of elation that shook the edges of her voice.

Winn’s expression softened, understanding the hope this possibility stoked within his friend. “I’m going to do everything I can think of to make it happen, Alex.” He cleared his throat, shifting his gaze to give Alex a moment to collect herself.

Focusing on Lena, he finished, “I have an encrypted VPN back at the DEO that will allow me to run simulations without running the risk of accidentally interfacing with the trackers. I’m going to head back and start working on the subroutine there.”

With a slight smile, Alex studied the CEO, relieved to see her posture had relaxed significantly in the time they’d been talking. “Thank you, Lena, for all your help.” She quirked her lips thoughtfully. “Kara—the secrets she keeps are at my request.”

The agent noted how the comment didn’t cause Lena to withdraw, instead illuminating her gaze with understanding. “I suspect Kara would do whatever she needed to protect those she loves.”

“She does.” Alex hoped her tone conveyed enough to the woman before her. With a step backward, she finished, “Agent Schott will be in touch. Have a good rest of the day, Lena.”

The journey back to Alex’s Denali was silent. However, before Winn could climb into the passenger side seat, a strong grip on his forearm stopped him in his place. “You were right to call me for this. Thank you.”

“Of course, Alex.” Winn offered her a slight grin, which she acknowledged with a nod and a nudge to his bicep.

Back at the DEO, they swiftly made their way up from the garage, discussing next steps in Winn’s work. The agents both slowed to a stop, however, when they noticed Kara and Mon-El together in the hallway leading toward the training rooms. Kara stood back from the Daxamite, her arms crossed tightly in front of her, and both Alex and Winn noted the shocked glare she was giving Mon-El. Winn caught the slight snarl of Alex’s lip as she read her sister’s tense body language.

“I’d give anything for super hearing right now.”

The sound of her comment instantly piqued Kara’s attention, the blonde’s startled gaze and flush of—what? Embarrassment? Anger?—evident as she turned sharply to face Alex and Winn. More tellingly, however, was the quick spark of ire that shone in Mon-El’s glare before he turned wordlessly and stalked away. Without waiting, Alex hurried to Kara, Winn traipsing quickly behind her. “What’s up with him?”

With a shake of her head and a sigh that shook far too much for Alex’s liking, Kara replied, “Nothing. He’s just—it’s nothing.” She waved her hands dismissively before shifting the conversation. “What did Lena tell you?”

Alex glared at her sister for a beat, not wanting to drop the issue but instantly giving in at the hopefulness in Kara’s eyes that barely suppressed the underlying pleading need not to talk about whatever had just occurred. Sighing and noting she would be revisiting this in the near future, she instead launched into an explanation about all they’d learned from Lena.
With barely controlled joy, Kara turned to Winn and wrapped him in the biggest hug the tech agent had every experienced from his friend—his first true Supergirl hug, complete with his feet leaving the ground by her doing for the third time that day. “Thank you so much, Winn, for whatever you can do to help us find CADMUS.”

When they landed once more, she pressed an elated kiss against his temple before doing the same with Alex. “This is so amazing,” she finished while floating up and backward. “I’m going to just—you know, take a patrol to celebrate.”

Before either agent could reply, the hero had spun in mid-air and zoomed toward the foyer. “Well, that was a new take on avoidance,” the techie finally offered.

He flinched at the very audible, very angry sigh beside him. “I’m going to stab him with a fistful of pencils.”

“You know pencils don’t actually contain any lead, right?”

“Fine,” Alex snarked, “find me something that does contain lead and I’ll stab him with that. I’ll make sure it’s nothing fatal. Yet.”

Winn shivered at the low growl of intent in Alex’s final word.

Blowing a puff of air rapidly out, she started to walk once more. “I’m going to go brief J’onnn. Why don’t you take a break from security stuff for a while?” She cast a sideways glance as Winn caught up beside her. “You’ve done a great job today, Winn. I’ll be sure to let J’onnn know.”

“Th-thanks,” the tech agent eked out, pleased beyond belief at Alex’s praise. He watched the other agent long enough for her to turn the corner before he pumped his fist enthusiastically while laughing to himself.

Taking Alex’s suggestion, he filled the Super Soda cup he always kept on his workstation desk (because how could he bring himself to throw away a special edition cup emblazoned with his friend’s likeness on it?) with soda from the break room and settled in for some mind-clearing Minesweeper time. He noted peripherally when Kara returned—noted as well the way she kept to the edges of Ops as though either trying not to bother him or to be noticed by him. Whatever reason, he decided to give her space for the moment.

After nearly a half hour of casual observation, however, he was through with space. He rose from his station and made his way to where Kara had sequestered herself in a corner. At Kara’s haste in flipping over the tablet she’d been glaring at since not long after sitting down, Winn laughed while motioning toward the device. “Okay, hand it over, Kara.”

The hero shifted nervously, crinkling her brow in feigned confusion. “Wh-what are you talking about?”

“So, I was going to let it go that you look like you’ve been on the verge of lasering a hole through that screen since you sat down. But first you freak out about me seeing the screen and now you blatantly attempt to lie to me in that endearingly transparent way of yours?” He grinned at her eye roll while dropping dramatically down into the chair beside her. “Nah, I can’t let this go.” He gestured with his hand for Kara to hand him the tablet. “Come on, it’s show-and-tell time at the DEO.”

When Kara made no move to acquiesce, he pouted out his bottom lip and leaned his head against her shoulder. “Please? Don’t you want to be extra nice to me after traumatizing me so badly
today?”

Kara snorted in protest at Winn’s inveigling while shrugging her shoulder enough to nudge his head away without hurting him. Her gaze, however, softened slightly in amusement. “I will not stand for this slander against Supergirl, Agent Schott. My flying skills are impeccable—not traumatizing.”

She instantly began to laugh as soon as she’d finished speaking, mostly from the feigned indignant glare Winn offered. Relieved to see some of the tension she’d been carrying relax from her posture, he tapped a finger against the back of the tablet. “So, what’s got you all glarey and cranky?”

With a sigh, she flipped over the tablet, holding it so only Winn could see the screen. At first, he snorted while rolling his eyes. “Really, Kara? You don’t see enough of her, so you’re looking at photos of Cat online?”

However, as he continued to scan through the image gallery, he realized Cat was accompanied in each picture. Leaning closer, he furrowed his brow at the realization. “Wait—is-is that Leslie Willis?”

“Yeah.” She let the tablet drop into her lap with a disconsolate frown. “She’s never mentioned that she and Leslie were—whatever this was.”

“A really terrible PhotoShop attempt, if you ask me.”

“What?” She turned to him with confusion and the slightest sliver of hope in her gaze. “What do you mean?”

Gesturing for the tablet once more and pleased that this time she capitulated, he tapped one of the more suggestive images. Even without looking at Kara, he could tell from the sound of the chair arms bending under her grip how much the image bothered her. “The chair surrenders, Supergirl.”

He glanced askance long enough to catch her slightly chagrined smile as she released her grip on the chair.

Shifting the tablet, he pointed to two areas on Cat’s and Leslie’s faces. “Look here and here. See how the shadow positions don’t match up on their faces? If they were really together this close in the same shot like this? The shadow alignments would match. But look: Cat has shadowing along the left side of her face while Leslie’s face is in full light on the left side. Also, the proportions are way off-kilter. Unless Cat’s wearing foot-high platforms that we can’t see, she’s way too tall in comparison with Leslie in this shot.” He shook his head in amused disdain. “I’ve seen worse PhotoShopping, but this one’s pretty ridiculous.”

A slight flush of color tinted Kara’s cheeks as she saw all the visual inaccuracies Winn so easily pointed out to her. “You’re right, that’s—that’s not a real photo.”

“Most of these shots are probably just as fake. And the ones that aren’t? Like this one,” and he tapped a shot of Cat and Leslie together at the CatCo event to launch Leslie as the newest CatCo radio personality, “are just Cat doing what Cat does. You know, that ‘Queen of All Media’ thing.”

The relief that began to cool the fire of Kara’s previous glare bothered Winn almost as much as the glare itself—or, rather, who he suspected had set the glare alight in the first place.

He nudged Kara’s bicep playfully with a knuckle. “So, what’s this all about? Why are you suddenly interested in these rumors? Because you know that’s what they are, right? Every single time Cat is even associated in the media with anyone, the gossip rags go wild.”
To prove his point, he tapped in a new search before turning the tablet back to Kara’s hold.

When the hero glanced at the screen again, Winn feared she might crack the device in half. “What are these? These—that’s not—these are definitely not all real photos.” The color of her blush deepened about three shades as she scrolled briefly through Winn’s image search before finally flipping it over to hide the photos.

“That is the Internet’s response to Cat Grant affiliating herself with Supergirl. Those started popping up almost as soon as she hashtagged you—which probably has a whole new meaning now that you two are together that I should definitely not think too much about.”

He shrugged at her eye roll and teased, “If you think those are bad, you should stay away from any images that come up under ‘SuperCat.’ Those are some—ingenious shippers there. Lascivious, but ingenious.”

Kara nodded absently while scrolling through a few more screens of images before something clicked in her thoughts. Looking up suddenly, she asked, “Wait, how do you know we’re called ‘SuperCat’?”

Winn blanched under the increasingly more inquisitive glare Kara focused on him, and he quickly snatched back the tablet to close out the window. “I was CatCo IT for six years, Kara. You—you learn lots of things when you’re CatCo IT. That’s all.” He took a hard pull on the straw in his soda cup, intentionally averting his eyes from Kara’s.

Kara smiled affectionately at her friend as he cleared the cache on the tablet. Leaning forward, she kissed his temple before rising from her seat. “Thanks, Winn—for everything.”

The agent huffed while playfully swatting Kara away. “Yeah, yeah, get out of here, Danvers. I’ve got real work to take care of, you know.”

With an amused sigh, Kara floated up off the floor, slowly gliding backward toward the bay doors. “Tell Alex I’ll see her tomorrow, will you?”

“Sure thing, Kara.” He offered her a quick wave before watching her flip in mid-hover and swoop swiftly out the bay doors and into the night sky. With a thoughtful glance down at the now cleared tablet, he slipped from his seat and called over to the nearest agent. “Hey, Paulson, when Danvers gets back, let her know Supergirl clocked out for the evening and I’m down in the cargo bay, if she needs me.”

Shrugging while reading the latest round of city-wide activity scans, he replied, “What’s down in the cargo bay?”

“Something Agent Danvers asked me to start working on.” When no other questions came his way, the tech agent hastened his gait toward his destination.

By the time he finally made it to the lower-level bay, Kara had already made her way back to Cat’s. After opening up her hearing to the whole city and not hearing anything that required Supergirl’s intervention, she decided the city was settled enough to do without her for the evening.

With absolute silence, the hero entered the Grant penthouse through the balcony door that led to Cat’s bedroom. Pausing for a moment once inside, Kara listened to the sounds of the penthouse until she pinpointed Cat’s location.

She heard the CEO’s voice, sharp and decisive, coming from her home office. She frowned in surprise at realizing it was Snapper to whom she was speaking. Slowly, she floated down the hall
toward the sound of Cat’s voice.

The smaller blonde stood by her desk, her back to the doorway. She stared down at the tablet in her hand for several more beats before setting it down on the desktop. With a soft huff, she finally sighed, “I hate to admit it, but your edits improve the story nicely. You prove your worth to CatCo for another day.”

Reaching out once more with her enhanced hearing, Kara heard the familiar gruff growl of her current boss. “Fine, since it’s CatCo confession time, even I have to concede this wasn’t nearly as terrible as I was expecting.”

Kara heard Cat’s amused sniff. “I don’t think I can withstand much more of your wooing, Lucas.”

“You couldn’t promise me enough future alimony to convince me to chase that insanity, Grant.” His tone shifted, sounding at once more and less gruff in one unsettling go. “You’re still a ball buster with this stuff, you know. You never should have given up real journalism for all the puff piece crap you peddle now.”

Cat leaned back slightly, her free hand finding its natural perch against the curve of her back. “The puff piece crap is how I’m able to keep paying you to track down the real stuff, Lucas. Besides, I burned my ‘serious journalist’ wardrobe years ago.”

“Cut the bullshit, Cat.” His tone was now anything but assertive, instead surprising Kara with its understanding undertone. “You got knocked off your game. You deserved to take a rest, but you shouldn’t have just stopped all together.”

“I haven’t stopped,” she countered. “By your own account, I just wrote another kickass, ball-busting article.”

No super hearing was necessary to hear the snort of dissent Snapper released suddenly. “Nice bit of hyperbolic hype there, Grant. Too bad the Pulitzer committee doesn’t buy into that self-congratulatory nonsense.”

She laughed as she finished, “Go ahead and send the article to the Tribune for publication and post it to the CatCo home page, app, and social media channels when we discussed. We’ll talk more tomorrow. Good night, Lucas.”

She placed her phone next to the tablet and arched back into a full-body stretch, extending her arms over her head as she did. At the sight before her, Kara moved so swiftly and silently from the doorway to right behind Cat that the smaller blonde had no time to even gasp in surprise before the hero’s hand was wrapping around her wrists, her other hand quickly clearing away the tablet and phone.

Pressing slowly but insistently forward, Kara pinned Cat’s upper body against the length of her desk, one hand holding the smaller blonde’s wrists in place against the surface and the other slipping around her waist. She leaned in, smiling at the feel of Cat instinctively pushing back against her body with a lustful sigh, to feel the press and heat of Kara against her. At the scrape of Kara’s teeth along her earlobe, Cat’s eyes fluttered upward and slightly closed, her breath stuttering in her throat at the sensation.

The hero nuzzled gently against the soft spot just beneath her ear while she shifted her free hand up under the smaller blonde’s shirt, to trace the contours of her side, the delicate lines of her ribs, the soft slope of her breast. She smiled against Cat’s neck when she felt the shiver that shook through the woman beneath her and pressed closer, grinding against the curve of Cat’s ass to release some
of the ache growing between her own thighs.

An involuntary upward shift of her hips against Kara was Cat’s initial response, followed by an immodest moan that sent arcs of sensation through Kara’s skin. Muscles tightened along Cat’s neck as she struggled to compose herself, but Kara could hear the uptick in her breathing and heart rate, could even smell the scent of Cat’s arousal—knew without any words the definitive reactions her attentions were receiving.

Once more she leaned forward, pressing languorous kisses along Cat’s jaw, gently sucking her earlobe, smiling at the shudders her touches were causing through the smaller blonde’s body, before finally, finally sliding her hand downward, flicking open Cat’s pants and slipping inside to brush her fingers against lace growing evermore saturated.

Kara felt Cat’s legs tremble at the teasing touches she now skimmed along her inner thighs, passing across the soaked expanse of fabric with barely enough pressure to register—but just enough to coax a frustrated whimper from between Cat’s now clenched jaw. The smaller blonde pressed her forehead against the cool surface beneath her, desperately trying to compose herself.

Kara took the moment to slide fabric aside and run her finger slowly along the length of Cat’s sex, savoring the sensory overload of sound and sight and scent that the touch released.

“Kara, please.” Cat’s voice, thick with need, set Kara’s skin ablaze as Cat writhed desperately.

Kara instead held her firmly in place, keeping her legs apart with her own boots planted against the insides of Cat’s feet so the smaller blonde could find no leverage and no relief from the hero’s teasing ministrations. Cat’s inner thighs grew slick with need, her frustration coming in sharp breaths and feral moans as Kara ground against her while keeping her touch unmercifully light.

Distracted by the sensations summoned by the soft swell of Cat’s breast palmed perfectly in her hand, the hero missed the beginning of the smaller blonde’s quiet mantra, barely expelled upon shallow gasps—a looping chorus of “please” that never ceased, never specified what precisely Cat needed so desperately.

Leaning in close enough to see the strong, steady pulse of Cat’s heartbeat against her neck, Kara husked into her ear, “What do you need, Cat?”

The smaller blonde shivered at the heat of Kara’s breath against her skin. A thousand different needs came to mind. However, she also knew she needed time for the soreness of the previous day’s sexual marathon to heal. “I need to feel your mouth on my clit, Kara.”

The directness of Cat’s words instantly shot the sharpness of desire straight across Kara’s skin. The groan she released reverberated against Cat’s taut shoulders before she released her hold on Cat’s wrists and quickly flipped her so she was now sitting on her desk.

Something about the sight of Kara standing between her legs, still dressed in her Super suit, made Cat achingly aware of how worked up Kara had already made her without ever really touched her. Reaching up, she tangled her hand in the thick crimson folds of the hero’s cape and tugged until Kara was close enough to kiss.

The press and slide of their mouths and the sharp bite of teeth against her lower lip left Kara struggling to focus, her mind a haze of distant noises and her eyes beginning to tingle with the familiar burn of her heat vision. The feel of Cat’s grip on her cape tightening caused the hero to laugh into their fevered kissing, cool wisps of breath soothing the kiss-bruised swell of Cat’s lips.
Pulling back enough to speak, Kara teased, “I never realized you had a cape kink, Ms. Grant.”

Another sharp tug on her cape drew Kara back enough to see the dark need in Cat’s gaze, her unfocused pupils practically eclipsing the jade brightness of her irises. The soft panting breaths passing between parted lips were all the response the smaller blonde could offer.

Without breaking eye contact, Kara reached up to loosen Cat’s hold on her cape and deliberately lowered herself to her knees. Muscles rippled along Cat’s throat from the rough swallow she forced down, still unable to stifle the moan that rose to her lips at the sight of the Last Daughter of Krypton kneeling between her thighs.

The hero wrapped her fingers along the waist of Cat’s pants, sliding them down and off in one fluid movement. Placing a soft kiss against the inside of Cat’s left thigh, she whispered, “Do you know how long I’ve wanted this?”

She shifted to lock onto Cat with her gaze, which sparked ever so slightly in rhythm with her breathing. “To show you how deeply I could love you?” Leaning forward, she pressed a kiss against the wet lace that separated her from where she had imagined her tongue a thousand times before. “To give myself completely to pleasing you?”

With one more swift smooth movement, Kara finished undressing Cat from the waist down. Her swallow at the sight before her was the only sound in the office.

Even through her own haze of longing, Cat forced herself to focus on her hero. Leaning up on her elbows, she watched Kara’s eyes grow brighter with their internal heat before slipping shut. And then Kara leaned forward instinctively, lips pressing against soft, glistening curls with just enough pressure for Cat to feel the sensation.

“God, Kara.” Head dropping back slightly, Cat bit her lip so hard she was certain she was close to drawing blood.

She felt another kiss, this time more insistent, followed by the breath of foreign words whispered so reverently, she shivered even without knowing their translation. By tone alone, she knew they held a depth of meaning of which she almost didn’t feel worthy.

She felt herself shifting as Kara drew her legs to rest on broad shoulders. The hero’s hands slid beneath her, pulling her closer to the edge of the desk as she slipped backward off her elbows with a soft huff.

Any further thoughts abandoned her at the feel of Kara’s tongue dipping between her folds. Tentative sweeps quickly became broad strokes of flattened muscle interspersed with sharp flicks of tongue tip that drew louder moans each time Cat felt the contact against the aching swell of her clit.

Kara felt the strong dig of Cat’s heels against her back as she persisted in the alternating rhythm of licks and flicks driving Cat to utter, audible distraction. Every now and then, she stroked her tongue up through Cat’s wetness, taste buds watering in anticipation of each unique element of Cat’s flavor.

“So magnificent,” she breathed before she wrapped her lips around the overly sensitive nerve bundle and began to suck. Even the slightest pressure by that point would have been more than enough to push Cat beyond the brink. These sensations slammed into her so ferociously, her upper body arched off the desktop even as she wrapped her fingers around the desk’s edges in an attempt at tethering herself. Kara felt herself pulled more deeply against Cat as the smaller blonde’s legs
tightened unconsciously around her.

She didn’t care how tightly Cat held on—all that mattered were the wanton sounds surging from Cat’s throat and the tense curve of her body as she arched against the sensations Kara poured into each suck and teasing scrape of teeth. Moving one hand from under the smaller blonde, she reached out, smiling at the instant feel of Cat grabbing and squeezing with all her strength.

All it took was one final pull for Cat to tumble hard and fast into a consuming surge of pleasure that bordered on painful in its intensity. Kara instantly released the pressure she held on Cat, although she kept her mouth wrapped securely around the pulsating bundle, feeling the strength of Cat’s climax against her tongue and lips.

Soon, however, she felt Cat untangle their fingers and push weakly against the hero, her limit reached. The smaller blonde hissed at the sensation of Kara releasing her completely. Eyes shut tightly, she focused on slowing her breathing. At the feeling of Kara kissing and then leaning her cheek against her thigh, she smiled and reached down to run fingers through the hero’s hair.

“You’re going to ruin me, Kara Zor-El.” She felt the low vibration of Kara’s laughter through her thigh.

When she felt the sudden loss of contact, she finally opened her eyes. Kara stood between her thighs, a hand on either side of Cat’s hips. The look on Kara’s face made Cat’s heart ache in a way she wondered if she’d ever truly felt before. Eyes slid shut at the press of the hero’s mouth against hers, her tongue darting along lips that tasted of her pleasure.

“I’m going to love you,” the hero finally corrected, “for as long as you’ll let me.”

Cat knew there was a time when she would have fought back the tears that sprang to her eyes in that moment. She knew there was a time when she would have scoffed at such words, pushed back against such devotion.

That time was gone.

Kara gently caught one of the tears to escape Cat’s eye as it rolled toward her temple. Her own eyes shimmered now as well as she reached down to help Cat once more to her feet.

She instantly felt the smaller blonde’s unsteadiness. Without pause, she wrapped her arms around Cat’s waist, drawing her close and leaning back until she was floating with Cat cradled against her body.

She wrapped her cape around them both, in deference to Cat’s current state of partial undress, even though her shirt hung low enough to grant her satisfactory coverage. She heard the smaller blonde click her tongue softly at the move and cuddle more deeply against her. “Such chivalry,” she teased.

With a responding huff, she floated them back into Cat’s bedroom, gently setting Cat down with hand on her waist to steady her.

“I’m fine now, darling.” The smaller blonde leaned in to press a kiss against Kara’s cheek. “Stay the night?”

The smile she received was all the answer she needed. Disappearing into her closet, she came back out with a tank top and shorts for the hero. “You should bring some of your own clothes over to keep here. I can do the same at your place—although,” she teased, “I think it’s much easier for you to come and go undetected than it is for me.”
Kara clutched the clothes tightly in her hands as she processed what Cat had just said. Nodding only as an afterthought, she finally stammered, “I—I think that sounds like a good idea.”

With an understanding smirk, Cat collected her own sleepwear and headed for the bathroom for her nightly ablutions. Kara quickly but carefully changed from her suit, folding it and setting it on the chair at Cat’s makeup table. She draped her cape along the back of the chair, smiling at the memory of Cat’s fingers tangled in its folds.

When Cat returned, wearing achingly soft-looking Pima cotton pajamas, Kara felt her fingers twitch at the thought of touching her everywhere the pajamas covered. Instead, she smiled while heading toward the bathroom.

The hero used just enough of her speed that she finished with her own nightly rituals in the same time Cat took to settle. As she slipped under the covers on what was apparently becoming her side of the bed, she sighed at the way Cat instantly slid closer. The smaller blonde leaned in, kissing the smile adorning the hero’s lips before querying in a low, husky tone, “Shall we focus more on you now, darling?”

The temptation all too real, Kara instead shook her head while coaxing Cat to lie down against her. “I think I’d just like to snuggle like this for a while. Is that okay?”

Gently stroking the hero’s jawline, Cat replied, “Of course it is.” She rested her head against the hero’s chest, shifting a few times to find the most comfortable position she could.

As her fingers idly played along the strong curves and dips of Kara’s abdomen, she narrowed her eyes, considering carefully her next words. “You speak Kryptonese sometimes.” She shifted again, this time to make eye contact with the hero. “When we’re making love, sometimes you speak Kryptonese.”

Kara only nodded in response, knowing already Cat’s follow-up question. “What are you saying?”

The sadness of her smile caught Cat’s breath in her throat. “It is the custom of my people to thank Rao for the blessings he bestows upon us. Even though I am far from Rao’s light, I still believe he shines his benevolence upon me as one of his children.”

Cat sat in silence for several beats, eyes shifting studiously along Kara’s features. “You—you thank your god for me?”

Light caught in the shimmer of Kara’s slightly watery gaze. “I have thanked him for bringing you into my life every day since we met.” As she continued, Cat saw the pained shadow that darkened her normally sunny features. “While you were away, I prayed every night that he would keep you safe until your return.”

Cat’s lips parted, unable to hide her surprise at this confession. “I—I don’t—”

Kara stilled her words with a gentle caress along her cheek. “I know your thoughts on religion and deities, Cat.” Her smile warmed. “It’s all right. Faith is the responsibility of the believer—no one else. Perhaps my prayers reach Rao. Perhaps they fall upon total emptiness. Either way, they bring me peace.”

When Cat’s silence stretched several beats longer than Kara expected, she nervously asked, “Does it upset you? I-I can stop—”

Pressing her finger against Kara’s lips, Cat quickly calmed her worries. “Absolutely not, Kara. I will never ask you to ignore your beliefs.”
A roguish flash flickered in gold flecks. “Besides, you’ve just confirmed what I’ve long suspected: being with me truly is a religious experience.”

The smaller blonde yelped in surprise at the feel of Kara rolling her quickly but gently onto her back, pinning her with just enough of the hero’s full weight to keep her in place. At the feel of Kara’s lips working their way along her neck while fingers danced lightly downward with explicit ease, Cat couldn’t restrain the moan that vibrated against Kara’s mouth.

In a tone equal parts playful and cocky, the hero finally replied, “I’m fairly certain I’ve caused you to call out to several of Earth’s deities a few times—even if you don’t believe.”

“Oh, I believe, darling,” she teased. “I believe we’re never going to get any sleep if you don’t stop.”

Huffing softly in acquiescence, Kara pressed a tender kiss to Cat’s lips before shifting onto her back. At the feel of Cat rolling against her and draping an arm across her stomach, she let her eyes slide shut and focused her hearing on Cat’s heartbeat, letting the slow soothing rhythm lull her to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

And this incredibly long chapter is brought to you by the fact that I was way too amused by the appearance or reappearance of certain characters. I got a little carried away with listening again. And then there was the ending...that was all Kara this time. Silly randy reporter.

Seriously, though, this is a hella long chapter. Longer than any so far. Like, so long, I almost feel like I should apologize and I don't even know why. It's got a lot in it--some funny, some serious. The tone of this story is getting ready to shift. There's going to be...less time for funny. I think that's why I'm more accommodating of the funny that arose here. But that's all I'm going to say about that.

So here, finally, is a bit more with Winn. Ah, Winn. I have mixed feelings about him. I want to like him way more than I do. I think that's because I wanted him to actually be the best friend--not "I'll pretend to be your BFF while I secretly harbor deeper feelings for you that will ultimately always manifest in me being a judgmental jerk whenever you do something that makes me feel badly about you not reciprocating my secret lust for you." (and breathe) I mean, both he and James treated Kara rather shoddily several times for not falling in line with who they thought she should be, but Winn more often than not did so for purely personal--and petty--reasons.

Anyway, I decided to make Winn a little more like how I would like to see him. I left the remnants of his crush on Kara as is, because I wanted to show him actually acting adult about the situation--accepting that the way he feels toward Kara as a friend is far more important than whatever other feelings he has (and only he has), and respecting the relationship she does ultimately pursue. Because being her friend means wanting happiness for her, even if it means temporary unhappiness for himself. My version of Winn sees her value beyond his own expectations. Also, I just love the idea of the alien-obsessed tech geek and an actual alien being besties. It's almost as much fun as the daughter of anti-alien sociopaths and an actual alien being besties.
For Lena, I decided to fix the atrociousness of the show "Ace Reporter." I didn't watch it, but I read the transcript. I found it unbelievable that she would simply walk away from a project she'd dedicated five years of her life to figuring out—especially one so in her "I want to prove to the world that a Luthor can be good" wheelhouse. Wouldn't this have been a perfect project to support this? Also, she kind of strikes me as a tenacious one. She would not be able to un-sink her teeth from that puzzle, regardless of personal feelings between her and her former business partner. It just seemed...ludicrous to me.

Oh, and Lucy and Vasquez will be back, I swear it. I've already written a great future scene for Vasquez. I had a couple great ones for Lucy as well, but I've significantly changed the plot line she was supporting. I'm sad to see her role change, but I'm ultimately way more satisfied with the new plot line. I never really felt comfortable with the previous one. I'm just going to have to figure out how to fix the new one to bring her in again. For now, though, hope you enjoyed her totally crushing on SuperCat. Because we all know she would. Winn, too--because in my head canon, he wants what's best for his bestie.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

CADMUS Test Subject Interlude 5

Chapter Notes

Standard Lillian Luthor warning in effect. No gory autopsy details this time, but she's in rare verbal form here. She says some pretty dark stuff in this chapter, including allusions to violent death, so if that's not your thing, then please don't read.

Test Subject CDS-06-583

It was too perfect.

Almost too perfect to believe.

She skipped back to the beginning of the images she’d found waiting for her in her inbox, clicking through each with breathless disbelief, gaze hungrily devouring each too-perfect pixel upon her screen.

She knew the moment she gave this particular assignment to her assistant, she would succeed. Lillian had learned immediately that the young woman was acutely resourceful and tenacious. It was no wonder Lex had clung to her and protected her with his unique intensity.

That she had come through with such astonishing end results? Lillian rewarded loyalty well. As far as she was concerned, there was no reward she was not willing to offer for this.

With a finger flick, she dialed the attending nurse assigned to monitoring her most prized patient. “Please wake Dr. Danvers. I’m on my way to see him now.”

After reviewing the photos one more time, she leaned back in her chair, fingers steepled before her. Closing her eyes, she waited for her exuberance to clear from her mind and, more importantly, from her expression. She would not let unchecked emotions threaten this moment.

Face once more implacably set, she rose, her stature casting an imposing length of shadow across her desk. She collected her tablet, anticipation still heightening her every sense and propelling her toward her destination with unmatchable speed.

As she entered Jeremiah’s room, she nodded toward the nurse by his bedside. “Did you fasten his restraints before administering the methylphenidate?”

“Yes, Doctor. He is secure. According to his vitals, he’s close to waking. Another five minutes or so should be enough.”

With a brusque nod, Luthor dismissively replied, “Please shut the door on your way out.”
Pulling a nearby stool, she settled next to his bed, tablet clutched possessively in her hands, and waited. The sound of his increasing heart rate set a calming soundtrack, his breaths slowly becoming stronger and more frequent.

Curious, she leaned close enough to shift aside his tunic. The incision encircling the edge of his shoulder was already smooth and slightly faded from the regular applications of the special salve she’d provided his nurses. Her pleased hum slipped between the metronomic sounds of his monitors.

Luthor studied the way his face lost its sedated slackness, firming in ways that gave him a certain degree of attractiveness. His dark hair now laced with far more silver than when Luthor had first saved and subsequently stolen his life, his features still held a vitality she was certain had been quite the draw in his youth.

When deep brown eyes finally opened, straining to focus, Luthor shifted enough to draw his attention. His still sluggish gaze finally fell upon her, and she offered him a controlled smile. “Dr. Danvers, I’m happy to see you finally awake. Tell me, how do you feel?”

She watched the convulsive swallow move along his throat and poured a cup of water for him. Once she had helped him sufficiently slake his thirst, he rasped, “How long?”

“Since we last spoke?” At the stiff nod she received, she replied, “Not long—no more time than I needed for a satisfactory recuperation period. I needed to be sure your body wouldn’t reject the new components we gave you. A surgery that long and complicated deserved every chance of success.”

She watched his struggle to interpret her words, deep lines settling across his forehead. As his head slowly rocked back and forth against his pillow, he stammered, “What—what have you done to me?” Fear coruscated within his eyes as he awaited her response.

“As I told you the last time we spoke, Jeremiah: We had the technology to fix what the Martian did to your body. I know I said I would await your choice in whether or not to proceed.” She cast her gaze down toward the tablet she had been cradling carefully in her grip. “Unfortunately, events have transpired that forced our hand earlier than we anticipated. I’m sorry, Jeremiah, but I needed to make that choice for you.”

As her words seeped through the waning haze of sedation within his mind, Jeremiah slowly lifted his head so he could look down at his body. He realized for the first time since waking the restraints on his wrists. More surprising, however, was the fact that he could feel these restraints as well as the ones he now noticed around his ankles. At the sight of one of his wrists pressing upward against the restraint, his lips parted in surprise. “It moved,” he whispered. Looking up quickly, he caught Luthor’s gaze. “My arm, it moved.”

“Yes, and so does your other arm and both your legs.”

“What did you do,” he queried once more, curiosity overshadowing the initial fear.

“We replaced both your damaged arms and legs with bionics. We will need to start your physical therapy as soon as possible, but I believe these parts will enable you to do what needs to be done to save your wife.”

The omission in her statement was all Jeremiah heard. “What about my daughter? What about Alex?”
A muscle twitched with near betrayal along her lips as she noted the concession in his question: *one* daughter.

Placing her hand against his chest, she schooled her voice with sufficient regret. “I’m sorry, Jeremiah.”

His tears were quick, his rage consuming. Luthor quickly withdrew her hand and nearly backed away at the sight of him pulling against his restraints, wretched agony ripping from his lungs in heaving cries.

“Jeremiah, I need you to stop. You will not be able to break your restraints, but you might damage the still-healing connection sites my staff and I worked so hard to establish. And then how will you save Eliza?”

Deep-set mahogany eyes bore down on her with such focused fury she noted she would probably be dead if she had given him the same optic enhancements she had given Henshaw. Finally, however, he relaxed his struggle, arms falling to rest once more. In a thick, breaking voice, he asked, “What did they do to my baby girl?”

“I don’t think you want details—”

“What did they do?” Tendons protruded from his neck from the force of words screamed in desperation.

“You need to calm down, Dr. Danvers.” The cool slice of her voice silenced him. “You were right about Eliza. She did finally figure out the Martian’s deception. She tried to leave, to save Alex and herself. They were on their way up the coast when the Martian and Kara found them. He made Eliza watch as he ordered Kara to break your daughter’s neck. It was his punishment for Eliza trying to leave him.”

She watched in fascinated silence as Jeremiah mourned the lie. Let the real Alex Danvers suffer soon enough as the traitor to humanity she was. Luthor could at least give the mercy of quick death to this imagined version of Jeremiah’s daughter.

“This is why I went ahead with our surgery without your permission,” she finally stated, her voice an illusion of comfort. “I wish we could be saving both Eliza and Alex, I truly do, Jeremiah. But my team and I are fully devoted to helping you at least save your wife—and to finally having someone on our team capable of stopping the Martian and Kara.”

Glaring once more through his tears, he tugged his wrists upward and snarled, “How am I supposed to stop either of them when I can’t even break through these restraints?”

“Do not be ungrateful,” she clipped, a pique of derision whetting her tone. “You cannot break those restraints because they are made with Thanagarian nth metal. Not even a Kryptonian could break those restraints. Thanks to my efforts, however, you have enough of this metal fortifying the endoskeleton of your new limbs that you will be able to break a Kryptonian.”

Lillian had seen the data from the Red Tornado testing. She knew the limits of Kara’s strength. She knew, too, the strength limits of the alloy within the bionic implants was decidedly lower than the Kryptonian’s. The purposefully weakened chemical composition of the alloy Lena’s de-fanged L-Corp had created was formulaic proof of her daughter’s continuing disappointment. At least she had the decency to remove the name Luthor from the once powerful company she now seemed intent on running into ruin.
“I only want to help you, Jeremiah. I know what it feels like to lose family. I’ve lost my entire family to those who are on the wrong side of this fight.” She finally lifted the tablet in her hand. “When I saw the images one of my operatives delivered after the Martian re-captured your wife, I knew what I needed to do. I needed to make sure you didn’t lose everything as well.”

Pulling up the photos, she held the tablet so he could see the screen. She scrolled through those unbelievably perfect images her assistant had gifted her: shots of Alex and Eliza inside the brunette’s DEO-issued Denali and then outside, Alex’s hand wrapped securely around Eliza’s bicep as she guided her mother.

Lillian had cropped these images to remove Kara walking behind them in her civilian clothes as well as the restaurant to which they had been heading. Alex struck quite the imposing stature in her obvious DEO fatigues, her expression trained into perfect impassivity, while a little PhotoShop finessing had slightly altered Eliza’s expression to one a bit more apprehensive.

She would have been content with these images only. Instead, Lillian flipped the images again, her earlier exuberance once more threatening betrayal as she watched Jeremiah’s expression harden with rage.

How her assistant had captured these particular images, Lillian ached to learn. Soon enough, she would be able to return to Lillian’s side and she would share how it was she caught these images of Supergirl lifting into the sky with Eliza in her hold.

“The Martian assigned this DEO agent and the Kryptonian to keep Eliza under constant surveillance. You will need to defeat them both to save her. We need to work fast to prepare you. I’ve given you as much as I can. Now, it’s up to you, Jeremiah. Will you help us? For your wife? For Alex?”

Reaching down and unlocking one of Jeremiah’s wrists, Lillian held out her hand, willing herself to remain still. At the feel of him finally resting his hand in her open palm, careful not to use any grip, her lips curled slightly upward.

“And so we begin.”
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Cat Grant puts Project CADMUS on notice: Neither it nor its minions are welcome in her city. Plus, further evidence in support of the truth that Cat is a total BAMF.

Chapter Notes

This chapter comes with quite a few warnings.

That last chapter was a little rough, so this chapter starts out with a little morning sex. It's the first several paragraphs, if you prefer to skip it.

Then I head into some fairly unsettling territory with Cat as we learn some truths about the darkness into which she dove during her time as a war correspondent. Mentions of war-related violence and sexual assault occur during her scene at city hall. There's also a scene at the DEO involving a panic attack. If any or all of these topics aren't your thing, I totally understand.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been long enough—nearly a half hour, to be exact. She had lain there in silence for that entire time, content to listen to the heartbeat beneath her ear. She had heard the moment the increased rhythm betrayed its owner when she awoke, and wondered if her own waking heart rate had been what had roused the woman resting beneath her, pretending still to sleep.

“I know you’re awake,” she finally intoned, her voice laced through with vestiges of sleep. She smirked in satisfaction at Kara’s huff before turning and nuzzling into soft blonde curls.

Mild exasperation quickly melted into a far less vexed emotion as Kara gave in to the feel of Cat pressing kisses along her neck while one hand found its way beneath her tank top.

“I could have said the same thing to you a half hour ago,” she sighed, her fingers flexing against the small of Cat’s back.

The smaller blonde simply hummed in acknowledgement, shifting enough to match gazes with Kara. Fingers still swirling soft patterns beneath the shirt, Cat watched blue eyes struggling to retain their focus on her.

“So sensitive,” she drawled, both women knowing it wasn’t her emotional status to which Cat referred.

To prove her point, she dipped her head, seeking out the hardened peak she’d noticed appear in response to her teasing attention. Even through the fabric of her shirt, Kara felt perfectly the sensations from Cat’s teeth.
Breath sucked harshly in through clenched jaw, Kara struggled to remain as still as possible so as not to jostle Cat too much. However, at the feel of the smaller blonde’s fingers slipping up over the underside of her other breast and seeking to cause sensations similar to the ones evoked by Cat’s teeth, she knew lying still was not going to be long on the table of options.

Relaxing her bite, Cat once more looked up to hold Kara’s gaze with her own. Her fingers, however, continued their dexterous dance, turning the hero into a writhing, whimpering mess in a matter of moments.

The sight sparked a thought in Cat’s mind, sharp and unshakable. “Darling,” she purred, her tone inquisitive enough to catch Kara’s attention. “Does your sense of touch not react like this when you, shall we say, take matters into your own hands?”

Catching the sudden discomfited shift in Kara’s expression, she tempered her tone. “Have you never—”

“I have,” Kara quickly offered, swallowing nervously at the sound of her voice hitching at least one full octave. “I mean, I’ve tried,” she corrected. “I—it’s not—it—it wasn’t—”

Cat silenced and calmed the hero with a kiss. When she pulled back, Kara offered a slight, grateful smile and breathed deeply. “Human sexual mores have mostly been a mixture of abstracts to me, sometimes put into clumsy practice,” she finally confessed.

The smaller blonde sucked on Kara’s earlobe, feeling the full shiver all along the hero’s body as she scraped her teeth against the delicate skin. “I could help make it far less clumsy. Would you like that?”

The sensation of fingers pinching fully awake flesh arced through Kara, coaxing a breathy, “Yes,” from her lips.

Considering the hero’s earlier attempted confession, Cat began, “Have you ever made yourself come, Kara?”

Embarrassment would have been the prevalent emotion to consume her in that moment were it not for the sensations scorching paths along her every nerve. In between stuttering breaths, she forced a reply. “I’ve tried a f-few times. I could never make myself feel anything—anything like this.”

“Even thinking about something like what you did to me last night?”

She could still hear Kara’s admission—could still feel it, whispered soft as supplication against her bare thigh.

“Do you know how long I’ve wanted this?”

Breath hitched in time with the feel of Cat’s fingers sliding down along the lines of her stomach muscles, tracing and then slipping below the band of her shorts and into the scintillating slickness of her arousal. “I never let myself—never let—n-never, never stop, oh, Cat, please don’t stop...”

Moans twisted upward in frost-tinged gasps as Cat’s fingers swirled and swiped along ridges she was learning to play like a virtuosa. Soon enough, Kara’s hips had caught the rhythm, rocking in urgent counterpoint to Cat’s touch.

The smaller blonde continued her masterful motions for several more beats before slowing to tortuously light caresses that instantly drew a frustrated glare.
“Never let yourself what, darling? Finish your thought.”

A fiery belligerence flashed within the hero’s gaze as she struggled to calm herself. Cat could still feel her heart beating a fierce cadence beneath her rib cage when she finally spoke. “I never let myself think too much about things I never thought could happen.”

Movement stilled completely at Kara’s words. Within dark sapphire eyes, Cat saw the deeper meaning—saw the fissures of heartbreak from so many desires forever denied by unchangeable providence.

The smaller blonde pushed back against the sorrow she felt for those deeper entreaties forever lost within the silence of space. She had no control over those—could never change what the fates had taken without concession.

This, however, was something Cat could grant in exquisite totality. “You can fantasize all you want now, darling.” Her half-lidded gaze swept along Kara’s features hungrily. “The fun will be in making the fantasies real.”

She pressed more closely against the strong body beside her, fingers once more beginning their intimate movements. “Like last night.” She nipped playfully at Kara’s lower lip at the sound of her surprised gasp. “Last night, you made one of my favorite fantasies come to life—if you’ll pardon the pun,” she added with a wicked smirk.

“You—you thought about me—about—”


With each location listed, she alternated between stroking her fingers along the throbbing heat of Kara’s ridges and pressing her palm against the tight, ridged bundle of nerves above them. Each motion shook through the hero with increasing sensitivity, exiting her mouth through the most gloriously iniquitous sounds Cat suspected Kara had ever made.

“The desk was always my favorite though—of my CatCo fantasies, at least.” She pressed with her palm hard enough to earn an uncontrollable groan of pleasure as Kara parted her legs more under Cat’s touch.

Capturing Kara’s mouth in a ferocious kiss, Cat used her fingers to pinch and pull against Kara’s already agonizingly sharp arousal. The smaller blonde devoured the responding cries tumbling from Kara with every gasp, noting the ache of her teeth from the ever-colder breaths the hero released into her mouth.

Pulling back just enough to catch Kara’s gaze, she continued a gentler variation of tweaks and tugs while whispering against the quivering curve of Kara’s lips, “Help me make you come, Kara.”

Cat was certain she’d never seen pupils completely consume their surrounding irises before. Removing her hand from the satisfying wetness she’d conjured, she wrapped her fingers around Kara’s wrist to redirect her.

“I wish these could be my fingers,” she husked while cupping her hand along the back of Kara’s and directing both inside her shorts. “What I wouldn’t give to be the one inside you right now.”

As she uttered the words against the flushed skin of Kara’s cheek, she guided two of the hero’s fingers down through soaked curls and slipped them inside. Met with just the slightest hint of
resistance, she sighed in awe of the strong clench of muscle she felt even through her guiding touch.

Kara’s body arched up from the bed with a soft grunt before she shifted to a renewed rocking of her hips. White teeth dug into her bottom lip as she fought to set a satisfying pace for these new sensations.

Cat slowed her down with a line of kisses along her jaw. “Shh, steady, Kara. Follow my lead.” She began directing the in-and-out motion of Kara’s fingers, watching the hero’s expression closely as she did. Eyelids fluttered almost as rapidly as the breaths Kara struggled to take for the first several moments before settling into slower gasps and soft whimpers.

As Kara’s own movements finally synced with Cat’s, the smaller blonde shifted her thumb up enough to add back some of the pressure she’d been previously applying with her palm. The hero hissed at the sensation, hips bucking an extra beat before falling back into rhythm.

At the sound of her name suddenly tumbling from Kara’s lips on frantic breaths, the smaller blonde increased the press and shift of her thumb and dipped her head, once more biting one of Kara’s rigid nipples through the fabric of her tank top.

The triple-play rush of sensations crashed into the hero, muscles tightening around her own fingers and locking her body into a paralysis of pleasure. On some level, she registered the sound of mattress seams tearing beneath her shoulders from the strength of her body’s arc. The higher level, however, were the white-hot jolts tearing through her at supersonic speeds, leaving her barely able to do more than clench her eyes shut and try to hold on through the overwhelming sensations.

Letting go with her teeth, Cat rested her head against Kara’s chest, listening to the savage percussion of the Kryptonian heart beneath her ear. A cocksure grin tripped along her lips at the sound as she slowed the motion of their hands. She felt Kara shudder through several aftershocks, each one growing less powerful until they became nothing more than a settling of limbs back against the bed.

“Cat.”

The smaller blonde shifted up at the sound of Kara’s barely audible exhalation of her name. Carefully, she coaxed the hero to withdraw her fingers, swallowing her soft cry of loss with several kisses to her lips and jaw.

Eyes struggling to stay open, Kara sleepily slurred, “That was amazing.” With an adorable half-grin, she amended, “You are amazing.”

“And you,” the smaller blonde replied in between more kisses along the strong line of Kara’s jaw, “are wickedly addictive.” She pressed smiling lips firmly against the moan of contentment she felt Kara release.

Too soon, however, she felt the hero tense beneath her, eyes instantly snapping open. After a beat in which Cat could tell she was listening to something in the distance, Kara turned an apologetic gaze toward her. “I need to go.”

The smaller blonde shot her a knowing quirk of her brow. “Go, be Super.” Then, quickly latching onto the neckline of the hero’s tank top, Cat pulled her in for a kiss. As they parted, she whispered against the full pout of Kara’s lips, “Be safe, Supergirl.”

With a beautiful smile and another quick kiss, Kara sped into the bathroom for what might have
been the world’s fastest shower, even by Kryptonian standards. When she reappeared already in her uniform, Cat couldn’t help the shiver of memory from the previous night at the sight of Kara suited and caped.

Catching the involuntary movement, the hero cast a knowing smile toward the woman still tangled comfortably among the bedsheets before launching into the tangerine-tinged morning sky.

The emergency Kara’s hearing had detected was easy enough to locate: three fire trucks trying to make their way through morning rush hour to a fire at one of the downtown apartment complexes. Swooping low enough to speak to the driver of the first truck, she directed, “I’m going to carry you in and help you contain the blaze. Let the other trucks know I’ll be back for them if they haven’t reached us by the time we get this under control, okay?”

Already beneath the truck before the driver could gather himself enough to reply, she extended her biomatrix around the vehicle and easily hefted it up and over the inbound line of commuters. She could hear the clatter of applause and cheers as she carefully navigated above the line of morning traffic, transporting the first truck to the blaze in a matter of minutes.

Setting them down as close to a hydrant as possible, she drifted back up into the sky, just beyond the lick of flames rising from the burning building. With her X-ray vision, she could see the bulk of the fire spread out along the western perimeter of the upper floor. She also saw how all the remaining residents from that floor were making their way across to the opposite stairwell. What caught Kara’s complete attention, however, was how close the fire was to the gas line that ran connections up from the main line in the basement to the individual apartments.

Acting quickly, she floated in through an already blown-out window and circled around to the edge of flames closest to the gas line. With a deep inhalation, she blasted back the encroaching fire with her freeze breath, quickly exterminating the bulk of the conflagration within minutes.

By the time she had extinguished the flames, fire fighters from the first truck had positioned their ladder outside to continue dousing any remaining hot spots. Flying out past the stream of water flowing through the burned-out western exterior, the hero paused mid-air to listen, locating the next closest fire truck. Waving her hands toward the gathering crowd of onlookers and displaced tenants, she called out, “I need you to clear this section of road, please.” She then shot up into the sky, returning only a few minutes later with the second truck. She repeated this step four more times, retrieving the third fire engine and the three responding ambulances identified by dispatch as en route.

Pausing after depositing the third ambulance, she glanced over at the approaching fire chief. “Supergirl,” she greeted, “thank you.” She shook the hero’s hand tightly while pointing toward the still slightly smoking building. “You really saved the day on this one. My officers just told me how close the burn marks were to reaching the gas lines. I don’t even want to think about what might have happened if those lines had lit up.”

The hero smiled appreciatively while watching the first responders tend to their duties. “Is there anything else I can do here?”

“I think we’ve got it covered now.” She shot a glance over Kara’s shoulder toward the approaching news truck. “Unless you want to hang around to give CCN a personal interview. I’m sure Cat Grant would appreciate the ratings boost.”

Kara laughed at the chief’s playful dig before lifting gently into the air. “I’ll leave the media to the professionals.” With a slight wave, she finished, “If you need any more help, just call for me.” She tapped her ear. “I’ll be listening.”
Back in the air, the hero turned her flight path away from CatCo, deciding to take a quick lap around the city before heading in. She still had a half hour before Snapper expected her in the office and a lot of adrenaline to burn off before then.

She wove her way between the buildings within the financial district before passing over the harbor and circling back along the stretch of outlying warehouses. As she approached one of the nearby construction sites on the fringe of the business corridor—the latest office space to fail once more to surpass CatCo Tower in stature—she slowed to a halt. She paused to check in with the crane operator whose three-year-old daughter now thought hers was the best dad in the universe. He’d come home a week ago with a selfie with the Girl of Steel and the hero’s signature in Kryptonian glyphs along the inside of his forearm.

“Hey, SG, check it out! Look what I got,” he yelled, rolling up his sleeve and showing her how he’d commemorated her signature in permanent ink. The tattoo matched her suit colors perfectly and ended with her uniform’s version of the crest of the House of El on the inside of his bicep.

The hero’s jaw dropped open in surprise and she felt the sting of tears in her eyes as she watched him flex while calling out, “Stronger together, right? Just like you told me!”

Moved beyond words, she hovered close enough to kiss his cheek. Her nose scrunched with the megawatt-bright smile she shot him before she looped around the end of his crane a few times and headed once more toward CatCo.

Landing atop CatCo Tower, the hero effortlessly changed into the latest clothes she’d deposited at that hiding spot. She mentally marked off the outfit and reminded herself it was time to re-collect several articles of clothing for laundry day.

While sweeping her hair up into a ponytail, she muttered, “I bet I’m the only person in National City with a laundry routine that starts with a scavenger hunt.”

Fastening her shirt over the crest on her uniform, she checked herself in her phone’s front-facing camera, swiping away the soot she saw on her cheek, and slipped on her glasses. She headed down the few flights of stairs between the roof and her work floor, fidgeting with last-minute wardrobe details before stepping out into the hallway near her office.

She knew from Cat’s conversation with Snapper the previous night that something big was in the works that morning. And then she’d caught the last bit of a radio report as she’d soared over the freeway, announcing Spencer Graves had plans to hold a public forum that morning for any resident who had questions about his proposed alien registration. Feeling confident that her series of alien-focused articles would give her better standing with Snapper, she began toward his office to make her case for covering the morning’s meeting.

Her progress through the bullpen quickly halted, however, at the realization of who was standing at Eve’s desk. He was laughing in an oddly overzealous way at something Eve had just said to him while clearly focused on watching her approach.

Stopping in front of her former desk, Kara smiled at Eve before turning with a less-than-elated expression for the surprise CatCo visitor. “Mike, what are you doing here?”

Before Mon-El could respond, Eve happily intoned, “He came all the way here to invite me to lunch today. Isn’t he too much?”

Refraining from her initial instinct to question Mon-El regarding the status of all his other relationships, Kara instead flashed a slightly too-bright smile and replied, “Definitely too
something.” Ignoring the narrowing of Mon-El’s gaze, she finished, “I hope you two have a great time.”

Her planned departure, however, ground to a halt at the sound of Eve beckoning her back. “Hey, Kara? I heard rumor that Ms. Grant was coming in to the office this morning.” Her brows drew together nervously. “Have you heard anything?”

The sound Mon-El released might have passed as a laugh, but Kara knew it lacked any element of amusement. “Oh, if anyone would know what Cat Grant was doing at any time of the day or night, it would be Kara. Isn’t that right?”

Eve cast a confused glance between the two as Kara struggled to retain control of her expression. “Does Ms. Grant still contact you for assistance?” Kara was startled by how quickly Eve seemed to be on the verge of tears. “I didn’t know that. I’m so sorry, Kara. I—I tried to be you but—”

Kara laid a calming hand on Eve’s forearm, grateful for her confusion over Mon-El’s statement. “It’s okay, really. Ms. Grant can be set in her ways sometimes. I don’t mind if she contacts me still. Besides, you’re not technically her assistant anymore either,” she teased.

“Then maybe both of you should tell her to stop taking advantage of you.” His voice and expression hardened in a way that made Kara flinch in recognition. Too many times, she had borne solitary witness to this swift personality shift within the Daxamite. The haste in which he could slip from the pretense of affability into this colder, sharper self filled her with an uneasiness that grew deeper each time she experienced it. The fact that finally there was another person to bear witness somehow calmed her.

“Mikey, don’t be so grumpy.” Two sets of alien eyes shifted with almost matching looks of surprise and confusion. Eve beamed with amusement as she finished, “Ms. Grant is the boss lady. It’s our job to keep her happy, right, Kara?”

“Yeah, well, I’m sure Cat has plenty of other assistants waiting on standby to keep her happy.” Not bothering to even give the hero’s hurt glare the courtesy of acknowledgement, he wrapped his arms around Eve’s waist and continued, “Hey, maybe we can leave a little early—like now?”

Eve pressed against his shoulder with a soft giggle. “Mike, it’s only nine in the morning! I’m not even hungry for lunch yet.”

Leaning closer, he whispered, “Who said we had to go to lunch right away?”

Quickly suppressing the shudder she felt coming on at the implication of Mon-El’s question, Kara backed swiftly away from Eve’s desk. “Okay, you two, um, you two have fun,” and she staggered away before either could respond.

Whipping slightly too quickly around the corner, she skidded to a stop in Snapper’s doorway. As she moved closer to his desk, she called brightly, “Hey, Chief, I heard about the meeting taking place this morning at city hall. Want to give me a last-minute pep talk before I head downtown?”

The hard set of his jaw twitched at the sound of Kara’s question. “You’re benched, Ponytail. You won’t be covering today’s meeting.”

“What? But that’s my beat!”

“You don’t have a beat yet. You have articles that sometimes focus on aliens, interspersed among articles about the National City dump. One could just as easily assume trash is your beat.”
Struggling to suppress the sigh of frustration Snapper could always pull from her, she instead decided to press her point again. “I know more about the Alien Amnesty law than anyone else on staff, and I’ve been following Spencer Graves ever since his attempt at passing his previous anti-alien legislation.”

Snatching his glasses off and tossing them onto his desk, Snapper rubbed at his perpetually stubble-smudged chin. “You’re actually preaching to the choir on this one, Danvers. I was going to send you, but I was overruled by the Queen herself.”

At the sight of Kara’s eyes going so wide he could see white encircling her irises, he scoffed, “Guess you’re losing your lion tamer touch.”

Painfully aware of the blush she could feel in her cheeks, she stammered, “Wh-what do you mean by that?”

“Come on, Danvers, you were the thing of legend around here: literally the longest-surviving assistant Cat ever had. Surprised the hell out of all of us. When she hired you, we actually started a pool on how quickly she would claw you to shreds.”

Trying to hide the mix of hurt and, weirdly enough, pride she felt from Snapper’s comment, Kara pointed out, “You know Ms. Grant actually hates cat puns, right?”

With a dismissive sound that was half snort and half snarl, he replied, “Then perhaps she should rethink the giant hot pink pussy in her reception area.”

“Lucas, I will not have you defiling my newest reporter with your poly-blend back alley banter.”

Both Kara and Snapper turned instantly toward the figure now leaning against his office doorway. Kara felt her throat spasm slightly at the sight of the CEO, dazzling in a form-fitting scarlet sheath dress that clung to her curves in sinful detail. A front slit offered the hero a tantalizing glimpse of toned thigh. She had accentuated the outfit with a gold Byzantine chain necklace and azure Manolo Blahnik suede slingbacks that gave her just enough height to meet Kara’s stunned stare almost eye-to-eye. Hitching a perfectly angled brow in Kara’s direction, she finished, “Pretend there’s at least one lady in the room.”

With a smirk, Snapper obliged, “Yeah, right. Sorry, Ponytail.”

Lips quirked to the side to disguise her amusement, Cat replied, “Sensitivity, Lucas. Take a refresher course if you must—or a primer, in your case.”

She pushed away from the doorjamb, the fingers of her right hand flickering impatiently as she moved closer to his desk. “Have you put together the news crews I asked for? We’re going to need a live feed in the chamber and another outside among this morning’s rally participants. I want reaction shots to this.”

Predatory glee sparked in the golden slivers of her eyes. “Oh, and perhaps suggest to Mr. Olsen that this might be a prime opportunity to dust off his camera and flex his photojournalist muscles.” Her gaze slid briefly toward Kara. “I believe this hearing is going to be far more than Spencer Graves ever bargained for.”

Catching the glance as well as the insinuation behind Cat’s comment, Snapper scratched the coarse underside of his jaw. “I’ve already sent Rodgers and Beckley over. They’ll be your crew inside. Larsen and Taylor will be your outside crew once they loop back around from this morning’s apartment fire.” He sniffed in Kara’s direction, causing the hero to shift nervously. “Apparently,
they just missed what could have been an exclusive with Supergirl.”

With a dismissive hum, Cat turned once more for the door. “Well, perhaps she was in a hurry.” With her back to Snapper, she shifted her gaze enough for Kara to see she was looking askance in her direction. “She’s going to have a busy morning.”

As the CEO continued out of Snapper’s office, she called casually to her newest reporter. “Kiera, once you’re finished here, come find me.”

“Y-yes, Ms. Grant.” Head dipped so she could look over the top of her glasses, her eyes continued to follow the CEO’s path long after human eyes would have been able to see anything. An exaggerated throat clearing pulled her attention back into Snapper’s office. The reporter was observing her with an indecipherable glare. “Wh-what?”

“You smell like a toasted marshmallow.”

If it were possible for her to pale, Kara was certain she’d be bone china white at the moment. “I-I passed by the apartment fire this morning. I thought I could cover it if the news crews couldn’t get through in time.”

With an unimpressed smirk, he sank back into his chair, his attention turning once more to the half-eaten danish on his desk. “You’re making me crave a smoke. Get the hell out of here.”

By the time he glanced back up, he was completely alone. The reporter stared at his now vacated office door with what he would adamantly deny was any degree of amusement before taking a massive bite of his breakfast.

Kara hustled back across the bullpen, her super hearing now tuned to locating Cat. When she realized where the CEO had gone, she frowned and hurried back through the stairwell near her office.

Once out of the access stairwell, Kara walked over to where Cat stood next to the landing pad. The hero looked around, unconsciously sighing at the feel of sunlight soaking into her skin. “What are you—are you taking the CatCopter to the hearing?”

A noticeable shudder shook through the CEO. “No, thank you. I don’t care if Leslie is still in prison, I’m not going anywhere near that damned chopper.” She gestured about distractedly. “I just thought you might enjoy a little extra sunshine. I know you’re probably fine by now, but it looked like you expended a lot of energy this morning. Besides, as long as I’m still not back in a full-time capacity, my presence causes more distraction and notice than I prefer right now.”

When the smaller blonde fell silent, Kara breathed deeply to steady herself. “Why did you pull me from covering the hearing today?”

“Because I need Supergirl at this hearing, not Kara Danvers.” She noted the expectant arch of brow that urged her for more. “I am sorry I didn’t discuss this with you first, especially since this would have been a significant article in solidifying your standing as CatCo’s resident alien reporter.” She smirked slightly at the clear double entendre. “I swear I didn’t want to spring it on you like this. I had planned on discussing it with you last night and then this morning—but I know my priorities.”

Pushing through the tingling sensation that Cat’s words lit deep within her, Kara pressed for more. “What exactly do you want me to do as Supergirl? Punch him on live television? That would be a ratings boon for CCN, I’m sure, but not so great for Supergirl.”

Cat clicked her tongue in repudiation. “You know Supergirl is capable of far more than just
physicality. You inspire, Kara. I’ve seen how crowds respond to you. You bring hope and joy to the people of National City.”

She moved close enough to thread her fingers around the back of Kara’s neck. “I need Supergirl to inspire them today.” Leaning in, she planted a delicate kiss against rosy lips. “And I need you beside me.”

Settling her own hands low along Cat’s hips, Kara pulled the smaller blonde flush against her. “I will always be beside you, Cat.”

With a soft chuckle and a nuzzle of their noses, Cat sighed, “That perpetual sentimentality of yours is going to completely undermine my unapproachable reputation.” She allowed herself the indulgence of a deeper, slower kiss.

When the smaller blonde pulled back, Kara rolled her eyes at the coy curve of her lips. Her eyes slipped shut, however, at the feel of Cat’s fingers releasing her hair, nails scratching against Kara’s scalp as she fanned out the long golden locks.

“Agent Hawthorne is waiting for me downstairs. Meet me at the front entrance to city hall. I want the crowd to see you. Maggie and your sister were right to be cautious yesterday, but now it’s important the other aliens see you and know you are with them on this. And the humans of National City need a little reminding that they owe their lives to one of the aliens Spencer Graves now wants to target. They must not be allowed to overlook that.”

Seeing the uncertainty dancing within Kara’s eyes, Cat pressed her lips against her cheek. She smiled at the sight of the lipstick smudge she left before wiping it away with her thumb. “Trust me, darling. When I’m finished, the people of National City will know exactly which is the right side to take in this fight.”

The CEO turned toward the stairwell, but Kara halted her with a hand to her forearm. When Cat turned back, she inhaled in surprise at the feel of Kara’s mouth pressing firmly against her own. The hero took advantage of the gasp to slip her tongue between Cat’s parted lips, exploring the sweet warmth with sighs of pleasure Cat eagerly returned.

As their mouths parted, Cat did nothing to suppress the satisfied smile that spread across her lips. “What was that for?”

The hero’s eyes sparkled with the light of galaxies. “For loving me the way you do.”

Wagging her index finger in Kara’s direction, she began to back once more toward the stairwell. “Girl of Steel with a silver tongue,” she teased. “How could I not love you in every way?”

Without waiting for an answer, she pivoted and disappeared through the access door.

Kara quickly changed back into her uniform, body thrumming with anticipation of what Cat had in store for them that morning. Listening, she tracked Cat from the moment she entered the DEO Denali all the way to the front of city hall before she finally took off from CatCo Tower.

The sound of wind snapping Kara’s cape drew Cat’s attention immediately. Looking up, she felt her heart flutter at the sight of her hero hovering above her.

She could hear stirrings through the nearby crowd as that morning’s protesters caught sight of Supergirl. She noted with pride in her staff the fact that CCN was the only news outlet set up to broadcast so far. Arms akimbo, the CEO shifted her weight and arched a brow expectantly. “Hello, Supergirl. Thank you for accepting my invitation to join me at this morning’s public hearing.”
Slipping into the role she knew Cat needed of her, the hero finished descending to the steps beside the CEO with a slight nod. “Of course, Ms. Grant. It’s my pleasure.”

Expression implacable save the slight dilation of her pupils, Cat pivoted and began ascending the stairs. She did finally smile at the realization that Kara had moved to float beside her. “I could really stir things up and fly you the rest of the way,” she whispered, nearly failing at her own expression control at the sound of Cat’s amused huff.

“Walking will do for now, Supergirl.”

Kara refrained from vocal agreement, settling instead on floating back slightly enough to afford her a better view of the purposeful sway of Cat’s hips as she proceeded inside. As Cat paused to pass through the metal detectors, Kara blushed at the sight of the CEO’s knowing smirk.

“Ms., ah, Ms. Supergirl?” The hero turned at the sound of the hesitant address. A young officer nervously smiled up at her. “Sorry, but I need you to go through one of the detectors, too.”

With a bright smile and a nod, she dropped down softly onto her feet once more and walked through the nearest detector. She noted as she passed through Cat quickly snapping a photo with her ever-ready mobile. “Always so by the book,” the reporter teased as they once more began down the hall toward the appropriate chamber.

Outside the closed double doors, Cat paused, holding a hand out toward one of the two members of her camera crew—Beckley, Kara noted absently. The young woman immediately handed over a stack of folders and a tablet, which Cat quickly checked for whatever she wanted queued up on the device.

Nodding in satisfaction, she turned to look at the hero. “This is where we part for the moment, Supergirl.” Her eyes sparkled mischievously. “We each deserve our own spectacular entrance. Give me mine and I’ll be sure to introduce you to yours.”

In a surprising gesture, the reporter reached up to brush back an errant golden curl from Kara’s eyeline. “If you’d be so kind as to wait out of sight—I believe Mr. Graves has earned a surprise of this magnitude this morning.”

Chuckling at the statement, the hero obediently stepped to the side of the doorway. She noted with amusement the tangle of disbelief and awe in Rodgers’s and Beckley’s expressions at how compliant the Hero of National City was to the Queen of All Media.

Two officers who had been standing outside the chamber immediately swung open the doors at the sight of Cat turning to face them. Kara couldn’t help but shake her head at the sight—how quickly people snapped to attention to Cat’s desires, even without the smaller blonde needing to utter a word.

The CEO strode through the open chamber doors, her moves strong and confident even under the scrutinizing weight of every eye in the room quickly settling on her. She nodded in acknowledgement toward James, who had positioned himself inside the room precisely so he could capture the moment Cat entered, camera crew closely in check.

Conversation at the front of the chamber stuttered to a halt as several council members, including Spencer Graves, turned in response to the sudden excited murmuring from the already substantial crowd inside the room. Graves glared at the reporter strutting down the aisle toward the podium provided for audience members who wished to address the chamber. With a perturbed flick of his hand toward the two CatCo staff setting up for a live feed, he snapped, “What is all this?”
“Democracy.” Cat spread her hands out in a gesture that indicated she thought the answer was quite obvious. “Perhaps you’ve heard that it dies in darkness. We’re simply making certain to keep the lights on and focused.”

She gave a nod of acknowledgement when she saw the thumbs-up from Beckley that they were broadcasting live. “The people of National City deserve to know what you’re proposing to levy against our alien residents—particularly the alien who saved all our lives last year.”

Cued by Cat’s words, Kara stepped through the still-ajar doors into the council chamber. A hush, quickly followed by excited murmurs rippled through the crowd at the sight of the Girl of Steel standing in the chamber entrance.

The swirl of nerves tightening Kara’s stomach muscles instantly relaxed as Cat turned to watch her, a soft smile instantly curving her lips. With a small nod of acknowledgement, the Hero of National City continued into the chamber, head high and cape swinging in rhythm with her strong strides.

Graves sneered with unapologetic disdain toward the CEO. “I should have known you’d turn this meeting into a circus.”

Cat’s elegant brow arched at Graves’s comment. “I would think someone with your propensity for three-ring posturing would appreciate a bit more spectacle.”

“Ms. Grant, I take my position on this council very seriously. I would appreciate if you extended me a bit more respect for what I do for the citizens of National City.”

“You mean like this citizen?” She gestured toward the hero now standing beside her. “And all those like her whom you would like to subject to the equivalent of a legal doxxing simply for not having been born on this planet? That is, after all, the ultimate purpose of your mandatory registry, isn’t it? The parts that you aren’t speaking aloud in mixed company?”

The murmur grew louder as attendees processed the insinuation of her statement. Graves shrugged dismissively. “I assure you, I have no idea what you mean with your accusation, Ms. Grant. I made my intentions clear with my press conference. I want National City’s aliens to register and start carrying their fair share of the weight here.”

He finally turned his attention to Supergirl. “It’s time you started feeling the financial repercussions of all the damage you cause to this city.”

With an amused hum, Cat cast an askance glance toward Kara. “Tell me, Mr. Graves, have you ever spoken directly with Supergirl before this morning?”

His lips lifted condescendingly. “I’ve had no way of contacting her directly, so, no, I have not.”

“Then allow me to provide you with some fact-checking assistance, since clearly your office has failed you dramatically in this regard.” The gold in her eyes glittered in delight as his oil slick of a smile sank from his lips. “Supergirl actually does possess full U.S. citizenship. I confirmed with President Marsdin that she granted Supergirl full amnesty and citizenship when she named her Ambassador of Alien Amnesty.

“I also confirmed both via Supergirl and her current employer that she, in fact, pays county, state, and federal taxes—and has done so for several years. Even when she lacked legal credentials, she abided by our tax laws.”

He shifted his incredulous glare toward the hero. “You have an employer?”
“I do need to eat,” she offered, eyes sparkling at the sound of laughs from the crowd.

Kara melted slightly at the sight of Cat casting an impish grin her direction before focusing once more on Graves. “Superpowers aside, she’s a grown woman, Mr. Graves. Surely, you realized she would need some way of taking care of herself financially. Other than not being forthcoming about her alien status or the legality of her original forms of identification, she has proven to her current employer to be exemplary in her civilian profession—just as exemplary as she continues to prove herself as Supergirl.”

“And what would this civilian profession be? What company would employ an alien with counterfeit papers?”

“A company that prefers to remain anonymous in deference to Supergirl’s true identity. They also wish to protect themselves against the future possibility that you return to your previous threats of levying punitive fines against any company that would hire aliens over humans.”

She tilted her head studiously. “Perhaps you could explain how you think our alien residents are going to start ‘carrying their share of the weight’ financially when you also want to punish any business that would consider hiring them.”

“You misunderstood my original intention, Ms. Grant. Let me clarify: I am merely suggesting we enact legislation that would ensure equal distribution of labor opportunities between humans and aliens. No need in companies going overboard in their attempt to toe the latest PC line by putting aliens above human job candidates, right?”

“Interesting proposition from someone who once declared affirmative action the ‘death of the competent American workforce.’” She paused, lips quirked pensively. “I’m curious as to why you don’t think the same about this proposition as you do about that one: that people should depend less on ‘government coddling’ and more on their own intellect and talents to prove themselves the best candidate for the job.”

“Ms. Grant, I will not engage you in this gotcha charade you’re playing. We both know many of these aliens possess unnatural abilities that give them unfair advantages.” He gestured heatedly toward the hero. “Her, for instance. Would it be fair to place her against a human when applying for a job in—construction? Or security? Or, hell, even food preparation?”

“So you admit that you want to punish aliens for simply being more gifted than humans at certain tasks?” Without giving him a chance to respond, she retrieved the tablet from where she had placed it on the podium.

“Congratulations on that winning combination of small-mindedness and shortsightedness that you always seem to pull off with unsettling acumen. Thankfully, we have more amenable and practical people actually out there doing the work and acknowledging the positive potential of collaborating with those like our resident Kryptonian.”

She flicked a finger against the tablet, firing up audio from a voice Kara quickly recognized as the fire chief who briefly spoke with her that morning:

“We will begin our investigation into the cause of this morning’s fire as soon as we can confirm the structural integrity of the floor that sustained the most damage. Until then, we’re working on helping to secure temporary housing for the tenants displaced by fire damage to their units. Thanks to the help of Supergirl, however, there are far more tenants who will be able to return to their apartments as soon as we’ve cleared the building."
“I’d also like to once again thank Supergirl for her assistance this morning. Not only did she help our fire fighters and EMTs arrive on-scene quickly and safely, she also prevented what could have been an unimaginable tragedy. She stopped the flames from reaching the building’s gas lines, which National City Gas & Electric was still working to shut down. If it hadn’t been for her—well, I don’t want to think about how many of my officers or how many civilians we would have lost today if it weren’t for Supergirl.”

Kara listened to the excited whispers around her as Cat shut down and set aside the tablet. “The aliens who call National City their home are an asset, not a hindrance. As this morning’s fire proves, we should be learning how to work together with them, as our first responders often do with Supergirl, rather than how to continue to divide our community.”

The incredulous snort from Graves finally broke Kara’s focus on Cat. “This is just one instance of Supergirl preventing damage to our city. I can provide you with at least a dozen instances, just from memory alone, of the extensive damage she has caused to this city.”

He shifted to meet gazes with the Kryptonian. “You bring danger and destruction with you wherever you go. You have cost National City millions in infrastructure and construction repairs. You’ve already depleted a quarter of this year’s public works budget. We’re going to have to increase taxes just to keep up with fixing all the damage you cause on a regular basis. Is that how you think you’re helping our citizens? By putting more financial strain on them with a-a Supergirl Tax?”

He leveled his glare once more at the CEO. “And you—how can you stand before this council and argue in her defense? How many times has she brought damage to CatCo Plaza? How much has her destruction cost you, Ms. Grant?”

“Whatever the cost, I am willing to pay it in exchange for her protection of this city.”

He leaned forward in his chair, lips curling scornfully. “And what about when you needed protection from her? Being thrown from the fortieth story of your own building—wasn’t exactly the high price you were expecting to pay, was it?”

Cat heard the choked whimper from beside her and could picture the hero’s devastated expression even without looking at her. She knew it would be the same expression Kara had worn the night she had come to Cat after being saved from red kryptonite. “It was too high a price—but not for me.”

“For whom, then? Her? She can fly, Ms. Grant. That’s the only reason you’re able to stand here today to give us all such a full view of your blatant hypocrisy—or perhaps you’ve forgotten what you said in your statement about her to National City? You publicly denounced her, told the people of this city to stay away from her for their own safety. You called her unstable and extremely dangerous. Are you now going to stand before us and say, what? That you no longer believe your own words? And if that’s the case, then tell me, how are we supposed to believe you, Ms. Grant?”

Staring Graves squarely in the eye, she stated, “Yes, I warned National City to stay away from Supergirl. It was my duty as a member of the media to protect the people who depend on us to keep them informed. It was also my duty to protect Supergirl as well, by removing the potential for her to cause injury while she was not in control. I knew that, if she hurt or killed an innocent civilian while she was unable to stop what was happening to her, it would devastate her once she was better.”

“So you denounced her to save her?” Graves feigned a confused laugh. “Is that what you’re now saying, Ms. Grant? Because if that’s the truth, then perhaps you should have clarified this sooner
for those of us still under the impression that we have an unstable alien in our city, and we have no idea what might set her off next—or how to stop her.”

“Supergirl isn’t a bomb,” the CEO interjected. “She wasn’t set off.” She gestured toward the hero standing silently across from her. “What happened to Supergirl was no different from what happens to millions of people around the world, myself included, when something happens to imbalance our brain chemistry. The only difference was there was no treatment at the ready to help Supergirl’s extraordinary brain handle its alteration—an alteration, by the way, a human inflicted upon her.”

Focusing on Graves, the gold in her eyes burned with fury. “If you’re looking for a monster in this scenario, then I suggest you look in a mirror. Someone like you, controlled by bigotry and unfounded fear—that’s who caused Supergirl’s alteration. We harmed her. We betrayed her and then blamed her for our own betrayal.”

He narrowed his eyes accusingly. “So you say, Ms. Grant. Perhaps you can dip back into your memory of being an actual reporter and provide us with names and evidence to support your allegations. Although even if you were able to prove this, she was still unstable and nearly unstoppable. She spread chaos and fear and destruction throughout this city, and no amount of spin control, even from someone like you, can change that truth.”

Leaning back in his chair, he gazed condescendingly toward the reporter and the alien beside her. “It’s a shame really. I remember when you were once a respected journalist, Ms. Grant. Now, you’re just a PR flack who wouldn’t know a real news story even when it throws you from a building.”

He preened at the sight of devastation that shattered the hero’s expression before focusing again on Cat. “It’s hard to imagine you were ever worthy of a Pulitzer.”

Body rigidly controlled in a way only Kara would notice, the CEO coolly countered, “I have two Pulitzers, actually.”

Whatever response Graves had expected, that was not it. Frustrated that he failed to elicit the rise that he had anticipated, he smirked, “Congratulations. I’m sure they look beautiful up there with all the other awards you’ve won.”

Something in Cat’s gaze shifted, dimmed. “They actually don’t remind me of winning at all, Mr. Graves. They remind me of loss—lost lives, lost innocence, lost faith, lost hope.”

Lost son.

The unspoken thought shot through her with a barely perceptible shiver. Objectively, she knew the incontestable prestige of the Pulitzers she earned for her reporting of the atrocities that happened in Rwanda and Bosnia. While she rarely mentioned them herself, she had also never placed a moratorium on CatCo PR mentioning them at their discretion. As head of a publicly traded company that answered to a board more concerned with bottom lines than bylines, she conceded to the value of what her Pulitzers could gain CatCo.

Subjectively, however, the awards served only to remind her how public honors could never pass as consolation for the personal absolution she refused to grant herself.

She’d already willingly given CatCo priority above so much else in her life by that point that she had almost stopped questioning whether anything or anyone could ever break her singular focus on the success of her company—until the answer came in tiny hands that clutched at her tightly and in cries that hiccupped around the desperate mantra of “Mommy, no go,” that broke something so
deep within her, she knew she would feel its deserved agony until her very last breath.

And suddenly Cat had shifted her focus from running her company to simply running—to wherever she could lose herself to any pain beyond what constantly raged within her own heart. If that meant diving into the darkest abysses of human tragedy, then she would accept whatever consequences awaited her as recompense for her own unforgivable failings.

She pressed her hands flat atop the podium, knowing that if she didn’t, their trembling would become a distraction. “So much loss,” she sighed once more, voice barely above a whisper. She forced herself to refocus on the less personal—though no less painful—truths behind her statement.

“No, not lost. Taken. Destroyed. Those of us who reported from the field in Rwanda and Bosnia bore witness to the absolute worst of humanity—corpses brutalized beyond recognition, bones piled like refuse, starving children forced to take up weapons against each other, women savagely raped and mutilated.”

She struggled to draw a deep breath around thechoke of memories unmercifully persistent even so many years later. “And the world sat back and watched the slaughter of more than a million people—Tutsi, Pygmy Batwa, Muslim Bosniaks—and the excruciating suffering of more than a million more. Broken in body, mind, and spirit because something marked them as different. Other.”

The word snarled from her lips with a ferocity that startled Kara. “They dared to worship differently, believe differently, look differently, think differently—exist differently. They suffered and died brutally for those differences. All I and other reporters could do was try to make the world bear witness, and hope that our efforts could force someone to take action before it was too late.”

When she finally looked at Kara, she saw the horror of her words carving themselves deeply into the hero’s heart. She saw, too, the aching need to comfort, to protect Cat in ways the reporter had always shunned as kindness undeserved in regard to this part of her life.

Turning away before she might break under the hero’s gaze, she continued, “I have seen what happens when prejudice goes unstopped until it reaches its brutal end, and I swore to myself I would never again just bear witness. I would do whatever it took to stop those who would target anyone simply for being different.”

Lifting the stack of folders she’d brought with her from the podium’s shelf, she pinned Graves in place with a hard stare. “It always starts out the same, though, doesn’t it, Mr. Graves? We focus at first on what it will cost us. They’re here to take our jobs. They’re here to be a burden on us. They’re all dangerous. They’ll hurt us, hurt our families, take what’s ours unless we stop them. So we single them out. Make them register. Ostracize them and any who would help them. Round them up. Lock them away. Punish them. Obliterate them. And we do it all with a piety that would make gods weep.”

Moving toward the table at the front of the chamber, she handed folders to all the council members except Graves, whom she simply glanced at with perfect Cat Grant cool. “Seems I miscounted,” she shrugged. “Perhaps you can use that as your excuse in trying to explain what’s in those folders.”

She turned and walked away, raising her voice so the entire room could hear. “Spencer Graves wants to distract you with fear and baseless blame. He wants you to believe aliens are here to replace you, take from you, cost you, harm you. He even has the audacity to sit here today and claim Supergirl is nothing more than a dangerous financial burden on this city. He wants to scare you into doubting her incomparable value. He wants to anger you with threats of a ‘Supergirl Tax’
to make you believe our funding shortfalls are all her fault.”

When the CEO pivoted to face the council, her eyes gleamed with calculated fire. “Supergirl, however, isn’t the one who has been funneling money from the city for the better—or worst—part of Mr. Graves’s term in office.”

The susurrus of voices that had lined the room throughout the hearing roared to life at this declaration. Unfazed, Cat continued, “While Mr. Graves wants you to believe Supergirl is at fault for the precipitous drop in our allotted funding, the truth I’ve discovered is he’s been misdirecting National City funds to an off-shore account that’s been receiving a lot of similar deposits from other apparently like-minded city council members all across the country.”

The flush of fury flooding his features, Graves rose from his seat with such force he knocked back his chair. “How dare you make these insinuations against me!”

At the sight of Graves clenching his fists, Kara stepped forward, positioning herself slightly in front of Cat. A light touch of fingers along her forearm stilled her. When she met Cat’s gaze, she saw the silent assurance that she needn’t trouble herself.

“You were too tempting a thread, Mr. Graves,” she calmly explained, "even for a PR flack like me. I simply couldn’t resist tugging to see just how much you would unravel. Turns out, you were the perfect thread to pull.”

She flicked fingers toward one of his fellow council members, who was busily flipping through the contents of her folder. “Not only have I provided detailed records tracking how you have managed to transfer almost three million dollars of National City’s budget, but I have also provided the names and jurisdictions of every other politician who has been siphoning their own constituencies’ funds into this same account. The last time I tallied my list of confirmed accomplices, it was more than four hundred names, including U.S. Army Colonel Geoff Burnham.”

Seeing confusion slightly dull the fury in Graves’s glare, Cat explained, “Colonel Burnham is the account holder.” She tilted her head. “You seem bewildered, Mr. Graves. Didn’t you know for whom you were stealing National City’s funds?” She smirked. “Sorry. Allegedly stealing?”

Uninterested in hearing any poorly contrived lies, the reporter continued, “No matter. You can tell it to the police waiting for you outside. I’ve provided NCPD with the same information I’ve given the council. Oh, and at ten o’clock this morning, CatCo and the Tribune published my article detailing all of this.”

Her lips twitched with the hint of satisfaction. “We’ve also informed the local news outlets in all the cities affiliated with the politicians in this pot with you. I daresay you’ve made quite a few enemies this morning, Mr. Graves.”

The feral curl of his lip glistened with spittle as he snarled, “You have no idea the power of the enemy you just made, Ms. Grant.”

This time, Cat needed to tighten her grip on the hero’s forearm enough to pierce the haze of protective fury clouding Kara’s thoughts. Fighting against the pull to tangle their fingers together, she instead spoke firmly enough to draw the hero’s attention. “I believe we’re finished here, Supergirl.”

In her eyes, Kara could see the unspoken command: Head up and eyes forward and not another second wasted on him.
Not trusting her voice, Kara nodded, hoping that she at least seemed more composed than she felt inside.

As the duo passed once more through the opening chamber doors, the roar within the room almost deafening, Cat nodded at the sight of Detective Maggie Sawyer entering with two uniformed officers. Kara’s jaw swung open in surprise, eliciting the faintest of laughter from the detective. “Ms. Grant, Supergirl, always a pleasure.”

“Likewise, Detective,” the reporter returned while continuing to stride confidently away from the sounds of chaos she left in her wake.

Once more outside city hall, they both halted at the sight before them. At the bottom of the stairs, the crowd that had gathered for that day’s rally had nearly tripled since they had entered. In addition, several news vans lined the street, crews setting up for live shots and the hope of catching the inevitable reveal of Spencer Graves being taken into police custody.

As soon as the crowd caught sight of Supergirl, the crescendo of voices surged just as it had within the council room. Cat nodded in approval at the sight of how they clamored for Kara’s attention. Her status as the Hero of National City remained unscathed, regardless of Graves’s attempts to the contrary.

The CEO turned toward Kara with a gentle gaze and calming smile. “Go, darling. They need you right now, and I daresay the feeling is mutual. Agent Hawthorne and I will head over to the DEO. We can regroup there when you’re finished.”

Maintaining their locked gazes several beats longer, Kara shook with the effort not to gather Cat in her arms right there and hug her tightly. “Thank you,” she whispered, tears shimmering in her eyes.

“Whatever it takes, Kara.” Her attention shifted toward the black-clad figure moving swiftly up the stairs to meet them. “Now, go, Supergirl. Be their hero. I’ll be waiting for you at the DEO—that is, if Agent Hawthorne can find it within himself to drive faster than a horse-drawn carriage.”

The agent dipped his head slightly, not even bothering to suppress the smirk earned by the CEO’s pointed comment and arched brow. “Both Supergirl and Agent Danvers have informed me that, for the foreseeable future, my continued existence hinges on my ability to keep you safe. With all due respect, Ms. Grant, I fear them way more than I fear you.”

With an exaggerated eye roll, the CEO began once more down the stairs, Hawthorne quickly falling into place beside her. “The price for being a muse is always high,” she sighed while smiling at the sound of Kara laughing behind her.

As the CEO reached the bottom of the stairs, reporters surged toward her, each calling her name and clamoring to be noticed above the others. Pausing with perfect flourish, Cat rested one hand high along the curve of her back, holding the other elegantly before herself as she addressed the media scrum. “I am merely the messenger of this story,” she demurred while gesturing toward the gathering beyond. “Look out into the crowd behind you and you’ll see the real story here today.”

As she spoke, she watched Kara circle the crowd once before setting down in the midst of the rally. Instantly, she was besieged by children, alien and human alike, seeking her attention. The hero dipped low for a moment. When she rose once more to full height, two children swung from her outstretched arms while giggling and squealing with delight.

“The real story isn’t fear—it’s hope. Hope that we can rise above the discord and division spread by people like Spencer Graves and instead work together to strengthen the ties that bind us all,
“Regardless of our differences.”

Lost for a moment to the lull of watching Kara surrounded by the adoration of her city, she forced herself back into focus at the insistent call for attention from reporters. With a dismissive flick of her fingers, Cat began once more toward her awaiting transportation. “Your story is there,” she reiterated. “Now, if you will excuse me, I believe my part here is finished. Thank you.”

Hawthorne circled back behind Cat, blocking further approaches toward her as she climbed into the back seat of his service vehicle before he swiftly hopped into the driver seat and drove them away. When the agent glanced into his rear view mirror, he was surprised to see luminescent jade eyes returning his gaze. He caught the slight hitch of one eyebrow before she commented, “Nice to see you can hustle when necessary, Agent.”

With a wordless inclining of his head, Hawthorne proceeded to move smoothly through traffic, acquiescing slightly to Cat’s impatience with a bit more haste than previously used.

Inside the DEO’s underground garage, the agent deposited Cat by the elevators while he parked his Denali. She made her way up to the main level, her sharp heel clicks against the tile quickly alerting the agents on duty to her arrival. While most of the agents watched the CEO’s approach with exuberant expressions that slightly unnerved Cat, one agent hustled up to the second floor, disappearing into Alex’s lab.

Seconds later, Alex was the first to appear at the top of the stairs, with Eliza close behind her. The two Danvers women moved swiftly toward Cat, who drew to a stop at the sight, confusion slowly contorting her features.

Before she could say anything, Alex had her wrapped in a tight embrace that took her completely by surprise and nearly lifted her right off her feet. Quickly enough, however, movement caught up with realization and Cat’s arms settled around the agent, returning the hug.

Shifting back and releasing her hold enough that Cat could resettle properly on her heels, Alex laughed while shaking her head. “Goddamn, Cat. You didn’t just throw down the gauntlet. You fucking hurled it at Luthor.” Her eyes glowed with a gratitude and awe that Cat hadn’t quite anticipated. “And you smashed out several of CADMUS’s fangs in the process.”

Eliza moved to her daughter’s side, placing a hand on Alex’s shoulder to steady her. “My daughter’s disturbingly graphic comparisons aside,” she began, earning a glimmer of contrition from the brunette’s gaze, “What you just did is a huge game changer, Cat.”

“I wish I could have finished connecting the trail all the way up to the big donors. Graves needed to be stopped now though. I couldn’t let him continue to move forward with legislation that might have endangered the aliens here in National City.”

“And this alien would like to personally thank you for that.” The trio turned toward the voice, met by the openly joyful face of J’onn J’onzz. “I do wish you’d given us a little heads-up about what you were about to drop,” he teased, eyes practically glowing at the CEO’s reaction to his impertinence, “but your actions this morning are already having massive repercussions, Ms. Grant. CCN is reporting at least fifty other council members across the country have already been brought in for questioning based on your article, with many more expected before the day is over. You’ve just severed a huge monetary artery for the project.”

He sobered noticeably. “Mr. Graves was correct, though, in what he said: You’ve revealed yourself today as the prime target for Lillian Luthor’s full fury.”
The CEO shrugged at the comment. “It’s not the first time I’ve been on the wrong side of Lillian
Luthor.” Ignoring the curious stares this comment earned from both Danvers women, she finished,
“This just means I get to spend more time surrounded by your alluring armed agents.”

“And a certain Kryptonian who you’ll be hard-pressed to shake for more than a few seconds at a
time after this—not to mention that Kryptonian’s sister.” Alex continued her hold, her eyes burning
with such intensity, Cat felt her breath stutter in her chest at the sight. “Thank you, Cat. What
you’ve done this morning—what you’ve been doing since you left CatCo—”

Cat rested her hands on Alex’s arms, her affection for this brave, bold woman growing stronger
every day. “She’s worth it all.” Catching sight over Alex’s shoulder of the familiar shy shuffle of
her former employee, she continued, “I can’t claim full responsibility for this morning anyway. As
spectacularly talented as I may be, I couldn’t have gotten nearly as far as I did without some
specialized assistance.”

Turning to follow the CEO’s gaze, Alex inhaled in surprise at the sight of Winn smiling at Cat’s
comment. “Winslow has proven once again his unparalleled tenacity in rooting out nefarious online
activity.” She arched her eyebrow in the IT agent’s direction, her singular concession to knowing
his role in Dirk Armstrong’s orchestrated downfall. “We made such a successful team, in fact, that
I might just try to lure him back from the DEO.” She narrowed her eyes toward J’onn in feigned
annoyance. “Unfair play, by the way, to wait until I’m out of town to poach my best employees.”

“B-best? Me?”

Amusement glittered brightly in Cat’s eyes as Alex finally released her hold on the CEO and the
two women began heading toward the brunette’s lab, Eliza falling in step beside them. She laid a
hand on Winn’s shoulder as she passed, laughter lifting her lips at the surprised squeak she detected
from her former employee.

When Kara finally found the trio in Alex’s lab nearly an hour later, she couldn’t help the face-
splitting smile at the sight. The three women sat at the center counter, each contentedly sipping
coffee while watching the CCN live coverage on one of Alex’s monitors.

She heard Cat tsk softly at the video loop that had just begun playing, of Kara besieged by young
rally participants. “Perhaps I shouldn’t have left your sister unattended down there. She’s probably
still letting all those kids swing from her like she’s a Kryptonian jungle gym.”

“They actually got bored pretty quickly when they realized their parents didn’t want me to take
them flying,” the hero finally offered, her whole body alight with happiness at the sudden attention
from all three women in the room.

Setting down her mug, Cat reached a hand toward Kara as she slid from her stool. Leaning into the
full embrace she found instantly engulfing her, she laughed, “Otherwise, you’d still be down there
with them, no doubt.”

She caught the glint of sadness within Kara’s smile. “I like making them happy,” she replied, her
expression hinting at deeper emotions she struggled to repress.

Cataloging the moment for later consideration, Cat instead returned to her seat, waving at the
monitor. “We’re now up to more than a hundred fifty cases of extreme political fallout. Even
Lesser Lane is getting extra front page real estate thanks to this.” She caught Eliza’s knowing eye
roll at her dig at Lois.

With a chiding huff, Kara pulled a stool over beside Cat, entwining their fingers to rest atop her
knee. “You should be nicer to Lois.”

“You should be nicer to Lois.”

“Any particular reason why, darling?”

Even she could feel the usual steadiness of her poker face faltering under the double barrage of nervous stammering from Kara and the snort of understanding she caught from where Alex sat. Turning slightly, she saw the brunette smirking at her with her characteristic candor, lips tilted in that telling way that let Cat know she was far more onto the smaller blonde’s game than Kara ever would be.

They continued watching the news coverage while Cat divulged a few details of what she planned next based on her research. She sighed in frustration while discussing how, no matter how deeply she had dug already, she was still missing the puzzle piece that would let her connect Lillian Luthor explicitly to Project CADMUS. “She continues to remain irreproachably in the eye of this shit storm.”

Kara leaned close and kissed the sensitive spot behind the CEO’s ear. “You’ll figure out how to stop her, Cat. I know you will.” She paused, her head tilting slightly for a moment before she broke into a full smile and looked toward her sister. “Maggie’s here.”

The brunette shot her a curious frown while rising and heading toward the stairs. “Really? She didn’t say she was stopping by.” She leaned over the railing, eyes instantly finding the detective striding in a determined line straight for the stairs.

The smile that had begun to spread across her lips at the sight of Maggie hurrying toward her dimmed when she noted the worried furrow set between the detective’s eyes. As soon as Maggie reached the top, Alex placed hands on her forearms to steady her in place. “Hey, what’s wrong, Mags?”

Three sets of eyes shifted at the sound of Alex’s concerned tone. Maggie slipped free of the brunette’s hold, her full attention focused on the CEO across from her. “Cat, there’s something I need to—”

Maggie made it no further before Cat was on her feet, interrupting with the only thought to instantly crowd out all else in her mind. “Is it my sons? What’s happened? Are Carter and Adam all right?”

Realizing her error, Maggie nodded quickly, hands extended to calm the CEO. “Your sons are fine, Cat.” Guilt spiked through her at the sight of Cat gripping her arms against the shiver of relief the detective’s words released. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you. This isn’t about Carter or Adam.” She waited until Cat’s focus returned before finishing, “It’s about Thomas Rieger. We just learned about an hour ago that he’s missing.”

Cat would have completely missed the stool she attempted to sit on at that moment had it not been for Kara’s super speed. She barely noticed, too intent on processing Maggie’s statement. Eyes narrowing in confusion, she shook her head. “That’s—that can’t be. He just checked in with his parole officer.”

“Two weeks ago. That was the last time anyone saw him.”

Anger flickered in Cat’s gaze. “I know he has a job. His employer didn’t report he was missing for two weeks?”

“He claims someone from Glendale Manor called him on the day Rieger was supposed to return to
work, stating he needed to come back for some additional minor adjustments to his medications. However, when the employer got in this morning, he had a message on his work phone from Glendale Manor, asking if Thomas was settling back into his daily work life successfully. They mentioned they were having trouble reaching him at his home and hoped his employer might encourage him to call them.”

“He’s been missing for two weeks.”

Maggie watched the weight of this realization settle along the uncharacteristic rigidity of Cat’s shoulders. “As far as we can tell at the moment, yes. His PO confirmed her meeting with him. She said he seemed to be doing fine and was even looking forward to going back to work the next day. I just spoke with his father on my way here—”

“His family wants nothing to do with him,” Cat interjected. “They made that bluntly clear during his trial.”

The detective nodded in solemn agreement. “Yeah, he made that perfectly clear during our conversation, too. He did confirm that he hasn’t spoken with Thomas since his arrest, so no help whatsoever there. Officers are currently canvassing his apartment building and neighborhood, but it didn’t look like he had many people in his life who paid much attention to him.”

Her dark gaze softened as she observed the woman before her. “You seem to be the only person in his life to show him any degree of compassion or concern.”

At the lull in conversation, Kara gingerly touched Cat’s shoulder, frowning at the way she flinched at the touch. “Cat? Who is Thomas Rieger?”

The smaller blonde reached up to cover Kara’s hand with her own, which Kara noted felt much colder than normal. “Someone who made a mistake while unwell and needed help overcoming that mistake.”

Eliza circled around to stand between her daughters, her hands lighting on the small of each one’s back as she shared a look with the detective. When she met Cat’s gaze, the CEO sighed in realization. “You told Maggie.”

Both Danvers sisters gaped in surprise at how quickly Eliza replied, “You bet your haute couture-covered ass I did.” She exhaled in relief at the slight lessening of tension she saw in Cat’s posture. “You’re not the only one capable of looking out for people you love. I’m just sorry it proved to be a necessary warning.”

“I still don’t understand.” Kara looked from Eliza to Cat, frustration and fear virtually seeping from her pores.

Rubbing a soothing pattern against her younger daughter’s back, Eliza explained, “When Cat hosted her talk show, Thomas Rieger developed an obsession with her. It began as increasingly threatening correspondence and moved into stalking. The police thankfully caught him before he could act on any of his threats.”

Eliza caught the waver in Maggie’s expression. The detective had shared with her a brief rundown of the things Rieger had written to Cat and the items he’d brought with him the day police caught him in Cat’s dressing room. She’d struggled for a week to push the subsequent horrific images from her mind.

“His arrest may have finally saved him,” Cat continued. “A psychiatric evaluation diagnosed him
as paranoid schizophrenic. He now receives treatment and monitoring from Glendale Manor. He goes through cycles in which the medications falter and require changing or adjusting, but he has responded in mostly positive ways to his treatments.”

“You pay for those treatments.” Cat turned toward Kara at the statement, the hero’s eyes bright with understanding. “Someone from Glendale Manor called you at CatCo once. You said something about it being for a donation, but you were agitated the rest of the day.”

“I insisted they call me whenever they needed to bring Thomas in for treatment and as soon as they released him. His PO also knew to call me whenever he checked in for his regular meetings.” She sighed, her eyes slipping shut. “Everything went smoothly this time, just as it always did. Nothing seemed out of place.”

Maggie reached into her jacket pocket, drawing out a sealed evidence bag containing a vial of jagged gray crystals. “When police entered Mr. Rieger’s apartment, they found evidence of a struggle and several large dried deposits of this.” She held it out to Alex with the warning, “Don’t let it come into any kind of direct contact with your skin. The first officer on-scene accidentally touched some that had dried on the doorknob to Rieger’s apartment. He lost feeling in his hand for twenty minutes.”

Alex squinted at the vial, her mother instinctively moving closer for her own look. “We should send a team over to run some scans as well. Maybe we can pick up something your team can’t read with your equipment. And does his apartment have security surveillance? If so, how long do they keep data before wiping it?”

Eliza took the bag from her older daughter, more interested in getting a better look at the sample while Alex and Maggie continued to discuss the security protocols of Thomas Rieger’s apartment. Kara watched in helpless silence, her mind churning with information and worry. Someone had once tried to hurt Cat and now he was missing. He was missing and that meant only one thing to the hero: He might try to hurt Cat again or someone might try to make him hurt her.

Cat was in danger.

She felt the painful constriction of her lung muscles at this thought, could hear and feel the increase in her heart rate—could also hear the unexpected and frightening uptick in another nearby heartbeat.

When she looked over at the smaller blonde, the first thing she observed was the sheen of sweat beading along Cat’s forehead and temples. Next were eyes clenched shut and shallow breaths pulled in with increasing difficulty.

“Eliza?”

The scientist turned quickly at the sound of fear in her younger daughter’s voice, met by panic-filled blue eyes. Shifting her attention, she instantly understood the reason. Without hesitation, she pulled one of the lab stools in front of Cat. Temperering her voice to a soothing cadence, she queried, “Cat, can you look at me?”

Alex recognized the soft, clear tone. It was how her mother spoke to Kara whenever the young Kryptonian slipped into one of the myriad panic attacks she suffered as she acclimated to her new reality. With a few quick key strokes, she triggered the lab doors to shut and lock, and adjusted the lighting to a lower level.

“Thank you, Alex,” Eliza whispered while waiting for Cat to comply. As green gaze struggled to
meet Eliza’s, she placed her hands, palms up, on her knees. “If you want, you can take my hands, okay?”

She swallowed back the relief that surged at the feel of Cat tentatively resting her hands in hers. Softly, she began to draw a square pattern on the back of the smaller blonde’s hand with her thumb. “Do you feel that, Cat? Can you focus on the pattern I’m drawing?”

Brow furrowed, Cat nodded once. Eliza squeezed her hands gently while continuing to use her thumb to draw the square, careful to remember she needn’t press hard the way she always had for Kara. “Good. Focus on the pattern and use it to regulate your breathing. Like this: Breathe in, hold, breathe out, hold.”

As she spoke, she associated each step with one side of the square. The next time through, she demonstrated with her own breaths for Cat how she wanted the smaller blonde to try to calm her own breathing. “Can you do that, Cat? Can you breathe with me?”

Eliza continued to demonstrate for Cat, silently noting how Kara had already begun to regulate her own breathing to match her guidance. Bittersweet memories washed over Eliza of the many times she or Alex had sat just like this with Kara, guiding her through the minefield of memories that often exploded around the girl with no obvious prompting.

A grateful smile curled her lips as she observed Cat fighting to comply with the slow count and steady pattern against her skin. “You’re doing great, Cat. I know today has been difficult for you, especially having to talk about and remember the horrors you witnessed in Rwanda and Bosnia. I can’t even begin to imagine. And now learning about Thomas Rieger—it’s a lot to deal with. It’s a lot to remember. But you’re not alone. I’m right here. Just keep listening, keep focusing on my words and the pattern: Breathe in on chahv, hold on tav, breathe out on non, and hold on ten.”

After several more rounds that finally regulated Cat’s breaths to a much slower, more comfortable level, the reporter softly stated, “You’re counting in Kryptonese.”

Eliza nodded, her smile taking on a slightly mischievous hue. “I knew that would catch your attention.” She glanced toward her younger daughter and winked, knowing Kara needed extra reassurance and comfort in the moment as well. She continued to explain, “Hearing her own language would often help Kara come out of similar attacks.”

Cat blinked slowly at this before struggling to shift her gaze toward the hero. Kara caught the flicker of curiosity fighting against the steady recession of panic. She jolted slightly at the soft call of her name from Eliza. “Kara, why don’t you take my place? Is that all right, Cat?”

The reporter nodded, but tightened her grip on Eliza’s hands enough to catch and hold her attention. “Thank you.” Eliza could see the strength of focus returning to Cat’s gaze. “I—I—it’s better with help,” she finally whispered, her gaze shifting down to their still-joined hands.

The pain behind those simple words struck Eliza silent for several beats. “How often, Cat?”

The smaller blonde shrugged, signs of chagrin steadily settling into her posture and expression. “At least once every few months. More at a certain time of the year.” She swallowed against the roughness of her voice. “Thankfully, Carter’s father knows this and has always agreed to schedule Carter’s summer vacation with him then.” She huffed slightly. “It’s his one concession of kindness left for me.”

Eliza stilled her every movement at this statement as she focused on controlling the reaction Cat’s words sparked within her. Her daughters knew her well enough to recognize the false calm, just as
she knew they shared the rage that calm contained. She refused to dwell too long on the “kindness”
of any concession that had abandoned Cat to struggle alone through anything similar to what they’d
just witnessed. Instead, she took small consolation in knowing Cat would never again face this
darkness alone—not so long as any of the women in that room with her drew breath.

Feeling the beginning of tremors through the smaller blonde’s body, Eliza tightened her grip to
refocus Cat on the sensation and rose from where she sat. “Can you stand with me?” Smile lines
fanned out from the corners of her eyes as she watched Cat rise, still graceful as ever on vertiginous
heels. “Kara’s going to take you home now, okay?”

She reached for her younger daughter, moving aside to draw Kara into the space in front of Cat.
Eliza moved a hand to Cat’s back, repeating the same soothing pattern she’d used only a little
while ago on Kara. “You’re always going to be safe with us, Cat.”

Unable to bring herself to meet the gazes of any of the women surrounding her, she merely nodded,
her eyes slipping closed as she hung her head.

Looking to her younger daughter, Eliza reached out and ran a hand soothingly along a blue-clad
bicep. “Take care of each other, Kara, and let us know if either of you needs anything.”

Kara’s eyes brimmed with tears as she gently wrapped Cat in her arms and lifted them from the
floor. Alex unlocked the lab entrance and activated the bay doors for Kara so nothing would
impede her departure. With a midair twist and softly whispered words of assurance, she glided
them from the DEO and up into the late afternoon sky.

Chapter End Notes

This is actually the first half of what quickly became a monster of a chapter—one I am
still struggling to finish. However, I realized that this half not only was finished but
also provided a logical break that I should use rather than continuing to let time pass
between postings.

This first half is primarily linked to the CADMUS story. However, it does provide
some deeper insight into the things that drive Cat as well as provides a nice segue into
the second half. That part is going to completely focus on Kara learning more about
some of the events from Cat’s past that created who she is now. The good news with
the second half is that I’m very close to being finished. I hope to be ready to post it
within the next few days.

Let me just state here that I mean no disrespect to the two journalists, Mark Fritz and
David Rohde, who actually won the Pulitzers for international reporting in 1995 and
1996, for their coverage, respectively, of the ethnic violence in Rwanda and the
massacre of Muslim Bosniaks in Srebrenica. Both more than earned their Pulitzers for
their unflinching coverage of these horrific moments in human history.

Both these moments were ones I couldn't help but believe a reporter like Cat Grant
would be driven to cover—not just for the reasons of running from her own pain. I
believe she would have realized the significance of turning her personal pain into a
means to push herself into showing the world the greater pains and atrocities being
committed on a global scale. She would have forced herself to focus on the greater
power she could wield by making us all aware of these shocking crimes against
humanity.

As for the overarching theme of both halves of this chapter, Cat is such a compelling study in darkness and light to me. I've been anticipating this part of the story for a while (and hopefully seeded preceding chapters here and the other parts of this series with enough allusions to support all I dropped in full here).

I also found this one of the hardest parts to write so far, because it does take us through some incredibly difficult truths for her. My heart hurt as I wrote a lot of both halves of this chapter, which I think is one of the reasons it's been taking me so long to complete. I'm not going to lie: A few things I wrote in this part of the story broke me a little.

On a lighter note, let it be known I know virtually nothing about fashion. Cat is really pushing me out of my comfort zone on that front. I hope I'm doing her justice. She looks fabulous in my mind at least.
Chapter Summary

Respite from their focus on CADMUS comes in the form of Kara taking care of Cat for the evening, which leads her to learn some of Cat’s most intimate truths.

Chapter Notes

Most important warning: This chapter is almost pure self-indulgence on my part. It contains some things I will work into other parts of the story, but mostly, it’s just me needing a really big dose of Cat Grant at the moment.

More of the same warnings from the last chapter. Since this is a continuation of that chapter, similar discussion carries over. Cat goes into more detail about the things she saw in Rwanda and Bosnia. Please note that discussion of what Cat covered during both wars includes discussion of graphic violence and rape (although I try not to go into too much detail, both conflicts were so horrific, even rudimentary discussion is going to be upsetting). It also involves a discussion regarding how witnessing all she did had extreme psychological effects on Cat. Many journalists who cover wars or extremely violent situations experience PTSD, depression, anxiety—it’s something we don’t often think about and something many of the journalists try to hide out of fear that they won’t get to continue to cover these events if they reveal their conditions. I’ve tried to make Cat’s reactions to her own psychological responses as realistic as possible based on this information.

We also have more intimacy between our ladies at the end. So, if ladies loving ladies ain’t your thang, you’ll know where to stop.

The flight was silent as Kara made her way across the city, feeling every shiver to course through Cat’s body as if they were her own. Even after wrapping her cape around the smaller blonde, the trembling continued as Cat burrowed as deeply into Kara’s embrace as possible.

As they drew closer to the penthouse complex, Kara pressed a kiss to the smaller blonde’s temple. “We’re almost home, Cat.” Relief spiked through her at the feeling of Cat acknowledging her statement with a nod.

Boots touched down soundlessly on the balcony, and Kara immediately carried Cat the rest of the way to her bed rather than releasing her on landing. The fact that the smaller blonde made no attempt to stop her alerted Kara to the level of emotional and physical exhaustion to which she was succumbing. After setting Cat down on the edge of the bed, she knelt and gently removed Cat’s heels. “Would you like me to draw you a hot bath?”

Cat blinked slowly several times before giving in to the need to let her eyes remain closed. “I’d just like to rest for a little while.” The smallness of her voice shook Kara more than any of Cat’s louder,
sharper cadences ever had.

“Of course,” the hero complied. “Let me help you get more comfortable?” At the sight of a slight nod, she lifted Cat to her feet and retrieved her dark blue Henley that Cat had taken over at some point. She helped the smaller blonde switch out of her dress into the soft shirt that covered her hands and brushed the tops of her thighs while standing. Kara drew back the covers and watched as Cat climbed stiffly back into bed, her body rigid and trembling where she lay.

Quickly divesting herself of her suit, she threw on a Radcliffe T-shirt of Cat’s she’d worn before and slipped into the bed beside the smaller blonde, surprised by how quickly Cat shifted into her arms. Wrapping her in a full embrace, the hero scratched soothing patterns against her back until she felt the full, exhausted press of Cat’s body against her.

Closing her own eyes briefly, the hero forced herself to hold back the tears that had been threatening to fall since leaving the DEO. With a shaky breath, she rested her cheek against the top of Cat’s head and focused instead on watching the play of shadow and light throughout the room as the sun shifted slowly across the sky. She had no idea how much time had passed when she heard the sound of Carter’s ringtone.

Worried the familiar noise might disrupt Cat’s sleep, she shifted as swiftly as possible from the bed and retrieved the phone from Cat’s purse, still abandoned by the balcony door where Kara had dropped it. With another burst of speed, she rushed into the living room, catching the request just in time.

The moment the FaceTime connection started, Kara instantly felt the balm of Carter’s laughter wash over her. “I’m starting to think I accidentally reprogrammed my mom’s number with yours, Kara.”

The hero’s expression eased for the first time since returning to the Grant home. “Yeah, well no one can get to a phone faster than me.”

Her smile broadened at the sight of Carter rolling his eyes and shaking his head. “Is my mom busy?”

Uncertainty dimmed her smile. She had no idea how much Cat had shared with Carter about her past, including Thomas Rieger, or how deeply it still affected her. Knowing how strong her relationship was with her younger son, however, led Kara to suspect he probably knew a lot if not all the story. Still, she never wanted to overstep when it came to Cat’s connection with Carter.

Erring on the side of caution, she offered, “Your mom’s actually taking a nap right now.” She tried to make her tone light at the sight of concern creeping into Carter’s expression. “She’s been pushing herself really hard to finish that article, so I insisted she rest when we got home. I can have her call you back as soon as she’s awake.”

Kara held her breath in anticipation of Carter’s reply, seeing the flicker of concern pass across his face. However, he finally just shook his head. “Nah, that’s okay. I’m getting ready to head down to the common room. Tonight’s our weekly Settlers game.” His eyes sparkled impishly. “I have to maintain the Grant tradition of kicking ass and taking names.” Before Kara could reply, he smirked and finished, “I know, I know: Watch my language.”

Kara couldn’t help the laughter that grew within her, threatening to unlock all the emotions she was struggling to keep in check. “No doubt you’re your mother’s son.”

Eyes shining joyfully at the statement, he replied, “Just let her know I called and we can talk
tomorrow at some point. And—and tell her what she did today was amazing and I love her.”

“I will.” She paused, letting his words soothe her. “I’m sure she wouldn’t mind if I confirmed how much she loves you.” She watched him wrinkle his nose at her obvious statement before softly adding, “I love you, too, Carter.”

The sound of the young man’s gasp of surprise caught Kara’s own breath in her throat. She never wanted to make him uncomfortable. However, the muddled mélangé of emotions from the day’s events pressed against her heart—made her painfully aware once more of how brittle and beautiful and strong and fragile and far too unbearably fleeting human life could be, and how she must never waste one moment of any of it. The universe promised nothing and rescinded with impunity, but never again would it take someone from Kara’s life without them knowing the fullness of her love for them.

“I love you, too, Kara.”

Pressing her lips together, she still heard the hitch of emotion she was certain Carter had heard as well. She watched as he blinked quickly to clear his eyes, not even attempting to hide the shine in her own.

When he spoke again, his words snagged sharply on the tightness in his throat. “Can you—can you stay with my mom tonight?” His cheeks reddened at the words, but he pushed forward. “She shouldn’t be alone after talking about some of the things she talked about today.” Worry darkened his gaze. “Talking about it makes her remember—and remembering is always really hard on her.”

“I’m not going anywhere tonight, Carter. I swear it. Your mom won’t be alone.”

Gratitude spread through his expression. “Thank you for taking care of her.” He bit his lip as he worked up the courage to continue. “Sometimes, she doesn’t think she deserves that—to have someone care about her.”

“I guess that just means we’re going to have to keep doing it until we can outlast that infamous stubborn streak of hers.”

“Agreed,” he laughed, relief relaxing his features. He turned suddenly, attention drawn off-screen for a beat. When he looked back, he frowned slightly. “I’ve got to go.”

Kara picked up on the apologetic tone of his words and shook her head. “Don’t worry, Carter. Have fun. Kick ass and take names.”

He grinned widely at her teasing. “Victory will be mine.” He started to say goodbye, reconsidered with a pensive draw of his lips. Kara could tell from the way his eyes briefly unfocused that he was unsettled by whatever he was debating telling her. When he finally refocused on her, a troubling disquiet darkened his features. “There’s stuff about my mom you don’t know, Kara—stuff that’s happened to her that she keeps inside, even though she tells me all the time that’s it’s better to talk about things than keep them bottled up.”

He dug the nails of his right hand into his palm, trying to focus on the sharpness of the sensation rather than the nervousness he could already feel twisting within him like a live wire. He knew how protective his mother was of the secrets she had always held so closely. He knew, too, how much she suffered from that decision—and how much he wanted to help her in whatever way he could. “I’ve tried to get her to tell me, but I think she thinks it’s too much for me to know. B-but you should know. She trusts you—more than I think I’ve ever seen her trust anyone.”
Without hesitation, Kara nodded, knowing there was nothing Carter could ever ask of her that she wouldn’t do. “I will make absolutely certain your mom knows I’m here to listen to whatever she needs to talk about.”

His responding head tilt, so like his mother’s, caused a slight flutter of uncertainty within her chest as she watched him carefully consider her response. Several beats of silent contemplation later, he finally righted himself with a nod. “Ask her about the ring she wears all the time. It’s time she stopped carrying this all by herself. The ring will be a good way to get her started.” Without giving Kara a chance to formulate a response, he waved his free hand before drawing the FaceTime session to an end.

Sinking down onto the nearest couch, she dropped the phone on the table beside her. At the sting of tears once more threatening to fall, she scrubbed at her eyes in frustration before threading her fingers through her hair and leaning back against the cushions.

Soon enough, however, she grimaced at the snarls and sharp pains coming from her unusually empty stomach. She knew she was well below the caloric intake she needed for the day she’d had, especially considering her morning shuttling emergency equipment. She also knew Cat needed to eat something, even if she also knew the smaller blonde would probably protest that truth.

With a decisive nod to herself, she headed into the kitchen. She satiated her worst hunger pangs with one of the energy bars the DEO created for her, based on the formula Cisco Ramon had concocted for Barry. She smiled at the thought of her friends on Earth 1 and reminded herself she should check on Team Flash at some point soon. World-saving victory aside, she wanted to know they were handling their closer-to-home challenges just as well. Updates on Team Arrow and Team Legend would be nice as well, she smiled.

Zipping around Cat’s kitchen with a quickness she knew would impress even the Scarlet Speedster, Kara proceeded to prepare dinner. As she was finishing blackening two chicken breasts with her heat vision, she caught the sound of an increased heartbeat and the soft rustle of sheets from the bedroom. When she heard footsteps treading down the hall, she placed the grill pan to one side and strode to meet the approaching figure halfway.

“That doesn’t smell like take away.” The words muffled against Kara’s chest, where Cat had once more burrowed deeply into the hero’s hold.

A relieved chuckle stirred in the back of Kara’s throat at the sound of Cat’s teasing. “I might be solely responsible for keeping several of National City’s finest fast food establishments in the black, but I also do know how to cook.”

Seeing the curious cock of Cat’s brow when she pulled back to make eye contact, Kara shrugged and bit her lip. “Eliza insisted that Alex and I both know how to take care of ourselves before we left for college. She knew it would be doubly important for me to know how to take care of my caloric needs without drawing attention to myself.” Her cheeks colored a dusky rose. “So in addition to setting me up with a dining hall account on-campus, she taught me how to make several dishes high in carbs and protein that I could make where I lived off-campus. I’ve learned to improvise some things on my own since.”

With that, she led Cat over to the center island where she had already set two places for dining. As the smaller blonde settled, Kara prepared a plate of blackened chicken and sauteed vegetables atop a bed of vermicelli tossed in olive oil she had infused with garlic and rosemary.

Taking advantage of how distracted Cat was by studying the contents of her plate, Kara slid a tumbler of water in front of her rather than asking if she wanted wine. When the smaller blonde
finally noted this, she merely took a sip while watching Kara prepare her own plate.

The moment she took her first bite, all other thoughts became irrelevant. “Kara, this is fantastic. What on earth is on this chicken?”

“Proprietary blend of seasonings,” she teased. “Alex has been trying to get it out of me for years.”

Eyebrow elevating precariously high, Cat countered, “I’m pretty sure I have a certain leverage in this instance that Alex doesn’t.”

Coughing slightly around her mouthful of food, Kara quickly took a sip of her own water. Cat continued to eat, the soft upward curl of her lips betraying her amusement.

After several more bites, Cat paused while thoughtfully twirling pasta around her fork. “Eliza taught you well.”

Kara nodded, easily hearing what the smaller blonde had left unspoken. “Eliza’s amazing,” she softly conceded. “I can’t imagine what my life might have been like on Earth without her or Alex. Even after Jeremiah—after we thought we’d lost him, Eliza stayed so strong for us.”

She bowed her head, the memory of those days right after Jeremiah’s presumed death rippling through her: How Eliza had let Alex and her mourn however they needed, how she was always there to help piece them back together when they fell apart, how she never let them forget that it was fine to let their sadness slow them, but she would always be there to help them back up when it tried to hold them down. Only Kara could hear how she would fall apart herself once she thought her daughters were asleep, her tears unnervingly silent and endless.

“She’s a remarkable woman.” The words breathed out softly, nearly lost inside the tumbler from which Cat quickly drank. Kara knew from the skittish shift of the smaller blonde’s gaze that this was as close as she could bring herself to mentioning earlier events.

Nodding, Kara let silence settle between them as they continued eating. She felt her lips hitch in delight at every sound of pleasure she was fairly certain Cat wasn’t even aware of making as she finished her serving of food. Only when she took her last bite did she seem to realize she had eaten it all.

“Want more?” Kara gestured toward the stove. “I made a lot,” she added, her expression taking a somewhat guilty hue at the confession.

Cat quickly waved away the offer. “I’m perfectly full, Kara. It was delicious—thank you.” She gave a pointed look toward the food still setting on the stove. “You need to eat more, though. Finish what’s left and have the container of Rocky Road you left in the freezer if you’re still hungry—and never make that face again or feel guilty about however much you need to eat. Even if you hadn’t shuttled around emergency vehicles all morning, you’re entitled to eat whatever the hell you want.”

The hero couldn’t help the laughter she felt rise within her even as she ducked her head in mild embarrassment. Her breath caught in surprise, however, at the feel of Cat suddenly by her side, her fingers pressing up against her chin. When she looked up in response, the smaller blonde kissed her soundly before locking onto her with unbreakable resolve. “Never be ashamed of who you are or what that entails. I want you to always feel comfortable being Kara Zor-El with me, do you understand?”

Blinking rapidly against the tears stinging her eyes, Kara wrapped her arms around Cat without
hesitation, shifting her deeply into the hero’s warm embrace. “Thank you, Cat.”

It was still so new, this reality in which Kara found herself constantly encouraged to embrace her true self—to be Kryptonian in every way. That the encouragement came from the woman in her arms made it all the more powerful.

“Of course, darling.” Pressing a kiss against Kara’s cheek, she finished, “I think I’m going to take a quick shower. Finish eating and then leave the dishes. I can take care of them when I’m out.”

With a nod, she watched as Cat softly padded once more down the hallway toward the bedroom. At the sound of the shower starting, she promptly set about devouring the rest of the food she’d prepared. Both her Kryptonian nobility and her human influence made her keenly aware of manners around others. Alone, however, she was content to shift into what Alex called her “Tasmanian Devil” mode. Finishing off the food while Cat still ran her shower, Kara quickly downed the ice cream as well while taking care of the dishes, contrary to Cat’s direction.

By the time Cat re-entered her bedroom, draped in a plum-colored silk night shirt and absently finger-combing still damp curls, she was surprised by the sight of Kara wrapped in a bath towel, still slightly wet from her own shower and searching Cat’s dresser drawers. “I, um, I still haven’t brought over my own clothes,” she managed to stammer when she caught Cat’s curious gaze.

Silent for several unnerving moments, the smaller blonde finally stepped forward and retrieved a CatCo T-shirt and cotton shorts from one of the bottom drawers. With a quick spin, the hero dressed, holding the towel in her hands when she was finished. Without comment, Cat took the towel and placed it in the bathroom hamper before returning and guiding Kara toward the bed.

The two were quick to settle into what was becoming their natural resting position: Kara lying on her back with Cat curled against her side. She tucked her head against the hero’s broad shoulder, resting her hand over the solid thrum of the Kryptonian’s heart. Kara reached up and placed her hand atop Cat’s, her brow furrowing slightly at the feel of metal beneath her palm.

Shifting her hand slightly to the side, she realized that Cat still wore the ring that always decorated the middle finger of her right hand. She realized in that moment how infrequently she had ever seen Cat actually remove the ring, it often being the last thing she did before falling asleep. Carter’s advice instantly flitted through her thoughts as she studied the way the room’s soft light played along the jewelry’s unique lines and curves.

Sliding a finger along the narrow rod that intersected the three segmented bands, she asked, “Tell me about this?”

She caught the instant tension that bristled through Cat’s body as the smaller blonde shifted to meet gazes. Not wanting to hide anything from the smaller blonde, Kara explained, “Carter called earlier while you were asleep. We talked a little about some things, and he told me to ask you about it. He’s worried.”

Kara frowned at the crestfallen expression to darken Cat’s features. “He shouldn’t burden himself with worry for me.”

“Hey.” Kara slipped fingers beneath Cat’s chin, coaxing her to look up. “You worry about the people you love. It’s that simple.”

“Nothing meaningful is ever simple, darling.” She tilted her head to the side, the golden flecks of her eyes distractingly bright, and queried, “Do you know that my own mother doesn’t even know the reason why Carter’s last name is Grant?”
Kara’s frown deepened at the wholly unexpected question. Cat took her expression as reason to continue. “When I was still married to his father, his name was Carter Morgan. My mother, of course, accused me of being petty and of trying to emasculate Joe by ‘taking away his son’s birthright.’”

Kara shivered at the sound of Cat’s uncanny impersonation of her mother’s disagreeable tone. “The truth, though, was that his son made the decision, not me. Several years after I divorced his father, he asked if he could take my name.”

Kara licked her lips nervously, uncertain where this conversation was heading and increasingly unsettled by Cat’s dark expression. “W-why? Why didn’t he want to keep his father’s name?”

“He said he didn’t want to continue to keep the name Morgan and be a constant reminder to me of how his father had hurt me.”

Cat caught the quick, white-hot flash across Kara’s eyes at this statement, felt the hero’s hands clench and her body almost begin to vibrate with fury. “Hurt? He hit you?”

The smaller blonde shifted into a sitting position, drawing her legs underneath herself and turning slightly to face Kara. She watched as Kara pushed herself up to lean against the headboard. “No, Kara. He never hit me. You can sometimes do far more lasting damage with words than with fists.”

She paused, considering carefully her words. “Neither of my sons’ fathers knew how to handle my ambition or my success. Devon resorted to the ultimatum of me giving up CatCo or Adam. He never considered his option of supporting me in having both. We weren’t married, and I suppose he viewed the notion of playing house dad while I worked late every night, weekend, and holiday to be a non-starter for anything more between us. I should be grateful that he loved his son enough to want to take him with him when he finally left me.”

“Cat—”

The smaller blonde pressed her hand against Kara’s chest to calm her. “Adam may still hold it against me that I gave up my rights to be his mother, but it was the right thing to do. I couldn’t be a single parent and keep my pace with CatCo. I hated Devon for years for forcing me to choose rather than help me—but I have hated myself far longer for accepting that my choice at that point in my life needed to be my work.”

With a despondent sigh, she continued, “Giving up Adam was what led me to Rwanda and Bosnia. I honestly didn’t give a damn about what my reporting would mean for CatCo. All I wanted was to find pain that could make me forget my own, and find a way to stop it.”

“But it didn’t work that way.”

The laugh Cat exhaled was hauntingly empty. “Never does.”

In the silence of the room, Cat focused on steadying her breathing, if only to keep at bay this panic always slithering darkly along the edges. She knew Kara would be able to hear the frenetic beat of her heart, the pounding of which muffled the sound of her voice to her own ears when finally she spoke.

“I had seen the results of violence before. When I begged my way off the Planet’s gossip page, Perry threw me to the crime beat. Even with your cousin’s protection over the city, people still suffered, still died, and I reported on it all: assaults, rapes, homicides, gang activity, domestic
“None of that prepared me for Rwanda—for the sheer depth and volume of horror we saw. They slaughtered whole villages at a time using nothing but machetes.” She crossed her arms across her stomach, hands clenching tightly around her biceps. “They brutalized the women and girls by—”

Her voice seized in her throat, the images even those few words conjured more than she could continue to convey. Kara reached out and drew her close, softly rubbing the tension she could see forming along the smaller blonde’s shoulders.

“What they did to the men and boys was sickening. But the atrocities they committed against the women and girls were the most inhuman crimes I will ever see,” she finally whispered. “In both Rwanda and Bosnia, they made rape another tool of their genocidal savagery. No woman was safe. No woman was spared. Some of the survivors I encountered were barely—they weren’t even—they—”

Kara startled at the sound to rend from Cat’s throat instead of further words—an anguished ululation dredged from the deepest darkness within her. Hands instantly lifted to her mouth as she tried to suffocate the sounds, her fingers digging into the hollows of her cheeks.

The hero took hold of Cat’s wrists, gentling her touch as much as possible while firmly pulling her hands away. When the smaller blonde fought to resist, clenching her eyes shut and biting her bottom lip against the betraying sounds until Kara was certain she’d break skin, she let go. Instead, she placed her hands against Cat’s cheeks and leaned their foreheads together. She felt the hot rivulets of her own tears as she whispered, “Please don’t hold this in anymore, Cat.”

Leaning back, the smaller blonde focused her watery gaze on the expectant hero. With a calming breath, Kara continued, “I know what it feels like to keep in something so terrible because you’re afraid to let anyone else see how much pain you carry inside. I also know how much it hurts to carry around so much pain alone. It’s too much for one person to bear.”

She pressed a kiss against Cat’s forehead before shifting them so she could wrap herself around Cat from behind in as snug an embrace as possible. As the smaller blonde settled against her chest, resting her head in the crook of Kara’s shoulder, the hero nuzzled against her temple, whispered softly into her ear. “You are so strong, Cat—but you don’t have to bear anything by yourself anymore. I’m here, and nothing you tell me will change that.”

The soft assurance drew Cat closer into Kara’s hold, her fingers wending their way into flaxen waves. Kara lifted the smaller blonde’s chin enough that she could offer a calming kiss. When she drew back, she stayed close enough to touch noses, the need to maintain as much physical contact as possible with Cat almost overwhelming. “I love you.”

She smiled at the sight of Cat’s lips shifting upward ever so slightly when she drew back to make eye contact. “I love you.” She kissed the tip of the hero’s nose, pursing her lips at the sound of the laugh the move inspired. When she snuggled back down into Kara’s arms, she sighed at the safety she felt in those lithe limbs wrapping completely around her.

After several minutes, Cat finally spoke. “I wrote about it all. I couldn’t do anything but write about it. And I felt completely goddamned useless with every article I filed. We all stood by and watched and did nothing.”

“You were making sure the rest of the world knew what was happening. That isn’t nothing, Cat. You did what you always do: You told the truth, no matter how difficult. And you made others see that truth when they probably just wanted to ignore it all.”
Head shaking disconsolately, she countered, “I question all the time what our level of help actually was. It felt like—like we were just screaming into a void. By the time help came in both places, it felt sadistically too late.”

In the silence that settled, Kara watched Cat run her thumb along the bar of her ring, lost to the swirl of memories she had unleashed. “I should have come home and stayed after Rwanda. I should have come back to CatCo and settled back into the life I had been trying to build before Adam. It was the first Pulitzer that sent me running again.”

When the announcement came, CatCo PR had instantly assailed the CEO, gushing over her with sycophantic glee at what the award would mean for the company’s credibility.

“Everyone else at CatCo saw profit gains and expansion opportunities and everything I thought I had wanted. But at that point, nothing here felt—right. I didn’t belong at CatCo anymore. No. I didn’t deserve CatCo.”

Her fists clenched at the declaration. “My head was filled with all the horrors and death the Pulitzer committee wanted to reward me for covering, and my PR department wanted to focus on dress designers and promotional interview schedules and photo shoots. I couldn’t handle it. Less than a month later, I left to cover the siege of Sarajevo.”

She shivered in Kara’s hold, instantly feeling the comforting press of the hero’s arms tighten around her. “I shouldn’t have been there. I shouldn’t have gone to Bosnia.”

At the sound of Cat’s heartbeat becoming even faster, Kara rubbed her hands along her arms to calm her down. With a nod, Cat continued, “After several weeks in-country, I wanted to see how much truth there was in the stories of deteriorating conditions at the UN safe area in the Drina Valley. We’d heard as many as twenty thousand refugees were seeking protection from Dutch UN troops in Potočari.

“I joined a Dutch relief convoy heading to Potočari through Srebrenica. I filed articles every day that detailed the journey. It was beyond a nightmare the whole way.”

Every moment of their journey, they endured unrelenting heat, and in every village they stopped in, they found no water, no food—signs of a purposeful and systematic starving of the villagers in an attempt to force out the Muslim Bosniaks.

“From what we were seeing and hearing throughout the area, though, it was becoming clear something far worse was on the horizon.”

Kara heard the strain in Cat’s voice, her own heart shattering at the thought of humanity being capable of committing such horrors upon their own.

Taking a deep breath, the smaller blonde turned so she could rest her forehead against Kara’s shoulder. Several minutes passed in silence as Kara gently ran her fingers through Cat’s soft waves. She felt her fingers trembling with each stroke, fear threatening to engulf her the longer Cat remained quiet.

When the smaller blonde spoke once more, her voice had shifted into a barely audible cadence. “A few kilometers outside Srebrenica, we were ambushed. They took out all our drivers in rapid succession.”

Her breath stuttered in shallow struggle for a moment, sprays of red blood and gray matter painting the dark canvas of her panic.
“I tumbled out the Land Rover on the side opposite the gunfire and tried to make it to the surrounding treeline. A ricochet off the back of the vehicle in front of ours hit me and lodged in my thigh. By the time one of the convoy survivors found me where I had rolled under the Rover, I was barely conscious. I just remember leaving a trail of blood in the dirt as someone pulled me out.”

The steady increase in the pressure of Kara’s hold on her jumped noticeably, squeezing so tightly, she felt her bones grind in protest. She said nothing, however—simply let the hero hold her close and drew comfort from the ferocity of her protectiveness, even so many years after the fact.

“The bullet had nicked my femoral vein, which was much better than hitting the artery, but still caused significant blood loss. When I finally woke up in a hospital four days later, my belongings included a vial with the bullet casing they removed from me. I don’t remember it, but the medics who had come for us when someone radioed after the attack said I woke up in transit and demanded they give me whatever they pulled from my body.” With a rather self-deprecating eye roll, she said, “I’d earned it, apparently.”

She breathed out a tremulous sigh. “A week after I had tried to reach the UN safe area with the convoy, the Srebrenica massacre began. The Pulitzer committee gave me my second medal because of my series of reports from our journey and my attempted warning of what was coming. I never really understood that: What’s award-worthy in a warning too late or too ignored?”

She ran her thumb once more along the copper rod that connected her ring’s three segmented bands. “I still can’t look at either of those medals without feeling—ashamed.”

“Why ashamed?”

Slender shoulders shrugged, but Kara could feel the tension in the tight movement. “I stood by and watched all these horrific things happening all around me and I kept telling myself it wasn’t my job to intervene. It was my job only to report.” She sank more deeply into Kara’s hold, her body weary with regret. “I won awards for watching the agony of others.”

Kara scratched gently along the back of Cat’s scalp. “You dream about what you saw.”

She felt the affirming nod against her neck. “Some nights it’s the things I witnessed. Some nights—some nights, my mind decides that what I witnessed should become what I experienced.”

She made no attempt to stifle the shiver that shook her in Kara’s hold. “Those nights are worse than the day I was actually shot,” she finished, her voice trembling with fear.

The feel of Kara’s fingers beneath her chin surprised her as the hero coaxed her to meet her gaze, overwhelming with understanding and concern. “This is the reason you need Lexapro.”

After an uncertain pause, Cat nodded at the statement. “Almost two months after I returned to National City, a therapist diagnosed me with PTSD and panic disorder. I’ve needed some form of anti-anxiety medication ever since. Those weeks I spent un-diagnosed and un-medicated were some of the most horrific moments I’ve ever known.” She forced herself to maintain eye contact with her hero. “I almost didn’t survive those weeks.”

A pained gasp parted Kara’s lips, her eyes instantly glazing with tears. She pressed her hands more securely around the woman in her arms as the dark truth of her confession flooded through her. “Cat.” Her voice practically squeaked out of a throat tight with emotion.

Hand rubbing circles against the hero’s chest, she soothed, “It’s all right, Kara. I’m here and almost none the worse for wear.” Not wanting Kara to dwell on the bleakness of her words, she
added, “I suppose this is as suitable a time as any to finally come clean about my actual relationship with Lois Lane.”

Even with the severity of their current discussion, Cat couldn’t help the tiny laugh that rose in her throat at the sight of Kara’s eyes widening or her adorable attempts to respond to Cat’s wholly unexpected statement. “What? Wait—wha—what?”

Having pity on Kara’s stammering downward spiral, Cat moved her hand up against her cheek and interrupted, “Lois is a royal pain in the ass, headstrong, smart-mouthed, fiercely loyal, and one of my closest friends.

“She also saved my life.”

No matter how willing Cat continued to be in sharing in the false shade she and Lois constantly threw at each other for public consumption, she would never dishonor this truth.

“She was the only person who knew everything—not just what had happened in Bosnia but why I was there in the first place—and the only person who insisted on calling me every day once I was back home. After two days of not being able to reach me, she flew out on the first flight she could get and promptly hustled me into an emergency session with my therapist when she found me—not in my best moment.”

The depth of darkness in Cat’s gaze at the confession left Kara certain of one thing: Whatever the details, she owed Lois a lifetime of gratitude for leading Cat once more toward the light.

“She’s actually two for two in the salvation department,” Cat continued, deciding in Kara’s silence that she lacked the strength to dive much more deeply into the events that transpired during that particular visit with Lois. “She was also there to give me the proverbial boot to the ass I needed when I finally decided to divorce Joe.”

The edges of her lips twitched upward slightly. “She loathed Joe so much for how he treated me, she perpetually threatened to have your cousin toss him into space for the first three years after my divorce.”

Kara snorted in amusement at the thought, easily able to envision Lois successfully entreating Kal-El to carry through her threat. In that moment, Kara realized she wouldn’t have any issue with now being the one to do the hurling. “How did he—I mean, how did you end up—”

“Settling for an emotionally manipulative, verbally abusive ass hat?” She felt Kara’s near-snarl of disdain at these words. “It was far easier than even I would have ever anticipated. I met Joe at the first gala I attended after getting treatment. I was still raw, still struggling to reintegrate into the life I once thought I wanted. Joe was the only one I encountered who didn’t seem to mind that I was far from my best self that evening. He was funny and unobtrusive and inquisitive, and had the most inescapably piercing blue eyes.”

She swept a lock of hair away from Kara’s face. “I’ve always had a thing for beautiful blue eyes.” Her brow smoothed as she continued to run her fingers through Kara’s hair, allowing herself for just a moment to fall into those sparkling sapphires focused so intently on her.

With a disgruntled huff, she continued, “We saw each other several more times at other gatherings through the ensuing months, but he made no overt moves. He played the gentleman very convincingly while I decided to throw myself back into running CatCo. I spent a good three years diving as deeply as I could, pushing CatCo’s reach and influence both here and internationally—and when I finally resurfaced, Joe was still there.”
Kara caught the glint of pain in golden shards. “The fact that Joe was still interested, even after watching me choose my work over him, made him—alluring. Of course, I should have reminded myself that him still being there was not reason enough to date him. But I was tired and alone and far too emotionally battered to be making the types of decisions I ended up making with him. Sometimes, though—sometimes, you’ll make the worst kinds of exceptions just so you’re not alone anymore. So, I convinced myself I was ready to run my business, have a successful relationship, start a family, and put all of the nightmares behind me.”

She quirked her lips to one side at the sound of Kara’s soft responding *tsk*. “So ‘Go Big or Go Home’ actually *is* the Grant family motto then?”

“Would you expect anything less from me?” Her expression instantly softened under the brightness of Kara’s smile.

The relaxed lines around her eyes tightened somewhat as she continued. “We actually worked quite well together the first few years of our marriage. He had a film production company that kept him almost as busy as CatCo kept me. We were both driven in our careers, so neither of us ever felt slighted by the other canceling plans at the last minute. We enjoyed each other’s company when we could, and we accepted when work took priority.”

Kara frowned at the hard shift in her mood. “While I was pregnant with Carter, Joe made a few poor decisions with some investments that led to him losing several big projects. It completely shot down his confidence, and I have learned that some men simply don’t know how to be vulnerable gracefully. That was when his mood began to turn. When Carter was born a few weeks later, Joe made a scene over, of all things, the order of Carter’s names. He accused me of being petulant and inconsiderate for insisting that my father’s name come before his.”

She rolled her eyes, but the strong set of her jaw tipped Kara to the deeper hurt behind the moment. Perhaps she had been rigid in her refusal to acquiesce to Joe’s unexpected last-minute decision. However, it wasn’t as if they hadn’t discussed their son’s name extensively—including the reasons behind Cat’s desire to give him a name she had chosen.

Beyond her obvious role, Cat had contributed almost nothing to bringing Adam into the world. No matter how hard she had tried, she knew her heart well enough to know it simply did not have the bandwidth a baby would require of her. So when Devon first broached the subject of names and asked if it would be all right to name their son after his grandfather, Cat had merely shrugged in compliance. It was the first in what would become a damning litany of ways Devon would note Cat had never truly invested herself in their son.

It also was a sadly incontestable truth.

Cat’s subsequent joy and anticipation over Carter’s arrival was also incontestable in a way that both enthralled and shamed her. She held her guilt at bay with reminders that the life Adam had with his father greatly surpassed anything he would have gotten with her.

No matter how much she had wanted to have him or how much she had hoped his arrival would finally press her into reevaluating her priorities, when she held him the first time, she had known his best hope at happiness would be far from her arms.

Just as she had known the first time she had held Carter that she would burn down the world itself to protect him. He had been so tiny, nestled perfectly in the crook of her arm—a good three pounds smaller than his brother had been, all fair-skinned and small-boned. The only things large about him at all were his eyes, blue as tranquil seas as he latched with unexpected ease to her breast to feed the first time.
“The only good moments in my marriage to Joe from that point on were those I shared with Carter. I think, in some ways, Joe envied our son. He saw how pliant Carter made me—how willingly I set aside CatCo duties for him, which I had never done for anyone before. He said Carter was making me soft.”

Her gaze unfocused slightly and Kara caught the minute quiver of her lower lip as she considered this statement. “He said it disparagingly, but he was right: Carter softened me in the best possible ways. He still smooths my edges, still brings me peace in ways I had always found elusive before him.” She turned her gaze to meet Kara’s, the shine of tears instant in her eyes. “I never thought anyone else would ever bother to find the kindness within me the way he always has.”

The muscles of Kara’s throat jostled in her struggle to swallow back the emotions Cat’s words and tears released within her. She leaned in, lips firm and full against Cat’s, tongue insistent as it swept along the ridges of Cat’s teeth, mouth warm and calming as she swallowed every whimper with holy fervor. The slide of her hand along Cat’s side slipped shivers along the smaller blonde’s spine, arched her body back against her hero in a desirous press that left her breathless when finally they parted.

Relishing the comfort of Kara’s touch and tender gaze a few beats more, Cat resolved to finish what she had started—to finally let Kara see her truest self.

“I tried to be supportive as Joe continued to struggle with his company. I even tried to get him to meet with CatCo financial advisers, but he saw more value in behaving like a child who’d broken his favorite toy but didn’t want to take the blame. It didn’t help that CatCo was beginning to come into its own globally while his company spiraled downward. That was when he began to focus on tearing me down in whatever ways he could.”

She pursed her lips. “According to him, though, I was the reason he spoke to me the way he did. He said his feelings for me made him feel weak and he couldn’t control himself. The lie there was that another person’s love should make you feel stronger, not weaker.” She gave Kara the most poignant look possible. “The right kind of love? That will make you feel goddamned invincible.

“Joe’s version of love turned him accusatory and insecure. Every accomplishment I earned became another way he could blame me for his own shortcomings. I should have been riding high on my company’s increasing success. Instead, I was constantly trying to hide it from him or constantly apologizing for it, if only to keep some semblance of peace between us. Of all the ways he diminished me, the worst was how he convinced me to diminish myself.”

She rested her head against Kara’s shoulder, threading their fingers together and kissing the hero’s knuckles. Kara hummed at the sensation but the crinkle between her eyes deepened. “Why did you stay with him?”

Silence settled as Cat studied the tangle of their fingers, her expression belying her concentration on the hero’s question. “I don’t really have a reason,” she finally conceded. “I could offer up all kinds of excuses and explanations, but the truth is, I don’t know why I stayed. Loyalty? Obligation? I suppose I thought on some level he deserved to be a part of his son’s life. I thought that, because he only spoke to me in those ways and only when we were alone that Carter didn’t know.” She stared into the middle distance, a sad smile tugging at her lips. “But Carter has always been far too observant.”

“He is Cat Grant’s son.”

The sad smile brightened slightly at Kara’s statement. “Yes, he is. And even as a small child, he picked up on things—my sadness, my withdrawal at home. My drinking.” Guilt flickered in her
gaze. “I know you think I used to drink too much in the office, but trust me when I say I am a pale shadow of the drinker I was when I was with Joe. Verbal evisceration doesn’t sting quite so badly when blunted by a good whiskey.”

Her mood darkened with remorse. “Carter found me one night after Joe had been particularly brutal.” She bit the inside of her cheek to keep at bay the emotions clawing at the back of her throat. Tears, however, still slipped from her eyes at the memory of her son’s small hands hugging her, his frightened voice asking why she was crying, worried that she was somehow upset with him. He had looked at her with such love and concern that night—looked at her in a way that Cat was certain no one other than her father had looked at her before.

“That was what finally made me realize I needed to end things with Joe. I couldn’t stand the thought of Carter ever seeing me the way his father saw me, or worse, hearing the way his father spoke to me and—and ever thinking the things he said were true.”

Kara slid closer and took Cat’s hands in her own. “I can’t imagine anyone not seeing you for the amazing person you are.”

Cat huffed softly in laughter. “You’re biased, darling.” She squeezed the hero’s hands tightly. “But thank you.”

“I promise I won’t ever let anyone else ever speak to you like that again.”

Cupping one of Kara’s cheeks, she stroked the soft skin with her thumb. “I appreciate the sentiment, but we both know my days of taking shit from anyone are well and truly over.” A more earnest laugh tumbled from her lips at the sight of Kara’s adamant head nod.

“After Joe, I found myself struggling with memories I hadn’t completely dealt with—of Adam and my time overseas and even my father’s death. I barely had a chance to mourn him before my mother was pressing me forward, to return to school, to get the best grades, to be a part of all the activities I could, to be the appropriate namesake she expected me to be.”

Feeling Kara tense against her, Cat pressed a kiss against her jawline. “There are myriad reasons to think poorly of my mother, I assure you, but I honestly don’t consider this to be one of them. I believe she truly loved my father. I think some part of her will mourn him privately until the day she dies. The way she responded publicly was to lock it all away and make me do the same. Seeing me mourn would have been too much for her, I think.”

The hero pressed her lips together at Cat’s words, begrudgingly nodding in acquiescence. Kara would never understand many things about Katherine Grant’s treatment of her daughter, but she also understood far too well the unpredictability of grief.

“I’d dealt quite well with the physical nature of my wound by that point.” She eased aside the hem of her night shirt, revealing unblemished skin that caused Kara to use her X-ray vision to locate the internal scarring left by the bullet.

“How did you—how is there no scar?”

With a devious smirk, Cat replied, “I have a shockingly wealthy though rather eccentric contact in Gotham whose company dabbles in, among other things, ER triage R&D. Seems he has a particular interest in being able to treat any type of wound quickly and without leaving scarring.”

She arched her brow pointedly. “Scars apparently are not appropriate accoutrements for the rich and batty.”
Kara’s incredulous snort pleased the smaller blonde immensely. “I was his original test subject for this particular treatment. It’s real skin synthesized from my own DNA. Not even the DEO has this kind of tech, I daresay.”

“Careful,” Kara warned. “Alex would not be above turning you into her own personal science project to figure out how that works.”

With a soft click of her tongue, Cat nudged the hero’s shoulder with her knuckle. “I’m quite finished with exposing parts of myself for your sister to examine, thank you.”

The sudden pink hue of Kara’s cheeks inspired a coy smile along Cat’s lips.

With renewed focus, the smaller blonde held up her right hand, gaze locked on the ring on her middle finger. “I couldn’t stop thinking how the bullet casing I had kept all those years rather morbidly connected all the major milestones of my life—how it all started with my father’s encouragement to always find the truth, no matter what; how losing Adam drove me to a place where I nearly lost myself; and how having Carter was how I finally started finding my own truth once more.

“I wanted a way to always be able to remember that journey and remember the ways each moment had helped define me and make me that much stronger. I took the bullet fragments to a jewelry designer I’d been using for years, and I explained all this to her. A month later, this ring arrived.”

Eyes widening with understanding, Kara reached out to touch the ring. “This is the bullet?”

Cat hummed an affirmative as she watched Kara reverently slide her finger along the rod. “There’s no other reason I would ever wear copper jewelry.” She chuckled at the soft huff her comment earned.

She tapped the gem at the tip of the rod. “This is a peridot, the birthstone for August.”

“Carter’s birthday is in August.”

The hero warmed at the smile her acknowledgement earned. “So is Adam’s and so was my father’s.” She caught the surprise in Kara’s expression. “You’ll learn quickly, darling, that August birthdays are incredibly common among people who celebrate holidays in December—or prefer a particular method of keeping warm in the winter.” She thrilled at the way the hero’s surprise quickly morphed into a delightful flush of understanding.

Finally, she ran her thumb over the three ring segments. “Each ring has a name engraved on the inside.” As she touched each segment, from top to bottom, with her left index finger, she stated, “Carter Joseph Grant, Adam Devon Foster, and Carter James Grant.”

Kara felt the stuttering breath Cat drew at the utterance of this final name. “My father would have loved his namesake. He was just as inquisitive and thoughtful as his grandson, both with the same bright, kind eyes. He died of cancer when I was twelve. He never knew what I would become, but he always told me that, no matter what, he was my biggest fan.”

Seeing the tears forming in Cat’s eyes, Kara shifted to gently ease her onto her back. Rising on her elbow, she brushed back a golden curl before leaning forward and softly kissing away each tear that silently fell. Jade eyes shifted pleadingly along the curves and planes of Kara’s face. Obediently, Kara leaned in to kiss away the tremble in Cat’s lips.

Wordlessly, the smaller blonde gripped Kara’s shoulders and pulled, instantly feeling the increase in pressure against the length of her body. She knew Kara was holding back, protecting her from...
her full weight—but even this amount was enough of a comforting pressure to keep her grounded in
the moment.

Already so attuned to Cat’s needs, Kara quickly fell into a pattern of kisses and caresses she knew
would soothe rather than excite. Still, it wasn’t long before Cat began directing the intensity,
needing more than gentleness from the hands exploring the contours of her body. With a swiftness
that caught the smaller blonde by surprise, Kara slipped off her clothes and unbuttoned Cat’s night
shirt, allowing them to feel the full warmth of each other’s bodies.

At the feel of the smaller blonde steadily encouraging Kara’s hand further down her stomach, the
hero obediently complied. Fingers slipped through dark blonde curls, sliding along sensitive curves
before disappearing within Cat’s inviting wetness. The smaller blonde released a soundless gasp,
hips shifting instinctively up against the thrust and scissor of Kara’s fingers inside her. Hands
splayed across Kara’s strong shoulders, dug deeply into flesh awakening to touch in ways that only
Cat could conjure from within her.

However, after several minutes devoted to memorizing once more every arch and hollow of Cat’s
neck with her lips and tongue, Kara felt the smaller blonde unexpectedly tense around her fingers.
Stilling her movement, she looked down—took in the sight of Cat’s tightly shut eyes and clenched
jaw, listened to the frantic heartbeat and shallow breaths and knew that Cat was mentally slipping
away from that moment, back into the nightmares that constantly shadowed her. With a soft but
steady tone, Kara stated, “Open your eyes, Cat.”

Eyelids slid open obediently, releasing the tears they had been keeping at bay, and Kara ached at
the sound of the strangled sob that Cat couldn’t hold back. “Place your hands on my face.” She
smiled encouragingly at the feel of the smaller blonde’s hands as they came to rest on her cheeks.
“Stay here, in this moment with me.”

Continuing to hold her hand completely still, she leaned down and pressed a kiss to Cat’s lips,
pulling back to whisper against the soft curve of her mouth, “I have loved your eyes since the
moment I met you.” Her fingers slowly began to move once more in a gentle in-and-out motion.
“I’d never seen eyes such a rich shade of green before. And the way light makes the gold in them
shine reminds me of the first time I saw a sunset here on Earth—how bright and warm and
beautiful it was.”

The smaller blonde shifted slightly beneath her touch, legs parting more and hips once again
moving in rhythm with Kara’s measured pace. The hero hesitated at the feel of Cat moving one
hand from her face. Concern bled into need swiftly, however, at the feel of the hand slipping
between her thighs, fingers trailing up along her ridges and around the swell of her clit.

Soft grunts overcame the hero as she tried to acclimate to the stimulation of giving and receiving
the level of pleasure she was sharing with Cat. The smaller blonde could feel her struggle in the
discordance of her movement inside her. “It’s all right, Kara,” she breathed, “you can stop if it’s too
much.”

Blonde curls swayed with the adamant responding head shake. Kara had slipped well beyond
coherence, beyond thought, her concentration narrowed solely to the language of the desire they
now shared.

When finally she found the counterpoint rhythm she needed, she breathed a lustful growl at the
sensation of fingers spreading her open, dragging along the pulsing heat of her ridges with
unrelenting pressure.

Forcing herself to remain focused, she flexed her fingers against the velvet strength pulling them
deeper inside Cat. The flutter of muscle and the corresponding sighs of pleasure breathed against her skin concentrated her every sense on the exquisite body beneath her. She knew she was close to surrendering completely to Cat’s dexterous attentions, knew the smaller blonde was just as close. With a deep breath, she narrowed her senses as far as she could, until there was nothing left beyond Cat: her touch, her sound, her scent, her softness and fire.

And then she let go. With a cry that shook her entire body, she arched backward, the long, hard lines of her neck muscles tight as she rode out the pulsations of pleasure crashing through her. Feeling Cat’s orgasm break moments later, the hero struggled to open her eyes, to consume every moment, every shudder, every play of emotion to cross Cat’s features.

The smaller blonde slung a leg around Kara’s waist, opening herself up enough for Kara to penetrate her even more—to coax a deeper surge of sensation with every drag of fingers along the rough patch of skin high inside, causing her toes to dig into the mattress and her body to rock impulsively against the hero. She’d never felt such concentrated power before, and relished the way it danced along the narrow delineation between pleasure and pain. One thing she knew for certain: She would be sore the next day—and it would be absolutely worth it.

Wanting to give more in return, she worked her fingers up along Kara’s ridges one final time before pressing as hard as she could against the swollen rise above them. Kara practically screamed in response, her fingers pulling free from Cat so she could brace herself against the mattress with both hands. Cat stared in stunned amazement as the hero tipped her head back and exhaled a massive frosty breath, which she watched slowly tumble down like a miniature snow shower.

The smaller blonde couldn’t help her laughter at the feeling of icy condensation falling down around her, melting against her overheated skin. As she slowly released her pressure against Kara, she wrapped her arms around the hero and eased her back down into her arms.

While stroking back long locks and holding her through several strong aftershocks, Cat kissed and nuzzled her cheek. She playfully whispered, “Congratulations, darling. That was the first time I’ve ever caused a meteorological event during an orgasm.”

Regaining her composure, the hero finally shifted onto her back, doing nothing to hide her smirk at Cat’s tease. She quickly broke into laughter, however, at the roguish joy to light the smaller blonde’s features.

Cat curled into her side, meeting Kara’s tender gaze with a kiss and smile. “Thank you,” she sighed, sliding instinctively deeper into Kara’s embrace. Exhaustion wended its way through her every cell, slithered between her bones. She suspected that night’s sleep would be anything but peaceful—but she also knew it would be safe. She would be safe.

As the steady rhythm of Kara’s heart beneath her ear lulled her to sleep, she felt the soft sweep of the hero’s fingers through her hair, heard the whisper of alien words, beautiful and lilting, as they surfaced along the edges of her consciousness. Once more, she knew even without understanding that whatever Kara had just whispered held a reverence that left her feeling humbled and utterly loved.

Chapter End Notes

So much for posting this in a few days. Remind me not to type things like that again. I’m just taunting the Fates. And the Fates don’t like taunting.
Let me just be straight-up honest: I am deeply, madly in love with the show’s version of Cat Grant. She so quickly became my personal aesthetic, I don’t even know exactly when or how it happened. It just did, and I fully and happily gave in. This chapter? This is totally my head canon of things I’ve thought since that first magical season of Supergirl introduced us all to the Queen of All Media.

This chapter brings together several things I’ve wondered or decided are true for Cat. A lot is built on the shoulders of show canon. Some, I even built on comics canon, like Joe Morgan, although he was Adam’s father in the comics. Carter Grant exists specifically for the show. Also from the comics, Joe was verbally abusive and Cat did compensate with alcohol. I went my own way with the rest.

Also, I hope my interpretation of Cat’s ring was satisfactory. I remember reading a while ago that apparently one of the show runners (probably Ali Adler) said Cat’s ring had more than just an aesthetic purpose. Sadly, I don’t think we’ll ever get to learn that “official” purpose, since I don’t even think they use the ring as part of Cat’s wardrobe anymore. Just another thing forever lost from S1. So this is what I came up with. This was actually one of the first things I wrote for this part of the story, so this has been on my mind for a while now.

I’d also like to thank Jane Q. Doe for writing Cicatrix, the first part of which inspired my initial considerations regarding Cat’s ring.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

CADMUS Test Subject Interlude 6

Chapter Notes

Even when she's not operating, Lillian Luthor is a tough one to take. Mention of impending surgeries and sundry horrors abound (although not as detailed as previous CADMUS chapters).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Test Subjects CDS-17-054 and -055

The sound of the familiar languid pace drew to a halt outside the cell, instantly drawing the attention of every technician inside. With a slight nod of acknowledgement, Luthor scanned the interior, noting the still-unfinished modifications. She turned toward the lead tech with a disquieting glare. “How close is your team to completion?”

Taking a half-step outside the cell, he lifted the tablet he had been consulting. “We’ve run into an unexpected inconsistency in the programming upgrades. We’re troubleshooting the error now.”

“Will you be finished by this afternoon?”

The lead tech easily heard the command beneath the question. “We will complete the Faraday cage modifications today, Doctor.”

“Good. I received confirmation from NCPD that we will be receiving our newest guests later tonight. Our contact only needs to wait for the prison’s night shift changeover to begin the transfer, so we need to be prepared.”

She shifted her attention toward her medical team lead, who had accompanied her to the holding cells. “They’ll be arriving fully sedated, Dr. Sloane, so we’re going to have to get them in for testing as quickly as possible. I’ll need a pint of blood from each of them in addition to the standard bloodwork panel and scan series for both. I also want a throat CT and ultrasound for Ms. Smythe and do a full neurological workup on Ms. Willis. Oh, and don’t forget to use the silicon restraints for her while she is outside this cell.”

“Of course. What about the sound dampening collar for Ms. Smythe?”

Nodding in dismissal toward the lead tech, Luthor began once more down the corridor. “I’m less concerned about the sound dampening collar. If it doesn’t work, sever her vocal cords. She’ll be getting more enhanced ones anyway. Our recent Ortrexian test subject provided me with knowledge and parts I believe Ms. Smythe will be able to put to extraordinary use.”
Luthor caught the stumble that threw off Sloane’s stride beside her. “Y-yes, Doctor. I’ve already selected and prepped my team for this evening’s arrivals. We will be ready for them.”

“Good. I’ll want to review procedures with them just to be certain we’re all in sync.”

Pausing outside her office, Luthor watched with satisfaction as Sloane nodded her understanding. “Of course. I’ll let my staff know to be prepared for a run-through at four this afternoon, if that fits your schedule.” At Luthor’s agreement, Sloane pivoted sharply and departed.

Pleased by her staff’s assurances, Luthor returned to her office to continue her weekly check-ins with her facility directors. If the awaiting presence of Hank Henshaw surprised her, she covered it well. “Come to offer your assistance for this evening’s arrivals?”

She looped around to her desk, sensing Henshaw’s gaze tracking her every move. “Or perhaps you would like to help with Dr. Danvers’s physical training?” She steadied her expression as she sat across from him. “I understand you’ve already spied on a couple of his training sessions.”

Henshaw sneered at the comment. “I was curious about his bionics.”

“You mean you were curious as to how they compare with your cybernetics.” The corners of her mouth slipped upward at the responding glare. “You remain far more versatile in abilities and in loyalty. However, you might want to avoid ever tangling with Jeremiah. I’ve upgraded his endoskeleton to be strong enough to cause even the Girl of Steel pain.”

“But can he stop her?”

Luthor leaned back in her chair as she contemplated the question. “Kryptonians cannot break nth metal.”

Henshaw’s glare narrowed. “That doesn’t answer the question. Can he stop her? Or does she simply rip off those fancy limbs from his frail human body and be done with him?”

“We both know Kara won’t cause any harm to her foster father. She has proven repeatedly that she lacks the resolve necessary to be truly invincible. Her compassion will always be her greatest weakness. But, to answer your specific question, even if she did find the spine to hurt him, she wouldn’t be able to.”

She allowed herself a moment to enjoy the confusion swirling in Henshaw’s one intact eye. “Nth metal isn’t valuable merely for its superior strength. It possesses qualities we haven’t even begun to quantify let alone understand completely. One of those is right now at work inside Jeremiah Danvers. We’ve been monitoring the nth metal we used to strengthen the endoskeleton of his bionic limbs. It has spread from the bionic implants and has infused itself into his own bones. His skeleton is reinforced and connected now to his new limbs in a way not even Kara could break.”

In the silence of her office, Luthor leaned forward, gray gaze locked on Henshaw’s brooding features. “Jealousy was not part of your CADMUS upgrade. I continue to require your assistance, but I do not require this insecurity. I have enough to contend with at the moment without having to deal with wet-nursing you.”

The doctor caught the flash within Henshaw’s exposed cybernetic eye before he relaxed back in his seat. Expression once more settling into his regular sneer, he finally replied, “How can I be of use to you?”

Pursing her lips in satisfaction, Luthor gave a quick nod. “I’ll need you in D.C. soon enough. It’s time we dealt with our information leaks out there before others within our network get similar
ideas. While Cat Grant’s revelations about Spencer Graves are both blessing and curse, I would like to stanch the flow of information to her before it becomes unmanageable.”

Luthor actually appreciated the fallout from Cat’s typically irritating persistence. The reporter’s revelations about the level of funding Luthor was receiving just from her city-level supporters served to put on notice those who were beginning to doubt her project’s viability. She knew there were many throughout her network who thought her project was a second-rate endeavor subsisting on whatever handouts she could beg from those so inclined to throw some change her way.

Cat Grant revealing the funneling of millions in purloined revenue from just the city level—Luthor couldn’t even be bothered to find her fury over losing this source of funding (temporarily, she told herself) because its revelation had left her supporters shaken. Now that it was out there—the idea of Lillian Luthor sitting atop a possibly multi-million dollar anti-alien effort—she couldn’t find a moment’s peace from the constant influx of phone and email messages.

Some were from her most devoted disciples, renewing their pledges of allegiance to her righteous work. Others were from those who had slowly been slipping toward the fringes of support, now reminded either of why they were supporters in the first place or of why they didn’t want to find themselves on the outside of Luthor’s good graces. Others still were from those who had lost their faith in Luthor, for whatever pointless reason, and wanted to level veiled threats and admonitions.

Those were the messages she memorized. Those were the messages to which she would attend first.

In the interim, she knew she needed to address the leak in Washington that would inevitably lead Cat to revealing Luthor’s other lines of funding—state, federal, international.

Luthor savored the continued secrecy of this final line of funding, knowing not one soul—human or alien—would be able to stop what she was on the precipice of unleashing on a global scale.

“I need you to report to the med bay once you leave here. As much as you seem to enjoy your battle damage, I need you to look human once more for the mission I have in mind for you next.”

She enjoyed invoking yet another curious stare from her companion. “I need you to pay a visit to Senator Crane similar to the one you recently paid Colonel Harper. However, I can’t have you traipsing around Capitol Hill looking like you’re searching for Sarah Connor.”

She found herself pleased by Henshaw’s understanding smirk. “And what about Cat Grant?”

Luthor curled her graceful fingers around the arm rests of her chair. “My plans for her have expanded slightly, to include Spencer Graves. He has agreed to help draw her out for what he thinks will be a reprieve from punishment for his incompetence. Unfortunately for him, I simply cannot guarantee that Mr. Rieger can control his aim well enough to keep him unharmed.”

Henshaw couldn’t help the anomalous laughter at Luthor’s comment. “And what of Cat’s alien guard?”

“R&D has been working on something special for Kara, should she try to intervene.”

A wicked shiver of delight shuddered through Luthor as she finished, “And I do hope she tries.”

Chapter End Notes
So...trying to shift myself back into CADMUS Ascending mode after my dalliances with other stories. Switching from tooth-rotting fluff back into Lillian Luthor's brain...ooh, that's a tough one! But I have this story inside me. I need to let it out. So...back into the Depths of Darkness I go.

Comic nerd side note: Nth metal from Thanagar is way more than just indestructible to Kryptonians. It's actually quite an amazing metal with all kinds of versatile properties. I've decided to let it flex its awesomeness a little here (at the writer's discretion, of course). I might be letting it flex more in later chapters. We'll see...
With a satisfied grunt, Alex slowed to a halt at the back entrance to DEO HQ. Slipping her badge out of the side pocket of her backpack, she scanned herself in and immediately began running up the stairs to the main level. It had been too long since she’d finished her morning run at the office. The satisfying endorphin rush left her feeling more than ready for that morning’s training session with Winn.

Wiping at the sweat beading along her forehead as she finally reached the foyer, she stopped, narrowed her gaze at the sight before her. The object of her observation hadn’t yet noticed her—or any of the agents shooting equally curious stares his direction as they passed.

Instead, Winn remained focused solely on whatever it was he was watching from the cover of the column behind which he hid. From the angle of his stare, Alex realized it was something in her lab.

Unable to hold back her curiosity any longer, the brunette silently padded her way across the foyer until she was standing right behind Winn. An understanding smile slipped across her lips as she followed his line of sight.

“Are you ever going to stop being scared of her?”

Alex snorted in amusement at how high Winn jumped at the sound of her words. Whirling around with eyes wide, he gaped in silence for several beats before trying and failing obviously to muster a glare at Alex’s pointed teasing.

“She does not scare me.” His blush deepened at the responding smirk he received. “Okay, yeah, she scares me.”

With an understanding grin, Alex nudged him teasingly in his bicep. “How long has she been up in my lab? And where’s Kara?”

“They both arrived about ten minutes ago. Kara flew them straight to your lab. They had what
looked like a tense conversation and Kara left.”

Alex frowned at Winn’s description. Before she could give it much thought, however, she heard the bay doors activate and watched as her sister sailed straight through to the lab without hesitation. Landing right in front of Cat, she placed a Noonan’s cup on the counter beside her.

The brunette watched as her sister and Cat exchanged more words before Kara removed an amber vial from one of the hidden compartments of her cape. Alex watched her tap pills into her hand and extend them to the smaller blonde. Cat at first resisted, hands remaining on her slender hips. However, at the sight of Kara tilting her head to one side, accompanied no doubt by one of her patented doleful expressions, Cat accepted the pills. With an exasperated eye roll, she popped them into her mouth and washed them down with a gulp of coffee.

Setting down the vial on the counter, Kara opened her arms and Cat slipped immediately into her embrace. Alex felt laughter tickling at the back of her throat at how Kara’s muscular frame molded perfectly around the smaller blonde—how they became practically seamless in their embrace.

Cat swiftly looped her hands beneath Kara’s cape and held her close. Kara, in turn, splayed one hand across the smaller blonde’s back, using the other to run fingers soothingly through Cat’s shoulder-length waves. She bent her head close to Cat’s ear, whispering words that visibly released the tension Alex knew always thrummed through Cat with an autonomic persistence.

More astonishing to Alex as she continued to watch was the shift she could see as bright and bold as Kara’s sigil—the deepening of their connection in ways that made Alex’s eyes burn and her breath stutter and catch in her lungs. Whatever happened the previous night after Kara had taken Cat home, Alex realized with absolute certainty what she was seeing: Cat Grant, with all her walls completely leveled for Kara.

Even from so far away, even without hearing a word they were saying, Alex knew. It was in the pliant press of Cat’s body into Kara’s hold. It was in the softness of her expression and the gentle stroke of hands along her sister’s jawline, through her sister’s hair, down her sister’s arms. It was in the mischievous nuzzle against Kara’s neck as she whispered something that lit laughter through Kara’s entire countenance.

It was in the beauty of Cat allowing herself to be cared for in a way Alex knew was new and terrifying—and yet she showed no fear. It was in the purity and strength of a connection that made Alex’s heart feel close to bursting for her sister.

“It’s kind of amazing.” Alex turned toward Winn, curiosity shimmering in her slightly teary gaze. He offered a self-conscious shrug. “I remember what Cat was like before Kara.” He chuckled softly. “She was pure intimidation in thousand-dollar heels.” Alex’s eyes crinkled with laughter at the tech’s quip. “I guess it was her way of keeping people at a distance. But that never worked on Kara.”

Alex gave a low laugh as she turned back toward her sister and Cat. “It never does.”

With one final kiss that toed the line of decency in a way both Alex and Winn struggled to ignore, Kara reluctantly released her hold on Cat. Before she could move too far away, however, Alex watched as Cat crossed her arms and stated something that instantly had Kara laughing. Quickly popping the top on Cat’s coffee, Kara hit the liquid with a double shot of heat vision that had the smaller blonde’s latte steaming just the way she preferred.

Handing over the cup with a cheeky grin, Kara lifted into the air and, with three words Alex needed
no lip-reading skills to recognize, once more departed the DEO.

The brunette watched as Cat turned and walked to the lab windows, peering in the direction Kara had just flown. Readjusting her backpack, she started toward the stairs. “Go change into workout gear, Schott. We’ve got some training to do this morning.”

A lopsided grin curled one corner of her mouth at the petulant sounds she heard from the techie as she moved toward the stairs. Taking two steps at a time, she hustled to her lab, stopping right behind where the CEO still stood by the windows.

Without turning, Cat sighed, “Agent Danvers, it would seem you are on babysitting duty today.”

The grin now growing into a full-blown smirk, Alex rejoined, “Good morning to you, too, Cat.”

Clicking her tongue, the smaller blonde pivoted, one hand instantly curving along her hip while she flourished her coffee cup in the other. Alex fought to maintain a neutral expression at her first full view of Cat that morning.

Though dressed far more casually than usual for a work day, the CEO appeared as immaculately coiffed and perfectly poised as always. If the brunette hadn’t witnessed Cat’s panic attack the previous day, in fact, she never would have suspected anything had shaken her in such an emotionally unsettling way. Beneath her admiration for the smaller blonde’s ironclad resolve, she felt the fury she knew she shared with her mother and Maggie at how Cat had been forced to build that self-reliance.

“As your sister will no doubt confirm, I am not ready for prime time until after my first full cup of coffee.” A trace of contrition still slipped across her features as she continued, “Good morning, Alex.” She took in the brunette’s attire with a curious glance. “Did you run here?”

Alex nodded as she slipped off her backpack and tucked it into a nearby cabinet. “I live like a block away. Usually, I just walk here, but this morning, I decided to take a run around the city center before coming in.”

Looking around for signs of Cat’s laptop or files, she queried, “Will you need a place to work? I can set you up in my office or one of the conference rooms. I’m afraid neither has any windows though.”

Coffee cup poised near her lips, Cat shrugged and sighed, “I decided to take a break for the day regarding my work.” Alex knew this was as close as Cat would come to admitting any effect from the previous evening.

With a nod, the agent clipped, “Right. You’re coming with me instead then.”

The brunette watched as Cat’s eyes narrowed slightly. “Are you recruiting me?”

With a profoundly amused bark of laughter, she countered, “Because nothing would say covert operations like the Queen of All Media decked out in riot gear.”

“Yes, but if I were on your team, you’d be guaranteed to have the most well-tailored riot gear of any service branch on the government payroll, covert or otherwise.” Her expression brightened at Alex’s amusement. “So, what grand plan do you have for me?”

“You’re going to finish that coffee first so you’re not verbally eviscerating my agents, and then you’re going to come with me. I was planning on hand-to-hand training with Winn this morning, but I think we all might benefit from some target practice instead.”
The sudden lift of Cat’s eyebrows and pleasurable hum this final comment earned made Alex
chuckle. “So, you in?”

“All in, Agent Danvers,” she complied before taking a long pull from her coffee.

The brunette nodded once in the direction of the large hand bag Cat had deposited on one of the
nearby stools. “Is it all right if I store your bag with my backpack? Or should I have J’onn lock it in
our high-security vault?”

“I would hope I wouldn’t have to worry about thievery within the DEO. Besides, I don’t imagine
many here would have any interest in a Hermes bag.”

The brunette rolled her eyes as she reached for the accessory in question. “I’m pretty sure most of
the agents here wouldn’t know whether or not we should have any interest in a Hermes bag.”

She paused, her gaze shifting toward the amber vial her sister had left on the counter. Picking up
the container, she turned and met Cat’s purposefully indecipherable gaze. “My lifeline ended up
being Cymbalta.”

The smaller blonde’s reserve faltered just enough to encourage Alex to continue. “My first
experience with a failed mission—it happened about four months after J’onn cleared me for field
duty.” She forced herself to swallow back the tang that still rose in her throat whenever she thought
of that mission. “I ended up with three broken ribs and a concussion, and I-I watched our target kill
an agent right in front of me.”

The final words tripped out in a quiet, rushed jumble, but Cat caught each one clearly. “No training
could ever prepare you for that.”

Alex’s gaze, blurred by immutable images, turned once more toward the smaller blonde. “No,” she
agreed, “it can’t.”

“Nor should it.” Alex could hear the raw current roiling beneath her clipped tone. “Only the truly
depraved possess immunity to such violent ends.” She moved close enough to remove the vial from
Alex’s hold, dropping it with a soft click of pills against plastic into the bag. “I’m glad Cymbalta
helped you.”

Squaring her shoulders, Alex closed the bag in her grip and placed it with her backpack. When she
turned back to Cat, the smaller blonde studied her with grateful understanding. “Come on,” the
brunette smiled, “let’s go terrify Winn.”

“Wait.” Cat’s fingers grazed Alex’s forearm to halt her movement, flexed away instinctively, and
finally settled into a firm grip when Alex didn’t pull away. “You speak Kryptonese, correct?”

The agent leaned her hip against the counter and nodded her head in affirmation.

Cat’s lips quirked pensively to one side, the sound of Kara’s soft words the previous night as Cat
drifted to sleep hazy and distant in her memory. “What does ‘I love you’ sound like in
Kryptonese?”

Alex’s eyebrows arched in surprise at the way Cat had worded her question. “Well, that’s a slightly
tricky question,” she began. “When Kara and I say it to each other, it’s ‘ukiemodh w rrip eh.’”

She saw disappointment flash though golden flecks. “That’s the form used with family and
friends,” she continued. With an oddly nervous breath, she finished, “For more intimate
relationships, Kryptonians would say ‘:zhaodh w rrip eh.’”
Recognition instantly filled the reporter’s gaze. “That didn’t seem all that tricky to me,” she teased.

Alex smiled and Cat watched as her expression softened. “The trick is in understanding the meaning of the second version. It’s not—it’s not something Kryptonians say casually. In fact, it’s something they would almost never say in front of anyone other than the intended recipient. It’s not just a declaration of love. It’s more like a promise.”

“I will never dishonor such a sacred promise, Cat.”

“A promise?”

Alex shook her head at Cat’s persistent questioning. “You’re going to have to go back to your original source for any further information.”

The smaller blonde rolled her eyes, once more relaxing under Alex’s familiar teasing. “Not even on deep background?”

“Not a chance.” The challenging flash in Cat’s eyes made Alex laugh all the more.

As the reporter finally moved toward the lab exit, begrudgingly acquiescent to Alex’s statement, the brunette slipped her mobile phone into her pocket with a mischievous grin.

Sweeping down the stairs and toward Ops, Cat barely turned her head in acknowledgement of Winn, still hiding in the shadows of the nearby column. “Winslow, your reconnaissance tactics are as questionable as Kara’s taste in cardigans. You’re lucky Agent Danvers has taken a personal interest in your training.”

Before he could fight through the shock of Cat’s statement, Alex strode past him, tagging him in the shoulder with a fierce fist bump. “Yeah, Schott, lucky you.” She continued to follow Cat, calling over her shoulder, “We’re mixing it up a little this morning. Weapons training instead of hand-to-hand.”

Quickly scurrying to catch up while rubbing at his shoulder, he mumbled, “Fine, just as long as I’m not the target.”

“Never,” Alex intoned as the trio headed toward the elevator bay off of Ops. “That’s way too much paperwork.”

Not missing a beat, Cat offered, “My previous assistant was a pro at speeding through superfluous paperwork. I should get you her number.”

The IT agent increased his pace slightly as if more distance would somehow protect him from the plotting between Cat and Alex. “My life has become way too surreal,” he grumbled as he hurried ahead.

Alex bumped Cat’s shoulder lightly, delighted to see the smile that finally broke along the smaller blonde’s full lips. “You can’t resist giving people shit, can you?”

Cat shifted her gaze toward the agent, a regal sharpness and a revealing spark of adoration bright in her jade eyes. “Always keep your opponent off-balance. Works in both our preferred methods of defense.”

With an amused shake of her head, Alex led the way into the arriving elevator car, choosing the lower level that housed the DEO’s armory and shooting range. When the elevator deposited them, she strode into the armory, giving a quick nod to the agent on-duty, and led Winn and Cat to the
selection of handguns displayed near the entrance.

Before she could say anything, however, Cat lifted one of the guns from its wall mount. “Beretta M9? The DEO follows military sidearm protocol?”

“Uh, yeah,” the brunette stammered, surprise evident in her response. “Easier on the budget that way, I guess.”

Cat hummed softly while examining the weapon. “But you at least got the M9A3 upgrade.” She smirked at the curiosity twitching through Alex’s features. “I was embedded in two international conflicts, Alex. Do you really think I went there armed only with a pen and my stunning looks?”

The curiosity quickly flashed to chagrin, surprising Cat with its hurried change. “Shit,” Alex sighed, “Cat, I’m sorry. I didn’t even consider that this might remind you of—of your time—”

Once more, the smaller blonde reached out, gripping Alex’s forearm firmly at first contact. Knowing she had the brunette’s attention, she explained, “Alex, I re-certify in precision response training every three years and have a lifetime platinum membership at a private firing range up near Oceanside.” She shrugged at the puzzled frown. “I have a beach house there. It’s far enough away from here that none of the paps have ever caught me. Last thing I want is to become some kind of NRA poster celebrity.”

Wiggling her perfectly manicured fingers in front of chestnut eyes, the CEO huffed, “The only thing I expect pried from my cold, dead hand is a crystal tumbler—preferably emptied of whatever fine scotch I was enjoying when I finally released my stranglehold on this mortal coil.”

Even Winn couldn’t restrain his shocked laughter at Cat’s comment. The feel of tension releasing beneath her grip on Alex broadened her smile. “So, let’s go shoot things, shall we?”

The brunette gave a brusque nod as she withdrew guns for herself and Winn. She then led the way to the firing range, disseminating safety goggles and earplugs as they went to the first available lane.

She caught the amusing double takes of the agents nearby. Cat simply inserted her ear plugs and slipped on her goggles, her cool demeanor giving all indication she hadn’t noticed—an impressively practiced lie if ever Alex saw one.

“Would you like to go first?”

Accepting the extended magazine, Cat slid it into place with a satisfying click, released the safety, and chambered a round before sighing, “If you insist.”

Moving into position within the lane, Cat adjusted into a tactical stance, drew her weapon and proceeded to take aim at the qualifier target down range. In a calm, clear voice, she announced to the suddenly silent range, “Firing in Lane Nine.”

Seventeen rapidly fired rounds later, the CEO dropped her weapon, relaxed her stance, and removed her goggles and earplugs amidst the pindrop-quiet gathering. Alex stepped forward, flicking the return switch that began drawing the target up range. When the mechanism whirred to a stop, the semicircle of agents who had gathered to watch stared with silent admiration. The target bore two clean patterns of tightly clustered shots over each of the shoulders.

With a casual shrug, the CEO explained, “I prefer shooting to disarm rather than shooting to kill.”

“You are so signing this,” Alex laughed even as her eyes glowed with awe.
Winn gaped incredulously for several beats until Cat’s pointed stare and slight head tilt shook him once more to his senses. “Teach me.”

“Seriously?” The tech agent flinched at the feel of Alex slapping the back of his neck as she passed him. Cat suppressed a smile at his squeak of surprise before turning her attention toward Alex.

Digging into one of the many pockets of her cargo pants, the brunette located a pen, which she happily handed to the CEO. “I’m not kidding,” she explained at the surprised glance from Cat. “Sign it, Grant. You’re part of our bulls-eye club now.”

With an exaggerated eye roll meant to deflect from the proud shine in her gaze, Cat accepted the pen and the target. When she righted herself once more after signing, she held up the bullet-riddled sheet and pen toward the agent beside her.

“Unh-unh,” Alex instantly replied, raising the mobile phone Cat hadn’t noticed before in her grip. “One more shot, for posterity—and Kara,” she added impishly as she centered Cat in-frame.

“One more?” The CEO curled one hand around the jut of her hip as she continued to hold the target out toward Alex. “And just how many have you already taken?”

Lips parting into full teeth-baring delight, Alex snapped her final shot. She snickered at how even in a confused state, Cat could still manage a striking pose, complete with a perfectly arched eyebrow. “I’m a specially trained DEO agent, Cat. If I can’t snag some surreptitious photos of you being a total BAMF, they might as well take my badge now.”

The responding huff did very little to quell the amusement in the smaller blonde’s eyes as Alex finally took the target. She immediately pinned it up to the “bragging board” agents often used to display their latest and greatest practice rounds. Cat noted several recognizable names, including the agent beside her. “Not a bad shot yourself, Agent Danvers.”

Shoulders hitched. “Kara insists. She makes me practice at least twice a week: once in the range and once in the field with her.”

Cat drew up in surprise. “Wait, Kara shoots?”

“Um.” Alex flushed instantly. “Not exactly.”

Jade gaze narrowed for the briefest moment before widening in shock. “You shoot your sister?”

Alex shifted her weight from foot to foot. Her gaze dropped to her boots as she considered how it must sound to someone not yet completely acclimated to the Danvers sisters and their need for warning tags. “Technically, I shoot at her. How good I am that day determines whether or not I actually hit her.”

“And you call me a BAMF?”

At the sight of Alex snapping her gaze back up, Cat laughed and patted her forearm, enjoying the agent’s shy smile.

“She calls it ‘Super Skeet.’ She’s actually improved my accuracy level for moving targets by about thirty percent. You could join us if you like.”

“Cancel those fantasies of letting Cat shoot me as foreplay.”

The smaller blonde caught the slight wrinkling of discomfort in Alex’s expression as soon as she
had finished making the offer. “Me helping you shoot Kara is a more psychologically loaded scenario than even I have ever presented to any of my therapists, Alex.”

Winn tried to cover his snort of amusement with several coughs while focusing intently on the targets pinned to the bragging board. With a shake of her head toward Cat, Alex returned to her phone. Opening her image layout software, she pulled together several of the photos she’d taken: Cat studying the wall of weapons, Cat in perfect tactical stance firing at her target, and Cat displaying her results. She smirked at the final shot, already suspecting her sister’s response to that one.

Attaching the collage to a text, she quickly tapped out: *Looks like I’ve found the DEO’s next sharp shooter.*

“Schott!” She reveled in the way he jerked nervously to attention. Waving her phone so he could see she was preparing to send a text, she teased, “Do you think this will be a record breaker?”

Cat’s confusion spread clearly across her face, but Winn instantly began to laugh as he checked his watch. “Guess there’s only one way to find out.” He quickly opened the stopwatch feature and cried, “Go!”

The brunette sent her text with the attached photo collage and focused on the shooting range entrance. “You might want to move away from the door,” she warned the rest of the agents.

“Alex? What—”

The smaller blonde stumbled into silence at the sight of Alex holding up one finger. Before she could even react to the gesture, she heard several surprised noises outside the range, followed up with hastily called-out apologies. When the doors to the practice range swung open so fiercely, they nearly bent the hinges, Winn stopped his countdown with a pump of his fist into the air and an elated yell of “We have a new best time! Seventy-five seconds!”

Although clearly flustered, the hero turned at the new information and scowled. “I thought this weirdness between you and Alex was timing my return to the DEO, not how long it then took me to hunt you down in the DEO.”

“She has a point there,” Alex conceded. “We could shave off, what? Five seconds?”

Before Winn could reply, Kara waggled her fingers in her sister’s face. “Hello? Could we focus on something more important than my in-city flight speed? Like *this,*” and she waved her mobile in the air, the photo collage Alex had sent on prominent display. “I’m going to have to repair the wall in my office—again!” She grimaced and added softly, “Once I remove my desk chair from the drywall.”

At the sharp *tsk* beside her, the hero turned toward Cat, who had been observing to that point in silence. “And just how many times have you caused this kind of wanton destruction to my building, Kiera?”

“Hey,” the hero instantly huffed, “I think I should get a little understanding this time! Either that or Alex takes some of the blame, too, for springing Cattie Oakley on me while I’m trying to work!” She brandished her phone once more. “Did you ever think this might be something to share?”

“With the bulletproof alien?” The CEO pressed her lips together to hold back the laugh that threatened to escape at Kara’s instant adorable pout. “Besides, darling, your reactions are always worth the price of admission.”
“Price of—like—like a fee?”

Moving forward, Cat ran her thumb along the crinkle forming in the center of Kara’s brow. “My beautifully literal Kryptonian.” Seeing the soft sweep of pink through the hero’s cheeks at the teasing and responding chuckles from Alex and Winn, Cat leaned forward and kissed the tip of Kara’s nose.

“You two are seriously nauseating right now. Stop it.” Both blondes turned in unison toward Alex, who stared at them with arms crossed, her expression teasingly indulgent. Winn continued to snicker safely from behind the brunette as she gestured toward the equally amused agents surrounding them. “You are preventing these highly focused agents from training because of your distracting cuteness. As the senior agent here, I’m going to have to order you to vacate these premises immediately.”

Amid the laughter of the other agents, Kara shyly ducked her head, her smile so easily, so beautifully betraying her delight. With a soft sigh, Cat reached for her hand, intertwining their fingers before leading her hero to the door.

“Whatever, Agent Danvers. My job here is finished anyway.” She gestured airily toward her target on the bragging board as she passed by on her way out of the range. “Once more, I am here to inspire.”

“She’s a muse, you know,” Kara called over her shoulder, happily playing along. “To the world.”

As the two blondes passed from sight into the hall, Alex and Winn met gazes long enough to roll their eyes and shrug in sympathetic amusement. “Remind me again,” Alex finally teased, “which one is the unstoppable force and which one is the immovable object?”

With as serious an expression as he could muster, Winn nodded and replied, “Yes.”

The response earned a snort of laughter from the brunette before she pivoted and began after the two women. As the agents caught up with the departing blondes, the sound of a ringing cell phone interrupted any further conversation.

Slipping her phone from her pocket, Cat glared at the name on the screen. She tapped the answer button, instantly slipping into a tone Alex found surprising but Kara and Winn recognized all too well. “Ms. Teschmacher, if you have confused my number with your cat groomer’s again, my next call is going to be to Human Resources to begin processing your termination papers.”

The assistant stammered nervously, “N-no, Ms. Grant. I’m calling because I have a Captain Garrick on the line insisting he talk with you immediately. H-he says it has to do with—with Spencer Graves.”

She uttered the final three words in a strained, nervous whisper. With a bemused tsk, Cat replied, “Speak up, Ms. Teschmacher. You’re talking about Spencer Graves, not Voldemort.” The Danvers sisters both snorted at the comment, glancing at each other in amusement. “Go ahead and connect me with Captain Garrick.”

Alex instantly perked, her eyes widening as she shifted her gaze between the two blondes.

“Alex?” Her sister studied her closely. “What’s wrong?”

“Garrick is Maggie’s CO,” she whispered while digging out her own phone and dialing the detective. “Maggie didn’t mention he had anything to do with Graves’s arrest.”
As the brunette connected with Maggie, Cat heard her own connection go through. “Ms. Grant? My name is Marcus Garrick. I’m captain of the NCPD’s ninth precinct.” He paused for a cough that rolled wet and brutal through the phone line. “Sorry,” he gruffed, breath wheezing for a moment in his chest. “I’m calling because I have some information on Spencer Graves that I think you should know—completely off the record, of course.”

With a pensive quirk of her lips, the smaller blonde locked gazes with Kara as the hero listened to both sides of the conversation. “Of course, Captain. I will hold whatever you tell me in the strictest of confidences.”

“It’s not much,” he conceded after a moment, “but it’s—well, he said something during our interrogation this morning about Lillian Luthor having a ‘much wider reach’ than we could ever stop. When I tried to get him to elaborate, the prick told me the kid who served as crossing guard in his neighborhood had a better shot at getting him to snitch on Lillian Luthor than I ever would.” He fell silent for a moment before rasping, “Sorry about that ‘prick’ comment.”

Biting the inside of her cheek to keep from laughing at the *she says worse things in her sleep* eye roll from Kara, the CEO queried, “And how far do you think the PR flack he so eagerly dismissed yesterday would get with him today?”

Cat purposefully avoided eye contact with Kara as soon as she posed the question. “I honestly don’t know the answer to that, Ms. Grant, but if you want to try, be my guest. However, it’s going to have to happen soon. We’re preparing to transfer Graves from holding to Ordway Prison today. The afternoon transport will be here in two hours.”

“Thank you, Captain. I believe I would like to give Mr. Graves one final opportunity to redeem himself.”

“Fine. There’s a side street off Pembroke you should use instead of coming in the main entrance. That will take you to the entrance the transport uses. I can meet you there.”

Cat glanced at her watch. “I can be there within the hour.”

Without waiting for further comment, she closed the line and slid her phone back into her pocket. Keenly aware of the stare focused on her, she turned her full attention toward the cape-clad hero. With a subtle hitch of her brow, she set her hands on her hips and sighed, “Are there words to go along with your glare?”

Alex flicked her finger to close her own line with Maggie, her gaze shifting with growing worry between the two blondes locked in an intense staredown.

Kara remained motionless, her feet planted firmly and her arms crossed against her chest, but Alex could tell her grip on her biceps had tightened significantly. Finally, she broke the moment with a slow blink and a calming breath. “You aren’t confined to the DEO.”

At the uncertainty to quickly paint itself across Cat’s expression, Kara allowed herself an indulgent smirk. “I’m not your jailer, Cat.” She bowed her head, allowing her worry to seep into her posture.

The smaller blonde stepped forward, placing a hand against Kara’s cheek. The hero leaned into the touch, lungs filling with the spiced scent of Cat’s perfume. “No, but you *are* my partner.” She watched the understanding of her sentiment roll across Kara’s expression like sunrise.

“I want you to always voice concerns when it comes to us, Kara. I can’t promise I will always acquiesce,” she added, charmed by the insouciant huff from the hero. “But I will always listen and
give your words and feelings consideration and respect.”

Moving closer, she wrapped her arms around the hero’s waist, smiling when she felt Kara’s arms mirror the action around her. “Would it make you feel better if you were to accompany me?”

“Another Super escort?”

“Actually,” she rejoined, “I was thinking Kara Danvers would benefit more from this mission than Supergirl.” Reading the hero’s surprise, she finished, “You’ve written more on Spencer Graves this past year than any other CatCo reporter. You know him and his distorted ideology better even than me. If he says anything worth reporting, you should be one to write it.”

“Really?”

“Really,” the smaller blonde confirmed with a laugh that warmed Kara and shook her in equal measure. “Besides, I owe you after I so rudely pulled you from yesterday’s story without first discussing it with you. I am truly sorry for that, Kara.”

The hero shook her head, eyes glinting with mischief. “If I had covered yesterday’s meeting, Snapper would have definitely ripped it apart for clear pro-Cat Grant bias.”

With a click of her tongue, the smaller blonde scoffed, “It isn’t bias if it’s true, darling.”

“Would either of you like to know what Maggie said?” Alex bit back laughter at the sight of both women startling at her question as if momentarily forgetting they weren’t alone.

“Of course,” Cat quickly replied, releasing her hold on Kara enough to stand beside the hero, one arm still wrapped snugly around her waist. “What was she able to confirm?”

“Well, the one thing I can confirm without a doubt is she’s pissed. She said Garrick got a call from the commissioner this morning to appoint him the lead on the case. Maggie said all she got was a consolation call from some bubbly aide in the commissioner’s office, thanking her for her efforts and letting her know Garrick would be in charge of the Spencer Graves case moving forward.”

“Let me guess,” Cat intoned, “the bubbly aide thanked Maggie for her continued service and explained this decision didn’t reflect poorly on her. Instead, it was meant to show the commissioner’s complete commitment to justice for the citizens of National City wronged by Spencer Graves’s actions.”

“Something like that.” The sneer that tugged upward at Alex’s lip confirmed she believed that line as much as Maggie and Cat.

“What if—what if CADMUS has someone in the department on their dole who they’re using to get to Graves before he talks? What if their ‘someone’ is the commissioner?”

Cat cocked her head to one side, pleased by Kara’s questions. “It’s possible, but if it is true, then that would mean Garrick might be on the take as well.” Shifting her attention, she asked Alex, “What does Maggie think of him?”

“The worst Maggie has ever said about him and that I’ve observed first-hand is he can be lecherous.” The brunette squinted at the memory of some of his more disturbing comments about her sister.

Cat caught the expression as well as the way Alex purposefully averted her gaze from Kara. “I’ll extrapolate from your verbal and non-verbal responses that he, like many within this city, has a
hard-on for the Girl of Steel—only he likes to vocalize his inappropriate urges in equally inappropriate ways.”

She huffed slightly at the shocked clench of Kara’s hold on her waist. Casting a mischievous side-eye toward the flustered hero, she sighed, “While that does make him vulgar enough to consider tossing him into space, it doesn’t make him a traitor.”

Alex conceded with a nod, barely caging the laugh within her throat at the sight of Winn’s grimace over Cat’s comment. “Maggie’s never had reason not to trust him. He’s stepped up for her several times, including with the NCPD response to the recent protests. She also said he seemed more pissed than she was that he had to replace her as the lead.”

Cat’s mouth twisted into a pensive frown as she processed this information. “We need to proceed with due caution.” With a strong squeeze of Kara’s waist, she finished, “I think we should trust Kara’s instincts on this.”

“My instincts?”

With a patent-worthy arch of her brow, Cat replied, “Something has set you on alert regarding possible collusion between the NCPD and CADMUS. Don’t dismiss that, Kara.”

The hero looked nervously toward Alex. “I-I don’t think it’s—I mean, I think the—NCPD is doing a great job.”

“Hey,” Alex interrupted, her stance relaxing and her lips forming a comforting smile. “Questioning the motives or actions of one or a few cops doesn’t mean you think all cops are dirty, Kara. I know that, and Maggie knows that, too.”

“Besides,” Cat added, “you’ve worked with enough of them as Supergirl to know there are plenty of exceptional officers out there—your future sister-in-law at the top of that list, of course.”

Kara was certain she had never heard a gasp quite as sharp or stunned as the one that stole her sister’s breath at Cat’s comment. The smaller blonde shot Alex a go ahead and fight me smirk, but the sound of heavy, hustling footsteps interrupted them before either woman could speak.

Alex frowned at the sight of the DEO director moving swiftly toward them. “J’onn? What’s happening?”

The Martian drew to a halt within the half-circle. “I just received a call from the President.” He focused his deep-set gaze on Kara. “She’s requesting our presence at a briefing in an hour.”

“Wh-what?” Electric jitters fluttered right down to the very tips of her nerves. “President Marsdin wants to see me? Why? When? What?”

“I see Snapper needs to work with you a little more on your five Ws.”

Unable to hold back an eye roll, much to Cat’s amusement, Kara took a calming breath and asked, “What does President Marsdin wish to brief us on?”

“She was unwilling to say anything specific, even through our secured connection.” He dipped his head slightly. “If we are to make it in time for the meeting without needing to rattle window panes in Peoria, we’ll need to leave as soon as possible.”

Unfazed by J’onn’s teasing, Kara instead turned her full attention toward Cat, the crinkle in her brow deeper than the smaller blonde had ever seen it before. Understanding the hero’s
consternation, Cat cut in before she could speak. “Kara, the President of the United States has summoned you for a briefing. There is only one answer to that—and it isn’t the one I can tell you’re getting ready to give.”

“But—”

“Supergirl.”

At the sound of Cat’s use of her title, Kara’s jaw clicked instantly shut. Pleased by the acquiescence, the smaller blonde continued, “As flattering as your preferential treatment is, the Leader of the Free World takes precedent over the Queen of All Media.”

She pressed her finger against Kara’s lips at the sight of the hero preparing to respond. “And before you make us look even more ‘seriously nauseating’ in front of your sister and these other fine, upstanding DEO agents, I know this is about me and not my title.”

Her lips twitched into the ghost of a smile at the blush to touch Kara’s cheeks. “Have faith in me, Kara. I’m many things, but I’d like to think foolhardy is not one of them anymore. I’m not going to do anything that would put me in undue danger.” Rising up on her toes, she finally moved her finger so she could press her lips against the hero’s in a soft kiss. “Trust me?”

With a thick swallow audible to everyone around her, Kara finally forced herself to nod. “Always.”

“Good,” she smiled as she settled back into a normal stance. She rested her hand against the crest of the House of El. “Now, go. Fly safely and give my regards to Olivia.”

Realizing Kara had not moved from her spot in front of Cat, instead focusing on her with rapidly darkening eyes, Alex gave an obvious cough while tugging Winn along behind her and gesturing for J’onn to move with her. As she passed Kara, she began to reach out to pat her sister’s bicep before thinking better of making any physical contact with her in that particular moment. Instead, she explained, “We’re, um, we’re going to head up to Ops now, Kara, so you can properly say goodbye to my future sister-in-law.”

Cat watched the brunette with an unfazed quirk of her lips, her eyes gleaming in a way that once again made Alex’s heart feel close to bursting for her sister.

The smaller blonde had very little time to consider any further comment, finding herself wrapped in randy Kryptonian and transported into the nearest empty room before the trio of DEO agents had even made it out of her line of sight. As soon as she felt floor once more beneath her feet, she also felt wall against her back and said randy Kryptonian molded perfectly against her front.

Huffing with faux indignation even as she tilted her head to expose more of her neck to the hero, she sighed, “Don’t think I’m writing an excuse note for you if you end up late to meet with Olivia.”

Kara’s laugh cast a shiver through the supple body pressing against her. Inhaling deeply enough to fill her lungs with the scent of Cat, she mumbled against the delicate line of the smaller blonde’s neck, “What exactly would such a note state? ‘Please excuse Supergirl, as she was detained at the DEO by a pressing need to kiss Cat Grant senseless’?”

To punctuate her point, she captured Cat’s mouth with her own, tongue instantly unlocking a sensual moan from deep within the smaller blonde’s chest. Hands slipped beneath the hem of Cat’s top, searing a path along the narrow curve of her waist and lower back. She ran her nails up and around, using just enough pressure to scratch contrails against porcelain skin, before palming lace-clad breasts.
“Fucking hell, Kara.” The smaller blonde breathed the words directly into Kara’s mouth as she felt her arousal tightening her nipples and fluttering low and sharp within her abdomen. With a push against the shoulders partially pinning her to the wall, she locked gazes with eyes blown dark with desire. “I would highly advise against either of us going to our next meetings while sexually frustrated.”

“Who said anything about either of us still being frustrated?” To accentuate her point, she let her thigh slip between Cat’s legs, lifting upward as she did. Her lips twitched at the feel of Cat’s hips pulling her forward against the hard line of Kara’s leg.

Voice low with need, Cat struggled to counter, “I applaud your ravenous libido, Supergirl, but we both know this can’t happen now.”

The CEO couldn’t hold back her laughter at the all-consuming pout to overtake Kara. Tenderly gripping the hero’s forearms, she moved Kara’s hands out from under her shirt and placed them on her shoulders. Curling her own hands around Kara’s neck, she leaned forward for a thorough though controlled kiss.

She pulled back, eyes sparkling with desire and devotion. “Tonight, my darling, I promise you, I will make it up to you that we’re stopping now.”

With another kiss, Cat took the hero’s hands in her own and began to walk backward toward the door. Kara’s pout slowly eased into a smile so full of adoration, Cat felt the sting of tears at the back of her eyes. As she spun around and continued to lead the hero toward the elevators, Kara smiled even more widely at the feel of their fingers still tangled together.

Rounding the corner into Ops, they found Alex, Winn, and J’onn waiting. Agent Hawthorne stood at ease before Alex, listening intently. With her back toward where Cat and Kara were approaching, the brunette continued, “You cover her at all times, keep yourself between her and any possible threat, and do not leave her alone, no matter what.”

Before Hawthorne had a chance to respond, Cat teasingly asked, “Even if she needs to go to the restroom?”

Without turning or missing a beat, Alex replied directly to Hawthorne, “Not even then, Agent. So perhaps you should inform your charge she should go to the Little CEO’s Room before she leaves here.”

Alex huffed at the feel of Cat bumping playfully into her shoulder as she passed to stand beside her DEO-assigned protector. “Agent Hawthorne and I will be fine, Agent Danvers. We make quite the team out in the field.”

The brunette gave a brisk nod, noting the grateful smile shadowing Cat’s expression. “Of course you do. Hawthorne’s one of our best. You’re also going to have me monitoring from here.”

She shifted her gaze toward Kara, who had moved to stand between Cat and J’onn. “We’re going to be monitoring all channel frequencies for abnormal activity and chatter as well as keeping open comm links with both your teams. Winn’s going to be monitoring Kara and J’onn, and I’m going to be with you the whole time. Before you leave here, I’m going to outfit you with a two-way earpiece set to our frequency. I’ve also alerted Maggie that you’re coming to the precinct for a talk with Graves. She’s out on a call right now, but she said she should be finished and on her way back to the precinct before you leave.”

As she processed her sister’s words, Kara stepped forward so swiftly, Alex barely had time to
register strong arms wrapping around her right before she felt herself lifted off the ground in one of Kara’s “Kryptonian bear hugs.” Unable as always to hide her emotions, the hero breathed a teary, “Thank you, Alex.”

All too aware of the groan of her bones beneath Kara’s hold, Alex hugged back as tightly as she could while laughing, “I’m not going to be able to do much of anything until you put me back down, Supergirl.” With a gasp of relief at feeling Kara’s immediate release, Alex continued her own hug for a few more beats.

When she stepped back, she nodded once toward her sister and J’onn. “Keep your links open as long as you can before your meeting, and leave them in emergency response mode while incommunicado, just in case we need to reach you while you’re out of pocket. We’ll all be here for a briefing as soon as you return.”

J’onn studied his second-in-command with a pleased expression before he closed his eyes and focused on morphing into his true form. Finished, he began walking toward the bay doors, his cape swishing in time with his steps. “Ready, Supergirl?”

The hero made to follow, reversed stride and gathered a pleasantly surprised CEO into her arms for a kiss. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” came Cat’s unhesitating reply, drawing a full-toothed smile to the hero’s face as she spun and floated up after J’onn.

Once the aliens were gone from sight, Cat refocused quickly on her part of the task at hand. “I suppose you don’t have an earpiece to match my earrings perchance?”

Alex rolled her eyes at the question. “Schott, bring the Lady Grant your finest earpiece.”

The IT agent skittered over to his workstation, coming back with, to Alex’s surprise, a variety of earpiece options, including a clear model that even had mostly clear interior components. Catching the brunette’s curious gaze, he smiled shyly. “Kara wanted a clear earpiece to be less obvious at work, and I wanted to see just how clear I could make it.”

With a pleased hum, Cat tilted her head to one side and declared, “I believe the Lady Grant would like the Supergirl model, please.”

Winn blushed at the teasing as he calibrated the device to the correct frequency and nervously slipped it into Cat’s ear. His blush deepened when he pulled back and found himself caught within the leonine stare of his former boss. “Fashionable and functional. I can see why Kara came to you for her suit.” She rejiggered the position of the earpiece slightly before sighing in contentment. “Thank you, Winslow.”

His smile grew slightly brighter. “O-of course, Ms. Grant.”

With a pat to Winn’s forearm, the CEO pivoted and flicked her fingers airily before her. “Come along, Agent Hawthorne. Allow me a moment to collect my things, and then let’s go find out what kind of tune we can compel Spencer Graves to sing for us today.”

Hawthorne moved to her side as she began walking toward Alex’s lab. Cat smiled to herself at how easily the agent synced with her movements, his body language already clearly signaling his protective posture.

The drive to the police station went smoothly enough for a midday commute, with Cat teasing Hawthorne in a manner he had learned was the CEO’s way of showing her approval of him. The
agent took it all in stride, his expression never betraying the pleasure he felt at knowing he had earned the trust not only of his COs but also of the two most powerful people within National City. It was yet another moment when he regretted, if only briefly, that he didn’t have a job he could actually discuss with his friends and family. He was fairly certain this particular accomplishment would have qualified him for full bragging rights and at least a couple free rounds.

Steering the Denali along the narrow side street down which Cat directed him, Hawthorne pulled around what was clearly the prison transport van and angled into a spot adjacent to the opposite wall. Turning off the SUV’s engine, he hurried out and around, opening Cat’s door before she could do it herself.

As Cat slid from the Denali cab, both she and Hawthorne pivoted at the movement of someone approaching from deeper within the alleyway. “Ms. Grant?”

“James?” The smaller blonde tilted her head, allowing her lips to curl upward slightly in approval at the sight of her acting CEO brandishing his DSLR and a photo kit slung across his torso. Walking around the DEO agent, she strode over to stand before the photojournalist. “You could have sent one of our staff photographers down here to catch Graves’s perp walk.”

Shrugging his broad shoulders, James offered one of his more reserved smiles. “I wanted to make sure we got the best photos, especially in light of the exposé you dropped yesterday.” He shuffled slightly before drawing himself up to full height. “I’ve got to up my game if I want to keep up with you.”

With characteristic candor, Cat rejoined, “No one can keep up with me, Mr. Olsen.” Her stance relaxed at his responding sniffed laughter, the hard slice of her voice smoothing. “But you’ve been doing well enough in your recent efforts. I appreciate you coming down here for this, but remember to delegate. You can’t do it all.”

“No only you can fill that role at CatCo,” he teased, the bright flash of his smile coaxing Cat into a returning grin.

Glancing up, the photojournalist finally noticed Cat’s driver. His expression instantly shifted to confusion as he took in the appearance of the familiar DEO agent beside the smaller blonde. Confusion quickly receded under the rush of worry. “Cat, did—did Supergirl arrange for you to have protection?”

The conversation ended abruptly at the heavy clang of the back door swinging open into the cinder block wall behind it. Cat bristled at the sight of two guards escorting Spencer Graves to the awaiting prison transport.

“What the hell?” She moved swiftly to intercept the officers and Graves, Hawthorne moving to shadow the CEO’s pace. With signature consternation, she snapped at the escort, “Who told you it was all right to remove this prisoner so early?”

The guard closer to where Cat had stopped in front of them shrugged in an infuriatingly apathetic fashion. “Does it matter? We’re taking him to where he belongs.”

“Captain Marcus Garrick arranged for me to speak with Mr. Graves before his transport.”

“What? She moved swiftly to intercept the officers and Graves, Hawthorne moving to shadow the CEO’s pace. With signature consternation, she snapped at the escort, “Who told you it was all right to remove this prisoner so early?”

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“Captain Marcus Garrick arranged for me to speak with Mr. Graves before his transport.”

When the CEO shifted her gaze to Graves, fury curled her lip at the sight of his condescending smile. “I told you, Ms. Grant, you have no idea the power of the enemy you’ve made.”
The back doors of the transport van unexpectedly swung wide, one door clanging loudly against the side of the van as the other crashed into one of the transport guards standing in its arc. Cat flinched at the sickening sound of snapping bones as the door made impact with the guard’s arm, outstretched protectively before him. With a strangled groan, he dropped to the ground, cradling his broken arm close to his chest.

The second guard rushed backward, dragging Graves with him away from the van. As he fumbled to unlatch and draw his weapon, he ordered, “Get down on the ground!”

Reflexes instantly kicked in as Hawthorne swung in a 180-degree turn to position himself between the transport and Cat, subsequently blocking her view of the van. Beside her, however, Graves tumbled backward into the guard still holding onto him, knocking both of them to the ground. From her point of view, she watched as the victorious smirk slipped from his lips, replaced by wild-eyed, terrified realization.

“Please, no, please don’t do this!” His voice choked on the panic rolling over him in insurmountable waves as he pleaded with whatever had emerged from the van.

Hawthorne turned Cat and began to redirect her toward the Denali, his expression more serious than she had thought possible for the normally affable agent. As James fell in place on her left side, she caught the nervous flutter of his fingers over his wrist watch as the trio hustled their retreat. Pressing more closely to the CEO, Hawthorne called out, “Green Team Leader, we have a situation. Requesting back—”

The rest of Hawthorne’s words morphed into a choked hiss as his grip on Cat tightened painfully and he shoved into her with unexpected force. Stereophonic screams of anguish echoed through the alley from the second guard and Graves while, beside her, James released a growl of pain as he tripped and struggled to right himself.

Stumbling to a stop and twisting from Hawthorne’s grip, Cat caught the collapsing agent by his biceps, bracing herself against his full weight. As she tried to keep him upright and moving with her, she caught a shocking reek of putrescence and struggled to swallow back the bile rising from her instantly soured stomach.

“Cat?” The sound of Alex’s voice in her ear sharpened her focus. “What’s going on? Winn’s established a connection with the station’s CCTV system, but he says the cameras in the alley have stopped transmitting. What’s happening?”

The CEO breathed deeply through her mouth as she watched Hawthorne stagger down onto one knee and struggle to rise. However, her attention transfixed on the sight she caught once she had a clear view of the prison van.

Thomas Rieger stared across the alleyway at the CEO, features sallow and sweat-slicked, and eyes glazed with panic. She watched his jaw clench tightly, his whole expression a rictus of agony. Shaking his head, he howled despondently while raising his hands to cover inflamed flesh that bled and seeped viscous liquid in dark stripes down his chin.

Releasing a very clear string of expletives through the comm link, Cat slipped her arms under Hawthorne’s and tried to pull him to his feet. “Rieger’s here, Alex! Lillian has altered him somehow.” As James limped up next to her, helping her lift the injured agent once more to his feet, she stole a closer look at Hawthorne’s back. Stomach muscles clenched once more with the betraying sensation of nausea. The agent’s uniform top hung from his shoulders in dissolving shreds. Open wounds sprayed across his back, a necrotic darkness spreading out from the jagged edges. “Alex, Rieger’s shooting some kind of acid. Hawthorne’s been hit. You’re going to have to
have a medical team on stand-by when we get back to the DEO.”

She shifted her gaze downward to the leg James was dragging with clearly pained effort. Similar though smaller wounds wrapped along the calf of his right leg. Catching her notice, the photojournalist stated, “It’s like my leg is burning from the inside-out, but it’s also like I can’t get my muscles to work right.”

As she and James pulled Hawthorne around the front of the Denali, her gaze shifted toward the screams still coming from Graves and the guard. “Oh my god,” she whispered, slowing James enough to match the direction of her gaze. As they both watched, the security guard arched up from the pavement, his body seizing with pain from the lacerations that sliced across his face and chest.

Behind him, Graves collapsed, his screams finally halting into a wet choke of sound bubbling out from a face now unrecognizable. Cat could make out dissolving sinew and even charred and breaking bone in some places as his head slumped into a final resting position, now-empty eye sockets pointed in her direction.

Turning away with a convulsive shudder, she and James continued around to the far side of the DEO truck and lay Hawthorne down on his stomach. Cat removed her jacket, folding it and placing it beneath the agent’s head. She then turned her attention to James, who knelt beside her, and began to look more closely at his leg. “Alex, James is here with me and he’s been injured as well. Not as badly as Hawthorne, but he’s going to need help, too. It looks like the acid isn’t going any deeper on his leg.”

When she heard Alex’s voice through her comm link again, she could tell the agent was running as she spoke. “Okay, Cat, I’m on my way with backup, ETA in fifteen, and I’ve got Desert Containment scrambling a Hawk to your position. I need you to stay away from Rieger, Cat. Do not let him near you, please.”

The raw fear in Alex’s voice sluiced like ice water through Cat’s veins. Nodding to herself in understanding, she reached down and released Hawthorne’s service weapon from his holster, unlocking the safety and chambering a round.

“Ms. Grant?”

Cat turned toward the confused, pained gaze of her acting CEO. With a comforting squeeze to his bicep, she whispered, “Alex is on her way here with a DEO team. Keep Agent Hawthorne safe just a little while longer, okay?”

At his slight, uncertain nod, Cat crouched low and hustled as quietly as she could back to the front of the Denali. Taking a deep, shuddering breath to calm herself as much as possible, the CEO slowly peered around the front bumper, certain she had never before heard the pounding roar of blood in her ears quite so loudly.

Chapter End Notes

It's been a hot minute, right? I swear to you, I'm not finished telling this story. If you're so inclined to continue to follow me, I'm delighted to have the company.

Also, I just have to squee a little for a moment. I've been waiting for a perfect chance for Alex and Cat to spend a little "off-the-clock" time with each other. I'm so happy
with how their first extended opportunity came together.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Kara and J’onn travel to D.C. to learn more from President Marsdin and an unexpected source regarding more unsettling news about Project CADMUS.

Chapter Notes

Without giving away too much, things get a little graphic toward the end of this chapter.

As the DEO bay doors closed behind them and the two aliens ascended high above National City, Kara stretched her muscles and twisted into a series of barrel rolls. Sunlight flowed all along her form, filling her cells with the familiar crackle and spark of solar energy. When she took in a deep inhalation of air, she couldn’t help the joyful laughter that tangled with the exhalation.

Looking to her right, she smiled brightly at the sight of J’onn soaring beside her, a look of pure contentment on his face.

“Want to train me some more on proper flight technique?”

His smile grew at the question. “You seem to have worked out the kinks all on you own, Supergirl.” His eyes shone with a pride that wrapped itself tightly around Kara’s heart.

“Alex and Winn have been helping me with my agility and tactical maneuvering.”

“And have been placing bets with the rest of Ops during your speed training.” A deep laugh rumbled in his chest at the sight of the hero’s blush. He knowingly teased, “Interestingly, Alex has yet to lose any of those bets, no matter how fast she wagers on you going.”

Blush deepening, Kara replied, “I’d hate for her to lose hard-earned pizza money—especially since I’m the one who eats most of the pizza anyway.”

J’onn shook his head at the response. He knew from what he could detect from Alex and the other agents, they all were in on the older Danvers sister’s playful attempts to coax her sister to fly faster, push herself harder. Every agent knew if Alex said she believed Supergirl could do something, then Kara would find a way to make it true.

So it was they all pretended to take bets, to go along with Alex’s goading of her sister, knowing they were playing a small part in helping to make their hero the best she could be.

Kara spun once more in corkscrew patterns beside J’onn, her infectious laughter slipping along the currents surrounding them. He both cherished and envied the Kryptonian’s joy—how she held steadfastly to the light within her, refusing to let life’s darkness diminish it in any way.
As the duo flew in tandem toward D.C., the Martian listened to Kara point out various tourist destinations she had visited and those she had yet to mark off her list. He laughed at her excitement over the odd things humans had done across the country with automobiles, giant pieces of furniture, twine balls, and paint.

When they finally reached the eastern edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the pair slowed to a hover high above the Shenandoah Valley. Kara nervously twisted a hand into the edge of her cape, her attention drawn toward the north.

“Since we’re a little early, would you mind if I, um, if I flew up to Metropolis really quickly?”

The Martian inclined his head, his eyes shining with the smile he purposefully suppressed at Kara’s quiet request. “Go. Find me with my tracker when you’re finished. I will need to return to my human form, and I’ll need you to fly me in to the White House. The President has requested we land directly in the Rose Garden.”

With a nod, the hero addressed Winn through her open comm link. “Blue Team Leader, I’m switching to simplex for a little while. I’ll still be listening, though, so no Super gossip.”

At the sound of Winn’s laugh-filled confirmation, she tapped her earpiece to mute her microphone. She gave J’onn a grateful smile and wave before twirling upward and rocketing off toward her destination.

The miles ticked off rapidly and within minutes, Kara found herself descending through the steel-gray cloud cover of Metropolis. She absently noted the icy condensation clinging to her uniform as she glided in parallel with the street grid below.

She slowed to a stop within the shadow of the Daily Planet’s ostentatious Art Deco globe. Scanning the building with her X-ray vision, she quickly found the focus of her trip and allowed herself to float downward.

Hovering outside the appropriate window, she silently watched the reporter within the office, absorbed as always in notes and research, a knowing smile curving the hero’s lips.

At a soft tap at the reporter’s door, Kara snickered at the terse, “This better be important.”

The door slowly opened, a young man—probably an intern, Kara surmised—hesitantly stepping inside. “Here are those archived articles you re—”

The reporter glanced up at the unexpected silence, glaring at the stunned expression now adorning the intern’s face. With a nervous fluttering of his hand, he stammered, “Muh-Ms. Lane, there’s—there’s a, um, you—you have an audience.”

Lois Lane turned, expectant smile shifting to surprise when she locked onto the mischievous grin on the other side of her office window. “Well, I’ll be damned,” she laughed as she slipped from her chair to face the hero fully. With an upward pointing gesture, she stated, “I’ll meet you on the roof.”

Kara nodded her understanding as she watched Lois grab her coat and hustle past the still-stunned intern. Offering her friendliest smile, the hero waved to him as she began to ascend, chuckling softly as he offered back a halting wave in return.

When she touched down on the Daily Planet’s helipad, she cast her gaze out over her cousin’s city, a proud gleam in her eyes. This time, however, she realized with a warm smile this was not just the city of Superman and Clark Kent and Lois Lane.
This was Cat’s city, too.

Metropolis was Cat’s home, a city of many firsts for the CEO—where she spent her childhood, where she came home to after college, where she first found her footing as a reporter. She had once walked a beat on these very streets—had favorite places to eat or grab an after-work drink, had friends, had sources, had competition, had a whole life before uprooting and seeking a new home and a new path on her own.

And while Kara knew how much Cat cherished National City and all it had come to mean in her life, Metropolis would always flow through her veins, always hold a special place in her heart and memories. In some small way, Kara likened it to how she would always cherish and protect her memories of Argo City.

Standing there, atop the building where Cat had started her journey, Kara felt the familiar stab of sorrow that she would never be able to share many of her own beginnings and firsts with Cat—to show her where she had begun the journey that would one day bring her into the Queen’s kingdom, first as her assistant, now so much more, but always her most loyal and ardent protector.

One day soon, however, she swore she would accompany Cat to Metropolis to share a part of Cat’s life she had missed at the time of its occurrence. In a small way now, she could at least know those moments through seeing and hearing stories as only Cat could share them.

The sound of the roof’s access door swinging open broke her thoughts. Her smile grew exponentially brighter as she heard the swift click of Lois’s heels approaching where she stood.

“What’s this? Has that self-obsessed Hell Cat already sent you running to the other side of the country after not even a couple months of being with her?”

Shaking her head, Kara spun to face Lois, her expression a picture of amusement. “And who exactly told you I was with that ‘Hell Cat’?”

Lois crossed her arms against a gust of wind. “You do remember Clark was there to witness what sounds like a stomach-churning display of friskiness between the two of you on New Year’s Eve, right? Besides, he and Eliza talk regularly.”

“But not as regularly as you talk to Cat, right?” At the defiant hitch of Lois’s brow, Kara finished, “You can pack away the pretense, Lois. She told me you two are actually friends.”

With an exaggerated roll of her eyes, Lois huffed, “Grant’s clearly going soft. She used to actually be able to protect her sources.”

Kara strode forward, her expression quickly growing more serious. She knew she had limited time and she knew what she needed to say to the woman before her. “She told me about what you did for her, after she came home from Bosnia.”

Lois’s response fell from her lips with a stunned gasp at the feel of Kara wrapping her in a hug. Voice thick with emotion, the hero whispered, “Thank you for saving her.”

“Oh, Little Bird.” The reporter returned the hug with all her strength, knowing it was what Kara needed. When she pulled back to match gazes, she gently wiped away the tears staining the hero’s cheeks. “The world is a far better place with Cat Grant in it, and you can quote me any day on that.”

To Lois’s surprise, Kara’s tears continued to flow, even as she wiped them away with a huff of embarrassment. “I’m sorry,” she mumbled, eyes downcast and lower lip quivering.
“Hey.” The reporter tucked a hand under the hero’s chin, coaxing her to look up. “Talk to me, Kara.”

With a sigh that hiccupped into a broken sob, Kara asked, “How bad was she when you went out there?”

Lois blinked rapidly several times at the unexpected question, the memories of that trip to National City still far too painful to process. With a shake of her head and a calming hand against the hero’s cheek, she replied, “Let me keep that between Cat and me, Little Bird. All that matters is now. And right now, I can confirm that, aside from the day Carter was born, Cat is happier than I think I have ever known her to be—and god knows I’ve known her long enough to be a reliable source on that statement.”

Her expression softened at the sight of joy finally breaking through the worry and fear marring Kara’s features. “She loves you a great deal, Kara, but just as importantly, she trusts you. She’s told very few people what she saw as a war correspondent, and I know she’s never told anyone about my trip out to National City after she came home.”

Seeing the pain and fear of what could have been once more blurring the edges of Kara’s gaze, Lois gripped the hero’s shoulder tightly to keep her focused. “Cat trusts you with her heart, Kara, and that is one of the rarest gifts in this world. Don’t lose sight of that because of things in her past that happened before you had even arrived on this planet. You can’t change those events, nor should you want to.”

At the curious squint of Kara’s eyes, Lois pressed, “No matter how painful or frightening, those events played a significant role in shaping the woman you’ve so annoyingly fallen in love with.” She sighed in faux irritation at Kara’s besotted blush.

Taking Kara’s face once more in both her hands, she drew the hero close to press a kiss to her forehead. “You are two of the most fiercely devoted people I will ever know. You deserve each other, and I suspect, together, you will be unstoppable at whatever you put your hearts and minds to accomplishing. Just be patient with Cat. She’s taken a lot of battle damage.”

Kara nodded her understanding as she shifted to stand beside the reporter. They looked out over the city, concealed in a cloak of winter gray, the promise of snow sharp in the air. “I still miss her here, even after all this time,” Lois sighed, her breath swirling out in frosty tendrils.

“You know you’re always welcome to stay with me whenever you want to see her, if you two insist on keeping up this fake feud.”

The reporter shoved against the hero with her shoulder, smiling at the feel of Kara instinctively moving in-sync with her. “We both know that offer has a short shelf life.” Catching the surprised swivel of Kara’s gaze in her peripheral, Lois chuckled, “I give her another three months tops before she asks you to move in with her—and I’m only giving her that long because she’s so damned stubborn.”

“What?” Kara stammered at Lois’s prediction, surprise lifting her eyebrows high along her forehead. “Lois, we’ve barely been together two months!”

“Oh, please,” the reporter scoffed, “both of you have been in deep for way longer than two months.” She laughed brightly. “I know precisely when I realized she was going down for you—if you’ll pardon the highly disconcerting visual of that phrasing.”

Fighting through the raging blush she felt rising through her cheeks, the hero softly asked,
“When?”

The reporter looped her arm with Kara’s and pulled her close with a wistful sigh. “The moment I saw that goddamned beautiful byline on her article introducing the world to the Hero of National City. I hadn’t seen that byline in almost twenty years.” Emotion misted her gaze. “I honestly thought I never would see it again.”

She leaned into Kara’s side. “She called me on the way home from that interview with you, by the way, to chastise me for not telling her sooner her assistant was Superman’s cousin.”

Kara rolled her eyes, still equal parts impressed and mortified by how easily Cat had seen straight through her early attempts at obfuscation. Instead, she focused on the part of Lois’s statement that confirmed what Lucy had already told her. “Why did Cat stop writing?”

With a nod of concession, she revealed, “Cat fought back from a very dark place after she returned home, but the spark she had for reporting never fully returned from that darkness. She tried a few times afterward, but it wasn’t there anymore. Turns out, she just needed the right inspiration to finally give her the proverbial kick in the ass she needed—which, by the way, thanks for being that kick. I was beginning to forget what it felt like to lose awards to Cat Grant.”

At the rightful flush of happiness to color Kara’s cheeks, Lois laughed while pulling Kara once more into a tight hug. “I would gladly lose every award for the rest of my career if it meant getting to continue to see the Hell Cat’s byline—but you cannot quote me on that.”

The hero shook her head at Lois’s statement, relief and happiness washing through her like a balm. “I swear, your secret’s safe with me.”

When Lois finally released her hold and pulled back, her expression shifted enough to cast concern once more into Kara’s heart. “Just keep her safe, Little Bird. What she’s doing right now, with this CADMUS investigation? It’s what Cat does best—does better than any other reporter I’ve ever known. She’s tenacious when she’s chasing a story, and the stakes are so very high with this one. But tangling with a Luthor again?”

Kara frowned at the wording. “Again? You were the one who broke those stories on Lex that ultimately led to his arrest.”

“True, but Cat was the one who brought down his father.” At the stunned gape of Kara’s mouth, Lois continued, “It all happened before the name Luthor meant anything to anyone outside Metropolis—but it was a major break both for the Daily Planet and Cat. She wrote a series of articles on several questionable deals Lionel made through Luthor Corp, including one that brought federal attention down on the company. Lionel thought he could discredit Cat simply by pointing out she was nothing but a glorified rumor peddler. He made the fatal error of underestimating her, and she crushed him. Her articles led to the legal investigations that nearly toppled Luthor Corp and sent Lionel to the cell where he ended up spending the rest of the few years he had left.”

“She’s never mentioned any of this.”

Lois caught the fearful edge in Kara’s voice. “Which is why I’m telling you, Kara. Don’t think for a minute Lillian Luthor has forgotten the role Cat played in sending Lionel to prison. And don’t think she’s not the kind of person who doesn’t just carry a grudge, but also lets that grudge consume her.”

Kara shivered at the statement. “Lois, Cat’s stalker from her talk show days, Thomas Rieger?” At the hesitant nod from the reporter, Kara continued, “He’s missing, and NCPD believes someone
abducted him. Alex and Eliza have confirmed that a substance found in his apartment is not terrestrial. The DEO is trying to identify the source, and a detective at NCPD is investigating several alien leads, but it’s Lillian, isn’t it? She’s coming for Cat, and she’s going to use Rieger.”

Lois ran her hands along the hero’s arms in soothing motions, but the worried crease of her brow betrayed her. “I honestly would not put it past Lillian. Do not trust a Luthor, Kara. Clark made that mistake, and it cost him a great deal.”

“But—”

“I know you’re friends with Lena, and I know you want to see the potential for good in everyone. But she grew up in the same dysfunctional house as Lex.”

“And you grew up in a house run, in your own words, by a xenophobic asshole with a god complex. Yet here you are, hitched to the alien invasion’s poster boy.”

Despite the severity of the moment or the deep slice of Kara’s words, Lois couldn’t help the laugh of recognition to rise to her lips. “She’s teaching you well how not to take shit from anyone, Little Bird.”

Relief slipped out on a sigh at the sight of Kara relaxing back from her defensive posture. “Dealing with Snapper on a daily basis has helped as well,” she offered, her words spoken with a more recognizable softness.

“But better than me on that one,” Lois teased. Shifting to a more serious tone, she continued, “You know I’m just trying to keep you from going through what I watched your cousin go through with Lex. I don’t want to watch another Luthor hurt someone I care about.”

“I know, Lois, I do—and I’m grateful for how much you and Kal-El care about me.” She breathed deeply. “But I believe in Lena. I believe she’s different, from Lex and from anyone else in her family.”

Anguish flickered against the flint of her pupils. “Maybe I’m naïve and maybe this will be one of the worst decisions I’ve ever made, but I trust her—and I need you to trust me.”

Sweeping a blonde lock behind the hero’s ear, Lois nodded and sighed, “I do trust you, Little Bird. You think you’d be bedding my best friend if I didn’t?”

Laughter rolled in thunderous joy from Lois at the sight of Kara blushing so fiercely, her cheeks practically steamed in the winter chill. “I’m starting to wish you two actually did hate each other.”

“I know that’s a lie, but I’ll let it slide since you make her so disgustingly, obnoxiously, nauseatingly happy—and you can tell the Hell Cat I used every single one of those adjectives to describe the two of you.”

She jabbed a finger against the hero’s crest. “And you take this to heart, Supergirl: You hurt her, I’m booting your Kryptonian ass into outer space myself.”

Kara was certain nothing she had ever experienced in her life could have prepared her for a shovel talk from Lois Lane in Cat Grant’s honor.

“You two are seriously twisted,” the hero sighed while giving Lois a goodbye hug.

“But you love us,” the reporter countered.
Releasing her hold, Kara floated slowly up from the helipad. “With all that I am.” With a grateful smile, the hero twirled in ascending corkscrews before breaking through the low cloud cover with an easy burst of speed.

Once back in-transit to locate J’onn, Kara reactivated her earpiece to duplex mode. “Blue Team Leader, I’m back on two-way communication. Winn, has Cat left the DEO yet?”

“Yeah, she and Hawthorne are about ten minutes out from their destination, but it’s starting to look like twenty minutes. Road work down on Seventeenth is snarling everything.” He chuckled, “I could hear Cat all the way through Alex’s earpiece. I’d forgotten how creatively profane she can be.”

He lowered his voice slightly. “By the way, how-how is your cousin?”

Rolling her eyes at her friend’s apparently unquenchable Superman infatuation, she replied, “I actually didn’t go to see him this time.” Not wanting to explain further, she asked, “Can you do me a favor and scan the precinct’s alleyway?”

Playful tone instantly taking sabbatical at the sound of Kara’s strained tone and nervous request, Winn instantly snapped into full agent mode. “Of course, but what’s going on?”

“I just want to make sure the alley is clear.”

Fingers flying across his keyboard in a frenetic rhythm that drew Alex’s attention, Winn hacked into the NCPD precinct’s security system and pulled up the cameras positioned to monitor the back entrance.

As Alex rolled her chair closer, Winn heard the brunette tell Cat and Hawthorne she needed to switch frequencies for a moment. Hopping channels, she queried, “Supergirl? What’s wrong? And what were you doing up in Metropolis?”

Ignoring the second part of the question for the moment, the hero replied, “I just need Winn to confirm everything is clear before Cat arrives.”

The IT agent shared a worried look with Alex as he next ran a thermal imaging scan using one of the DEO’s satellites. On another monitor, he tapped into the precinct’s server and accessed the system log on the back entrance’s security scanner. After quickly running it against the transport’s departure log from Ordway Correctional Facility, he stated, “Everything is okay, Supergirl. The only thing I’m seeing in the alley is the prison transport van. Three guards are working the prisoner pick-up. Two of them scanned themselves in about ten minutes ago, leaving one in the van. That’s the only heat signature I’m picking up on thermal.”

The worry passing between Alex and Winn deepened at the sound of Kara’s tremulous sigh of relief. The brunette immediately stated, “All right, Supergirl, talk to me. I need to know what you’re thinking right now.”

For several beats, the only sound through the comm was the hiss and roar of wind. Finally, Kara replied, “I just had a conversation with a very reliable source who told me Cat was responsible for getting Lionel Luthor thrown into prison. Did you know that?”

“Not exactly.”

“Alex?”

The brunette’s lips curved downward as she muttered, “When Cat returned yesterday from city
hall, she said something about being on the wrong side of Lillian Luthor once before. She didn’t elaborate and I didn’t follow up. I’m sorry.”

Hearing her sister’s remorse, Kara quickly replied, “No, Alex, it’s—it’s okay. There was a lot going on yesterday.” She began her descent at the sound of J’onn’s tracking indicator growing stronger. “Just, Winn, keep checking the alley, okay? And, Alex—”

“We’ve got this, Supergirl. I promise.”

With a relieved sigh, Kara scanned the terrain below her in search of her target. The moment she caught sight of J’onn, positioned on the edge of a clearing, back in human form and standing out against the surrounding nature in his suit and tie, she allowed herself a well-needed laugh.

Touching down right in front of him, she teased, “You look like you’re preparing to sell insurance to the bunnies and deer.”

Catching the sound of snickering through the comms, the director replied, “Even DEO consultants can be found insubordinate, Supergirl.”

Huffing softly, she wrapped an arm around J’onn’s midsection in a sideways hug, capturing him fully with her biomatrix as she once more lifted into the air. The Martian’s brow hitched in surprise, impressed by the strength of Kara’s energy field.

Alex wished them both good luck before switching back to Cat and Hawthorne, and Winn quickly jumped in to let Kara know his latest check of the CCTV cameras showed James had arrived in the police alleyway. Before the hero could reply, he added he had already texted to confirm James’s location, and it was most definitely him, hoping to grab some shots of Spencer Graves being escorted to the prison transport. Kara thanked her friend for knowing just how to calm her worries.

“Of course, Supergirl. You’ve got presidential matters to worry about. Let us take care of Pink Panther.”

“You know she’d throttle you clear across the multiverse if she knew that was your codename for her, right?”

“I’m not telling her,” Winn laughed before instantly whispering, “You—you haven’t told her, have you?”

“I’m not going anywhere near that one,” she replied, smiling at J’onn’s chuff of amusement.

Kara and J’onn flew the remaining few miles in silence. J’onn’s sturdier Martian build meant Kara could fly faster than she’d learned was comfortable for humans. After what seemed like only a handful of minutes, the pair soared up along the Potomac, following a path similar to the one Kara had flown on her first trip to the city. A broad smile broke across her face at the memory of that trip. With one final kick of energy, she glided easily across the National Mall, this time soaring beyond the Ellipse and toward the residence growing ever more prominent before them.

Realizing as she approached that the White House rooftop snipers had noticed them as well, Kara made certain to slow her momentum and make her movements as clear and visible as possible.

Extending her hearing, she listened as Secret Service confirmed their arrival before alerting the DEO they were cleared for landing. She acknowledged Winn’s confirmation a moment later through their comm link before informing the tech agent they were switching to emergency standby. Unable to help herself, the hero waved to the agents on the roof, breathing out a laugh at the grumble of consternation she felt pass through J’onn.
As she focused her descent on the Rose Garden, Kara caught sight of a Secret Service agent awaiting her landing. With a gentle touchdown, she released her hold on J’onn and offered a cheery smile to the agent.

“Welcome to the White House,” the agent stated, adding with a nod, “it’s a pleasure to see you again, Ambassador. The President is waiting for you in the Oval Office.” She lifted a hand-held metal detector wand toward them both. “First, I do need to scan you before allowing you into the White House.”

Both aliens nodded in understanding while taking the appropriate positions. As the agent scanned the Martian first, she queried, “Director J’onnz, are you not carrying your service weapon right now?”

“No, I left it back in my office. Figured it would make things easier for you.”

As the agent finished wanding the Girl of Steel, she replied, “Greatly appreciated, Director. You both are clear. Please follow me.”

Kara glanced toward J’onn as they fell into step behind the agent, her eyes shining with excitement. “Do you think the Oval Office will look like it does on Veep?”

At the sound of the agent ahead of them barely stifling a snort of laughter, the Martian patted her shoulder. “You take note and let me know on our way home, Supergirl.”

The hero crinkled her nose at the teasing as J’onn allowed her to step past the Marine sentry on duty and through the entrance before him.

President Marsdin strode gracefully across the Oval Office toward the arriving aliens. Extending her hand toward the Martian, she greeted, “It’s wonderful to see you again, J’onn. Thank you both for your impressively quick response to my summons.”

With a close-lipped smile and a nod, he replied, “Of course, Madame President.”

Kara nervously snapped to attention the moment the President released her hold on J’onn and turned to face her.

“Supergirl.” Marsdin’s expression glowed with the brilliance of her smile as she focused on the hero. As J’onn stepped aside, the President wrapped Kara in an impressively strong hug. “It’s wonderful to see you again.”

As they pulled apart, Kara shifted her attention to the President’s left. “General Lane?”

The officer drew sharply to a halt before the two aliens. With a curt nod, he greeted, “Supergirl, Director J’onzz, thank you both for coming here on such short notice.”

Marsdin gestured toward the couches beside them. “Please, sit down.” She nodded to the Secret Service agent. “Thank you, Agent Toscano. You’re dismissed.”

Toscano nodded in reply before leaving through the doorway into the office of the President’s personal assistant.

Marsdin settled onto the couch beside Lane, across from the two aliens. “General Lane has been investigating a matter he believed had ties to CADMUS. Unfortunately, what he has confirmed only further solidifies his original concerns and has led to new ones.”
The general shifted to face J’onn and Kara. “When President Marsdin and Cat Grant first briefed the DEO on Ms. Grant’s CADMUS investigation, they told you of a specially selected platoon of soldiers Superman thought he was going to train in advanced alien defense tactics.”

J’onn nodded. “She said it was a ruse that CADMUS hoped would allow them to capture Superman.”

“And when it failed, Colonel Burnham disbanded the soldiers into other outfits before any of his COs caught word of the platoon or tried to confirm Burnham’s involvement with the botched attempt to capture Superman. What I have discovered is that, throughout the next decade, the Army listed every member of that platoon as killed in action. However, when I started looking into all the KIA cases, I discovered the families received back nothing but ashes, the Army claiming it was the most respectful way to handle what was left of the soldiers.”

The Martian frowned at this information. “Can’t return a body for burial if the body isn’t dead.”

“Precisely,” the general gruffed. “When I cross-referenced the final sign-offs for each KIA, I came up with one name.”

“Colonel Burnham?”

The general’s expression hardened as he nodded toward J’onn. “When I looked into records on all the members of that platoon, I learned why Burnham selected them. They all had expressed stronger-than-usual anti-alien sentiments, particularly toward Superman.”

He forced himself to make eye contact with Kara. “Colonel Burnham adhered to a prevalent opinion at the time within the military that those like Superman should be treated as enemy combatants. We believed your cousin’s heroics were a diversion from some unknown alien agenda.”

He bowed his head, inhaling deeply through his nose. “Burnham never made his attitude a secret, even when your cousin continuously proved himself as an ally—and there was never any dearth of soldiers willing to align themselves with Geoff.”

“He was your friend.”

Lane’s head snapped back up at Kara’s statement. Muscles rippled along his jawline as he gave one nod. “I mentored him. I encouraged his views and I told him it was our duty to stand firm against any threats to the homeland.” The hint of recrimination tightened his expression. “If what I suspect he’s done is true—”

The general paused, fingers scratching over stubble as he wiped at his face. “I’ve gone through every single KIA Colonel Burnham has signed off on since your cousin’s first appearance as Superman. Nearly all of them were for soldiers who routinely expressed strong anti-alien sentiments, and none of their families received back anything more than cremated remains.”

“How many?”

Pale eyes narrowed as Lane responded to the Martian’s question. “More than seven hundred at last count match my search parameters.”

Kara felt the familiar barbs of fear tightening within her chest. “And that’s just from the Army.”

Lane nodded. “If I’m correct, Lillian Luthor may very well be amassing a literal army of soldiers loyal to her goals and providing her with ample test subjects for her experiments. I’ve been
reaching out to contacts throughout other branches of our military. It’s taking a while to try to discern who of my contacts might be trustworthy in supporting this investigation, but what I’m seeing so far is not comforting at all.”

He turned toward J’onn. “Then there are the DEO defectors. Before you arrived, Henshaw had filled the DEO with likeminded agents willing to support Dr. Luthor’s CADMUS agenda. It’s how he was able to siphon off so many of the aliens Ms. Grant has confirmed disappeared during his time as director. Those agents left the DEO not long after Henshaw’s disappearance and subsequently disappeared themselves.”

The Martian frowned at the statement, remembering the massive agent turnaround he learned had occurred not long after the real Henshaw had been presumed dead. “Dr. Luthor and Henshaw pulled those agents they knew were loyal to CADMUS.”

“Most. As you recently learned, Dr. Luthor has maintained a quiet presence within the DEO. Agent McGill was just the latest CADMUS informant in HQ.”

“We’ve done a new thorough background check of every agent assigned to HQ and Desert Containment since discovering McGill. Everyone passed—but so did McGill when we first brought him on-board.”

“She’s still got her inside contacts. Do not make the mistake of underestimating her.”

Kara shifted, pensive lines furrowing her brow. “If Dr. Luthor has maintained a presence within the DEO, why didn’t she just have one of her operatives out J’onn as an impostor as soon as he arrived? Why support his ruse?”

“Because him continuing as Hank Henshaw meant two things to her: One, she would always know where he was.”

Lane shifted his attention back to the Martian. “Mark my word, Director, it’s not just Supergirl Dr. Luthor would love to get her hands on. Colonel Harper’s failure to deliver you to CADMUS was a massive disappointment to her.”

He paused, noting the worried glaze of Supergirl’s eyes and the way the Martian reached over to squeeze her hand to comfort and re-focus her.

“The other reason is that you continued to perform Hank Henshaw’s duties to the fullest extent. You put the DEO back on-task right from the moment of your return, continuing Henshaw’s mission to locate and apprehend those who had escaped from Fort Rozz.”

Lane shook his head, genuine confusion seeping into his expression. “There was no reason for you to come out of hiding, but to come back as Hank Henshaw and continue his mission at the DEO—why?”

Gaze never once breaking with the hero’s, J’onn replied, “I made a promise to a friend that I would protect his daughters. Protecting one of them meant stopping those her mother had imprisoned on Krypton from finding her and harming her in the name of revenge.”

“You risked everything because of a promise to protect Supergirl?”

J’onn finally turned to face Lane. “Would you do any less for either of your daughters, General?”

Comprehension lit Lane’s eyes even as he noted the sharp intake of breath from the hero. “No, sir, I would not.”
The general’s expression once more turned serious. “With that in mind, I would like to make a personal request: that you increase your security presence at Desert Containment. In protecting Supergirl from the prisoners her mother sentenced to Fort Rozz, you also continued to amass what is literally the motherlode of temptation for Dr. Luthor. One way or another, she is going to try to make a play for the collection Henshaw started for her years ago.”

J’onn nodded in understanding. “Of course, General. I will give Director Lane whatever she needs to ensure the safety of Desert Containment and her staff.”

“What about you, General?” All eyes shifted toward the hero, her expression creased with worry. “You’re not really winning points with Dr. Luthor by helping us.”

She pressed her lips together pensively. “I’ll do whatever it takes to protect Lucy and her staff—you have my word on that. In return, I’d ask a favor from you.”

Lane tipped his head back, jaw jutting forward slightly. “What would that be?”

“Let me ask my cousin to keep watch over you while Dr. Luthor is still free.” She hustled to add, “As you’ve said yourself, it’s becoming more and more difficult to know who to trust right now. And I know you haven’t always seen eye-to-eye with my cousin or me, but please let us protect you. I know Lucy would ask us to do the same for you as you’re asking us to do for her.”

As Lane studied the hero for several silent beats, he allowed himself the slightest hint of a smile. “Feel free to make the request, Supergirl, but I suspect Lois beat you to that years ago. Also, you might want to let your cousin know he isn’t nearly as stealthy as I think he believes he is sometimes.”

The humor dimmed slightly in his eyes. “Lois and I might not agree on most things, but I’ve always admired her tenacity when it comes to looking out for those she loves.”

Kara’s response stuttered into a sharp gasp that startled the three other office occupants into silence. The sound of James’s watch alarm screeched through her head with piercing clarity, the thousands of miles between them no dampener to the high-pitched shriek that filled her with sickening fear.

“sokao–, rao, zha,” she breathed, panic driving her to her feet.

Marsdin watched the hero stagger with uncertainty, torn between fleeing toward whatever pulled at her and her duty there.

“Supergirl.” Her voice remained surprisingly steady. At the hero’s desperate attempt to focus on Marsdin, the President pointed toward the Rose Garden exit. No words came as the hero instantly spun, gone so swiftly only a door hanging askew on bent hinges and a bewildered Marine sentry standing post outside were signs of her hasty departure.

Shooting straight up into the mesosphere where she knew she would be safe from colliding with any aircraft, the hero accelerated without hesitation, the air around her rippling with the power of an accompanying sonic boom felt hundreds of square miles. As she roared once more toward the opposite coast, she heard the click of her earpiece reactivating. “This is Blue Team Leader. Supergirl, J’onn told us you’re on your way. Patching you in to Green Team Leader’s frequency now.”

Before Kara could respond, Alex’s voice filtered in through the line. “Cat? What’s going on? Winn’s established a connection with the station’s CCTV system, but he says the cameras in the
alley have stopped transmitting. What’s happening?”

Even with the turbulent roar of wind surrounding her, Kara could hear Cat’s deep breath and exhaled profanity through the line. “Rieger’s here, Alex!”

Whatever else Cat spoke following those three words fell silent beneath the wild slam of Kara’s heartbeat through her body.

*Rieger.*

Teeth clenched with the strength to shatter diamonds, Kara folded her arms tightly inward against her abdomen, wrapping her cape around her as she did, and focused on the thrust she generated through her biomatrix to propel her body forward.

Just as she did whenever trying to match Alex’s challenge to increase her speed beyond her previous record, she envisioned tightening her biomatrix, streamlining it and drawing as much power from it as she could—concentrating as much of her stored energy as possible into slicing through the skies with maximum velocity and minimum resistance.

Shutting her eyes against the darkness pressing in along the edges of her vision, the hero focused on the sound of James’s alarm. She could feel the blood rushing downward through her body, feel the fluctuations of her biomatrix against the pull of G-forces stronger than any she’d ever felt before as she sped unerringly toward National City.

Miles rushed by on the rapid timpani of her heart, lungs compressing in an unyielding squeeze of fear. All she could hear through every cell was the mantra of one thought, louder than all else.

*Faster. Faster. Faster.*

Alex was speaking through the comm link, her words at first nothing more than a dissonant buzz in her ears. “I need you to stay away from Rieger, Cat. Do not let him near you, please.”

The darkness slipped from Kara’s vision as she finally allowed herself to slow enough to get her bearings. Plummeting once more into the troposphere, she took her first real breath since leaving D.C. as she saw the familiar rise of mountains and desert before her. With one final push of speed, she shot past the arid terrain, her trajectory carrying her right into the heart of her city.

Soaring downward between the buildings on either side of the police station’s alleyway, Kara could see Cat crouched low against the front of the DEO Denali that had brought her there. She could also see Rieger struggling to approach where Cat had concealed herself from his view. Even through her fear and fury, the hero could see the suffering in every line of Rieger’s body. As she focused on his features, she could see tracks of flesh seared away from his chin and jaw, bone rutted by rivulets of whatever he was expelling from his mouth.

He began to rear back, liquid dripping from the eroding corners of his mouth. A gurgling sound, wet and tortured, choked from within him and Kara simply reacted.

James jumped to his feet at the sound of Cat’s startled cry, his eyes bulging wide at the unexpected sight. The CEO had completely left the ground where she had been hiding, gun slipping from her grip as she rose rapidly into Kara’s outstretched arms.

Realizing her biomatrix was drawing Cat in more quickly than she anticipated, Kara drew back in sync with the smaller blonde’s movement, hoping to lessen their impact. Cat still huffed in pain at the feel of colliding with Kara. Before she could get her bearings, she felt the hero wrapping her tightly in her hold, spinning them upward further.
Screams from below drew both their attentions in time to watch Rieger drop to his knees. Fingers clawed desperately at the flayed remains of his cheeks. Kara grimaced at the sight of what was left of Rieger’s tongue as he tipped his head back, horrifying sounds bubbling from his wide-open mouth.

And then Kara heard it: a high-pitched, mechanical buzz that began to grow in intensity from somewhere within the alleyway. Activating her X-ray vision, the hero scanned the area, fearing the noise was indication of an explosive getting ready to detonate.

“Oh, no.”

Clutching tightly to Cat, the hero focused on pushing outward with her biomatrix. The force knocked Rieger back diagonally across the alley just as the buzzing within him crescendoed and blew outward in a massive pink spray.

With her back toward the settling detritus of what was left of Rieger, Kara looked over her shoulder and gasped. An undulating wave of silver began to coalesce above where Rieger had once stood. The hero watched as the tiny metallic shards drew together into a tightly formed ball.

“Hold on, Cat,” she whispered even as she began to ascend rapidly. The ball shifted, elongated into an obelisk as it took chase behind the hero. Checking to be certain her biomatrix was still strong enough to hold Cat in place, Kara twirled upward in a confusing corkscrew blur before diving unexpectedly to the left and spinning swiftly downward until she was below the shimmering metallic cloud.

“Jesus, Kara.” Cat gripped more tightly to Kara’s body, the stomach-lurching motion casting a sickly pallor through her skin.

“Almost finished,” Kara replied as they floated into place beneath the cloud. With as deep an inhalation as she could take, the hero blew outward in a fierce Arctic blast. As Cat watched, the cloud above them froze into a solid mass of ice.

Whatever had kept the cloud hovering failed under Kara’s total freeze-out, beginning a rapid descent as soon as she stopped keeping it aloft with her breath. With one more abrupt shift of position, she moved out of the icy mass’s way. Pulling her cape up to cover as much of Cat as she could, she activated her heat vision, twin beams blasting the sphere into tiny shards of ice and metal.

Kara hovered in place for a moment as she watched the icy fallout, the rapid fire of her heartbeat combining into a staccato symphony with Cat’s. Only the sound of Cat gasping in clear discomfort forced Kara to refocus. Dropping swiftly back to the ground, the hero released her tight hold on the smaller blonde enough for Cat to take in a much-needed gulp of air.

The hero instantly began apologizing as she scanned Cat for signs of broken bones or internal damage. “I—I didn’t mean to hold you so tightly, Cat. I’m sorry. I just—I was so scared.”

Cat simply stared at Kara’s increasingly distressed features for several beats. The sound of Alex’s approaching DEO convoy snapped her back into focus. Reaching up, she held Kara’s face with both her hands.

“You’re here.” Her grip tightened as if confirming what she was feeling beneath her touch was real. “You—how? How can you be here?”

Tears of relief slipped from the hero’s eyes. “I will always come for you, Cat. Always.”
The smile that broke across Cat’s features finally released the terror that had gripped Kara’s heart since she first heard the alarm that drew her home. Pulling Cat close once more, she wrapped her arms completely around the smaller blonde, sniffling happily at the feel of Cat holding her back with impressive strength.

A line of DEO vehicles zipped down the alleyway, screeching to a halt behind them. Alex jumped out from the driver’s seat of the first SUV, quickly crossing the distance to her sister and Cat. Her confusion at Kara’s presence barely hid her fear. “Supergirl, how the fuck—”

The sound of Winn’s voice through their comms drowned out the rest of Alex’s question. “Green Team Leader, Supergirl, I’m showing three drones approaching your location from due north. I’m picking up weapons on all three.”

Kara looked up quickly, scanning the skies to locate the drones. “I see them.” She glanced across the alley to where James was still standing, confusion wrinkling his features. She could see Hawthorne’s prone body lying at James’s feet. “Alex, I’m going to draw their fire so you can get Hawthorne secured for transport back to the DEO.”

“On it.” The brunette called out to the agents who had come with her in the convoy, “Swensen, Coles, grab a backboard and get Hawthorne secured for transport. Torres, Marshall, and Williams, with me. Supergirl’s going to try to keep the drones occupied, but if one or more break rank, we need to be ready.” She pointed toward the photojournalist watching them. “James, grab your gear and let’s go.”

When she turned toward her sister and Cat, Kara quickly kissed the CEO before releasing her hold and floating upward. “They’re almost here, Cat, please get inside one of the DEO vehicles. They’re bulletproof; they’ll protect you if I can’t keep the drones focused on me. Please.”

Cat nodded as Kara turned and shot upward above the surrounding buildings. She heard Alex draw a breath as if preparing to speak, words lost instantly at the sound of bullet fire exploding loudly above them. Alex grabbed Cat by the shoulders and both moved to crouch behind the open door of the brunette’s Denali.

A surprised grunt echoed through the comm link, followed by Kara muttering, “Give a girl a chance to get her bearings, jeez!”

Cat rolled her eyes at Kara’s apparent irritation over being hit with heavy fire. Beside her, Alex called, “You all right, Supergirl?”

“Yeah. Just didn’t have on my game face yet.” She dipped below a strafe of bullets from one drone, twisted out of the way of another’s fire, and finally took out the third with a well-placed shot of heat vision.

As she watched the drone disintegrate in a shower of glowing metal and melted plastic, Kara called out, “Hey, Winn? These drones are all equipped with cameras that look like they’re recording. Any chance you can tap into them, figure out where they’re sending back visuals?”

Fingers flying over his keyboard with speed that could rival Kara’s, Winn replied, “I’ll do my best.” He picked up another grunt, followed by the sound of an approaching chopper. “But don’t wait for me. If you get a chance to take down the drones, do it, okay?”

“Copy that!”

The two remaining drones circled around the hero, one in front and one behind, panels opening
along the bottoms of each. Kara easily took out the drone in front of her with a blast of heat vision, spinning as quickly as she could to face the one behind her.

Before she could fire again, the drone sprayed directly at her, engulfing her completely in a cloud of crimson. Choking to clear her lungs of whatever she’d just inhaled, the hero instantly felt herself dropping from the sky, crashing to the ground with enough force to crater the concrete beneath her.

“Supergirl!”

She registered Alex yelling through the comms at the sound of her impacting the ground with a heavy groan. Trying and failing several times to open her eyes, the hero gave in to the feeling of sinking further into the cracked concrete beneath her.

As Alex tried again to coax a response from her sister, she watched the Black Hawk from Desert Containment soar into view and come to a hover above them. A line dropped down into the alleyway, a familiar and welcome voice breaking into their open comm line. “Agent Danvers, want to hitch a ride?”

“Damn right, Vasquez,” she called, jumping to full height.

The feel of Cat’s hand clutching fiercely to her forearm held her in place. Gripping the smaller blonde’s biceps with comforting strength, she whispered, “Go with these agents back to the DEO and I will bring her home to you. I swear it.”

With a small nod, Cat released her hold on the agent and watched as she hurried to catch the line dangling from the chopper. Wrapping it securely around herself, she tugged and yelled into the comm link, “Reel me in!”

As the chopper began to pull once more upward while still retracting the line, Cat turned back to the activity in the alley in time to watch two agents carry Hawthorne past her. She quickly fell in behind them, climbing up into the back of the panel van toward the rear of the convoy. The agents slipped Hawthorne into the van, and she reached out to take one of his hands within her own. “Don’t you think this is going to stop me from giving you shit for being so slow, Reeve.”

Even barely conscious, Hawthorne snorted in response, more at the sound of Cat speaking his first name than at her teasing, and gripped her hand as tightly as he could.

High above, the Black Hawk’s blades sliced through the sky, closing in rapidly on Supergirl’s tracker. Alex dangled precipitously from the line, scanning below her for signs of her sister. As they crested a set of office buildings and circled east, Alex cried out, “I’ve got a visual on Supergirl. Hold position!”

The brunette instantly noticed the final drone, hovering above where Supergirl had fallen, the on-board camera aimed at the hero as she lay unconscious below. “Vasquez, I need cover!”

“You got it, ma’am,” came the response, followed instantly by the sound of shots fired from above her.

As Alex descended from the line to drop down beside her sister, she noted how the drone quickly pulled back and went into evasive maneuvers while still hovering close enough to be within visual range of the fallen hero.

“Supergirl, can you hear me?” Alex fell to her knees, pressing her gloved hands on either side of her sister’s face. She heard a groan rising in Kara’s throat before blue eyes struggled to open and focus.
A convulsion arched the hero upward off the ground, her eyes immediately rolling back and her jaw clenching.

“Alex!”

Kara’s voice choked on the familiar strain of pain she felt consuming her far more quickly than it had the first time. Reaching out, she began clawing desperately at the spare gun on her sister’s hip holster. “Alex, sh-shoot me!”

Alex moved back slightly, startled by Kara’s command. As she watched, however, she saw the veins in Kara’s face pulse with the telltale crimson of red kryptonite infection. Without pause, the agent unholstered the modified gun she carried for just this possibility, jumped quickly back and fired a blast of Maxwell Lord’s antidote at her sister.

Kara rocked back deeper into the cratered ground, her hands and feet clawing and kicking against the concrete shards beneath her. The crimson pulsations, however, seemed to intensify, the glow of Kara’s veins growing stronger and darker. Eyes clenching shut as tears began to stream down her cheeks, she cried, “Alex, it’s not working!”

She shoved against the ground before scrambling back and crouching low and out of reach of the brunette. “It’s not working,” she repeated, doubling over in pain as the pulsing spread down through veins that disappeared beneath her suit, down her arms into clenched fists.

Alex quickly called through her comm line, “Winn, are you hearing this? Find my mom and tell her Supergirl has been hit by red kryptonite and the original antidote isn’t working this time—tell her to start Plan K!” She turned back to Kara, saw the dark set of her features and knew that time was running out.

As if sensing her sister’s thoughts, the hero forced herself to her feet, staggering several times before steadying herself. Struggling against the pull of the chemical alteration overpowering her brain with even greater speed than before, she rasped, “Please find me, Alex.” And then she launched into the sky, heading toward the outlying desert around the city.

“Supergirl!”

“Alex!” The brunette realized too late Cat was still connected to the comms and was listening to everything happening. “What’s she doing?”

“Not sure, Cat, but whatever it is, she’s heading away from the city.” She secured herself to the drop line once more and then held on tightly with both hands, tugging to signal that she was ready to be lifted. The rope instantly began pulling her once more toward the chopper.

“Winn, send Supergirl’s earpiece tracker coordinates directly to the chopper pilot. We need to find and secure her before the red kryptonite completely overpowers her.” Hands grabbed her quickly as the other agents pulled her the rest of the way into the chopper, which immediately began flying toward Kara’s direction.

“Already done. Looks like she landed about seventy miles east of city limits. Nothing around her but mountains and dust.” He furrowed his brow at the readings he was picking up from her location. “Alex, it looks like she’s using her heat vision, full power.”

Alex inhaled sharply, knowing already what her sister was doing. “She’s burning out her powers.” She smiled at Kara’s quick thinking. “That’s fucking brilliant.”

“What does that mean?” Alex could hear the worry thick in Cat’s voice.
“It means she’s making sure she won’t be able to hurt anyone the way she did the last time. It’s probably not going to stop the red kryptonite from affecting her since it works on a chemical rather than cellular level, but she’s protecting all of us right now.” Alex’s heart ached at the thought that her sister was still going to suffer.

Pointing to one of the first aid kits bolted along the chopper’s interior, she ordered Vasquez, “Prepare a sedative injection. She’s blowing out her powers so you’ll be able to inject her, but you’ll need to use the Biojector to get through her skin. She’s also still going to be stronger than a human, so move fast.”

Minutes that seemed interminable dragged by as Alex watched the city give way to desert scrub and mountainous terrain. She clung to one of the handholds along the open door of the chopper, hanging out as far as she could and scanning the terrain visually while the pilot homed in on Kara’s signal. As they climbed a slight rise, the agents all caught sight of Supergirl’s heat vision, flaring across the desert in a sputtering stream. Alex marveled that her sister still hadn’t blown out her powers. “She’s growing stronger,” she whispered.

However, a few seconds later, Alex watched Kara collapse to her knees, her heat vision instantly disappearing. “She’s down! Move in closer and we all drop together on my mark!” The two other agents with her clipped their drop lines and moved into position next to the brunette. When Kara didn’t move to rise after a five-count, Alex nodded. “Okay, 3-2-1, go!”

In unison, the agents zipped down their lines, dropping to the ground almost simultaneously and taking up a triangular pattern with weapons drawn around the kneeling hero. Alex called out, “Supergirl, stay down and place your hands on your head.”

She heard the Kryptonian begin to laugh, felt chills lick through her body at the hollow sound. “Or you’ll do what, Alex? Finally kill me?”

She rose to her feet, looking imperiously down at the brunette once she was at full height. The older Danvers sister gasped at the sight of red veins standing out starkly against Kara’s skin and the blistering beneath her eyes.

“Rid yourself of this alien burden so you can finally focus only on your little detective?” She flashed a feral smile. “That’s why you’re so supportive of Cat turning me into her latest acquisition, isn’t it? Gets me out of your way. You probably would have pushed me off onto Mon-El if you thought it would mean being free of me.”

Feeling the twitch of a muscle beneath her eye at that comment, Alex scoffed, “This Red K has really fucked up your brain if you’d ever think I’d be that cruel.”

She nodded toward the ground while continuing to aim her weapon at her sister. Her gaze glistened as she ordered, “Lie down on the ground, Supergirl, and let us cuff you.”

“Not likely,” she snarled, body already coiling into position to spring toward Alex.

With one quick gesture, however, the brunette gave the command for Vasquez to act, watching as she instantly surged forward and jabbed the Biojector against Kara’s neck, injecting a sedative through the Kryptonian’s still-thick skin. The other agent fell into position as well, Taser drawn in case the sedative failed in any way, but it was clear there would be no need.

Boots slipping against the crumbled dirt beneath her, Kara staggered forward, down onto her knees once more. Before she could fall completely to the ground, Alex was there, by her side, arms holding her tightly.
“It’s okay, Kara. I’m not going to let you fall.” She eased them down onto the ground, the hero’s body cradled heavily against her. “Never going to let you fall again, je te.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh, that Lillian Luthor. Even when she doesn't even appear in the chapter, our heroes can still feel her tightening her hold.

I had such a fun time bringing Lois Lane into this story. I know Lois and Cat are supposedly "enemies" on the show, but honestly? I think, if we'd gotten more than one full season with Cat, we would have learned in time that was actually a lie. Why? It was a line Cat spoke in the episode "Hostile Takeover" about how she'd called Lois a particular insult "and worse" to her face. Cat's the kind of person, I think, who only gives people shit if she cares about them (right, Kiera?). So hearing her admit she'd called Lois nasty names? I don't know--something about that just made me think, "Lois is totally her best friend." To me, it just made more sense than buying into the belief that Cat would disparage another woman in a profession already hard enough on women. Call me naive. Also, I just really liked the idea of Cat and Kara being linked through Lois even before they ever met.

The Kryptonese Kara speaks in the Oval Office is, "Please, Rao, no!"
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

The women who love Kara work together to save her from Lillian Luthor's latest attack on the hero, and James returns to the DEO and some truths he's not quite ready to accept.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The world whizzed by in a tinted blur of steel and glass as James stared out the Denali rushing him back to the DEO. Then again, he thought, everything had been nothing but a blur from the moment the prison transport van’s doors had flung open, revealing—whatever the hell it had been that attacked them. He flinched once more in pain as one of the field agents with him continued to cut away what was left of his pant leg and place it and his shoe into a medical biohazard bag.

“I’m sorry, sir,” she calmly stated as she shifted his leg to examine the wounds.

The photojournalist only nodded, making sure to avert his gaze from the gouges scorching diagonal slashes across his calf. The glimpses he’d gotten already were worrying enough and the sickly stench that filled the Denali cab continued to trigger his gag reflex. He listened to the agent relaying his status through her comm link while focusing his attention through the windshield toward the DEO van in the lead.

With a thick swallow, he asked, “Any word on Agent Hawthorne’s condition?”

“They’re working to stabilize him now, sir,” she replied while carefully covering his wounds.

Shifting in discomfort, he remembered the sound of Cat calling out to Alex, fear hitching her voice by a full octave. “What about Supergirl?”

Even as the agent continued to focus on her task, James could see the worry tightening her jaw muscles. “I’m sorry, sir, I don’t know. Only those with Alpha-Three clearance or higher can access the channel secured for communications with Supergirl.”

“Can’t be that secure if Cat Grant’s plugged into it,” he scoffed, his pain leaving him unable to filter his reaction down to something less severe.

James startled at the protective glint to sharpen the agent’s gaze. “Ms. Grant has Alpha-One clearance on President Marsdin’s authority.”

Not expecting that revelation, the photojournalist simply gaped in silence as the agent finished her work and began packing up her med kit. Finally, he glanced once more toward the front of the SUV, through the windshield at the DEO van in the lead. Even though he couldn’t see her, he knew Cat was in the back of the van.

Cat Grant, the Queen of All Media, knew about the DEO. Cat knew about Kara.

His photographic memory flashed through images from the police alleyway of Cat and Kara’s
interaction: Cat somehow pulled by Kara through the air into the hero’s arms. Kara holding onto Cat with unshakeable strength even as she spun and soared with dizzying speed. Cat’s hands cupped against the hero’s cheeks. Kara’s tears of relief as she wrapped Cat in her engulfing embrace. Their brief kiss before Kara flew away to face whatever Alex quickly followed after her to fight.

He looked down at his watch, his jaw muscles clenching as he pushed against the crystal to ensure it was locked securely in place over the alarm button hidden beneath it.

“I press that button when I get scared. And I was scared that I was going to lose you.”

After the Reactron incident, James had made a point of letting Clark know that, if he ever pushed his alarm button again, it would be to summon Kara. He also made a point of letting Kara know this, wanting her to understand that he did trust she would save the day. More importantly, he had also wanted her to know he understood: There was no reason to be scared of falling as long as she was there to catch him.

So he’d pressed the button in the alley and Kara had come—but not for him.

“I will always come for you, Cat. Always.”

He swallowed roughly at the realization, the tang of truth painful as the venom that burned agony into his skin. Kara had come for Cat—had apparently come from such a great distance in such a short time span, the DEO agents left behind after Alex’s sudden departure couldn’t stop chattering about it, even as they had rushed to secure the scene and tend to the injured, their voices hushed and reverent.

It hadn’t been that long since James had last been inside the DEO, yet as they drew ever-closer to the destination, he couldn’t help feeling he would be a stranger in a strange land upon his arrival—the prodigal “Super Friend” returning to a reality he struggled to comprehend.

Cat knew Kara. Kara had come for Cat.

The DEO convoy looped around to the back of HQ, disappearing into the underground parking garage. Before James’s SUV had even come to a complete stop, he could see agents rushing Agent Hawthorne out of the back of the van and onto an awaiting gurney, Cat holding his hand every step. As the photojournalist slipped out of the Denali onto his good leg, he could hear the CEO’s side of a conversation through her open comm line.

“But she’s all right? And you swear she didn’t hurt you? Okay, we just arrived back at the DEO. Once they take Reeve in for surgery, I’ll check in with Eliza. What’s your ETA? Understood. We’ll be waiting for you. Just—just keep both of you safe and bring her home, Alex.”

James frowned at the sound of Cat’s voice breaking on the final words she spoke before disappearing into an awaiting elevator car.

Once the agents were certain Hawthorne was on his way for proper treatment, they turned their focus onto tending to the photojournalist. Ignoring his protestations, they maneuvered him into a wheelchair and quickly escorted him up to the med bay for treatment. Getting him up onto an exam table, two med techs began working on removing his temporary bandage and beginning the process of examining his wounds.

“I’m afraid this will leave scarring, Mr. Olsen,” one of the med techs explained. “The venom necrotized the flesh it hit, which means we’re going to have to surgically debride the necrosis. The
good news, though, is that it doesn’t look like the venom that hit you was enough to cause any permanent damage to the underlying muscle. We will need you to stay here for overnight monitoring, however.”

“What the hell kind of venom hit me? What was that thing in the alley?”

“Believe it or not, that was a human.”

James shifted on the exam table at the sound of the familiar voice coming from the med bay entrance. At the responding grin his appearance earned, Winn moved quickly to hug James, clapping him soundly on his back. As he pulled back, he flinched at the sight of the photojournalist’s injuries and subconsciously sent hopeful thoughts to wherever Dr. Hamilton and her team were operating on Agent Hawthorne.

“It’s been a while since you showed your face here,” he laughed, relief evident in his voice even as he nervously scanned his friend for further signs of injury.

“You know, I needed a big entrance,” he replied even as he fought back a grimace of pain at the med tech’s actions. “So how was that—that thing a human? What happened to him?”

“Lillian Luthor happened.” Winn watched the shiver of understanding shake the line of James’s shoulders. “We suspected she’d taken him, but we had no idea what she was doing to him.”

James’s eyebrows drew together pensively. “Wait, you knew who he was?”

“His name was Thomas Rieger.” The tech agent glanced nervously over his shoulder. “He has—had a history with Ms. Grant. We’re pretty sure Dr. Luthor meant for her to be one of the recipients of that venom facial Spencer Graves got.”

The memory of the sight—and sound—of Graves’s final moments roiled the photographer’s gut. Swallowing convulsively, he queried, “Why the hell is Cat even here?”

Winn recognized the darker edge in his friend’s voice. “Ever since she left CatCo, Ms. Grant has been working with President Marsdin’s approval to locate and shut down Project CADMUS. She—she’s basically taken on Lillian Luthor in the smack down of the century.”

“And what? Winner gets Supergirl?” With a bitter grimace, he huffed, “Someone should tell Dr. Luthor Cat’s not waiting to collect her prize.”

Gentling his voice in counterpoint to James’s growing petulance, Winn replied, “It’s definitely been a while since you were here.” His tone held only understanding as he observed the disappointment slipping into his friend’s expression.

The duo paused as one of the med techs returned. “We need to get you into surgery as soon as possible, Mr. Olsen. I’m going to administer a local anesthesia and then prep with Dr. Ramirez, so please wrap up your conversation with Agent Schott by the time the local kicks into full effect.”

Once the med tech finished and left, James turned back to Winn with a disconsolate frown and queried, “How long?”

Knowing without further prompting what James meant, Winn shrugged. “I’m pretty sure it legitimately started when Kara went to D.C. for the tree lighting ceremony, but it definitely kicked into high gear a week later when we all learned what Cat’s been up to since she left CatCo.”

James glared at Winn incredulously. “So, what? You’re telling me that because Cat knows the
President and called in a few favors from sources, you’re all going to just let her have Kara?”

Winn flinched at the harsh sentiment. “Okay, you do know Kara isn’t some kind of DEO door prize, right? She’s a grown woman, which means she’s free to make her own choices. And whether or not you approve of or even like the idea, she and Cat have willingly chosen each other.”

Leaning back on his elbows, James huffed dismissively. “I can’t believe you’re just letting this happen.”

“Just letting what happen?”

James and Winn startled at the sound of Alex’s clipped query as she strode into the exam area.

Ignoring the question, the tech agent instantly latched onto the more pressing worry, made worse by Alex’s tightly controlled expression. “Alex! Is Kara all right?”

The brunette laid a calming hand on Winn’s forearm. “Dr. Luthor has altered Lord’s original Red K formula in a way Mom and I didn’t anticipate. We’ve run enough models at this point, though, we’re pretty sure we’ll be able to isolate the correct antidote quickly enough.”

James sat up instantly, worry pushing aside all other thought. “Wait, Kara’s been hit with red kryptonite again? How did Lillian Luthor even get hold of it? Is Lord—”

Alex quickly cut him off with a shake of her head. “CADMUS cracked into Lord Tech’s servers and took the formula. We were afraid Luthor would do something like this, so we’ve been working on altering the formula and devising antidotes through computer modeling.” Jaw muscles flexed in frustration. “We just didn’t think dark enough in our models.”

Winn’s panic visibly increased. “How bad is she, Alex?”

“This Red K is attacking Kara in the same way the previous iteration attacked her, but it’s also causing physical complications we didn’t anticipate.”

Seeing Winn preparing to launch into more questions, Alex tightened her grip in his arm to draw his attention. “She’s okay for right now, Winn, but I need your help.”

Eagerness flooded through his expression, relaxing his grimace of fear. “Of course, Alex. Whatever you need.”

“I need you to modify one of Kara’s sunbeds to emit light that mimics Krypton’s red sun. Whatever Dr. Luthor did to Lord’s formula, we think it’s programmed to need Kara’s cellular supercharge to reach full potency. We need to keep Kara de-powered while we work on an antidote.”

Winn instantly snapped to attention. “I can—I can have a sunbed modified in less than an hour.”

“I need it in less than half that time, Winn.” Her expression shifted under the weight of fear pressing into her heart. “Please. Take whatever help you need and just get it done.”

“I can help.” James shifted closer to the edge of the exam table, frowning at the lack of feeling through his leg. “I can tell them to wait on surgery. This is more important.”

Alex instantly countered, “No, you need to let them do whatever they need to make sure you’re okay. What hit you is lethal venom. I won’t take any chances on you, James.”

Winn caught the inference of Alex’s statement. “Hawthorne?”
“He went into cardiac arrest as soon as they got him into surgery.” Her eyes grew glassy with sorrow. “They’re trying everything they can, but they don’t think he’s going to make it.”

Seeing the fear this sparked in James’s expression, Alex continued, “Hawthorne took most of the blow-off from what hit Spencer Graves, James. But please, let them treat you thoroughly.”

The photojournalist nodded, the frightened sheen in his eyes difficult to ignore.

Turning toward Winn, Alex finished, “Take Vasquez and Paulson to work on the sunbed. I’m going to go check on how Cat is doing.” Her expression darkened with regret. “She’s going to stay with Kara while we work on an antidote.”

Winn’s expression mirrored the brunette’s. “Is Kara still sedated?”

“For now, but it’s only a matter of time.” Shifting at the sound of the returning med tech, Alex focused once more on James. “Winn or I will check in as soon as you’re out of surgery, okay?”

Waiting long enough to see James’s cautious nod, Alex gave Winn’s arm a squeeze before she hurried back out into the med bay. As she approached the private exam room where they had brought Kara, she could hear Cat’s and Eliza’s voices.

“When did you implement this ‘Plan K’? And did Kara know about it?”

“Alex asked for my help as soon as she learned Dr. Luthor had gotten her hands on the formula for red kryptonite. We’ve been running simulations ever since of possible alterations and then formulating antidotes. Alex also had two of every DEO vehicle outfitted with field blood test kits that included green kryptonite tourniquets and portable monitoring equipment that could communicate Kara’s bioreadings back here to me while in transit.”

“Kara didn’t know about it though,” Alex added as she crossed into the exam room. She averted her gaze from the sight of her sister, unconscious and secured to an examination chair, her uniform exchanged for one of the med bay’s coveralls. Instead, she focused on Cat’s growing scowl of disagreement.

“We didn’t want to upset Kara. Her first encounter with red kryptonite was the realization of one of her biggest fears since she arrived here on Earth: that she would lose control of herself and hurt someone.”

She dipped her head slightly. “It was my decision to keep Plan K from her, Cat. She’s barely forgiven herself for all she did the last time. I didn’t want our research being a constant reminder about the possibility of this happening to her again.”

“And yet here we are.” Though her words sounded clipped and her tone sharp, Alex could see Cat’s understanding and fear in her drawn expression. “Why has this red kryptonite affected her at a much faster rate than the previous version?”

Eliza pulled up on her tablet the information Alex had streamed to her while in transport back to the DEO. “Dr. Luthor added a boutique pathogen to Lord’s formula, coded to respond specifically to Kara’s Kryptonian cellular structure.”

Alex’s jaw clenched tightly, the guilt of Kara’s albeit brief incarceration by Luthor burning just as painfully within her as when first lit. If she and the DEO had just been faster, been better at protecting Kara, Luthor might never have had the chance to take any samples or readings from her sister.
Placing a calming hand on Alex’s shoulder, Eliza continued, “We believe Dr. Luthor meant for the pathogen to attach itself to Kara’s solar-charged cells. It would have used that energy to self-replicate at an aggressive enough rate to flood her system and outpace any attempts at slowing the replication with an antidote.”

Understanding tightened the lines of Cat’s shoulders. “She programmed it to use Kara’s body to resist any attempts to cure her?”

Alex nodded, anger sharp in her eyes. “And she wanted everyone to watch it happen. Winn wasn’t able to patch into the video feed on the final drone before it withdrew, but I’d bet everything it was sending back images of Kara’s infection to wherever Lillian Luthor was watching. Whatever happened to Kara, Luthor wanted National City to witness it.”

Cat’s response caught in her throat at the sound of Kara gasping softly behind her. Turning, she realized the hero was still sedated. Even unconscious, her features contorted with strain as she gasped again. Two strides brought her to Kara’s side, where she laid a hand against her shoulder. “What’s wrong? Why is she having trouble breathing?”

Alex moved to one of the diagnostic monitors. Her expression darkened as she shifted to look at her mother. “Her flow rates are dropping.”

Seeing the concern and confusion mingling in Cat’s gaze, Eliza explained, “The red kryptonite the drone sprayed on Kara is still in her lungs. We think it started to metabolize into her bloodstream while Kara still had close-to-normal photonucleic levels, but wasn’t able to complete its dispersal and now it’s obstructing her natural airflow.”

Cat shook her head as she peered back down at Kara. “Because she blew out her powers?”

“Yes. Dr. Luthor didn’t anticipate the possibility of Kara forcing a solar flare.” Alex’s shoulders hitched once, her expression wary. “When Kara is fully powered, she has a significantly higher basal metabolic rate than a human’s. However, during solar flare, it drops to a level more in-line with a highly active human adult—still faster than average, but not nearly fast enough to metabolize the pathogen through her body the way her Kryptonian metabolic rate would.”

“Which is why we need to keep her de-powered. As long as we keep her photonucleic levels as close to flatline as possible, we deprive the pathogen of the supercharge it’s looking for to self-replicate. We need more time to develop an antidote.”

Eliza pressed her lips together, eyes blinking back tears as they all listened to Kara draw another labored breath. “Unfortunately, that means Kara’s current metabolic rate won’t be able to clear the Red K from her lungs. We need to figure out something soon before her breathing becomes too compromised.”

Alex pulled her mother into a one-armed hug as she added, “Winn is working on modifying a sunbed to mimic Krypton’s red sun. We’re hoping this will continue to render her powerless and keep Dr. Luthor’s pathogen from activating in her system at a more accelerated speed.”

With a worried sigh, Cat ran her fingers through Kara’s curls, noting the sweat-dampened hair along her temples. Not wanting to dwell too long on what she’d just learned, she queried, “I assume I’ll be in for some interesting verbal sparring when she wakes up?”

Alex watched her mother’s brow crinkle in confusion at the comment. She’d made a concerted effort to tell their mother as little as possible about Kara’s actions while she had been under red kryptonite’s influence. She’d almost even gone so far as to hide her broken arm, but hiding how
dangerous Kara had been meant leaving Eliza unprepared should Kara ever be infected again.

Still, the pain of comforting Kara through her shame-filled sobs when she learned Eliza knew she had injured Alex were almost as deep a wound to her heart as watching Kara consumed by terror when Eliza came to visit them the first time afterward. Even now, Alex could feel the betraying burn of tears at the memory of Kara flinching at first and then falling apart in Eliza’s strong, unhesitating hold.

“If my interaction with her in the desert was any indication, I’m afraid so,” the brunette confirmed.

A resigned sigh escaped the smaller blonde. Scooting a chair closely beside Kara, Cat descended with a slight huff of pain. She could feel the hand-shaped bruises imprinted along her sides and back from how tightly Kara had held onto her as they soared up over the precinct alleyway.

Catching the recognition and worry in Alex’s gaze, she quickly flicked her fingers toward the exam room’s exit. “Kara needs you to focus on her right now, Agent Danvers.”

The tone wrapping around Cat’s words, succinct but still warm, quickly refocused Alex. Fighting to steady her voice, she replied, “With Kara in solar flare, I’m not sure how much longer she’ll be unconscious. I’m going to have an agent stand post outside the room, in case there are any problems. We’ll be in Med Lab Four, right down the hall if you need us.”

The CEO nodded and watched as mother and daughter departed from the exam room, Eliza pulling the door shut behind her with one last glance toward Cat. Finally without a conscious audience, Cat collapsed slightly against the stiff-backed plastic chair, muscles slumping beneath the weight of exhaustion. She flexed her fingers in her lap as she rolled her head from side to side, feeling the welcome burn of her neck muscles stretching and releasing their tension.

Eyes closed, she reached up and began massaging her right shoulder where she had taken the brunt of her impact with Kara. Even with the soreness in her body and the fear coiled tightly in the pit of her stomach over the hero’s current condition, she couldn’t help the smile to lift her lips. “Wait until we tell Alex about you finally getting to show off your new biomatrix skills.”

When she reopened her eyes, she wasn’t certain whether her relief or disappointment was greater when she saw her statement had done nothing to stir Kara. Further consideration faltered under the persistent sound of her phone announcing the deluge of alerts that hadn’t stopped since she’d arrived back at the DEO.

Ignoring for the moment all the alerts from her CatCo app as well as the apps from several competitors, she scrolled down to the message thread she’d begun with Carter as soon as the med team awaiting Hawthorne’s arrival had whisked him away to surgery. The last thing she wanted was her son reading about what was happening in National City before she had a chance to assure him they were all safe.

As she read his response, she felt the heat of anger flood her veins: *Examiner said you were hurt in violent alien attack and S might be poisoned and dangerous again. Trib not reporting anything. Please text back as soon as you read this. I love you.*

Her anger deepened when she pulled up the alerts her son was seeing from the *National City Examiner*, headlines brimming with fallacies and vulgar conjecture. Refusing to fall prey to the pathetic attempts at clickbait, she instead quickly perused the alerts coming from the *Trib*. She was pleased to see that, while they were far fewer in abundance to the *Examiner’s* alerts, they stuck with what few facts she knew her reporters would be able to confirm.
“Time to teach that xenophobic rag what real journalism looks like,” she sighed as she first typed out a response to her son: *Sweetheart, I promise you I am fine and will call you as soon as your classes are over for the day. S is safe and receiving the treatment she needs. Please don’t worry. I’m getting ready to put things right with the Trib so they can thrash the Examiner with some actual facts. I love you.*

Satisfied for the moment with her response, she leaned back and listened to the number she’d dialed ring twice.

“Where the hell are you, Grant?”

Huffing softly, she teased, “You nearly sound worried about my welfare, Lucas.”

“Only as it pertains to getting the truth out there to our readers,” he countered with his familiar gruff of belligerence. “We’re treading water waiting for actual facts while the *Examiner* is one step away from winning a Pulitzer for fiction at this point.”

“If they had as much talent as they had lazy reporters, they might actually pose a threat.” Glancing at Kara and confirming she still slept, the CEO continued, “So let’s get to the facts, shall we?”

She heard rapid shuffling as she pictured Snapper rifling for his notepad through the piles strewn across his desk. The creak of him tucking his handset between his ear and shoulder and the scrape of stubble against the mouthpiece signaled his readiness. “Tell me what you’ve confirmed so far.”

“We’ve got confirmations on deep background from NCPD that the disgusting puddles eating through the floor of a prison transport van and the asphalt behind the ninth precinct were once Spencer Graves and two prison guards from Ordway. We’ve also got the most unbelievable quote on record from the one surviving guard from the Ordway transport. He’s currently at NC General, getting a broken arm set. I’ve never seen someone so grateful for *just* a broken bone, as he called it.”

At the memory of the screams and stench of disintegrating flesh that filled the alleyway, Cat shivered. “Believe me, that gratitude is not misplaced.”

“You speaking from personal experience?”

“I’m mildly battered but unbroken.”

“And not at NC General.”

“No. Off the record, I’m within the protection and care of those monochromatic secret agents we always see shadowing Supergirl throughout National City.”

“Lucky you,” he snorted, the sound of his rapid scrawling halting at Cat’s declaration of unreportable information. “You got Olsen with you? He mentioned going to catch Graves on his perp walk, and the guard confirmed seeing someone who matches his description with you.”

“James is here as well, receiving treatment for injuries he sustained during the attack. And, yes, he will live to torment you another day.”

Cat noted the reporter’s chuff lacked its normal derisive quality. “The Ordway guard who survived is singing a pretty fantastical story about a mutant who spit acid and blew up into a cloud of tiny metal balls. He’s also trying to convince people that Supergirl levitated you off the ground and knocked the acid mutant across the alley without ever touching him.”
“What would you say if I told you he wasn’t telling that fantastical a story?”

“I’d ask you to smuggle out some of whatever they’ve hopped you up on, because I could really use that level of high.”

“The ‘mutant’ in question was Thomas Rieger.” She refused to pause, even at the sound of Snapper’s grunt of recognition. “Contact NCPD and ask to speak to Detective Maggie Sawyer. Tell her I asked you to contact her. She was in charge of the Rieger investigation prior to this morning. She’ll be your best bet at an on-the-record account of what NCPD knows so far about him. She might also be able to tell you more about who set us up to be in that alley in the first place. Ask her about Marcus Garrick. She might not be able to say anything yet, but it’s worth a try. I don’t have the substantiating evidence yet, but this was a CADMUS-planned attack on Spencer Graves—and me,” she added, her throat clenching tightly around the final two words.

“Christ, Grant, you really stuck your foot in it with Luthor this time.”

“I’m just this desperate to get you to respect me again as a real journalist, Lucas.”

“Keep trying,” he countered, tone edging dangerously close to concern. “And what about these wild claims about Supergirl? What, she’s telekinetic now? Or was she just practicing for an upcoming Vegas gig with Zatanna?”

“She’s honing her abilities—no need to go into further detail for now.” The less they printed about Kara’s expanding abilities, the more they kept from Lillian Luthor.

“Okay, then million dollar question time: Where is she? We’ve got eyewitness accounts and now there’s an anonymously leaked video showing her having it out with drones, dropping from the sky, getting shot by one of her own secret agent posse, and then bolting out of city limits.”

“She’s safe.”

“Well, that’s nice to know. Are we?”

“Yes.”

“Who’s your source?”

Cat paused, eyes flickering once more over the prone body lying beside her. “I am. I’m looking at her right now.”

“And?”

“And, on the record and absolutely attributable to me, she poses no threat to National City.”

“Any chance she’s up for giving us a quote to support that?”

With a sigh that gave away far more than any words, Cat replied, “No, she’s currently unavailable for comment.” Not wanting to dwell on that truth any longer than necessary, she finished, “Give me ten minutes and I’ll give you a quote you can use in your follow-up.”

“Forget about it. Focus on the Princess of Power. I’ll pull something together. I’m pretty sure I can fake a Cat Grant quote.” He actually chuckled at the CEO’s disapproving tongue click before continuing, “Too bad I can’t seem to find Ponytail. I’m sure she could nail you in her sleep—your tone, that is.”
Amusement twitched the corners of her mouth and she was certain she could hear the satisfied smirk she knew adorned Snapper’s face in that moment. “I’m sure you’ll come through in a pinch, Lucas.”

Brushing her finger across the button to end her call, she swiped her free hand through wind-tangled curls while pulling up Carter’s response: *Gonna need FaceTime. With both of you.*

Blinking against the way the letters on her keypad blurred instantly, she managed to type out: *I promise. I will text when we’re both able to talk with you. Now, focus on school.*

At the sound of stirring from beside her, the smaller blonde set aside her phone and focused on the hero now beginning to awaken.

Moan rising on alarmingly shallow breaths, Kara shifted her head against the exam chair’s headrest, eyes clenched shut against the brightness awaiting her. At the feel of the restraints stopping her from lifting her arms and legs, however, eyelids slid up and gaze instantly hardened at the sight of the woman who sat beside her.

Cat felt her fingers twitch with the need to reach out, take the hero’s hand and try to offer her some small bit of comfort. However, the cold glare to sharpen Kara’s gaze was enough to remind her of the truth of the situation.

Struggling to control her expression, she asked, “How do you feel, Kara? Do you need anything?”

Purposefully flexing her arms and legs against the chair restraints, the hero’s lips twisted into a feral curl. “I should have pegged you for a bondage queen.”

Despite knowing the danger of engaging the hero in conversation while she was under the influence of red kryponite, Cat queried, “Is this your way of declaring your kink? Or do you think this is the only way I can keep my lovers?”

“Why bother with restraints when you can just sink your claws into whatever you want?” Her sneer deepened. “Tell me, how good did it feel to finally sink those claws into your very own Kryptonian?”

Cat clicked her tongue. “Kara, if I wanted bad cat puns, I could go visit Leslie.”

Kara growled. “I bet you’d enjoy visiting Leslie, hmm? Another of the attractive young women you surrounded yourself with at CatCo—like Siobhan. Tell me, did you fuck them, too, Catherine?”

She instantly noticed the way the smaller blonde flinched. “Do you not like your name, Catherine? Does it not have the predatory hardness you prefer? Or is it because it reminds you of what you’ll become? Cold and selfish and alone?”

“I’ve spent far too much on therapy to fall prey to your insinuations that I will become my mother. Although, if you truly believe that, let me be the first to warn you away.”

The hero sighed while testing the limits of her leg restraints, shifting her thighs apart, her shoulders pressing back against the chair. “But I love you, Catherine.”

Barely able to swallow back the shock of pain in time, Cat shook her head. “Please don’t make a joke of us, Kara.” Her voice noticeably cracked on each word.

Beneath the contempt that flared with each glowing pulse through the hero’s veins, Cat saw the
faintest flicker of remorse—knew her Kara was there, beneath Luthor’s poison. “I assure you, Catherine, Shakespeare would write no comedy for us.”

“So what are we? I’m not much for the bard’s historical plays. We are teetering dangerously close to the edges of a tragedy, but I will have you sedated again right now if you curse us to the banality of those ‘star-crossed’ children.”

“Shall we be a sonnet then? ‘Being your slave, what should I do but tend upon the hours and times of your desire? I have no precious time at all to spend, nor services to do, till you require.’”

She gave a shallow huff of disgust. “So unforgivably callous that even one of your most revered authors would be so flippant about slavery. You could rival Daxam in that level of abhorrence.”

Cat’s gaze narrowed at the aristocratic timbre of Kara’s voice. “‘You refute what you call flippancy, yet you still chose that particular sonnet. Is that how you see yourself with me? As my slave?’”

“I’m your former assistant,” she snapped, sweat slipping down her cheek to darken the neckline of her coverall. “I helped satisfy all your impulsive desires so well in the office, it was only inevitable you’d want to see how satisfying I could be in other ways.”

She shifted again, back arching against the chair, lips parting wantonly. “Tell me, Catherine, don’t you want me to satisfy you now?”

“When you’re better, of course. But right now? This isn’t you, Kara.”

Back suddenly ramrod straight, she sat up against her restraints and glared at the smaller blonde. “This is more me than any of you is willing to accept.”

“We really do need to work on releasing the anger behind your anger.”

Expression turning in a way Cat had only seen from the hero once before, Kara ordered, “Do not patronize me.”

“I’m not,” Cat calmly countered. With clearly unexpected understanding, she continued, “I think you have spent a very long time having to hide your truth. I don’t blame the Danverses for making that decision. Everything they have done for you comes from loving you and wanting to protect you from a world that can be so cruel and violent to those who are different. But that decision came at the unforgivable sacrifice of Kara Zor-El—all you had left of who you once were. I think your anger and resentment over that are justifiable.”

Encouraged by the silence from the hero when she paused, Cat pressed on. “I have watched you try to pass yourself off as ordinary while being anything but. You are not ordinary. You are not human—but you have somehow managed to find the best of humanity and make it a part of who you try to be every day.”

Pushing aside the muscle memory gained from her first encounter with Kara under the control of red kryptonite, Cat reached out, brushed back damp strands of the hero’s hair from her forehead. She noted with relief how Kara held steady rather than pulling away from her touch.

“I know, beneath this chemical fugue, you’re hearing all of this, and you’ll remember everything we’ve said here.” She placed her hand against one of Kara’s flushed cheeks. “So remember this, Kara Zor-El: I see you as you truly are, and I want all of you—even this darkness and anger and pain.”

A defiant smirk unfurled across the pout of Kara’s lips. “I know what else you want from me,
Catherine.” She watched with heavily lidded eyes as Cat withdrew her hand and leaned away. “It’s just us here, so you can tell the truth: That’s all you wanted, isn’t it? To add me to your list of conquests? After all, you’ll forever be able to say you claimed the virtue of the Last Daughter of Krypton. So why don’t you finish this off right here? Purge me completely from your system in one final go so you can be through with me now instead of dragging this out longer.”

“Kara.” Cat breathed deeply, focused on remaining as calm as she could. She knew the red kryptonite was bringing out the most uninhibited parts of Kara, including her fears. “Kara, I’m not trying to get you out of my system. I’m not using you. I care about you far too much to ever be so cruel.”

“But you are cruel, Catherine.” She moved her thighs apart once more, a desperate sigh passing from parted lips. “So cruel to be so far away when I need to feel you so badly.”

She rocked her hips in a slow rhythm. “I have no powers. You could be inside me right now. Don’t you want that? Don’t you want to take what’s been denied you all this time? I know the security code to lock the door. No one would know except us.”

With a sigh, Cat sank back in her seat, rubbing tiredly at her forehead while watching Kara. “I think I preferred being tossed from the top of CatCo,” she muttered.

Growling in frustration, Kara began pulling at the restraints, releasing a string of Kryptonese that Cat knew without translation was profane, her eyes boring into the smaller blonde’s.

“Language, Kara.” Alex strode into the exam room, Eliza and Winn flanking her sides. Concern furrowed their brows at the sight of the hero struggling and the sound of her desperate gasps for air. “We don’t need to hear about your :zhao for Cat.”

The brunette risked moving closer, her hands gripping the hero’s wrists to try to stop her from hurting herself. At the feel of Kara’s feverish skin, Alex pulled back quickly. “Kara, you’re burning up.”

The Kryptonian rolled her eyes upward and bared her teeth in a pained snarl, pulsing red veins flaring brightly beneath sallow, sweat-slicked skin. “So observant, Dr. Danvers,” she whispered, still breathless from her outburst. “Mom must be so proud.”

Cat stepped forward, placing a hand on Alex’s shoulder as the brunette began to pull away. Kara glared at the action. When she went to speak, however, her words choked on desperate pulls of breath.

“Kara?” The smaller blonde reached out without hesitation to grip one of Kara’s forearms. When the hero continued to struggle for air, she moved her other hand from Alex’s shoulder to rest against where Kara’s crest would normally set. Pressing against chest muscles she could feel constricting beneath her hand to keep Kara from doubling over, she turned questioningly toward the brunette. “What’s happening?”

For several quiet beats, Alex simply moved around the exam room, checking monitors and collecting items she needed to tend to Kara. With gentle moves, she looped an oxygen mask over her sister’s mouth. With a flick of a switch, she activated the portable oxygen generator she’d placed beside Kara’s exam chair and adjusted the air flow until she found a level that gave Kara the relief she struggled to regain. The group standing around her waited in silence as Kara began to breathe with slightly less struggle. Cat could still hear the strain of every breath she drew.

Leaning closer, Alex once more placed her hands on Kara’s shoulders. Gaze shifting rapidly in a
desperate need to see some sign of her sister beneath the red kryptonite haze, she whispered, “Kara, we’re going to need to keep you de-powered a little bit longer, okay? That means your breathing might get worse, but Mom and I are doing everything we can to stop what Dr. Luthor has infected you with.”

She pushed a golden curl behind the hero’s ear, forcing herself to smile even as Kara jerked away from her touch. “Please just relax, okay? We’re going to fix this. I promise.”

Not wanting to give her sister a chance to respond, the brunette quickly stood back up to full height and turned toward Winn. “Let’s go ahead and transfer her to the sunbed.”

The tech agent nodded and headed back out of the exam room, casting a worried look toward the hero before leaving. A moment later, he and Vasquez returned, pushing one of the sunbeds the DEO designed after Kara’s arrival.

Alex leaned closer once more. “Kara?” She watched, concern twisting knots through her, as Kara struggled to refocus. The hero’s breaths came in small, shallow bursts that clearly failed to provide her enough oxygen. Eyes that filled with the briefest flash of panic began to roll upward behind increasingly heavier eyelids. Alex watched with growing alarm as her sister finally collapsed back against the exam chair, body sinking limply into the cushions.

Taking her own deep, calming breath, the agent began undoing the restraints around Kara’s wrists and ankles. Without looking up, she said, “We need to lift her up into the sunbed. Cat, help me lift her shoulders. Mom and Vasquez, lift her legs. Winn, lock the bed’s wheels so it doesn’t shift when we lift her on.”

As the women moved into position around Kara, Alex draped the tube from Kara’s mask across her forearm and called, “Winn, grab the generator and move it with us.”

The tech agent quickly scrambled to Alex’s side, hoisting the generator and keeping in sync as they gently lifted Kara and shifted her to the sunbed. With the click of the hinged top back into place and the flick of a switch, Alex activated the bed, bathing Kara’s prone form in a deep red glow. As Alex began fastening the wrist restraints she’d had Winn add, Cat frowned in dissent. “Isn’t that overkill? She’s unconscious.”

“I’m not taking any chances with you, Cat. Not today.”

Something dark and fearful bled into the cracks of Alex’s voice, telling Cat it was not the time to pursue her disagreement any further. Once the agent finished connecting the diagnostic monitors to the sunbed and Kara, she double-checked the oxygen mask’s connection to the generator and once more adjusted the generator’s output levels.

“We’re nearly finished,” she offered as she brushed back her sister’s sweat-dampened hair from her forehead. “We think a combination of elements from two of the antidotes we already formulated is going to work. We’re running final control tests now.”

“Lillian will undoubtedly be disappointed.” Without looking away from Kara, Cat knew Alex was waiting for her to continue. “I’m sure she wanted much more chaos and damage.”

When Cat finally turned toward the brunette, she was struck silent by the anguish contorting her features. With a hard swallow, Alex pivoted and began for the exit. “You can sit as close to Kara as you’d like. The red light from the sunbed won’t hurt you. Agent Vasquez will be right outside if you need anything. We’ll be back soon.”
Before Cat could gather her thoughts enough to respond, Alex had led everyone else out of the exam room, shutting the door behind her. With a slightly confused frown, she tugged her chair once more beside the hero. Studying the light shining down on Kara, she sighed, “I don’t mean to alarm you, but I think your sister and Winslow have stuck you under a darkroom lamp. Should I now employ some cheesy pick-up line about seeing what develops between us?”

At the lack of response from the hero, she leaned close, absently straightening the strap to Kara’s mask. “Fine, I admit that wasn’t my best work, but you could have at least humored me, darling.”

In the fresh silence of the room, broken only by the sounds of all the equipment regulating and monitoring Kara’s status, Cat began to feel the adrenaline seep from her system. Limbs and eyelids growing heavy, she focused on Kara’s expression, noting how it betrayed her struggle for enough air. Scooting closer, the smaller blonde intertwined their fingers, frowning once more at the restraints, and settled back into her seat.

When she heard the shuffle of someone moving to her side, she struggled to resurface from the sleep that had so unceremoniously overcome her, contrary to her best attempts to stave it off and watch over Kara. Her brow furrowed as she fought through the tangle of dreams filling her mind, cluttered with images she was certain she wouldn’t be forgetting any time soon.

“Cat?” Fingers ghosted along the sharp line of her shoulder, curled gently over her clavicle. A groan tripped from her lips at the soft shake that pulled her further toward the surface of consciousness.

With a deep breath, she opened her eyes, surprised to realize at some point after falling asleep she had made a makeshift pillow of her arm against Kara’s sunbed. Shifting so she could sit up without relinquishing her hold on Kara’s hand, she felt her spine pop with the realignment and frowned at the stiffness that remained.

“Cat?” The sound of her name called once more drew her attention. At the sight of jade eyes focusing, Eliza smiled and gave the smaller blonde’s left shoulder a squeeze. “How do you feel?”

Rotating her head enough to crack her neck, Cat sighed, “I’m definitely giving the DEO a scathing review for its sleeping accommodations in *CatCo* magazine’s next ‘Best and Worst of National City’ issue.”

An amused snort drew the CEO’s attention toward the other side of Kara’s sunbed. Alex finished securing the catheter atop the back of Kara’s hand and checking for tangles in the line to the IV bag she’d just hung. As she moved around to stand beside her mother, she teased, “At least wait until you experience our full array of amenities. Winn makes mean midnight runs to the new Big Belly Burger across town. If you’re really nice to him, he’ll even pick you up something off their secret menu.”

“Be still my heart—literally, if the burgers are as greasy as they appear in their commercials.”

“They’re definitely not gourmet,” Alex conceded, “but they get the Kryptonian seal of approval.”

Both Danvers women laughed at the unimpressed hitch of Cat’s eyebrows. Turning once more toward the IV bag, the CEO queried, “The antidote, I assume?”

“Yeah, we needed to tweak it slightly from the last control test, but we think we’ve got it this time.” She observed Cat unconsciously begin to rub at the shoulder she’d been favoring earlier. “It’s going to take some time to make it through Kara’s system since she’s still de-powered, so why don’t you let my mom stay here with her while you let me check that shoulder?”
Blushing at the brunette’s pointed calling out of her tell, Cat quietly rose from her seat, releasing her hold on Kara’s hand with a final squeeze. As she stepped aside, she smiled at how easily Eliza moved to take her place. “We’ll be here when you’re finished,” she stated, turning her attention toward her younger daughter.

Alex pressed a hand against the small of Cat’s back, noting the way she pulled away beneath even her lightest touch. Guiding the smaller blonde to the adjacent exam room, she closed the door, handed Cat a coverall, and nodded toward a partition in the back. “This’ll make things slightly less awkward for both of us.”

Snatching the coverall with a click of her tongue, the CEO disappeared behind the partition to the sound of Alex chuckling softly. When she re-emerged, she climbed up onto the exam table as the brunette moved behind her and gently shifted the coverall off her right shoulder. At the sight of the dark contusion that ran down below the line of the coverall, Alex began, “Cat, how—”

“She did it, Alex.” The smaller blonde shifted enough to catch Alex’s gaze. “Kara pulled me up to her using her biomatrix. She must have been a good hundred feet away when she did it.”

Her prideful smile faltered slightly at the feel of Alex probing her shoulder. “She just needs to adjust the strength of her pull a little. Hurtling through the air into a Kryptonian is similar to slamming into a moderately padded brick wall.”

Alex huffed softly at the comment. “As someone who’s run into that wall before, I think that’s a fair assessment.” Pushing open the back of the coverall more, she hissed in sympathy at the sight of Kara’s hand prints bruised into Cat’s lower back and curved around her sides. “Well, at least you knew she wasn’t going to drop you.”

After tugging up the coverall slightly, she circled around in front of Cat and took a seat on the spare stool. “I’m fairly sure nothing’s broken, but I’d like to run some X-rays of your shoulder, just to be sure. Then I can get the device Dr. Hamilton designed to reduce bruising, hopefully to help alleviate some of the swelling and pain.”

A slight tint rose to her cheeks. “I did ask Amelia to design a smaller version you can keep at home like I said I would, but she hasn’t finished with it yet.”

With an amused eye roll, Cat reached out and patted Alex’s hand, which slowly unclenched at the feel. “Let’s focus on one thing at a time, Agent Danvers. You have officially helped your sister one-up the Man of Steel. Total bragging rights with Clark unlocked.”

Alex laughed openly at Cat’s satisfied smile. “Is there anything you don’t already know?”

“Yes, whatever it is you held back from telling me earlier.”

Cat watched the joy drain from a suddenly too-pale face. “Reeve didn’t make it.” The agent swallowed at the way Cat’s lips parted, sorrow whispering along the sharp breath she drew.

“Where is he—his body now?”

“We have a morgue here onsite. We’re waiting to hear from his family what funeral home they’re using.”

“What did you tell them happened to him?”

“They thought he worked at one of the labs here in National City. It’s actually part of the DEO, so a lot of us have used it as our cover. We told his family an experiment in one of the labs resulted in
a reaction that sealed the room until the ventilation system could clear the toxic fumes. We said Reeve overrode the safety protocols to save the lab techs trapped inside but didn’t make it out on his final trip in to check for additional coworkers.”

“A hero even in his cover story.”Cat let her head drop slightly as she released an unsteady sigh. When she looked back up, Alex could see the sheen of barely contained tears. “Please let me know what funeral home when you find out.”

As Alex studied the woman before her, she knew without hesitation that Reeve Hawthorne’s family would not spend one cent for their son’s funeral.

With a slight jut of her chin to steady its betraying tremble, Alex finished, “On happier news, James is in recovery. They successfully debrided his wound. He’s going to have scarring, but he’s also not going to lose any mobility or muscle strength. And Lucy has agreed to my request to assign Agent Vasquez to you. Get to know her and get used to seeing her, because she’s now your official second shadow until we stop Lillian Luthor.”

“All right, darling. You’re safe.”

The unspoken implication wrapped around Cat with welcome warmth: I’ll take care of you.

For the next hour, Alex did just that, tending to Cat’s injuries and providing her with what even the CEO had to agree was a phenomenal grilled chicken salad from one of Kara’s favorite Greek places near the DEO. She, Alex, and Eliza gathered around a makeshift dinner table in Kara’s room, softly chatting about whatever idle banter came to mind, so long as it pulled them, even briefly, out of the severe grip of the day’s events. Cat noted with ever-deepening affection the quiet observance and subtle glances shared between mother and daughter as they continuously assessed the CEO.

As they cleaned up their containers, Cat heard the sigh of her name from the sunbed. Striding quickly to Kara’s side, she caught the hero’s hand in her warm grip at the sight of her struggling to open her eyes. Seeing the glaze of confusion in her barely focused gaze, Cat whispered, “It’s all right, darling. You’re safe.”
From Kara’s other side, Alex began checking her readings to determine how far along their treatment had brought her sister. “Air flow rates are still low, but I think we can switch you from the mask to a nasal cannula, okay, Kara?”

Eliza moved in with a nod of acknowledgement to her older daughter to locate a cannula while Alex shut down the sunbed and disengaged the hinged top. Unlatching the restraint on Kara’s wrist and noting Cat doing the same on the other side, she watched Kara slowly turn toward her and gave her sister a comforting smile. “I’m going to need to draw a blood sample, ie te, so I can be sure the antidote is doing a thorough job, okay?”

Cat watched clarity begin to filter through Kara’s expression as she remembered the past few hours. Feeling the hero tug weakly away from Cat’s grip, the smaller blonde tightened her hold. “Kara, look at me.” She settled her tone impressively between command and entreaty. Capturing Kara’s guilt-heavy gaze, she stated, “We’re all here with you, and we are fine.”

“She’s right, ie te,” Alex concurred as she began filling several collection tubes while Eliza removed Kara’s mask and adjusted the prongs of the replacement cannula she looped behind her younger daughter’s ears. “You did amazing things today, Kara, that saved so many people.”

Shaking her head as her eyes filled with tears, the hero husked, “Alex, what I said—”

The brunette set aside the tube she’d just finished filling and took the hand Cat wasn’t holding. “What you said,” she quickly countered while running her thumb along Kara’s knuckles, “made me realize we are sorely overdue for sister night very, very soon—and at least once every week from now on, like we used to do. Maggie and Cat will just have to accept that the Danvers sisters are a matched set. I promise we will both do a better job of making more time for each other, deal?”

When Kara finally gave her a slow nod, she finished, “But I need you to promise me you’ll work on letting me know when anything is upsetting you like this, okay?” She used her other hand to brush back a lock of Kara’s hair from her forehead, smiling at the second nod from her sister. “Good. Now, Mom is going to start running your blood work, and I’m going to go find some wheels to transfer you to your regular sunbed so we can start getting you back up to full power. You and Cat get your mushy stuff out of the way while I’m gone.” She chuckled at the way Cat winked at her before kissing Kara’s hand and releasing it.

The smaller blonde waited quietly until Alex and Eliza departed before turning her attention once more to her hero. At the sight of Kara preparing what Cat had no doubt would be a full-blown apology, she softly rested a finger against the hero’s lips. Her heart ached at the feel of the tremble beneath her touch. “No apologies, Kara. There is still nothing to forgive.”

Leaning forward, she placed her hands on Kara’s face. After pressing their lips together in a gentle kiss, she captured watery blue depths with jade sharpness. With a conviction she felt through her every cell, she stated, “Kara Zor-El, žhaodh w rrip eh.”

Seeing the surprise and then the apprehension churning dark and wild in Kara’s eyes, Cat increased her grip on cheeks that still felt feverish beneath her touch. “I know what I just said to you, Kara. I understand from the little Alex explained to me that it’s reserved among your people only for your most intimate bonds. I don’t know any more than that—your sister makes a terrible source, just so you know.”

The smaller blonde snickered at the tired eye roll her statement earned. “Whatever its true meaning, which I expect you to explain when you’re feeling well enough for us to have a more in-depth conversation about all of this, all I need to know is this: Whatever promise I’ve just made to
you, I mean it with everything I am and I will never break it.”

At the sight of her hero’s tears, Cat lifted one of Kara’s hands to rest atop the strong, steady beat of her heart. “You have saved me in so many ways, Kara—in ways that continue to change and inspire and make me want to be and do better. In whatever language, in whatever universe, I love you.”

Even as a sob choked from her still-weak lungs, Kara nodded and turned her hand in Cat’s hold to tangle their fingers once more. “:zhaodh w rrip eh.”

The smaller blonde didn’t bother to dry her eyes as she heard Alex return. Instead, she slipped a hand beneath Kara’s shoulders and began to guide her into a sitting position. “Now, Carter is waiting to hear from us, so let’s get you settled and then let’s call our boy and let him know we’re all right.”

Kara absorbed Cat’s words like sunshine, her whole countenance brightening with incomparable joy. As she helped Kara carefully slide from the sunbed and settle into the chair, Cat caught the subtle motion of Alex wiping at her eyes before moving to the chair’s handles. Taking Kara’s hand in hers, Cat strode beside the chair as Alex steered them down the hall to Kara’s new room.

From across the hall, Winn felt James’s shoulders slump slightly as he helped the photojournalist balance on his crutches. They had paused from their short walk around the med bay to watch the trio move down the hall. Winn could tell James’s gaze was focused solely on the sight of Cat’s and Kara’s intertwined hands.

“You know she broke Mach 16 today,” Winn finally stated when the women disappeared into the farthest private room. “If it came down to it, I think she would try to stop the world from spinning if she thought it would save Cat.”

He watched a muscle jump along the column of James’s neck. “I knew,” the photographer softly confessed. He tilted his head forward, shaking it once. “I didn’t want to accept it, but I think—I think I’ve known for a while.”

“I don’t know if this will help or not, but they are undeniably in love with each other.”

“Definitely doesn’t help right now,” James huffed, but his lips parted into a full flash of one of his more charming smiles. Winn chuckled at the sight, relieved to see his friend slowly coming around. “But,” he conceded, “it’s what they both deserve.”

Patting James’s shoulder, Winn nodded toward the room where Dr. Ramirez had placed him for overnight observation. “Come on, I bet we can get in one more episode of Orphan Black before they hit you with your evening pain meds.”

James settled his hands on the grips of his crutches, pivoting to follow the tech agent. With one final glance down the hall, he disappeared back into his own room, regret bright in his gaze.

Chapter End Notes

Finally! Life has definitely been uncooperative these past few weeks, but I’m finally posting this unexpectedly long chapter. Honestly, I was only planning on this being a short wrap-up of the preceding two chapters before swinging back to check in on
Lillian Luthor. However, the interpersonal interactions that availed themselves to me were too tempting to resist. Some nice Cat and Alex moments, plus some more advancement with Cat and Kara's relationship (even if there are clearly some things they will need to discuss). Oh, and just a hint of Carter. Our boy will be back in a greater capacity soon, but I really like how he fit into this chapter.

As for James, I liked opening and closing this chapter with him and showing his admittedly unfinished progression toward acceptance of Kara and Cat. I'm struggling to find a more suitable voice for James in this story than they gave him in S1. I never liked the judgmental vein they implanted into him in the first season. I applauded him calling out Kara and the DEO on their questionable incarceration of Maxwell Lord, but on a personal level, he always seemed unfairly hard on Kara for not doing things the way he thought her cousin would do it. Plus, his reaction to her after the original Red K incident still makes me bristle. Here, I think he still would struggle with letting go of the idea of what he might have had with Kara, but I also want him to want what's best for her. He might stumble a bit in that belief later on, but we're going to get to the other side together. I promise.
A trail of taillights blazed scarlet as a wound through the city below. From his rooftop perch, he watched the stuttering flow, stanched and released through the surrounding street grid by the endless cycling of stoplights. Across Constitution, he heard the familiar hiss and squeal of a Metro bus lumbering to a halt, trading off and on weary workers before rumbling haltingly back into traffic. With a slow blink, he shifted his gaze out over the silhouetted skyline, the city’s powerful heartbeat recorded in its spikes and dips against the dimming dusk sky.

Fingers scratched the skin along the left side his brow, curved down to rub the corner of his eye. Nothing itched, of course. He simply enjoyed feeling the wholeness of his features once more. The surgeons had done a convincing enough job at their repairs that he couldn’t even feel the slightest ripple in the synthetic covering.

Standing a few more moments at the roof’s edge, he let his telescopic gaze wander, out toward the Marine Barracks southeast of his position and then across the Potomac toward the west where he could just make out the buildings of Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall. It had been too many years since his current life had usurped his former—even before his conversion to CADMUS’s best cybernetic attempt at replicating the Man of Steel.

Still, the Corps would always be a part of him, a deeply embedded vein of honor and duty that no implant could ever replace. The uncompromising code of integrity he learned during his service had been central to every aspect of his life since—first at the DEO and now to his dedication to CADMUS. Soon enough, it would be central to the legions of Dr. Luthor’s genetically engineered soldiers he would lead in purging the Earth of its infestation of alien terrorists.

With a series of blinks to deactivate his telescopic vision, he stepped forward and dropped down. Activating his internal thrusters, he leveled off beside the line of windows that marked the floor he needed to enter. With a controlled burst, he moved along the line of office windows until reaching the one he knew to look for: unlocked and attached to a dark office.

He grabbed hold of the window ledge, giving a swift upward shove to open the lower sash and slipping inside. Blinking the sequence that would activate his X-ray vision, he scanned the area, including his destination. At the sight of the mostly clear path awaiting him, he smoothed out his
suit and straightened his tie before exiting into the main corridor.

He walked swiftly and with an unmistakable purpose, his stern frown and narrowed gaze aimed discreetly toward any aides hustling past who might dare consider themselves bold enough to question him.

With a satisfied shift of his lips, he ducked into the outer office of his destination. The emptiness that greeted him gave him a moment to decompress before slipping into the main office. Kicking the door shut behind him, he strode immediately over to unlock the office window. He paused at the sight outside, still not quite finished satisfying his need to rememorize the city skyline.

It had been far too long since his time lived in this beating heart of power and corruption. His fingers lifted at the thought, unconsciously tracing over where his own heart had once beat—before receiving the sci-fi facsimile now beating within him to an infinite tempo.

His gratitude for Luthor’s salvage of his broken remains had tempered quickly enough upon learning she had both saved and sacrificed him. It still sparked fury in the disjointed bits of humanity left him that she had allowed one of them to walk into his life—to wear his face and claim his name all those years.

Only Luthor’s unchanging assurance had kept him focused, tethered to their ultimate goal.

“The Martian will fail. It’s simply a matter of time. And when he does, he and the Kryptonian girl will be ours, and Hank Henshaw will be your life to reclaim.”

The Martian’s failure had come—had nearly brought him and the Kryptonian’s human “sister” to Project CADMUS. Instead, both had escaped and the only casualty from that mission had ultimately been Jim Harper—Henshaw’s closest friend and yet another piece of his humanity stripped away because of the Kryptonian and her endless coterie of protectors.

Was she worth it, this alien who had filled Lillian Luthor with such Ahab-like zeal?

“She better goddamned well be worth it,” he muttered as his fingers tapped against his chest in rhythm with his cybernetic heart.

His head tilted at the sound of the office door’s latch releasing and scraping slightly against the strike plate right before the door swung open. The sight of him turning toward the office entrance drew a startled gasp from the new occupant. Several heel clicks drew her closer as she assessed this unexpected visitor. “Director J’onzz, what are you doing here?”

The cyborg offered his most placating smile as he stepped away from the window and around the desk. “Senator Crane,” he nodded while clasping his hands behind his back. “I was in town for a meeting and thought I would stop by, to check on you.”

Reticence simmered within her bright gaze as she halted before him. “I thought we left things sufficiently resolved during our previous meeting. Has anything changed since then?”

His hearing picked up on the flutter of her heart rate. “I understand your distrust of me, Senator. I assure you, though, I only wish to keep you safe. Your betrayal of Lillian Luthor places you in great danger.”

“It would,” she agreed, “if it were possible for her to link me to any of the information Ms. Grant has collected from me so far. Cat has been meticulous in her protection of my involvement.”
“Right now, Cat Grant is a bit preoccupied with her own protection.” He stepped closer, his movement quickly halting at the way Crane’s eyes widened fearfully for the briefest of beats. “Are you all right, Senator?”

Henshaw caught the subtle sway of the senator’s body away from him, her expression a struggle to regain neutrality. Finally, she broke, her head bending forward as she brought a hand to her forehead. “I really am sorry, Director. I’m trying my best to accept who—what you are, but it’s difficult.”

“Especially considering I’m one of the monsters you used to warn your constituents about, correct?”

A storm of emotions gathered within her steel gray glare. “I am sorry for those things I said. They came from a place of fear I’m working very hard to overcome.” She pursed her lips as she studied the visage before her. “It helped a great deal when you shared with me some of your story—about Mars and your wife and sons.”

Henshaw inclined his head. “I’m glad I could help you in any way, Senator.”

Crane offered him a half-smile, her gaze still a dark pastiche of emotions. The movement of her thumb along the edge of her mobile fumbled slightly at the sudden buzz from the device. Looking at the screen, she sighed, “I apologize. My aide is trying to run interference for me with a colleague insisting I speak with him this evening. Just let me text her that I am now legitimately unavailable—with a donor.”

“Of course, Senator.” Henshaw silently stood by as she tapped out her text.

She waited for a response, glancing briefly toward the cyborg until the buzz of her phone startled her back into focus. Finally, a smile of relief curled along her lips. With a few more taps, she texted once more before slipping her phone in her suit coat pocket. “Well, that’s finished.”

Gesturing toward one of the chairs behind Henshaw, she walked around him to sit in the other seat. “I do appreciate your visit. The news from National City has left many of us rattled. Spencer Graves was one of Dr. Luthor’s most avid supporters.”

“Imagine what she must have in store for those who have purposefully betrayed her.”

Crane shifted slightly in her seat, her fingers curling against the arm rests. “Do you have new reason to believe she now knows about me?”

The cyborg’s smile remained solely on his lips, his eyes retaining their belligerent glint. “Nothing substantive at the moment. However, Dr. Luthor is scrupulous in her reach, and she does not like disloyalty.”

Eyebrows arched in surprise. “You speak as though you have personal experience with her.”

A gravelly laugh dragged from his throat. “Senator, she created a hybrid specifically to make Cat Grant’s death excruciating. You don’t need personal experience to extrapolate the meaning of that.”

Crane turned away at the thoughts conjured by Henshaw’s unsettling remark. “Would it be possible for the DEO to provide me with an agent for security when I’m not here or at the Capitol? Perhaps someone experienced with this matter?”

When she returned her gaze to Henshaw, her eyes shimmered once more with fear. The cyborg
turned his head to the side, his hearing picking up subtle noises outside the Senator’s office. “I will contact the D.C. bureau and put in the request.”

Crane’s response halted at the sound of her desk phone signaling an internal call. Frown lines instantly bracketing her mouth, Crane slid from her seat with a mumbled apology. As she retrieved the handset, Henshaw focused his hearing on both sides of the conversation. “Hello?”

Henshaw caught the sound of a high-pitched and clearly flustered female voice both through the phone line and out in the exterior office. “I’m very sorry, ma’am, but Senator Fletcher is here and he’s refusing to leave until he speaks with you about tomorrow morning.”

The cyborg activated his X-ray vision as he listened. Through the senator’s office wall, he could make out the woman speaking to Crane as well as a man Henshaw recognized as Senator Ridgley Fletcher. Henshaw’s lip curled at the sight of the senator who had been one of the most vocal alien advocates in Congress as well as the lead in rallying enough votes in the Senate for President Marsdin’s amnesty bill.

Crane pinched the bridge of her nose, her patience escaping on the back of a clearly perturbed sigh. “Fine, I’ll be out in a moment.”

Dropping the handset back to the base with a careless clunk, she turned apologetically toward her guest. “Please forgive this interruption, Director. I have no intention of indulging my colleague any longer than I have to.”

“Of course, Senator.” He nodded in acceptance of her apology and watched as she stepped out toward the anteroom where her aide and the other senator awaited. As soon as he was certain she was distracted, Henshaw slipped the needle-free injector he brought from his inside jacket pocket. Just as with Colonel Harper, he knew the device would leave no mark when he injected Senator Crane with the same serum Dr. Luthor had prepared for him to take out his friend.

Rising from his seat, he moved once more to the window, this time to open it. With his back to the office entrance, he crossed his arms with the device palmed securely in the hand hidden in the crook of his elbow.

Several moments later, Crane returned. Henshaw listened as she spoke softly to her aide, instructing her to tell any additional visitors that she had left for the evening. She nudged her office door shut, momentarily confused at the empty chair.

Realizing her guest once more stood before the window, she moved to his side. Noting the chill coming through the open lower sash, she stated, “I didn’t think you’d be a fan of our winter weather.”

“I miss this weather,” he admitted, not caring at that point about any implications his confession carried. “I miss many things about D.C.”

He turned to meet the senator’s confused stare, his own expression dark with fury. “I miss my previous life. Soon enough, though, my fate will finally change. Once our global forces purify the Earth for humanity, Hank Henshaw will be mine to reclaim.”

Rushing forward in an unstoppable blur, the cyborg subdued the senator with a hand in her hair, tilting her head back to expose her neck and injecting her with Luthor’s serum. His voice rumbled low and jagged against her ear as she began to slump within his grip. “Our new world has no room for the disloyal.”
A gasp at the office entrance caused Henshaw to spin, releasing Crane to crumple to the floor. The senator’s aide rushed forward, stumbling unceremoniously to her knees beside Crane's unmoving form. As she pressed her fingers against the senator’s neck, Henshaw moved closer, realizing the perfect opportunity afforded him by this unexpected intrusion.

Pausing long enough for the aide to look up, he leaned in to ensure she could see his face fully. Once satisfied, he rose to full height and strode toward the window. He jumped without a second thought, activating his thrusters and soaring effortlessly out over the bustling city.

Chapter End Notes

I did not intend to take so long to post this. A short vacation led to a nasty cold picked up on the plane ride home. Also, I admittedly have been spending a lot of time writing scenes for the next three chapters (because who needs to write in a linear fashion?). I'm really excited about some of the things I'm doing in the upcoming chapters. I'm also a little nervous about some decisions I'm making. But they all have a purpose, I promise.

I really wanted to give Hank Henshaw a bit of his own time in this story, mostly as a concession to David Harewood's own frustration at the character's lack of development. This is mostly my own take on Cyborg Superman.

Here's hoping I can post Chapter 19 soon. Lots of moving parts from this point on, readers. Stay tuned ;-)


Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

The aftermath of Kara’s red kryptonite scare as well as surprise revelations that help our heroes’ step up their fight against CADMUS and Lillian Luthor.

Chapter Notes

A few warnings: This chapter is going to be an emotional one for Kara. Her powerless state is bringing a lot of vulnerability to the surface she needs help handling.

There’s also some SuperCat sessy time near the beginning of this chapter. The focus, however, is more emotional than physical this time--although Cat knows how to make both enjoyable for our recuperating hero.

Finally, there's some possibly upsetting talk between Cat and Kara during the Alura scene concerning Kryptonian fertility issues.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The soft sounds of the med bay circulated around Kara, barely registering to hearing still unnervingly normal. She knew her cells once more showed total solar saturation thanks to several hours in her regular sun bed, but still her powers remained dormant. Alex and Eliza had quickly ameliorated any concerns she might have felt over this, reminding her how her body required an extra boost of adrenaline each time she previously experienced solar flare, to jumpstart her powers once more.

The hero had blushed furiously at that point as Alex had teasingly suggested Cat might be willing to assist in that regard. The smaller blonde merely offered Kara one of her sanguine smiles even as Eliza tugged a protesting Alex from the hero’s room. Once alone, Cat had climbed into bed with Kara, no longer needing to worry about any damage the sunbed could cause her.

Instead of following Alex’s friskier recommendation, the smaller blonde stretched out beside her hero, happily wrapping an arm around Kara as she tucked tiredly into Cat’s hold. Even with her denser bone structure and solid muscles, the hero somehow felt lighter without powers—no longer a threat to Cat’s breathing should she relax fully into the smaller blonde’s embrace.

Cat, of course, was more than happy to accommodate, wrapping Kara in the strongest, safest hug she could manage. She knew Kara well enough to know the hero needed the extra comfort. Soon enough, they would both need to talk about the things Kara had said while under the influence of Red K. In that moment, however, what both of them needed was the safety of each other’s arms.

As Kara allowed herself to slowly surface from sleep several hours later, she sighed at Cat’s now-vacated spot and stretched muscles stiff in some places—downright sore in others. With a grumble of barely articulated Kryptonese, she curled onto her side and buried her face into the pillow beside her.
Even though the fabric was cool to the touch, clearly abandoned a while ago, Kara could still detect traces of Cat’s unique perfume blend of sandalwood and lavender. Her fingers curled into the pillow as she breathed in the familiar, calming scent.

“She seemed in a big hurry to leave you by yourself.”

The sound of the statement, so close to where she lay without her noticing another presence in the room, startled the hero instantly into an upright position. Clutching the bed’s thin sheet and blanket protectively against her chest, she glared at the person occupying the chair beside her.

“What are you doing in here?”

Mon-El frowned at the edge to Kara’s question. “I thought someone should be here with you when you woke up.” He shrugged even as his words hit with just enough sharpness to sting. “Besides, you sat with me when I was sick. It seemed right for me to do the same for you.”

The mention of Mon-El’s struggle against the Medusa virus twisted through Kara in a way that left her filled with guilt and discomfort. “That’s—thank you.”

Even the slightest kindness was all the encouragement the Daxamite needed. Rising from the spare chair he’d taken over, he immediately sat on the edge of Kara’s bed. The hero tugged, with little effect, against the feel of the blankets slipping away under his weight. Unnervingly aware of how thin her med bay coverall was in that moment, she grabbed the pillow Cat had used and held it against her chest, pressing back against her own pillow to add distance.

“Of course.” He gestured toward the entrance to her room. “I was beginning to wonder if they’d ever let me in. I think either your sister or your little protector told the agent outside your door to keep me away.” His laugh clanged hollow in his throat.

Frowning at how he referred to the smaller blonde, she replied, “If either Alex or Cat said anything about keeping people out of my room, it was out of protectiveness. I wasn’t at my best last night.”

“You lost your powers again.” A dark satisfaction filled his eyes at the sight of Kara’s nervous surprise. “Winn told me. They let him in to see you.”

“Winn is a DEO agent.”

“Cat Grant just gets special privileges, I guess.” Without waiting for Kara’s response to that, he pressed, “So do you have them back?”

Kara pushed backward once more, fighting the sudden urge to pull her knees up close to her chest. “N-no,” she softly stammered.

“So I’m stronger than you.” A shift of weight brought him closer to Kara’s side.

“For now.” Her gaze shot quickly past his shoulder toward the entrance.

“The agent who was out there is gone.” Kara startled at the words, her eyes widening just enough to betray her discomfort. “Must be scary for you to be powerless.”

Steadying her grip against the nervous tremble she felt, she replied, “It was scarier the first time. Now it’s just unsettling.”

“What caused it this time?”
“I did.” Fingers dug into the pillow in her hold as she debated how much to reveal to him. “I needed to take away the possibility of hurting anyone with my powers. I wasn’t in control of myself.”

“Because of that human who hurt both of us.”

The hero bristled at the disdain coiled tightly around his words. “Not all humans are like her.”

With a laugh full of disbelief, he replied, “If you say so. Seems to me, though, all any of them want to do is either hurt you or use you.”

Drawing herself up, the hero quickly refuted his words. “No one is using me. I choose to use my powers to help others.”

Hearing the dig in Kara’s statement, Mon-El leaned back slightly and scoffed. “And look what it gets you.” He scanned the length of her body in a way that made Kara struggle not to squirm. “Totally helpless and targeted by the humans you waste your powers to protect.”

“And what should I do instead with my powers? Beat up those weaker than me for money?” She recalled the bit of information she’d overheard Alex discussing with Winn. “Or maybe I should just go hang out at the bar and wait for someone to ply me with drinks and take me home with them.”

She watched as yet again the Daxamite’s pretense of affability slipped into his far colder and, she was beginning to believe, far truer self. “And what business is it of yours who I go home with or for what purpose?”

“It’s nothing to me,” she countered, noting the glare of displeasure her easy dismissal conjured. “However, have you thought even once about if it’s nothing to the women taking you home with them?”

The hero flinched at his sharp stab of laughter. “Not all species are as uptight as Kryptonians, Kara. I know how to enjoy myself, and so do those who take me home with them—nothing more, nothing less.”

“Including Eve?”

With a shrug, he queried, “Why? Are you jealous?”

Holding back from instantly rejecting his accusation, Kara instead took a moment to consider his question and the eager gleam it drew to his gaze. “Are you only using Eve to try to make me jealous?”

“What do I care if you’re jealous?” He glared at her in a manner Kara knew didn’t match his blasé tone. “You really are so full of yourself, Kara. It’s no wonder you’re behaving like such a fool over that human woman.”

“What does that mean?”

“I’ve read all the articles Cat Grant has written about you. The only reason you simper after her is because she strokes your enormous ego. Your need for attention is pathetic, Kara.”

Refusing to let her speak, he pressed on, “You’re nothing more to her than a sales spike and a pretty, if not mediocre, distraction. Once you lose your momentary appeal, though, I guarantee she’ll have no further use for you.
“Maybe I should start playing the hero, since that seems to be what she craves.” Something feral and cruel sparked in his gaze. “I bet she’s got many cravings going unmet right now.”

Even as tears instantly blurred her vision, Kara gritted her teeth against the cry threatening to slip from her throat. “Get out.”

A self-satisfied smile slipped along his features as he shifted closer. Kara reached out, pressed a hand against his shoulder, but her still-diminished strength did little to slow his movement. “And what will you do if I don’t leave?”

Instead of fear, Kara felt anger filling her, rippling through her muscles and pouring into the gaps between her bones. As she met Mon-El’s glare with equal intensity, she felt a distant but familiar stinging pressure in the backs of her eyes. A muted spark sizzled around the rings of her irises, gathered in the depths of her pupils. Startled, the Daxamite finally shifted backward enough for Kara to shove him the rest of the way to his feet with a momentary burst of strength.

As he stumbled to stand upright, the hero addressed him, her voice an angry rasp. “I have taken enough from you, Mon-El. I have taken your petty insinuations and your anger and your vindictiveness. I’ve taken all of it because I thought if I just treated you the way I wanted you to treat me, then maybe you would choose the better way. But you know what? I don’t care what way you choose. It’s not my job to take your abuse—and it’s not my job to make you a better person.”

“But Kara Zor-El always has to be the hero.”

With her jaw set firmly against her building fury, she dismissed, “Not for you. Not anymore. Figure out how to be your own hero—and get the hell out of my room.”

The sound of approaching footsteps outside the exam room halted Mon-El from whatever response he was preparing. With one final, defiant glare, he pivoted and rushed out of the room.

Kara listened as the Daxamite brushed into whoever was in the hallway, heard the tone of a quiet exchange that sounded equally annoyed and bemused. When the door opened once more, the hero breathed a happy sigh at the sight of Cat sweeping through an entrance that remained open long enough for Kara to see Vasquez taking up position just outside.

The hero’s sorrow for Hawthorne’s loss tempered her joy over seeing Vasquez once more in their midst. With a shaky breath, she pressed her palms against her eyes, pretending to rub the sleep from them as she instead swiped away several errant tears.

With a patented fulsome sigh, the smaller blonde made her way to Kara’s bedside, preoccupied by all she carried, and asked, “And what did the Boy Blunder want this time?”

The mild annoyance she felt over the Daxamite’s unwanted intrusion shifted to a more imperative worry at the clear signs of Kara’s distress. Setting down the drink carrier and bag from Noonan’s in her hands, she slipped the backpack from her shoulder and slid into her spot on the bed. “Kara?”

Hearing the tangle of concern and curiosity in Cat’s tone, the hero shook her head while snuggling contentedly into the smaller blonde’s open arms. As she rested her head so she could hear the steady beat of Cat’s heart, she sighed, “I’m okay. Mon-El just—he’s exceptionally good at saying all the worst things.”

Humming in response to the vague reply, Cat offered, “Let me guess: He decided that you being powerless and me being gone would be the perfect time to try once more to get in either your pants or your head.”
Unable to control the gobsmacked gawp Cat’s uncannily concise words evoked, Kara stammered out, “How did—you know?”

“What? That he thinks he’s your better match? Or that he’s been saying things to you to undermine your faith in us?” She flicked her fingers disdainfully toward the room entrance. “He’s not exactly complicated, Kara. I’ve seen microwaveable meal instructions more difficult to decipher than him.”

Taking the feel of the hero relaxing with a soft laugh into her embrace as a suitable enough opening for the conversation they needed to have, Cat continued, “Besides, after learning from Winslow the kinds of Google searches he’s been running on me, it wasn’t hard to deduce where some of the worries you voiced last night originated.”

Mention of the previous evening instantly dimmed the too-brief joy in Kara’s eyes. Shifting her hips, she sat up and out of Cat’s embrace, clenching her jaw so tightly against the rush of conjured emotions, she felt jolts of pain.

Cat gripped the hero’s chin before she could turn away. Pressing gently, she drew Kara’s gaze back to hers. She frowned at the sight of tears gathering in the corners of a slightly medicated gaze. With a reassuring smile, she leaned in until their lips nearly touched. “Kiss me?”

Kara pushed up eagerly at the request. She sighed at the way their lips melded together, quickly losing herself to the familiar tightness low in her abdomen Cat’s kisses could always conjure. Their tongues tousled slightly for dominance before Cat relinquished, moaning at the feel of Kara probing into her mouth with inquisitive licks.

A surprising tremble through her arms finally caused Kara to drop back into the bed, laughter bubbling within her at the feel of Cat chasing her lips all the way down. Bodies pressed snugly together, Cat slowly pulled back, lips hitching into the secret smile Kara realized she’d grown to crave.

Nimble fingers brushed through her hair, the sensation still unsettlingly muted, and Cat scanned her eyes for several beats. “We’re still very much okay, Kara,” she softly reassured. “What you said to me last night simply let me know there are some things we need to discuss regarding us. Any strong relationship requires constant, honest communication. This is just part of that, okay?”

She waited until her words broke through the fear and upset she hated seeing in the hero’s gaze. When she finally received a slightly uncertain nod, she sat back up, tugging Kara back into a sitting position with a soft smile.

She collected the Noonan’s bag from the bedside table and dug out two containers, which she promptly opened, revealing oatmeal in one and freshly cut fruit in the other. “First, though, I brought you breakfast. I had them add pumpkin and cinnamon to the oatmeal for some extra vitamins and flavor.”

As Kara took the container, which Cat wrapped in a napkin as an extra buffer against the heat, she shyly noted, “You remembered I love pumpkin.”

Cat smiled at the soft tone and leaned in to kiss the corner of Kara’s lips. “Of course I remember, darling. It reminds you of sokorath.”

She couldn’t help the happy smile at the sight of Kara’s surprise. “I also have some fruit for you. I know you’re typically all about the calories, but today, I need you to be about the vitamins and minerals. Your immune system needs all the help it can get while we wait for your solar charge to
kick back in to invulnerable mode.”

Twisting a cup from the drink carrier, she passed it to the hero. “And hot cocoa as a peace offering since I know you’d much rather have one of your multitudinous sticky buns right now. It’s dark chocolate, so at least we can claim you’re getting some antioxidants.”

Taking the proffered cup, Kara stared down for several beats. When she finally met Cat’s gaze, the smaller blonde startled at the tears that had finally slipped over the hero’s eyelids. “Thank you, Cat.”

Cat ran a hand through Kara’s sleep-tousled locks. “It was my turn to take care of you, Supergirl,” she smiled before kissing away a tear from the hero’s cheek. “Now, eat up. There’s nothing worse than cold oatmeal.”

Kara laughed as she set her cocoa and fruit aside and tucked into the container of oatmeal, sighing happily at the familiar taste she loved so much. After making her way through most of the serving while watching Cat enjoy her own fruit bowl and coffee, she pointed toward the backpack she recognized as one she’d borrowed from Alex. “What else did you bring?”

“A change of clothes and some toiletries for you.” Setting aside her fruit bowl, she tugged disdainfully at the sleeve of Kara’s coverall. “Seeing you in this actually makes me miss the cardigans.”

At the playful eye roll her teasing earned, she casually added, “I hope you don’t mind, but I packed up some of those cardigan outfits you insist on wearing, along with some other clothing and items you might need at the penthouse.”

Kara froze, her gaze instantly shifting to meet Cat’s, her lips parting with a surprised gasp. The smaller blonde easily understood the hero’s uncertainty and wanted nothing more than to quell it. “I also cleared out a few dresser drawers for you and some space in the walk-in while I was at the penthouse showering and changing.”

When words refused to come, Kara curled her hand around Cat’s wrist, fingers coming to rest against the smaller blonde’s pulse. Cat noted how the move seemed to calm and steady her. She wrapped her hand over Kara’s and waited until the hero finally met her gaze.

Before she could speak, however, Kara began to shake her head as she nervously sputtered, “It—it’s none of my business—who you’ve been with, I mean. You had a life before me, I—I know that. I had no right to say any of what I said to you last night—or ever. You never owe me anything regarding—re-regarding that.”

Cat drew the hero’s ramblings to a halt by cupping her hand against Kara’s cheek. “You have the right to ask me anything you want to know about me, Kara. I want no secrets between us.”

Sensing the continued hesitation, she stroked her thumb along Kara’s skin. “Does it upset you that you’ve only been with me?”

Kara leaned into Cat’s caress as she drew a deep breath, Mon-El’s taunt still fresh in her mind. “Only when I think about—about how little I can offer you.”

The smaller blonde closed her eyes, brow furrowed by the anger and distress that fired through her veins at Kara’s confession. Later, she would most definitely be having a conversation with Alex about how to deal properly with the Daxamite and the slew of fears and insecurities he’d been planting in Kara’s mind.
When she refocused on Kara, however, she allowed the fury to subside instantly. Her expression softened as she once more drew close enough to kiss Kara until she felt the smile that lifted the hero’s lips against her own. Ending the kiss, she rested her cheek against Kara’s, whispering into her ear, “You offer me more than I ever dared to hope for, my darling.”

The hero’s hitch of breath shook both of them as Cat leaned into Kara’s frame, her hands finding their way once more into golden locks. She continued to speak softly into Kara’s ear, feeling her words in every shudder and every tear she felt slide from Kara’s cheek onto hers.

“You love me with a purity I have never known from another partner. I have never felt more treasured or safe than I do when I’m in your arms. You love Carter, and I know you would do anything to protect him. You are kind to your core, Kara, and braver than anyone on this entire planet. You are selfless and, even with all the sorrow the universe has forced you to bear, yours is the brightest, most wondrous smile I have ever seen.”

When the smaller blonde pulled back, Kara’s lip quivered at the depth of conviction that sparked bright in Cat’s gold-tinged gaze. “You offer me all of you without hesitation or expectation and, Kara, that is everything.”

The responding sob rattled from Kara’s lungs, chattering her teeth with its intensity as it broke the air between them. Cat swore she could feel the impact of the sound deep within her, consuming almost all her own resolve as she tugged the hero into an embrace she reminded herself needed to be less forceful than normal.

At the feel of Kara pressing her head once more against her chest, Cat tightened her hold until she actually heard the hero huff slightly. “My darling,” she soothed against Kara’s flushed cheek as the hero struggled to control her tears. “It’s never been about the sex, Kara.”

She paused, a coquettish grin curling her lips. “Although the sex so far has been exemplary,” she teased. “So kudos to Kryptonian diligence.” She rejoiced in Kara’s respondent laughter even through a series of sniffles.

As Kara snuggled closer against her, she waited patiently at the feel of the hero drawing a shaky breath as though preparing to speak. “I-I just don’t want to make you regret being with me.”

Cat heard her swallow click against the lump Kara’s hushed words formed instantly in her throat. Bending close so her mouth was a breath away from the hero’s ear, she promised, “There is nothing I could ever regret about loving you, Kara.”

Silence punctuated by Kara’s soft snuffling surrounded them as Cat ran her fingers through Kara’s hair. Finally, after several moments, she nudged the hero back to sit beside her. She noted how, as soon as Kara’s head left its position against her chest, the hero reached out, wrapping her fingers once more around Cat’s pulse point on her wrist.

Clearing her throat, the smaller blonde stated, “I know if I were to ask you if it bothered you how many people I’ve been with, you would say no with roof-shaking adamancy.” She smirked at the shy way Kara pulled her lower lip between her teeth. “So I’ll skip to the chase: Leslie and Siobhan.”

Once more, Kara protested. “Cat, it’s not important.”

The smaller blonde shook her head at the hero’s futile insistence. “If it’s upsetting you enough to be a part of something red kryptonite would bring out in you, then it is most definitely important, Kara.” She sighed as she pulled one leg up underneath herself. “I made many mistakes with both of
them, but bedding either of them wasn’t on that list.”

At the sight of relief and then guilt flooding Kara’s gaze, Cat paused for a long, gentle kiss she hoped would soothe the hero’s pique. “Leslie was someone I took far too much joy in encouraging.” She shrugged one shoulder. “I suppose she appealed to my vanity. I saw bits of myself in her brash behavior. I should have been a better mentor to her. Instead, I kept letting her move my limits farther and farther down the line.”

She sighed, her lips quirking downward in disappointment. “Siobhan was a punishment—to both of us, really.”

At the smaller blonde’s uncomfortable pause, Kara shifted to face her more fully. “Why?”

“Because I really do make the worst decisions when I’m scared—and the way Adam left, I was terrified.” Her voice tightened as she forced herself to maintain eye contact. “He called me out about my feelings for you after your final discussion with him.”

She released a frustrated huff. “It took him only a few days and a handful of times observing us interacting to see right through me. You, too,” she added, noting the way Kara’s fingers flexed nervously against her wrist. “He said he didn’t understand the game we were playing with each other, but he didn’t appreciate being brought into the middle of it without any warning.”

“D-did he leave angry?”

“Somewhat,” the smaller blonde conceded after a moment of hesitation. “ Mostly confused. Things were a little tense in our conversations for a while, but we’re back to a better place now.”

She worried her bottom lip between her teeth, something Kara had rarely seen the smaller blonde do. “It scared the hell out of me though—that I was so goddamned transparent and easy to read when it came to you. All I could think was, if Adam could figure out my feelings for you that quickly, who else had done the same?”

Embarrassment flinched across her expression as she pursed her lips. “I ended up having an anxiety flare-up my Lexapro couldn’t control.” She attempted a shrug that ended up being a noticeable slump of her shoulders. “Siobhan was the end result of that.”

The hero dropped her gaze briefly. Even though Cat avoided making the point, Kara knew J’onn’s well-meaning but ultimately disastrous impersonation of her must have exacerbated Cat’s already precarious emotional state. “I’m so sorry, Cat. I never wanted to make things worse for you or Adam. I-I wish I’d never agreed to go when he asked me on that date. I just saw how happy it made you to see him so happy.”

She released a shaky sigh, guilt over her next words twisting her gut into queasy knots. “And-and a part of me thought that if I could make you happy by being with Adam, then maybe that would be good enough.”

Cat nodded slowly as she processed Kara’s confession. “No matter your intentions, Adam deserved better than being considered ‘good enough,’ Kara.”

The hero hung her head at the statement, feeling the weight of Cat’s disappointment in each word. “I know,” she softly husked. “I never meant to hurt him, Cat. Please believe me.”

Strong fingers clutched at her chin, coaxing her to look up. “I do believe you, Kara. We both admittedly made very poor decisions with Adam. Mine just happened to turn into yet another vengeful ex-employee with questionable hair and fashion sense.”
Kara snorted at the statement, but paused at Cat’s suddenly penitent demeanor. “Both Livewire and Silver Banshee could have killed you, and neither would have existed were it not for poor decisions I made during moments when my anxiety was out of control.”

She felt Kara’s hand wrap more tightly around her wrist—knew it must have been because of the rapid increase in her heart rate, which she could feel deep in the concave of her abdomen. “That’s my fear,” she quietly confessed. “That you’ll regret getting involved with someone who sometimes can’t control the things she says or does.”

The hero rose like a flower to the sun’s rays, her smile bright as daybreak as she lifted her hands to gently cup Cat’s face. “There is nothing I could ever regret about loving you, Cat.”

Cat’s features relaxed with a warmth she rarely allowed herself to express with anyone beyond Carter. With a happy sigh, Kara curled more closely against the smaller blonde, wrapping her arms snugly around her waist.

After several beats of silence, the hero stretched, humming contentedly at the sensation of Cat scratching along her neck and scalp. Curious, Cat queried, “What does my touch feel like without your powers?”

A full pout tugged at the hero’s lips as she considered the question. “Diffused,” she finally stated, much to Cat’s surprise. “Even without the interference of my biomatrix, my skin is still much thicker than a human’s.”

The smaller blonde shifted her actions to trail her fingertips down along Kara’s shoulder and arm. “And what about more intimate touching?”

As she asked, she drew her fingers the rest of the way down Kara’s arm before softly brushing her knuckles upward against one of the hero’s breasts. The gasp and visible response were instantaneous.

“Seems like you’re still fairly sensitive,” Cat teased as she rotated to press Kara back against the bed. With the hero pinned by the length of her body, Cat tangled her hand in golden locks and tugged enough to angle Kara’s head back.

As she sucked and nipped along the line of Kara’s now arched neck, she noted the red pressure marks her attentions were leaving. “Want to see how much it will take to reignite those powers?”

She laughed at Kara’s mewling response, the vibration low and tingling against the hero’s skin. “I-I don’t think it would take m-much.”

Cat clicked her tongue before running it along the shell of Kara’s ear. “I see we still have work to do on that stamina of yours.” She slid a hand down along Kara’s rib cage, her fingers leaving a wake of goose bumps that drew a surprised giggle from a suddenly squirming hero.

When Cat drew back at the sound, she was met by wide blue eyes and brightly suffused cheeks. Understanding slowly arched one brow upward, pursed her lips into a rakish twist. “You’re ticklish.”

Kara breathed a nervous laugh, her body tensing noticeably against Cat. “I-I should—I mean it’s not-not-no—yes,” she finally whispered. “I was always very ticklish back on Krypton.” A wistful shimmer settled in her downcast gaze. “My Aunt Astra and I used to get into the best tickle fights when I was little. We’d chase each other all through the house. I remember always laughing the whole time—well, almost the whole time.”
The feel of Cat’s fingers tracing the scar on her forehead drew Kara to look up. When the hero nodded in confirmation, Cat leaned forward and kissed the scar.

A knock at the door to her room caused Kara to jump, eyes once more wide at the unexpected sound. Cat gave her a comforting squeeze, understanding how disconcerting it must be for the hero to be taken by surprise. “Come in.”

Eliza smiled as she entered, pleased to see her daughter awake and alert. “Good morning, sleepy head,” she chuckled, happy to see the responding grin. “How are you feeling?”

“Still powerless,” she sighed, though Eliza caught the telling blush that suffused the hero’s cheeks and the brazen smirk Cat barely hid. “But I can definitely feel the energy in my cells again.”

“That’s good, Kara.” Eliza moved bedside and began to examine the hero. Taking a pen light from her pocket, she checked Kara’s pupil response. “Any pain at all?”

“My muscles are all a little sore. And I have a slight headache.”

Eliza nodded as she listened to Kara’s heart and then checked her lungs. “I’m still hearing slight rhonchi in your breathing, but our last bloodwork this morning showed you still had trace amounts of the altered red kryptonite in your system. That’s probably causing the continued obstruction. Your breathing sounds much better, though.”

Noting the way Kara began to withdraw at the mention of Red K, Cat reached for the hero’s hand, placing it knowingly on her wrist. Kara curled her fingers around the smaller blonde’s pulse point, once more soothed by the steady beat. “Even under the influence of red kryptonite, Kara, you still protected us all from what was happening to you. You were still our hero.”

“Cat’s right, sweetie.” Eliza gently rubbed Kara’s shoulder as she checked her temperature. “What Dr. Luthor did to the formula would have made you completely impervious to any of the antidotes your sister and I had formulated in our tests, and we have no idea how long it would have lasted—or if we would have ever been able to stop it. This could have been so much worse.”

“But it wasn’t,” Cat emphasized, “because of your quick thinking and your willingness to sacrifice your own well-being for others. Lillian underestimated you, and you proved what a mistake that is.”

Cat shifted, the gold flecks in her eyes burning fiercely. “She won’t make that mistake twice. She’s too pragmatic to succumb to the arrogance that ultimately brought down her husband and son. So we’ve got to hit fast and hard if we want to keep our momentum to take down CADMUS.”

Kara tensed at Cat’s declaration, her fingers gripping the smaller blonde’s wrist in a way Cat knew would have broken bones if the hero had her regular strength.

“No.”

The word choked from a throat tight with emotions already spilling from fear-widened eyes. “You could have died yesterday! And five people are dead!” As the flow of tears increased, she sobbed, “Reeve is dead.” She motioned helplessly. “I c-couldn’t get there any faster. I couldn’t save him. I almost couldn’t save you.”

The weight of her words bowed the hero’s body into itself, trembling and heaving as she shattered from sorrow breaking bone-deep. Cat understood—knew the grief that would forever rend the hero’s heart and spark within eyes haunted by incomparable, inconsolable loss.
“Oh, my love.”

She opened her arms wide, Kara falling immediately into her embrace. The sounds of her sobs tore at Cat, each stuttering gasp scattered through with shards of stardust, dangerous and fractured—even more embedded into unbreakable bones, coursing through impenetrable veins.

A world of loss overflowing a heart too kind, too broken, too determined.

Noticing the movement behind the hero, Cat reached out, caught Eliza’s hand as she withdrew it from Kara’s shoulder. With a shake of her head, the smaller blonde tugged her closer and returned her hand to its previous position. Eliza offered a small smile of understanding as she perched on the bed beside her daughter, rubbing soothing patterns against her back.

“Hear my heartbeat, Kara,” Cat whispered as she felt the hero rest her head against her chest. “You did save me. And I know you would have saved everyone in that alleyway if you could have. But it wasn’t your fault you couldn’t. There is one person to blame for those deaths, and we must stop her.”

Cat bit back a pained gasp at the feel of Kara’s arms wrapping tightly around her, hands pressing into the tissue-deep bruises the hero had left along her back the previous day. “I know, my darling. I know you’re scared—but this is when we have to rise above our fear and know that, whatever happens, we must win. We cannot allow Lillian Luthor to continue. If we let that happen, then all the deaths she has caused—and will continue to cause—will have no meaning or honor. We cannot let that happen.”

She cupped her hand beneath a quivering chin, drew Kara’s glassy gaze up to meet hers. Even as she listened to Kara’s hiccupped attempts to calm herself, she firmly stated, “Reeve died saving me, and Thomas Rieger died because of his association to me. Would you have me dishonor either of their deaths by telling me not to keep fighting?”

Unable to answer the smaller blonde’s question, Kara barely stammered out, “I ca-can’t lose you, Cat. Please.”

“Kara, sweetie.” She felt Eliza’s hand curve tightly against her shoulder, uncertain if it was in response to her words or the fact that she had begun to tremble. “Do you remember what I said when you told me how afraid you were of losing Cat because of what she was doing?”

Kara sniffled as she shifted to meet Eliza’s gaze. With a hesitant nod, she replied, “You told me we needed to protect each other, the way Alex and I do.”

Eliza’s smile crinkled the edges of her eyes. “And what else?”

Kara’s confused frown shifted into a shy quirk of her lips. “To never ever underestimate Cat’s intellect or instincts.”

When the scientist caught the surprised hitch of Cat’s eyebrows, she offered the smaller blonde a quick wink while teasing, “Still a wise choice, my daughter.”

Resting a hand against Kara’s flushed, damp cheek, she finished, “You also need to remember there isn’t a soul here at the DEO who wouldn’t do whatever it took to protect both of you, Kara.”

Cat chuffed softly at Eliza’s statement. “Including an agent on the other side of this room’s door who I damn well know your sister told to Taser me if I tried to leave this building on my own.”

The sound of Kara’s surprised laughter uncoiled some of the tension along the base of her spine.
“Honestly, I’m amazed Alex let me leave here at all this morning without first cuffing me to Agent Vasquez.”

Kara pushed herself once more into a sitting position, wiping away the remaining tears on her cheeks. “Really?”

“Yes. She was quite adamant in her orders to me as well. You know how I feel about orders.”

“They’re impertinent—unless you’re the one giving them.”

“Precisely.” She draped her arms around Kara’s shoulders, relieved to hear her laughter strengthening each time it came. As she tugged the hero closer to snuggle into her embrace, the smaller blonde said, “I’m scared, too, Kara. But we both know we can’t stop—not now, not this close.”

Clearing her throat, she carefully chose her next words. “J’onn has brought us even closer.” She felt the hero’s gaze intensify. “He’s got quite a bit to share with us from what happened in D.C. after you trailed sonic booms across the country yesterday. He’s scheduled a debriefing at ten.”

Kara grimaced as she looked down at herself and then back to Cat. “Could I at least take a shower before then? I feel kind of gross.”

The smaller blonde snorted in response as she glanced at the watch on her wrist. “I believe there is still plenty of time for you to get in a shower—even without your Super speed.”

Most of Cat’s words slipped into background noise as Kara noticed in more detail the watch she wore. Fingers gently tracing along the gold band, she furrowed her brow at the jewelry she knew didn’t quite match anything the smaller blonde would have chosen—although it was a valiant attempt. However, the watch crystal was slightly too large, the case too thick—on a whim, Kara pressed in on the watch stem, feeling the case pop apart with the action.

Cat let the hero study the hidden compartment for several beats before declaring, “It’s not completely my style, but Winslow does have quite the flare for combining fashion and function. He said he even added a secondary GPS tracker synced to boost the signal on the one in my arm or replace it should it be damaged, so apparently, the DEO has now double-tagged both me and my son.”

Kara’s head snapped up at the final part of Cat’s statement. “Carter got his watch, too?”

“J’onn took it to him this morning,” Cat confirmed. “He went out into the city disguised as Supergirl earlier. We wanted to make sure people saw the Girl of Steel back in action as soon as possible. CCN also may have gotten a heads-up to be looking for Supergirl so they could add video of your sightings to our morning coverage.”

She chuckled as a thought hit her. “J’onn really does rock the Super skirt quite well.”

The hero sniffed in response. “I’ve actually been thinking about asking Winn to make me some pants. You’d be surprised how many people I’ve caught trying to look up that skirt.”

“Not surprising at all,” Cat countered, pressing her lips together to stifle laughing at Kara’s instant blush. Moving on, she stated, “When he finished doing a tour of the city, he diverted up north to deliver Carter’s watch to him.”

Seeing the concern begin to gather in Kara’s gaze, Cat calmed, “He didn’t arrive as Supergirl, though. All Carter got was a delivery from his mother via very boring, very human-looking courier.
Everything went fine, Kara—but I think I should give you fair warning. You now have a very excited young man patiently waiting for your powers to return so he can officially test his new watch.”

“So chop, chop,” Eliza finished, causing Kara’s eyes to widen even as Cat laughed. The scientist brushed a lock of hair behind her ear, the move strikingly similar to Kara’s own habit. “While you shower, I’m going to track down some of those disgusting sports drinks your sister is so fond of. Our last bloodwork also showed your electrolytes were still low. Drinking some of her stash will be less invasive than you wheeling an IV pole around.”

Even as she nodded, grateful of being spared any further needle pokes, Kara turned a suddenly nervous gaze toward her foster mother. “Is—is Alex not here?”

Exchanging a knowing glance with Cat, Eliza pressed her hand against Kara’s cheek. “She went down to the precinct with a few agents to help Maggie and her team work the alleyway, but she said she and Maggie would be back here for the debriefing. She did ask me to give you this when you woke up though,” and she kissed the hero’s temple. “And she wanted me to tell you again how proud she is of you for all you did yesterday.”

The hero shook her head, her expression split between confusion and guilt. Before she could work herself up with either, Eliza stated, “You did extraordinary things, sweetie, and we’re all so proud of you.”

The smaller blonde patted her abdomen playfully. “So let’s get you cleaned up so we can be on time.” She twirled a long lock of Kara’s hair between her fingers. “It’s going to take some time to dry all this in a more conventional way,” she teased.

Blowing air between her lips at the smaller blonde’s comment, Kara swung her legs over the edge of the bed. She smiled gratefully at the feel of both Cat and Eliza steadying her on her feet. Cat shouldered the backpack she’d brought with her, shooting Kara one of her more withering glances when she tried to take the bag.

The hero rolled her eyes as she met gazes with Eliza before hugging her foster mother tightly and letting Cat lead her out the room. As they passed into the hall, she couldn’t help the giggle inspired by Vasquez receiving a similar glare from Cat when she attempted to help as well. “I told you earlier, I’m perfectly capable of carrying a backpack.”

Vasquez gave a nod. “Of course, ma’am.”

The smaller blonde cocked her head just enough to side-eye the agent as she led the hero onward. “Thin ice, Agent Venskus.”

Kara turned back toward Vasquez as she fell in-step behind the two blondes. Leaning closer but speaking in a theatrical whisper, she confided, “She must really like you if she’s already calling you the wrong name.”

The hero gasped in surprise at the feel of fingers tickling her side as Cat led her onward, Vasquez shaking her head as she continued behind them.

When Cat diverted from the direction of the main locker area and showers, she rolled her eyes at the confused scowl she caught on Kara’s face. “You’re not using a communal shower, especially right now. You went out in public the first time you lost your powers, and you were already Patient Zero by the time I arrived at the office.”
Kara conceded to Cat’s point with a sigh. “So where are we going?”

“Alex told me about a smaller facility assigned to the lab. It’s for decontamination mainly, but she said it also contains a private shower area.”

“Decontamination?”

As they approached the facility entrance, Cat squeezed the hero’s hand in reassurance. “Trust your sister, Supergirl.” She pushed the door open to allow Kara to enter first, turning toward Vasquez before following. “Please make sure we aren’t disturbed.”

Kara knew the warmth she felt in her cheeks at hearing Cat’s comment and seeing Vasquez’s barely controlled smirk had probably turned her red all the way to the tips of her ears. She also knew it wasn’t completely from shyness. Understanding the mixture of expressions in her hero’s eyes, Cat tugged her along while playfully whispering, “I see you’re not waiting until the shower to get wet.”

Ignoring the choked inhalation, Cat guided them toward the back where the showers were tucked away from the main area. Setting the backpack on a recessed counter, she retrieved Kara’s shampoo and body wash, both of which always filled Cat with thoughts of ocean breezes and warm summer days.

“Do you think you can manage the shower without my help?”

Kara shuffled uncertainly at the question, disappointment pointedly visible in the downturn of her mouth. Cat moved closer, kissed those adorably pouting lips. “We’ve got a time limit, darling.” After another, longer kiss, she finished, “But if you’re fast enough in the shower, I’d be willing to spend a little extra time afterward helping you get ready.”

With a high squeak and a loud swallow, Kara grabbed the bottles from Cat and hurried off. She immediately heard the shower running, followed by the sound of an impatient hero dealing with the unexpected effect of not waiting long enough for the water to heat up.

The smaller blonde cleaned up the array of discarded clothing Kara had left in her wake, smirking at the several times she heard bottles drop to the shower floor. By the time the water cut off, Cat had counted five drops. Circling back through to collect towels, she drew to a halt outside the stall. “Must be some extra slippery water they use here at the DEO.”

She heard the hero sigh within the stall. “No, that would be the extra clumsy Kryptonian you were hearing.” She tugged back the curtain enough to see Cat, who smiled at the sight of Kara looking as water-drenched as when she’d climbed aboard the wing of a plane, newly baptized by her first act as the Hero of National City.

At the curious hitch of Cat’s brow, Kara flushed a delightful shade of rose and shrugged. “Usually, I have to remind myself all the time not to hold things too tightly.”

Hearing the embarrassment twisting through the hero’s words, Cat mimicked her shrug while unfolding a towel and slinging it over her shoulder. “They’re designed to survive being dropped, Kara. It’s no big deal.”

As she unfolded the second towel, she approached where Kara still peaked out from behind the curtain. She caught the tremor of the fingers holding the curtain in place. “Why don’t we get you dried off and in some warm clothes?”

The responding nervous swallow surprised the smaller blonde. Noting the way Kara suddenly
averted her gaze, Cat reached up and softly swiped away droplets of water dripping down into her eyes. “You’re safe with me, Kara.”

The words snapped Kara’s gaze instantly upward, rebuke bright in suddenly wide eyes. Behind it, however, Cat could still see the vulnerability she knew must be terrifying to the normally invincible hero.

“It’s my turn to take care of you,” she reiterated as she spread the towel open. She maintained eye contact as Kara finally slid the curtain aside and stepped out into the towel Cat carefully held. The smaller blonde wrapped the towel around her, drawing her into a loose hug.

“I can’t imagine what it must feel like not to have your powers right now. But you are safe to feel however you want with me. So be clumsy, be scared, be angry, be whatever—it’s okay.”

“Thank you, Cat.” Gratitude coarsened her voice as she leaned in, nuzzled against the smaller blonde’s neck.

“Always, Kara. Now, finish drying off and here’s a towel for your hair.”

She smiled when Kara took the towel while pressing the other one in-place against her chest.

Back out where she’d left the bag, Cat unpacked the sweatpants and NCU sweatshirt she brought, smiling at the frayed cuffs of what was obviously a well-loved college souvenir. She heard Kara slowly shuffle up behind her. “That’s my favorite hoodie.”

Cat tugged at one of the loose threads dangling from a sleeve. “Is it now?”

She chuckled at the grumble of mock annoyance she heard. “It was Alex’s—she wore it on her first visit home after she started college. I-I took it before she left. It smelled like her.”

The smaller blonde pivoted to face Kara, noting peripherally how she wore one towel wrapped around her waist and the other over her shoulders as a modest wrap. More capturing, however, were the memories splintering sadness through the hero’s ocean-wet gaze.

“It must have hurt you a great deal to be without Alex when she left.”

“It was hard, especially being at school without her—but Alex did all she could to make it okay. We texted every day and talked on the phone every night. And whenever she came home, she always wore this sweatshirt, so I would have something imprinted with her scent when she left.”

An image surfaced of Kara curled up on the porch swing back in Midvale, maybe even devouring the latest issue of *CatCo* magazine, tucked into her sister’s hoodie and trying her hardest to be strong against the tumult of emotions any level of change must stir within her.

“You’ve got a great sister.”

The ocean in her gaze crested, broke down both cheeks in shimmering streams, but her laughter rang with joy. “She’s okay.”

The smaller blonde huffed at the comment as she set down the clothes and pulled the hero into her arms. “Indifference is *my* superpower, not yours.”

She tasted Kara’s laughter in her kiss, felt the smile she pressed happily against Cat’s lips. When they parted, however, she noted the easy shift of Kara’s mood, the wide pop of her pupils and the instinctive roll of her hips. Waiting, she gave Kara the choice for how to proceed.
“I still don’t have my powers.”

The whispered words breathed sparks against Cat’s skin, but she held her response to a casual, “I know, darling.”

Fingers flexing along her waist announced the course of Kara’s desire. Tugging until the hero was flush against her, Cat slid one hand up, beneath the towel on Kara’s shoulders. She rested her hand against Kara’s side, fingers slotting into the spaces between her ribs while her thumb swiped across the swell of her breast. “Tell me what you need, Kara.”

She watched the hero nervously work her bottom lip between her teeth as she settled herself in her decision. Dipping her head slightly, she looked up into Cat’s gaze beneath the latticework of her eyelashes. “I—I need you to know all of me—t-to have all of me.”

The smaller blonde pushed the hero back to sit on the recessed counter. With a step closer, she straddled one of Kara’s thighs, watching the towel loosen as Kara shifted her legs farther apart to accommodate. With her thumb and forefinger, she tipped Kara’s head back by her chin until she could capture her lips.

She directed their kisses with slow, steady movements—the same languid pace she set for her hands as they descended beneath the towel once more, pushing it off Kara’s shoulders, and gently palmed Kara’s breasts. Thumbs and forefingers worked to draw the hero into a slow, aching ascent as she continued her thorough exploration of Kara’s mouth.

Feeling Kara shift, gasping for air, she rested their foreheads together while never letting her fingers stop. “Are you all right?”

A shaky exhalation carried a soft “Yes” as Kara tried to steady herself. “It’s—it’s different, but in a good way.”

Hand drifting lower, fingers skating along the ripple of abs, Cat waited for eye contact as she slipped beneath the edge of the towel around Kara’s waist. “Is this okay?”

She held steady at the tension she felt in Kara’s grip. “If I pull your hand away, it—it’s—”

At the nervous shiver in Kara’s voice, Cat countered, “It’s because you might hurt me. I understand.” She untucked the towel, letting it slip away from Kara’s shoulders, and gently palmed Kara’s breasts. Thumbs and forefingers worked to draw the hero into a slow, aching ascent. “If it comes to that, I will trust you.” Nipping at the hero’s earlobe while sliding her fingers to rest at where Cat longed to touch, she whispered, “Trust me?”

Kara responded by parting her legs more for the smaller blonde, her head rolling back enough to watch with eyes filling with nervous anticipation. Cat leaned in, returned to her slow study of Kara’s lips to calm the hero. As she coaxed out a particularly satisfying moan, the smaller blonde took the moment to press two fingers inward, met with just enough resistance for the moan to shift into a sharp inhalation. Cat stilled instantly, worried she was either hurting Kara or about to experience what it felt like for Kryptonian muscles to crush delicate human bones to dust.

A desperate blush heated Kara’s cheeks as she bit down once more against her bottom lip. Cat felt the soft flutter of muscle against her fingers and slipped slowly deeper, her own lips parting in wonder at what her fingertips were relaying.

“You are so exquisite,” she breathed as she let her fingers trace soft patterns against Kara’s internal ridges. The delicate ripples of flesh seemed even more sensitive than the hero’s external ones, their
deep pulse throbbing against Cat’s fingertips.

Succumbing to Cat’s steady, satisfying rhythm, Kara dropped her head back, eyes half-closed and mouth slightly agape, her sounds of pleasure littered between with softly uttered Kryptonese. The smaller blonde listened to the words until her curiosity finally drove her to speak.

“Teach me, Kara.” She waited for the hero to regain enough focus to meet her gaze. Pressing a kiss against lips parted by soft whimpers and sensual sighs, she whispered, “Teach me ‘I need you.’”

The hero furrowed her brow even as she felt her entire body tremble under Cat’s dexterous touch. “I-I don’t—”

Before she could utter another word, Cat kissed her again, more insistently, while pressing her fingers up against the descent of Kara’s internal ridges. She felt Kara’s entire body tremble from the sensation, felt her internal muscles clench a fraction tighter than she expected, before she relaxed once more into Cat’s arms. Holding the hero easily in place with the strength of her body, she whispered again, “Teach me ‘I need you,’ Kara.”

Comprehension struggling through the haze of desire stirred by Cat’s ceaselessly moving fingers, Kara breathed out the words Cat sought: “tulemodh w rripp eh.”

With a thrill of delight, the smaller blonde leaned in, her lips caressing the shell of Kara’s ear. In a voice reverent and soft, she sighed, “tulemodh w rripp eh, Kara Zor-El.”

The hero rested her forehead against Cat’s shoulder, panting softly for several beats as Cat worked her fingers slowly in and out. Swallowing, she raised her head to meet Cat’s gaze. “kahrah, .zor,ehl,.”

The name swirled from Kara’s lips, feather-soft and foreign, her true accent twirling gracefully around each syllable. Cat laughed at the sheer joy of its sound as tears gathered in her eyes. When she repeated the name back in her best attempt at capturing the delicate nuances of this noble tongue, her reward was the full press of Kara’s lips against hers.

Cat leaned closer, cheek-to-cheek once more with her hero, and whispered, “I will never leave you.”

Kara whispered in return for Cat to repeat, “awuhkhu zhadif w rripp eh.”

“You are my strength.”

“.nahn rripp w raogrhys te.”

“You are my home.”

“.nahn rripp w zehdh te.”

“You are my heart.”

“.nahn rripp w zhor te.”

Not needing any translation for what she wished to say next, Cat leaned back, cupping Kara’s face with her free hand. As she gently stroked her thumb along the elegant line of the hero’s cheek, she finished, “.zhaodh w rripp eh.”

Tears gathered against a shade of blue Cat would swear until her last breath existed only in Kara’s
eyes. With steady strokes, she continued to draw the hero slowly to the precipice, in silent wonder of the sight before her.

When finally Kara slipped over the edge, she came with a quiet sob as she pressed her hand against Cat’s heartbeat. The smaller blonde felt the spasm of Kara’s muscles pulling her fingers inward, the strength still well within human tolerance. Stilling her own movements against the fluttering contractions to continue to shake through the hero’s body, she used her free hand to draw Kara closely against her, raining kisses upon still-damp hair.

As Kara settled into Cat’s hold, she rested her head where her hand had been and whispered, “I miss this in my head.”

Cat felt the words vibrate against her collarbone. Gently removing her fingers, she tugged the towel back around Kara’s waist, pulling the hero to her feet with the movement. “Perhaps after our debriefing, we can try something a little more exerting to reignite those powers so you can hear it in your head once more.” At the sight of Kara biting her lip while eyelids slipped shut over rapidly dilating pupils, Cat chuckled while turning away to retrieve the hair dryer in Kara’s bag.

Once the hero had finished toweling off and dressing, Cat dried and brushed her hair, enjoying the way Kara leaned into her touch, content to receive such attention from the smaller blonde. “I love how deliciously tactile you are, darling.”

The hero hummed as she looked up at the smaller blonde, her expression one of pure joy. When Cat finished, she leaned close to kiss her cheek before packing up the bag and leading Kara out of the facility. At the sight of Vasquez still standing post outside, Cat handed off the backpack toward the agent, stifling a smile at how Kara pointedly avoided making eye contact as she passed.

As the trio made their way across Ops, Vasquez slowed their pace with a hand on Cat’s forearm and a nod toward the main entrance. Alex and Maggie matched paces as they strode through the foyer toward them. Cat noted the concern etched across both their faces as they assessed Kara and, to her surprise, her. Alex’s gaze on Cat remained narrowed for several more beats before she shifted her full attention toward her sister. Her gaze glistened as she took in the sight of Kara in the brunette’s NCU hoodie, fingers tangling nervously with the frayed strings along the cuffs. “Hey, how are you feeling?”

Kara’s response was to wrap herself around Alex, arms crossing against the brunette’s back and hands coming to rest over her shoulder blades. Alex returned the embrace in-kind, letting the hero hold onto her as tightly as she could. “We’re good, Kara. I’ve got you,” she whispered as she felt the shuddering breaths Kara drew.

Maggie shifted her attention from the Danvers sisters to Cat, reaching out to grip the CEO’s forearm. “We just finished processing the alleyway.” She tugged Cat into a hug that bordered on painful against the smaller blonde’s bruises. “Thank fuck for Super speed.”

Cat blinked once in surprise, twice more to clear the haze of emotion from her eyes as she returned the detective’s embrace. “Thank Kara,” she amended, watching Alex hug the hero even more tightly at hearing Cat’s statement. When she released Maggie, she finished, “Besides, there’s no way I’m leaving you without backup in keeping these two in line.”

Matching sounds of protest slipped from the sisters as they pulled apart, Kara still standing well within Alex’s personal space. The brunette merely continued to hold her sister close, letting Kara rest her forehead against her temple. “Is this slander or libel I’m hearing right now? I need to know which when I call my lawyer.”
Kara snickered at her sister’s question while Cat continued up the stairs to the second-floor conference room, patting Alex’s bicep as she passed. “Neither, Agent Danvers—and Lawyer Lucy would agree whole-heartedly with me on that.”

Once inside the conference room, Kara stepped to Cat’s side, her gaze instantly falling on the occupant of the seat across from J’onn. Brow furrowing in surprise, she stated warily, “Senator Crane?” A thought stirred within her. “Were we supposed to meet yesterday?”

The senator rose from her seat, revealing an outfit surprisingly casual in comparison with her sharper, more tailored suits. “Ambassador,” she greeted, shaking the hero’s hand without hesitation. “Don’t worry, we weren’t scheduled to meet yesterday. My presence at the DEO is—completely unscripted but unfortunately necessary at the moment.”

Miranda turned her attention to Cat, noting the way the hero leaned into the CEO’s hand resting along the curve of her hip. Cat’s brow arched in acknowledgement. “Seems we’ve both succeeded in making our way to the very top of Lillian’s shit list.”

“Speak for yourself, Cat,” Miranda instantly countered. “I’m now erased from all of her lists.”

Both seeing and feeling Kara’s increasing confusion and concern, Cat gently pressed her toward the closest seat while nodding to the senator. “Why don’t we give Supergirl a bit more exposition before exposing her any further to our gallows humor.”

“Of course.” Miranda smiled apologetically toward Kara before returning to her seat. As everyone settled into spots around the table, Miranda glanced toward J’onn, who nodded in deference to her. “Seems Lillian Luthor decided yesterday was a good day for spring cleaning regarding those she’s deemed intractable to her cause.”

The senator then proceeded to describe the events of her previous evening, leaving the hero slack-jawed with disbelief by the end.

“Okay, wait,” Kara finally managed to stammer out at Miranda’s finish, her brain struggling to sort all the information the senator had just delivered. “So Henshaw no longer looks like a cybernetic nightmare?”

J’onn shook his head. “He’s fully repaired and virtually indiscernible from me.”

“And more than happy to pretend to be you—badly, I might add,” Miranda inserted. “Thankfully, your visit earlier in the day gave me all the information I needed to confirm Henshaw was not who he was claiming to be.” She gave the Martian a grateful look. “He knows nothing of the real J’onn J’onzz—and that helped save my life.”

Kara turned toward J’onn, her frown of confusion deepening. The Martian’s gaze softened, wanting to help assuage the hero’s uncertainty. “When Agent Danvers reported to me what was happening here in National City to cause you to leave in such a state, I remained behind to coordinate efforts between the DEO, Secret Service, and Capitol police to secure all of Dr. Luthor’s possible targets there including Senator Crane.”

“J’onn tried to convince me to return with him to the White House. However, I found the thought of spending my afternoon sequestered with General Lane less appealing than the possibility of facing a CADMUS attack, so I declined.”

Even with the severity of the conversation, Kara couldn’t help the snort of laughter at Crane’s remark.
J’onn scowled at the comment, but Kara could see it lacked any serious sting. “So we agreed to a new plan: If the senator was going to stay out in the open, we were going to figure out how to use her stubbornness to our advantage.”

He paused at the sound of Crane’s dismissive huff. “I replaced her aide with a DEO agent who I linked comms with while I patrolled the city. When our scans picked up the signature from Henshaw’s cybernetic power source a few hours after the NCPD precinct attack, we easily identified his trajectory as heading toward the Dirksen Senate Building.”

Admiration reflected within the onyx depths of J’onn’s eyes. “Miranda let him find her and kept him engaged until I could arrive and trade places with her.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever been more nervous in my life,” the senator interjected, her voice quavering along the edges from the memory. “But I knew if I could keep him talking until J’onn returned and could replace me, we could convince him he’d successfully completed his mission and Lillian would think she’d rid herself of another traitor to her cause.”

J’onn caught the mounting tension within Kara’s posture. “I promise you, Supergirl, Senator Crane was never in any serious danger. The DEO agent I assigned to shadow her was in the adjoining office the entire time she was with Henshaw.”

Miranda nodded in an attempt to help calm the hero. “Thanks to J’onn and his agent, I am perfectly fine, Ambassador—contrary to the current news reports,” she added with a teasing hitch of her brow toward Cat.

The CEO smoothed her hand along Kara’s forearm at the comment, which clearly troubled her, and explained, “All the major news outlets, including CCN, are reporting news of Senator Miranda Crane’s death last night from still unknown causes.”

“Although Henshaw made sure my agent saw his face when she entered the senator’s office after he injected who he thought was Senator Crane.” The Martian scratched unconsciously at the spot where Henshaw had shot him full of serum. “He could have tried to kill her as well in an effort to ensure Senator Crane’s death remained a mystery. Instead, he made sure she saw him long enough to identify him.”

Cat felt Kara withdraw at the realization. “Because everyone saw you reveal yourself as an alien while you were trying to stop me last year.” She hung her head, shaking it morosely as she did. “One mistake,” she muttered as a tear splashed down into her lap.

Warm fingers hooked beneath her chin, pulling her head up to meet Cat’s confident gaze. “A mistake we continue to fix together, Supergirl.” She indulged in a knowing smirk. “Which is why, with Presidential approval, CCN was the first to report that Senator Crane had been found unresponsive in her D.C. office and died before paramedics could reach her. With the attacks here in National City, the senator’s death became a solemn B-story to the breaking news we were reporting across all our platforms. All the other news outlets followed our lead on both stories.”

Kara shook her head at the explanation. “But why? Why even put this lie out there as the truth?”

Cat swiveled to face the hero. “Because with this one lie, we have the chance at gaining the upper hand. Even though Lillian wasn’t successful in silencing me, right now she thinks she’s eliminated one of my prime sources.”

“And now that I’m safe and presumably DOA,” Miranda added, “I can finally stop holding back on all the information I know pertaining to those who are filling Project CADMUS’s deep
pockets.”

At the curious glances from everyone except the CEO, she explained, “Cat knows I’ve been withholding certain names from her—that I feared if I revealed them, Lillian would know I was the source and respond accordingly.” She laughed at the statement. “Seems I have nothing to fear anymore.”

With an appreciative tip of her head, Cat continued to study the hero. “I’ve already put Winslow to work on tracing the money trail for these newly identified sources the same way he did with Spencer Graves. This time, however, the names are connecting higher and higher up the chain of command the further he goes. This is the game changer we were looking for—maybe even the trail that will lead us eventually to Luthor herself.”

Crane studied the hero’s conflict as she processed Cat’s words before offering her what she hoped was some bit of solace. “I understand your concern, Supergirl. But I trust Director J’onzz, the DEO, and you to keep me safe, and I trust Cat to be able to report the truth that will level Project CADMUS. I want to do whatever I can to help.”

Kara cast her gaze down once more toward her hands, tangled together nervously in her lap. She relaxed, however, at the feel of Cat’s steadying grip on her arm. “We keep moving forward, Supergirl—and soon enough, Lillian Luthor won’t be able to stop our momentum. Time’s up for CADMUS.”

Seeing the defiant glint sharp in Cat’s eyes, Kara couldn’t help but nod in agreement.

J’onn directed his attention toward the detective seated opposite him and asked, “How goes the NCPD investigation into yesterday’s attack?”

Maggie cocked her head slightly to one side, her expression noticeably more drawn than normal. “Much faster thanks to the DEO’s help.”

She managed a small grin at how her comment delighted both the Danvers sisters. “Of course, that just means we’ve hit a wall faster than we would have on our own. Thomas Rieger’s remains are so—pureed, there’s no way we can confirm what Dr. Luthor did to him.”

Catching the way Kara gulped in a slightly nauseous manner at the implied imagery, Maggie softly apologized before continuing. “We’re hoping to identify alien DNA within the acid traces we collected, so we can at least confirm Rieger had alien-based alterations. We’ve collected the fragments from whatever tech killed him, and both NCPD and the DEO have samples under analysis.”

She looked to Kara with an apologetic frown. “Super freeze breath and heat vision are a seriously brutal combination, though.”

The hero ducked her head at the comment. She’d had several conversations with Alex regarding how to help first responders, especially local police, without compromising crime scenes. All those conversations, however, became meaningless to her in the face of protecting Cat.

“Hey.” Kara looked up at the comment to the sight of both Maggie and Alex watching her with approving expressions. “You did what you needed to do, Supergirl.”

As she absorbed Maggie’s words, the hero felt Cat take her hand and relaxed at the soothing warmth.

The detective moved on with her report, teeth clenched briefly in frustration. “Marcus Garrick has
completely disappeared. Our raid of his home last night turned up absolutely nothing to help us ascertain what he’s been doing for Lillian Luthor or for how long. It honestly doesn’t even look like he’s been back to his house in several months—no food in the refrigerator, no laundry, no garbage. Neighbors told canvassing officers they couldn’t remember the last time they saw him. We’ve got one of our computer forensics analysts going over his work computer, but I doubt we find anything there. And we’ve found no computer equipment or mobile phones on the premises so far even though there’s a docking station in his home office and several chargers throughout the house.”

The tight line of her shoulders rose in exasperation. “I’ve also got several detectives working on pulling all of Garrick’s sign-offs, starting with his most recent and moving backward through the past year to start. To be honest, I have no idea how far back we should go—but we’re not going to stop until we find something.”

She glanced at her watch, startling when she realized the time. “And on that note, I’ve got to head out.” Kara caught the way Maggie lifted her chin at the statement as she stood. “The commissioner has officially made me head of this investigation, so I’ve got to go prepare for this afternoon’s briefing.”

As she backed toward the conference room exit with a wave, she called to the CEO, “Tell your camera crew my left side is my best side and I might keep giving exclusive quotes to that persistent reporter of yours.”

Cat clicked her tongue at the comment, her expression brightening as she took in the way Alex practically glowed with pride for the detective.

With a clearing of his throat, J’onn made eye contact with those still seated at the conference table. “Well, I believe that draws a conclusion to this meeting.”

At the expectant arch of Cat’s eyebrow, he nodded. “Our consultant informed me she is still in Ojai working on some calibrations, but should be here in the morning. We can regroup then.”

When the CEO shrugged her acceptance, the Martian rose, looking to the senator beside him. “If you’re ready, Senator, I can show you the location of where you’ll be staying while in our care.”

Miranda stood as well, smiling at the offer. “I would greatly appreciate that, J’onn.” She glanced toward Cat. “Unless you’d like to continue mining me for information,” she quipped.

The reporter held her hands up in acquiescence, appreciating Miranda’s question on a deeper level. The remaining trio watched as J’onn and Miranda departed together, Cat rolling her eyes at the surprised expressions the Danvers sisters were exchanging when she turned back.

“Well,” Alex finally sighed, rising and stretching. “I’m going to go see if Mom wants to help me analyze goo samples or if she’d rather try to identify the serum sample J’onn provided from Henshaw’s attack.”

The CEO waggled her fingers at the agent as she strode past, pausing long enough to kiss Kara’s cheek. “Sounds like quality mother-daughter bonding time on the horizon, Agent Danvers.”

Alex nudged the CEO’s shoulder with her fist as she made for the room’s exit, her laughter trailing after her as she headed for her lab.

Once alone with the hero, Cat leaned her head against the seat back with a sigh. “Looks like we’re on our own. Any recommendations?”
A strange glimmer lit Kara’s eyes as she considered Cat’s query. Rising, she replied, “Actually, I do have an idea.” With a shy smile, she tugged the smaller blonde to her feet and led her out of the conference room. “There’s someone I’d like you to finally meet.”

As Cat processed the statement, she realized with a surprising burst of nerves where Kara was taking her. The strong grip of Kara’s hand on hers, however, was enough to quiet those nerves and keep her moving in-step beside the hero through the DEO.

Outside their destination, Kara placed her hand against the biometric scanner to open the door. Shooting a smile toward Vasquez, she stated, “You don’t need to hang around if you’d like to take a break.”

The agent nodded while still taking position beside the entrance. “Agent Danvers was explicit in her instructions, ma’am. I’ll be here when you’re finished.”

Once shut inside, Kara led Cat to stand at the base of a dais that took up most of the room. The holographic emitter in the center of the platform, clearly activated by their presence, flickered to life, coaxing a soft gasp from Cat at the sight.

She instantly recognized the strong jaw and startlingly blue eyes of the holographic image before her, while she wondered at the rich darkness of her hair color. Had that been Kara’s true color before the kiss of Earth’s yellow sun?

As her gaze swept lower, she noticed the necklace she had seen Kara wearing the night of the tree lighting in D.C. as well as the gold belt that Kara’s uniform matched perfectly. She noted how, even in holographic form, nobility strengthened the woman’s stance, lifted her head, and sharpened her gaze. In the woman’s bearing, Cat could see how formidable Alura Zor-El had been.

“How may I help you, Kara?”

As the hologram addressed Kara, Cat watched the hero struggle to center herself. Ignoring the clearly standard greeting, she offered the hologram a melancholy smile. “ieiu, I’d like to introduce you to Cat Grant.”

She squeezed the smaller blonde’s hand, a broad flash of teeth appearing at how easily Cat responded in-kind.

The movement drew the A.I.’s focus. “.nahn zhehd w zrhemin ni, inah te?”

Green gaze narrowed curiously at the soft blush Cat watched bloom in Kara’s cheeks. “zehtiahr chahv, zhindodh w khap,” she whispered, her eyes shimmering as she locked gazes with the smaller blonde.

The hologram shifted its sightless gaze toward Cat. “Catherine Jane Grant. You are the founder and chief executive officer of CatCo Worldwide Media. My daughter has told me much about her time working there.”

Alura paused for several silent beats, unnerving Cat with the emptiness of a gaze so familiar and yet so foreign in its current context. “Your company consistently ranks in the top one percentile on all respected national and international ranked business lists. You consistently rank highly as a powerful influencer as well. You are the recipient of multiple journalism awards, including two Pulitzers for international reporting. You are one of only two people to have won two consecutive Pulitzers. You currently are the only woman to hold this distinction. Recently, you received top-level government security clearance and Presidential approval for Alpha-One clearance at the
DEO. My daughter has chosen well.”

Cat sniffed in bemusement at the A.I.’s analysis. “Because of my professional bio and my security clearance?”

“It indicates your high position in your society. Your status and influence are comparable to that of the House of El. We were one of Krypton’s most distinguished houses. You make a suitable match in status to Kara. It is unfortunate she cannot bear—”

“ieiu, sokao–.”

Cat turned instantly at the break and tremor of Kara’s voice. The hero had paled significantly, her eyes bright with grief. “Kara?” Feeling her tugging as though trying to free herself from Cat’s grip, the smaller blonde tightened her hold.

“Kara, what is it? What’s wrong?” She glanced toward Alura, seeking guidance from a frustratingly empty gaze.

The hologram tilted its head slightly in an unsettling mimicry of curiosity as it observed Kara. “zha-shahrodh zhed w rip?”

Kara shook her head with adamancy. “.nahn udolkhehdia w khap.”

As she spoke, she turned away from the dais that housed the holographic emitter. Walking slowly toward the adjacent wall, she slid down to the floor and pulled her knees up to her chest.

“It wasn’t always like that,” she sighed while gesturing toward the now-silent hologram of her mother. “So much focus on achievements and status.”

She paused as Cat came to rest beside her. Simply feeling the smaller blonde’s presence so close filled her with the calm she needed to continue. “There was a time when Krypton’s society was far less rigid—before our world began to die.”

She bowed her head slightly, sighing, “Before we began to die.” She looked up to meet Cat’s observation, tears slipping from her eyes with the movement. “Krypton had been dying for decades prior to its destruction—our wildlife, our seas, our flora. The extent of environmental damage we had inflicted upon our world slowly stripped us of all our natural beauty. And then it turned into irreversible damage to ourselves as each new generation produced fewer and fewer capable of natural reproduction. Even those born with the ability lost it due to the high environmental decay.

“Our scientists were able to keep us from extinction through a process of genetic sampling and combination that they then gestated within a birthing matrix. By the time they figured out this process, however, our population numbers were dangerously low. The High Council ruled on mandatory pairings based on House and Guild standing; all Kryptonians were assigned to another at a certain age, and each couple was required to have at least one child, to guarantee continuation of our species.”

Cat grimaced at the entire process. “You would have been assigned someone?”

The hero noted the soft gasp of surprise her nod earned. “Yes. The High Council would have used the Codex to pair me with my most suitable match in my fifteenth ahmzeht, had Krypton survived.”

Jaw shifting several times as she attempted to come up with a response that wasn’t the infuriated rant she felt surfacing, the smaller blonde finally settled on, “I suppose there was no ‘swipe left’ option?”
Kara’s amused though slightly self-conscious laugh broke some of the tension pooling between Cat’s shoulders. “Not quite. What the Codex decided was what you followed.”

“And what about love?”

The smaller blonde couldn’t hide the contempt in her voice. Kara, however, merely smiled at the sound, understanding it was born of anger over what she knew Cat would consider unacceptable practices.

“Sometimes, it happened that two people paired by the Codex did fall in love.” Her smile turned painfully wistful. “I know I’m probably being naïve, but I would like to believe my parents actually loved each other. After all, they committed early in their pairing to having me. Some bonded pairings deferred for years before committing to the birthing matrix.”

At the sight of the deep furrow along Cat’s brow as she processed this information, Kara shifted nervously. After several moments, the smaller blonde reached up and softly smoothed her fingers over Kara’s scar. Understanding twisted like a sharp blade. “Our sun couldn’t help you because the damage was already done.”

The hero kept her head held high, even as inconsolable sorrow tightened her features. “I matured fully on Krypton. The environmental decay had the same effect on me as it had on other Kryptonians.”

Forcing a slight smile that barely ghosted her lips before disappearing, she sighed, “The House of El could continue through Kal-El. He was young enough when we left that Krypton’s environmental damage had little time to affect him. Tests Jeremiah ran on him indicate he is fine, and that Kryptonian and human physiology are close enough to be compatible.”

She bit her lip, unable to stop the quiver of her chin. “Unfortunately, the family of Zor-El will end with me.”

When she met Cat’s gaze once more, she saw not pity but instead a hesitant curiosity. With an understanding nod, she offered, “It was never something I questioned on Krypton. Because of the birthing matrix and the edict from the High Council, I knew a child would be in my future. When I arrived here, though—”

She bit down against the sudden rush of loss to flood her tongue with its acrid tang. “It became yet another choice I was denied.”

Cat watched the hero grip her biceps tightly in a steadying self-embrace. “My whole life on Krypton was a series of choices made for me: what Guild I would join, who I would marry and have a child with. Even when my parents sent me away, it was their choice—not mine.”

Kara lost herself momentarily to the despondent, angry swirl churning beneath the surface of her skin. “I never would have chosen to leave them to die—and now I must watch them perish still in my nightmares,” she finally whispered.

With a shake of her head, she forced her thoughts forward. “I don’t know if I even wanted to have children. I-I sometimes think I would have been like my aunt. She deferred her summons to submit to the birthing matrix’s collection procedures four times before—before things began to fall apart.”

Cat heard something more behind Kara’s words—a twist of fresh devastation she marked for later questioning. In that moment, she asked, “Did she not want children?”

“I don’t know. Maybe? She was always so happy to be with me when I was little—playing,
teaching me about the stars, telling me stories of her service or of Krypton when she was my age.”

“I couldn’t love a daughter more than if Rao had granted me a child of my own.”

Kara shrugged. “I think she just didn’t want to have a child with her husband. He was—well, you met Non.”

Hearing the name instantly drew a shudder of revulsion through Cat. “Yes, I can understand your aunt’s desire for deferment there.”

Kara huffed her response, disgust sharp in the sound.

“But now you do have a choice, Kara.” Seeing the argument ready to leap from her tongue, Cat held up a finger for silence. “There are options: adoption, surrogacy—if you decide you do want a child, it is possible.”

A hand slipped along Kara’s cheek, swept upward through her hair as Cat coaxed her to look at her. “And what I said last night about our boy stands true—if that’s something you want.”

The sound of Kara sleepily telling Carter she loved him during their brief FaceTime session the night before, and her son responding in-kind without hesitation still filled Cat with a devotion she knew would push her to whatever lengths necessary to protect them both.

“He knows he can trust you—and so do I. And I don’t even trust his own father, just so you know how momentous this is.”

Kara’s laughter released several more tears from the corners of her eyes.

“You can play as much a role in his life as you want.” Cat patiently waited for Kara to process her words, the hero’s eyes widening noticeably as she accepted their meaning.

“You would be okay with that?”

Dropping her fingers to curl around the back of the hero’s neck, she drew her in for a kiss. “We’re in this with you, Kara—both Carter and I. ,ehl, magharrah.”

The responding inhalation vibrated against Cat’s fingertips as she drew Kara close once more. The kisses they shared were soft and tender as Cat reveled in the feel of the hero melting into her hold. After several moments, however, she felt Kara tense and pull back.

Seeing Cat’s confusion, Kara blushed and inclined her head to the side. “It, um, it just occurred to me—we’re making out in front of my mother.”

Both women turned their attentions toward the still-active hologram watching them impassively, Cat dissolving into laughter that shook both of them. When she regained enough composure to speak, she teased, “Better your mother than mine.”

Kara sprang from Cat’s hold at the thought, scuttling back against the wall with wide eyes. “Not the slightest bit funny,” she huffed even as she fought back the smile at Cat’s amusement.

“I suppose not,” she conceded as she rose to her feet and extended a hand to help Kara. “Come on, darling. There’s something I’ve wanted to ask your mother.”

The hero accepted the help, her curious pout too adorable for Cat to resist kissing once more before leading them back to the holo-emitter. Ignoring the unsettling emptiness of the hologram’s stare,
she asked, “You carry all of Alura’s memories?”

“Right up until the morning of Krypton’s destruction, yes.”

“So you carry memories of Kara as a child?”

“That is correct.”

Cat narrowed her eyes thoughtfully as she studied the hologram. “Could you show us one of those memories? Project it through your own emitter?”

The A.I. stared at the smaller blonde with an impassive expression as she analyzed the question. “I am able to comply with this request.”

Cat and Kara both started at the sudden shimmer and swirl of light and color that took the place of the Alura hologram. Their breaths caught collectively at the image that finally coalesced, of a young girl dressed in white robes trimmed in gold and emblazoned with the crest of the House of El. Long hair a deep chestnut color flowed down her back and she stared straight at Cat with the widest, brightest eyes in that beautifully familiar shade of blue.

Feeling Kara step closer, the smaller blonde reached out, smiled at the easy slip of her arm around the hero’s waist. She turned and instantly fell captive to a look of pure awe. “You remembered.”

“I—I know that there were other more important things to consider when my parents were preparing what they would include when they sent me away from Krypton, but I wish they had included some of the images of us together.”

Cat nodded, not trusting her voice in that moment. She had been wanting to ask this question of the Alura A.I. since learning of its existence—anything to help remove even a small portion of the loss she knew Kara carried within her heart. Clearing the weight of emotion from her throat, she replied, “You were a beautiful child, Kara.”

She smiled shyly, cheeks shining with fresh tears. “Those are my first *rahduh* robes, so I must be five *ahmzeht* in this image.”

Cat directed her questioning once more toward the hologram. “Alura, can you show us a memory of all of you together? Kara with you and her father?”

With another complicit response, the hologram shifted to a second image, this time of the young girl, slightly older, standing between her parents. Cat noted that, while Kara had inherited her mother’s eyes and strong jaw, she had inherited her father’s gentle smile.

Alura’s voice broke the silence. “This was Kara’s first day of studies toward her assignment as a member of the Military Guild. Zor-El hid it well from her, but he was deeply disappointed she wouldn’t be joining him in the Science Guild.”

Cat flinched at the thought of Kara working with her father. Would she have stopped him from creating things like the Medusa virus? Or would she have believed, as he had, that it was for the protection of Krypton?

Pushing aside the morose contemplations, the smaller blonde removed her phone from her pocket. “Tell me, could you create digital captures of the images you just showed us and upload them to this device? I’m assuming you’re advanced enough to be Bluetooth-compatible.”

The soft chime of incoming texts quickly followed the request. Cat pulled up the messages,
delighted at how crisp and clear the attached images turned out. She handed the phone over to Kara, pleased by the hero’s joy.

Making a mental note to have James print and frame the images, Cat wrapped her arms around Kara with a chaste kiss. “Why don’t we go show Eliza and Alex? I’m sure they would love to see these.”

Kara nodded before pulling Cat into as strong a hug as she could manage, nestling happily into the smaller blonde’s hold. “Thank you for this, Cat.”

“Of course, my darling. I’m just glad it worked.” She wiped away the hero’s tears as she leaned back. “I hope it’s made today a little better?”

“The day has definitely gotten better,” she agreed with a smile. “Although I’d prefer to never wake up to Mon-El again. Seriously, like never,” she reiterated with a dramatic shiver.

Cat chuckled softly as she intertwined their fingers. Before she could confirm her absolute agreement, however, the holo-emitter shifted back into the form of Alura, who stated, “Mon-El, emissary of the House of El. Presumed killed by planetary debris during his mission to warn Daxam of Krypton’s imminent destruction. Shall I update my information to reflect his survival?”

Kara startled at the information. “No. N-no, that’s not necessary. This isn’t that Mon-El. This Mon-El is a refugee the DEO recently saved. He’s—he’s a Daxamite.”

The hologram tilted its head at Kara’s statement. “It is improbable your refugee has told you the truth.”

“Why? Because he’s a Daxamite? Daxam is gone, iėiu, just like Krypton. Isn’t it time we let our bigotry go as well?”

Unmoved as always by emotional responses, Alura continued, “It is improbable for two reasons: No member of the House of El was part of the expedition that colonized Daxam, and Daxam purged all Kryptonian surnames from their society after the Krypto-Daxam War.”

Seeing Cat’s curiosity pique within her gaze, Kara explained, “Daxamites are actually distant kin to Kryptonians—a mix of explorers who left Krypton many centuries ago and the inhabitants of the planet they eventually chose to colonize within the Rao System. Our worlds coincided peacefully at first—sister planets with the largest populations within our system. With time, however, the Kryptonian colonists began to take on the ways and beliefs of the planet’s original inhabitants. They were a hedonistic monarchy with questionable values, especially when it came to their treatment of those they deemed inferior.”

Kara’s expression darkened at the expectant hitch of Cat’s brow. “Daxam was a founding member of an intergalactic slave trade. Even when all other planets within the Rao System formed an alliance to ban the trade from our space, Daxam refused to join with us. They claimed it was a matter of their continued financial stability.”

“Sounds familiar.”

The hero shook her head. “The end of truce between our worlds came in part because of Daxam’s refusal to cease their participation. Daxam claimed the only reason Krypton wanted them to leave the slave trade was because we wanted them destitute and dependent. Daxam was never as technologically advanced as Krypton. Slave labor was all that kept them even remotely viable in the system’s larger economy. They claimed Krypton was trying to take away that viability.
“They accused us of being selfish for not sharing our technology and knowledge with them—of punishing them for leaving Krypton so many centuries ago. We soon found ourselves in a war we didn’t want to fight. We held them at stalemate until they came dangerously close to depleting their resources. After that, we limited our interactions with Daxam as much as possible.”

She blushed slightly as she pondered Alura’s statement. “I-I didn’t know that no one from our House chose to join the expedition that colonized Daxam.”

Concern began to swirl within the pit of her stomach. “Mon-El—the Daxamite claiming to be Mon-El arrived in a Kryptonian pod. The pod’s internal systems were damaged enough that Winn hasn’t been able to access anything beyond the navigational logs, but the Daxamite claimed the pod belonged to an emissary from Krypton, sent to warn Daxam of Krypton’s unstable core.”

The Alura A.I. reactivated at Kara’s pause. “The Daxamite is very likely claiming the identity of our emissary.”

Kara shook her head at the hologram’s statement. “I don’t understand how he is—or was a member of the House of El. I-I don’t remember anyone named Mon-El in our family.”

“He was not a relative. His given name was Mon-Im. He was a member of the Labor Guild who pledged himself to the House of El as a means of improving his status. In doing so, he took our name as a sign of his loyalty and swore to honor our crest and creed as his own.”

Kara frowned in chagrin. “I knew nothing about this.”

“You were a child, Kara.” Cat drew the hero’s attention with a strong squeeze of her hand. “Why would you know of such things?”

“No, I was the daughter of Krypton’s chief adjudicator. I was to become an adjudicator as well. If I had focused on the studies of my assigned Guild, I might have known all this already. And I should have known enough of the history of my own House to—”

Cat quickly derailed the hero, not willing to let Kara berate herself unduly. “Kara, you were a child! A child spared to bear the weight of survival, not just for yourself but also for an entire world. You will not punish yourself for not knowing this.”

With a sigh and a slump of shoulders, the hero glumly nodded. Turning back to her mother’s A.I., she prodded, “Please continue, ieiu.”

“Mon-El’s last mission as our emissary was to warn Daxam of the volatile status of Krypton’s core. Our scientists thought we had at least enough time to evacuate our world and those around us that our destruction would affect.”

“But Krypton exploded before they predicted.”

“Yes.”

The smaller blonde shifted her gaze downward briefly, forcing back the sharp grief she always felt at the thought of Kara’s world dying as she barely escaped. Pressing fingertips against the pain rising within her temples, she sighed, “Well, this is a total shit show.” She looked to Kara and queried, “The DEO wouldn’t happen to have a plan for getting rid of an intergalactic squatter, would it?”

Blowing a frustrated breath between her lips, Kara shook her head. “He’s only still here because of me. As soon as everyone was convinced he wasn’t a threat, J’onn wanted to send him to Desert
The curiosity rolling off Cat was practically palpable. Instead of responding to it, however, Kara continued, “I asked J’onn to let him stay—to let me try to reach him, train him. I thought it would help him acclimate to Earth if I helped him find a purpose.”

“And you felt guilty.”

Kara refused to argue, knowing Cat would see through whatever attempts she made to refute the truth. “I know it’s not my fault—the events that led to what happened to Krypton and Daxam began long before even my own parents were born. But he’s all alone here—maybe even all alone in all of the galaxies out there, because of the hubris of my people. No matter my opinion of Daxam, I wanted him to know I was here for him.”

Her expression hardened as she considered all she had taken from the Daxamite in her desire to help him. “I have allowed him to deceive and use us all because of my feelings of guilt.”

With a sigh, the hero scratched absently at her neck, forcing her brain to process something other than the anger and disappointment threatening to unseat her thoughts completely.

Finally, an idea sparked within her. “ieiu, did you ever interact with Daxam’s royal family?”

“Yes. Krypton hosted the royal family for diplomatic meetings twice during my time as chief adjudicator.”

“Did you ever meet the prince of Daxam?”

“Yes, Prince Lar Gand accompanied his mother both times. Queen Rhea insisted he be there to observe as next in the line of succession.”

“And he brought his palace guards with him on these trips?”

“Daxam royals never left the palace without their guard. Their refusal to stop supporting the intergalactic slave trade even when all other planets within the Rao System had done so made them paranoid about potential attacks whenever they left Daxam.”

“They sound more and more likeable all the time,” Cat rejoined.

“I see Kara has not exaggerated about your propensity for sarcasm, Catherine Grant.”

Kara chuckled at the open-mouthed surprise Cat offered in response before she continued, “Could you show me one of your memories of the prince that would include his palace guard?”

“Memory-based images will only be as accurate as the actual memory. I do not have any specific recollection that would match your request, Kara.”

Shoulders slipping downward minutely, the hero refused to be deterred so quickly. “Maybe not, but maybe you can recall enough to confirm at least whether the prince’s guard even remotely matches in body type or hair color—anything!”

After a moment, the holo-emitter’s image shimmered briefly, morphing from the form of Alura to an image of several men, most of their faces nothing more than obscure blurs. The one clear face in the group, however, was instantly recognizable. Kara pointed excitedly. “That’s him! In the front, that’s who is claiming to be Mon-El!”
Alura’s voice replied, “You have identified Prince Lar Gand of Daxam.”

Confused glances passed between Kara and Cat at this statement. “No, wait. The person in the front—that can’t be the prince. He told us he was the prince’s guard.”

“I can confirm from Alura Zor-El’s memories this is Prince Lar Gand.”

“He has been lying to us since his arrival!” Cat gasped in surprise at the snap of power to flare white-hot within Kara’s eyes. More disturbing, however, was the fury flooding through her expression, dark and foreboding.

“Kara? Kara, wait!” The smaller blonde grabbed at suddenly empty space, already well behind the hero who sped swiftly from the A.I. room. As she ran toward the exit, she saw Vasquez standing beside the still-open door, turning questioningly toward her. “Get Alex. Tell her Kara is looking for Mon-El, and it would be in his best interest if Alex found Kara first.”

The smaller blonde called most of this over her shoulder as she continued to run from the A.I. room, trying to determine which way Kara had headed. Vasquez easily matched her pace, relaying Cat’s words through her comm link as they headed toward Ops. On their approach, they could hear Kara asking in an uncompromising voice, “Where is the Daxamite?”

Coming around the corner into the DEO’s command center, Cat startled at the view of the hero hovering before Winn, her glare clearly unnerving the tech agent. “K-Kara? What’s wrong? What do you need Mon-El for?”

Before she could reply, the sound of hard soles rapidly hitting tile drew her attention. Alex and J’onn drew to a halt before the hero, the brunette quickly scanning her sister before querying, “Kara, what’s happened? Is everything all right?”

Without answering, she pivoted and rose in the air at the sight of her quest shambling toward the second floor staircase, oblivious to anything beyond watching whatever was playing on the tablet in his hands. The hero detected the sound of Alex’s voice, relaying orders through her comm link, and watched as several agents appeared and took position along the walkway behind him, to block his path. She caught more movement peripherally below her—knew that, even without knowing what was wrong, her sister was taking her lead and providing back-up for whatever was about to happen.

Taking a deep, steadying breath, the hero called out, “zha-thronivodh w rrup udol’rhygahs im ,daksam, lar gand bothgrhyv!”

The Daxamite’s head instantly snapped up, his eyes widening as Kara’s words finally sharpened his focus. Dropping his tablet, he reversed course away from the hero only to encounter agents moving in formation toward him. He took several strides forward as he prepared to scale the agents separating him from the wall of windows he’d broken through before to escape.

He pushed off from the floor and began to ascend toward those windows once more, his trajectory interrupted by the crush of a furious Kryptonian slamming him back down to the first-floor command center.

The two landed with enough force to crack and crater the tiles beneath them. Holding him in place with a steady palm against his chest, she commanded, “Do not make this any worse, your Highness.”

She growled the final two words in seething mockery of how the Daxamite had once branded her
“Don’t I have the right to respond,” he huffed, unable to pull sufficient air into lungs Kara pressed against with increasing strength. “Or does Kryptonian self-righteousness trump the words of a lowly Daxamite peasant?”

Anger pinwheeled in white-hot fissures around her irises as Kara set her jaw against the fury kindling beneath her skin. “You are no peasant. You are a liar and a coward!”

Moving cautiously into her sister’s peripheral vision, Alex called out, “Kara, whatever Mon-El has done—”

“He is not Mon-El!” Curling her fists into his shirt, the hero rose, dragging the Daxamite to his feet and drawing him close enough he could feel the heat from the pulsating fire in her glare. “Tell me what you did to my family’s emissary. Did you murder him for his pod?”

“No!”

She tightened her grip, fabric fraying instantly within her hold. “And do you lie to me still, Lar Gand?”

“Kara?” Alex now stood close enough she could touch her sister’s shoulder. She held firmly in place, however, not wanting to antagonize the hero in any way. “Why don’t you let go now? He’s not going anywhere, okay? We’ve got him covered from all angles.”

“He has been lying to us from the start, Alex!” Her fists slipped higher as the Daxamite’s shirt began to tear, her knuckles pressing into the sides of his throat as she continued to hold him in place.

“I understand, Kara, but you need to let go, okay? We will handle this together, I promise. He’s not going anywhere.” With her final statement, she locked gazes with the Daxamite, her expression allowing no doubt regarding its truth. “You will cooperate when my sister releases you, won’t you?”

Defiance curled his lip but the press of Kara’s knuckles against his throat—not to mention the room full of agents poised with weapons drawn and trained on him—convinced him finally to nod in compliance.

Slowly, Kara relinquished her hold though she gave no ground, forcing the Daxamite to step out of her personal space. Remaining safely behind her sister, Alex asked, “Is what Kara saying true?”

Trying and failing to hide his flinch at the sound of Kara’s heat vision crackling once more within her glare, he lifted his chin and replied, “Yes.”

“All of it?”

“Yes.”

“And were you ever going to tell us the truth?”

Turning on Alex only to regain his composure at the sight of Kara’s clenched fists raising defensively, Lar Gand snapped, “What does it matter who I used to be? I’m the ruler of a dead world now, thanks to her people!”

The brunette placed a calming hand against her sister’s bicep, the tension she felt beneath her
fingertips thrumming wildly. “Clearly it matters if you’ve been keeping it from us this whole
time.”

“I did it to protect myself from her!” He jabbed an accusatory finger toward Kara. “She judged me
as unworthy the moment she learned I was even from Daxam! Could you imagine how she would
have treated me had she known—”

“That you were in line to rule one of the most influential members of an intergalactic slave trade?”
Kara stepped closer, imposing in her power. “All this time, I have told myself you were not to
blame for being born on a cruel planet, but now I learn you were one of the implementers and
benefactors of its cruelty.”

“There was nothing I could do.”

A growl of frustration ripped from her throat, vision snapping white-hot with her fury. “You were
the prince of Daxam! Second in power only to your own mother! You had the ability to change
everything!”

With a warning squeeze against Kara’s arm, Alex tried to refocus her sister. “Kara, whatever he
oversaw on Daxam is over.”

“Yes, over—for all those his family forced into slavery.” Turning once more toward Lar Gand, she
snarled, “How many off-worlders died that day, alone and frightened on a world where they didn’t
belong? How many should have been on their own home worlds but instead perished because you
helped ensure their forced subjugation?”

Imperious steel flashed in Lar Gand’s gaze. “You expect me to mourn the death of a few slaves
over the obliteration of my entire world?”

“Kara.” At the sight of the hero beginning to tremble with the effort to maintain her position, Cat
used the tone she knew would always draw Kara’s attention the moment she heard it. With great
effort, the hero turned toward Cat, eyes blazing supernova-bright. “You know the battles worth
fighting—and the ones undeserving of another moment of your time.”

Cat watched the hero’s unresponsiveness for several worrisome beats before she saw her words
finally make it through. With a slow, purposeful blink, Kara’s gaze once more cooled though it still
held an intimidating sharpness the smaller blonde had never seen before.

Turning once more to pin Lar Gand in place with a glare, the hero declared in a strong, clear
cadence that brooked no question, “You will leave here and never again set foot in this building.
You will go find your fortune or failure elsewhere—but not in my city. And you will bring no harm
to any of the inhabitants of this planet, or I will find you and bring you to justice. Do I make myself
clear?”

Thinking it best to interrupt whatever the Daxamite was preparing to say, J’onn intervened. “I will
take care of everything pertaining to Lar Gand, Supergirl. I want you to report to the med bay to be
checked over now that your powers are back.”

Cat and Alex both nodded in agreement, each taking one of Kara’s hands. “Come on, Kara. J’onn
can handle things from here. Let Eliza and Alex take care of you.”

The muscles along the hero’s jaw worked beneath her skin, teeth grinding ferociously as she glared
at the Daxamite. Without another word, she let Cat and Alex guide her away.

Once the group disappeared into Alex’s second-story lab, Lar Gand pivoted plaintively toward the
Martian. “J’onn, please! She’s being irrational and unfair! But you and I can come to some kind of agreement, right? Two refugees, looking out for each other?”

J’onn never broke eye contact with Lar Gand as he moved into the Daxamite’s space, shifting to his true form as he did. “Do you know why I am a refugee? Why I am the last of my kind?”

At the prince’s silence, he finished, “Because those who considered my kind inferior enslaved us and butchered us until I was all who was left.”

When Lar Gand made no attempt to speak again, J’onn continued. “It is up to your gods and your conscience to deal with the sins you committed in your former life. However, it is up to me to deal with you now. I have granted you leniency up to this point because Kara interceded on your behalf. I’m sure even you can understand how that will not be happening again.”

Sensing the Martian’s decision, Lar Gand exclaimed, “You can’t just throw me out! I know nothing about this world! How will I survive?”

“We have procedures in place to help process you out of DEO custody and integrate you into Earth society. I will arrange transport for you to be taken to our Desert Containment facility to begin assisting you—”

“No! I won’t be shuttled off to some backwater hideaway! I’m a hero!”

“You could have been a hero,” J’onn corrected. “Instead, you wasted your second chance in ways I suspect weren’t much different from how you wasted your life on Daxam—including in your treatment of an actual hero.”

Red eyes shone dangerously beneath his protruding brow. “I suspect she has protected you far past the point of deserving, but know this, Last Son of Daxam: Kara Zor-El might be Kryptonian by birth, but she is part of my uhk ’tahk-bal. My family. And I will not tolerate your abuse of her any longer.”

At J’onn’s decree, all the agents within earshot shifted, drew up taller, their glares levelled against the Daxamite in a manner that allowed for no doubt in their resolve.

Backing away from the semicircle of armed agents, Lar Gand shot an impertinent glare at J’onn. “I don’t need your threats and I don’t need your help.”

As he turned and stormed toward the front entrance, J’onn held up his hand in a halt command. “We have no cause to hold him.” He glanced toward the agents to his left. “Mitchell, Paulson, you will follow him without being seen and report in hourly until I call you back or send others to relieve you. Inform me immediately, however, should he use any of his powers or cause any trouble.”

“Yes, sir.”

J’onn watched the agents hurry off with a mixture of relief and worry and a silent prayer to the pantheon of Martian gods that the prince of Daxam would soon enough be nothing more than an unfortunate experience for all of them.
This chapter was a BEAST. Final tally before I moved several scenes to later chapters? Fifty-three pages. Several characters finally rebelled and refused to let me finish their portions, preferring to get more time in a less crowded chapter. It took me a while to capitulate, but I finally agreed with them. This chapter, while still hella long, needed to focus on dealing with Kara's healing from her latest bout with red kryptonite (including all the repairs she believes she needed to make with those she loved); and the reveal about Senator Crane's survival from the previous chapter's events (which I really hope I did justice in my summary and dove-tailing of Miranda’s perspective and J'onn's).

Edit: I forgot to include translations for the Kryptonese I mangled throughout this chapter. During the A.I. scene, Alura asks if Cat is Kara’s wife. Kara’s response is "One day, I hope."

Their next exchange includes Alura asking Kara if she doesn't trust Cat to know the truth about Kara’s inability to have children. Kara states she is afraid to tell her the truth. This is in reference to not just the birthing matrix but also Krypton’s arranged marriages.

Rrahduhs means sacred.

Finally, Kara declares upon finding Lar Gand, "You cannot hide from the sins of Daxam, Prince Lar Gand."
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

CADMUS Test Subject Interlude 8

Test Subjects CDS-17-055 and -059

The pounding sounded all through her apartment, a discordant mix of knuckles and open-palmed slaps slammed against her front door with jarring strength. With a curious frown, she shoved up off the couch and shuffled toward the interruption to her peaceful evening. A quick check through the peephole only caused her frown to deepen as she wrenched open the door with surprising speed.

With nothing to intercept the force of his fist, the unexpected visitor stumbled forward, the velocity of his unblocked swing planting him unceremoniously at her feet. He groaned at the feel of his face smashing into laminate flooring, his limbs lacking enough coordination to block his impact.

“Mike?” Eve hopped backward as her surprise visitor fell over onto his side while cupping a hand over the center of his face. “What are you doing here?”

The uncoordinated heap at her feet groaned again, mumbling from behind his hand, “I think I broke my nose.” Pressing his free hand against the floor in an attempt to push himself upright, his fingers brushed against a divot where his face had landed. “Or my nose broke your floor.”

Eve nudged his legs out of the way enough that she could close her front door, which she noted now had several distinctly knuckle-shaped divots of its own. “Mikey,” she called once more, kneeling next to where he had finally curled into himself with a despondent pout, “what’s going on?”

“They threw me out.”

As he spoke without the barrier of a hand in front of his mouth, Eve caught the distinct pungency of alcohol on his breath. “Maybe that’s a hint you shouldn’t drink so much.” She rose once more to her feet, stumbling at the feel of fingers wrapping around her ankle to stop her from leaving.

“No, Kara threw me out.”

“Kara? Wait, you live with Kara?”

The immediately indignant tone was enough to break through even his Aldebaran rum haze. “eul, no,” he huffed, this time succeeding in dragging himself to his feet. “She had them throw me out of where I was living. That fal,zhora told them who I was—what I was!”

Eve bit her lip as she tried to piece together the muddle of mostly slurred words spilling from his mouth. “Okay,” she drawled, “maybe you should sit down while I go make you some coffee. You’re not really making much sense—and I think you’re making up words,” she giggled.

With agitated strides, he moved deeper into her apartment, oblivious to her words. “None of them understands the pressures I was under. I had no choice! We had to do what was right for us!”
Daxam’s prosperity would always come first—not those too weak or foolish to escape capture. Besides, their service gave them a purpose they would not have been able to give themselves.”

He flopped down onto her couch, the force of his fall creaking through the wooden frame. “But Kryptonian conceit is apparently contagious on this planet—especially with that human she calls a sister and the one she’s claimed as her mate.”

Eve moved across her apartment, sitting down in the chair adjacent to the couch. Patiently, she waited for focus to return to eyes that stared vacantly into the middle distance. “Mike?”

After more than a few liquor-heavy blinks, he finally turned toward her with an expression that made her wonder if he’d forgotten he wasn’t alone. Offering him a slightly frazzled smile, she asked, “Who?”

“Who what?”

“Who are you talking about?”

Expression remained blank for several beats before shifting to a lascivious sneer. He moved closer to the couch edge. “Better question is why are we talking at all?”

At the sight of him beginning to lean closer, Eve slid from her seat and headed toward her kitchenette. With a perplexed frown, he watched as she sifted through a couple of drawers and cupboards, coming back with a bottle of Advil in her sweatshirt pocket and a glass of water.

“You’re going to need both of these, I think,” she sighed as she set them down on the coffee table.

Ignoring the offering, he continued to press, “What I really need doesn’t come in a bottle or a glass, Evie.”

“Oh at all when you’re this drunk,” she mumbled.

Brow furrowing in confusion, he reached out in an attempt to pull her closer. “Don’t you want to help make this day better for me?”

Side-stepping his reach, she sighed, “That’s not really my job, Mike. Besides, my actual job has been exhausting these past two days, with everything that’s happened. Just fielding all the calls for and about Ms. Grant makes it almost impossible to even leave my desk!”

Mention of Cat hardened his glare, drained his demeanor of any playfulness. “None of what happened today would have if that dhohl’vah had died like she deserved to do. Instead, she continues to stand in the way!”

Startled enough to step back slightly, Eve frowned and asked, “Stand in the way of what, Mikey?”

Her voice, sweet and lilting, drew an unexpected rage. “What I am owed,” he growled, his body instantly losing its inebriated looseness.

“I was to be king! Daxam was mine by rite of ascension, but Krypton robbed me of my kingdom. Kara Zor-El would serve me well as payment for what her people stole from me.”

Rising on barely steady legs, he declared, “She should be mine to claim—not some human who thinks because she has influence with the inhabitants of this primitive world, she has the right to call herself a queen.”

Eve mouthed the final word, curiosity turning to comprehension as she felt the weight of meaning
settle within her. “You mean Queen of All Media?”

“She is no queen!” Spinning to face Eve, his legs tangled and he toppled once more onto the couch. His ire seemed merely to grow, his body lurching forward in disjointed movements. “My mother was a true queen! The greatest ever to rule Daxam! Cat Grant is nothing—yet Kara simpers after her as if she were some kind of hero.”

He beat a hand against his chest. “I’m a hero!”

“You are a hero, Mon-El.”

Squinting up in confusion at Eve’s unexpected statement, he mumbled, “What? What did you just call me?”

“Your name, Daxamite. And you have no idea how much of a hero you just became to our cause.”

Finished with the conversation, Eve slipped from her pocket the device she’d retrieved from the kitchen drawer and shoved it against his neck, filling him with enough voltage to stun even the Daxamite into unconsciousness.

As he slid into a useless heap on the floor, Eve headed into her bedroom. Retrieving the burner phone she kept locked in the case beneath her bed, she dialed, knowing she would need to destroy the device the moment the call ended.

Before the third ring began, she heard, “Did you make it to the airport in time?”

Responding with their agreed-upon code, she replied, “No, there was too much construction.”

“Where?”

“The Puzo Underpass.”

Through the line, Eve caught the soft hum of approval and concern. “What’s happened?”

“The Daxamite came to me this evening. I’ve taken care of him, but he told me information on our target I believe will make you exceedingly happy. She and the media manipulator are involved in an intimate relationship.”

The several beats of silence to follow Eve’s revelation shattered with unexpected laughter. “Oh, my son was right to place so much faith in you, my dear.”

Blushing at the praise, Eve replied, “It’s my honor to help you in any way I can.”

“I know. Were you able to set up our contingency plan?”

“Yes. All elements are in place and awaiting activation.”

“Excellent work, as usual. When I give you the signal, implement the plan from a safe distance and await further instruction. I have one final mission in mind for you, but I think you’ll appreciate it. And then, it’s time for you to come home.”

Eve smiled in unchecked joy. “Thank you.”

“You have far exceeded all of my hopes for this mission. You have more than earned the reward I’m preparing for you. Now, is the bargain-bin Kryptonian still alive?”
“Yes.”

“Good. I’m going to send someone over to retrieve him. I’m in need of a healthy host body—and
his would provide the bonus of getting us back into the DEO.” Eve heard a soft exchange of voices
before being directly addressed once more. “Unlock your sliding glass door. Someone will be there
shortly.”

With no further words, Lillian Luthor disconnected the call. Setting down her phone, she faced the
other occupant of her office, aglow with pleasure.

“I take it Eve has yet again come through?”

Silver rills of delight spidered through her gray gaze. “In the most unexpected way. She’s just
delivered all we will need to get Kara Zor-El to come to us.”

She laughed once more, a dark, rolling tide of sound. “I never thought I’d be this happy in my
failure to kill Cat Grant.”

Henshaw huffed at the comment as he rose from his seat. “Where should I bring the Daxamite?”

“Take him straight to OR One. My staff should have it prepped once more after our earlier
procedure with Ms. Smythe. We need to move quickly before Garrick’s lungs finally fail and we’re
stuck trying to figure out how to resuscitate a puddle of goo.”

Henshaw grumbled in disgust before heading off in his mission. Indulging in a smile she felt well-
earned, Luthor unfolded herself from her chair, stretching into her imposing height.

With enjoyably unhurried strides, she returned to the holding cells she had visited only a few hours
ago. Halting before the cell of the now sole occupant of the block, she announced, “Looks like
you’ll be getting new roommates soon, Ms. Willis.”

Refusing to open her eyes in acknowledgement of Luthor’s presence, Leslie instead continued to lie
on her cot. “What? Did Siobhan get paroled without me?”

“You partner will be back soon enough. I’ve just finished giving the Silver Banshee a platinum
upgrade.”

“She’s not my partner.” The former radio host shifted enough to glimpse Luthor through still
partially closed eyes. “She’s also about three bananas shy of a bunch—so good luck trying to get
her to cooperate with whatever supervillain plot you think you have in store for her.”

Luthor dipped her head in acknowledgement. It would be disingenuous of her not to, having noted
almost instantly upon her awakening the unraveling lucidity of the woman in question. “She does
seem quite fixated in her desire to destroy Kara Danvers.”

Leslie snorted. “Understatement of the fucking millennium there. Even with whatever the prison
did to keep her from using that irritating voice of hers, she whispered nonstop about Cat’s assistant.
That was worse than her shriek.”

“I believe whatever triggered Ms. Smythe’s abilities is linked somehow to her need to kill Kara
Danvers.”

What little the NCPD had in Siobhan Smythe’s file seemed to indicate a mystical element that
Luthor doubted she could either duplicate or eliminate.
“The longer that need is denied, the more pressing it will become until I’m fairly certain it will drive Ms. Smythe completely mad. Unfortunately, I cannot allow her to satiate her need.”

Pushing upright, Leslie swiveled until she sat cross-legged on her cot facing Luthor. “Why not? It’s not like the world would mourn the loss of a mousey little corporate lackey.”

“I need Kara Danvers to live.”

“Desperate for someone to do your evil filing and arrange your schedule of doom?”

With a shake of her head and a tight-lipped smile, Luthor replied, “You have a quick wit and a sharp tongue. I can see why Cat Grant valued you.”

Leslie’s demeanor quickly soured. “Yeah, until the intergalactic Girl Scout came along.”

“I understand your animosity toward both Cat Grant and Supergirl. While my requirement for Supergirl and her powers takes precedent, I could help you finally eliminate one part of that equation. Join me and I will give Cat Grant to you for whatever purpose you wish.”

“And if I say yes to this Secret Santa gift exchange of yours, then what? You start ‘upgrading’ me too?”

“Not at all. Siobhan’s operation was because she still had room for improvement—and, quite frankly, because of doctor’s prerogative. I had the parts and the opportunity. However, even if my procedure went well and I can keep her body from rejecting the alien upgrades I gave her, the most I’ve done is create another unique hybrid I have no hope of duplicating.

“But don’t you understand, Ms. Willis? You are the perfection I strive to attain for humanity.”

The laugh Leslie exhaled was harsh and empty. “Lady, you’re more warped than I thought if you think I’m perfection. I’m a walking defibrillator.”

She rose from her bunk, hands stretched before her, fingers curled in powerless arcs. “And thanks to you, I’m not even that right now.”

Luthor shook her head, expression unsettlingly benign. “I have spent decades experimenting on ways to create more powerful humans through genetic recombination with alien DNA. Even my most successful attempts have never been as impressive as what occurred in seconds with you, Supergirl, and a bolt of lightning.”

Leslie sneered at the comment. “Sounds like instead of holding me in this hamster cage, you should be reevaluating your life choices.”

Surprisingly, her comment drew an honest smile to the doctors lips. “Perhaps. But now that you have shown me the truth, my resolve is stronger than ever. You are the key, Ms. Willis. You are what I want my soldiers to become, so that when I unleash them on the world, no one will be able to stop them.”

“Except Malibu Barbie and her secret agent squad.”

With a defiant cock of her brow, Luthor rejoined, “Supergirl will be in one of these cells before the next forty-eight hours are over.”

Leslie’s laughter sparked with disbelief. “Sure, and we can be bunk mates and braid each other’s hair.”
Turning and flopping back down onto her cot, she huffed, “You should stop hanging around Siobhan. You’re starting to sound as obsessed and delusional as her.”

Luthor stepped closer, her demeanor cold and sharp. “Be assured, war is imminent, Ms. Willis, and I promise you, my soldiers are engineered to win. I’m offering you a place, to help lead us to that victory.” Gray eyes flashed flinty sharpness. “But my offer is finite—as is my patience.”

She stepped away from the Faraday cage, her expression shifting once more into its illusion of serenity. “Consider what I have said, Ms. Willis. I give you until the arrival of Supergirl to make your choice.”

Noting the still-disbelieving smirk, Luthor merely smiled in acknowledgement before pivoting and disappearing into the darkness beyond Leslie’s cell.
The sharp sensation pierced her sleep with a precision that had her arching in response before she had even opened her eyes. Brow instantly furrowing in confusion, she struggled toward waking, her body sending messages her brain desperately tried to process. Another jolt and she felt heat flood through her, uncontrollable moaning instantly betraying her arousal.

Laughter brushed across her skin in response, warm currents that left pebbled skin in the cooling wake. “You’re making this too much fun, Danvers.”

Alex shifted, groaning against the grind of a strong thigh pressing between her legs. As her eyes fluttered open, she squinted up into a dimpled smirk and dark eyes flashing with seductive satisfaction. And then she was arching once more in response to the double stimulus of Maggie’s fingers sharply pinching one nipple while she leaned down and tugged the other between her teeth.

The detective chuckled softly as she listened to Alex’s need intensify, knowing how a little roughness always was the fastest way to rile the brunette. Before she could unleash more upon the lithe body beneath her, however, hands conformed to her waist. With a surprised yelp, she felt Alex’s grip flip her and pin her to the mattress.

Staring down at Maggie, a cocky grin curling her lips, Alex straddled the detective with one knee pressed between her legs. She felt Maggie’s hips rock upward at the sensation and her grin stretched wider. “Am I now?”

Not ready to relinquish control of the situation just yet, Maggie grabbed the brunette’s shoulders, drawing her downward while shifting to press her thigh against Alex’s center. Their mouths crushed together fiercely, Alex barely fast enough to brace her hands against the mattress to keep from completely collapsing against Maggie.

The brunette smiled at the feel of Maggie’s laughter filling her mouth, sighed with desire when her tongue quickly followed. She loved the insatiability of the woman beneath her—the hunger that blazed in obsidian depths and curled contrails of salacious sound from between kiss-bruised lips. Fingers scorched fire into her skin as they began to move once more in rhythm, need dispersing
like wildfires across the planes of her body.

She felt the spark of Maggie’s nails along the flint of her spine and she ground harder against the thigh pressed relentlessly upward against her.

“Goddammit, Alex.”

The words flamed against her cheek as she curled inward, pleasure pulling her body down into tight undulations. Brightness burst behind her eyelids, grunts rattling from between gritted teeth. She could feel the tension vibrating through her as she clenched tightly against Maggie’s thigh, greedily seeking more friction that would finally tip her off the precipice.

Shoving roughly upward, Maggie caught the brunette with enough surprise force to give her the extra pressure she so desperately needed. Exhaling a sharp trill, Alex reversed her curve against Maggie, a concave of quivering muscles and flushed skin.

When Alex began once more to descend from the climax still quaking through her, Maggie drew her lover down into her arms. “You are so fucking hot, babe.” She chuckled at the way Alex tucked her head against her shoulder, shifting enough to curl into her side.

Lying tangled in Maggie’s arms, Alex hummed contentedly, ignoring the brightness of sunrise slowly breaching the dim sanctuary of their bedroom. She turned away from the slivers of sunlight stretching across them to place open-mouthed kisses along Maggie’s neck and shoulder.

The detective gasped at the sensation of teeth playfully nipping a spot high along her neck Alex had discovered was particularly sensitive. “You know our alarm is about to go off in five minutes, right?”

With an impish quirk of her lips, Alex shot back, “I might be feeling another case of the black lung coming on. We both might have to call in sick.”

Maggie swatted playfully at Alex’s shoulder, wishing more than she ever had before that they could just call in—let someone else deal with all the fallout from CADMUS’s most recent attack. Far too much, however, was at stake, including securing the safety of a certain Kryptonian Maggie had grown to care about with a fierceness she realized she happily shared with Alex.

Catching the somber shift in Maggie’s expression and the way she had absently begun to rub her thigh, Alex blanched and stammered, “Mags? Are you okay? Did-did I hurt you?”

The detective rested her hand flat against Alex’s chest, slightly relieved for the brunette’s misinterpretation of her preoccupation. “I’m fine, babe—just a little twinge. But,” she pressed on while sliding her hand upward and curling her fingers around the nape of Alex’s neck, “I love when you go all Xenia Onatopp on me.”

Alex snorted at the sentiment. “You know you just referenced a movie that came out when we were in kindergarten, right?”

“Doesn’t matter,” Maggie countered while wrapping her legs around Alex’s waist and twisting until she was sitting astride the brunette with a victorious quirk of her lips. “Colonel Onatopp played an integral role in my self-discovery.”

Running her fingers through Alex’s hair, she tightened her grip enough to coax the brunette up onto
her elbows. “I must have a thing for Black Ops bad asses.”

“You know she was actually a—”

“Shut up, Danvers,” the detective growled before dropping down to capture the brunette’s mouth in a searing kiss. The growl quickly shifted from arousal to annoyance, however, at the mocking bleat of the alarm luckily out of her reach. Both collapsing downward in defeat, Maggie muttered an annoyed expletive (or five) into the curve of Alex’s shoulder.

The brunette pressed an understanding kiss against the top of her head. “Come on, Sawyer. These super villains aren’t going to stop themselves.” She waggled her eyebrows as she pushed out from beneath the detective. “Want to save time and shower together? I’ll even let you stand in front so you can actually get some of the water.”

Sitting up, Maggie gaped at Alex for a beat before asking, “Did you just take a jab at my height?”

Pressing an index finger against her lips, the brunette narrowed her eyes in mock contemplation. “Let me think—um, yeah, I totally did.”

Never more thankful for her DEO training than in that moment, Alex still nearly wasn’t fast enough to avoid Maggie’s lunge after her as she quickly rolled across the bed and scurried to her feet. “Don’t tell me bad-ass Agent Danvers is getting ready to run from a fight?”

The detective wasted no time in taking advantage of Alex’s pause at her impertinence, launching herself from the bed and into arms she knew would always be ready to catch her and keep her close, keep her safe—keep her loved.

The thought caught her by surprise even as she succumbed to the eager press of lips against her neck, the heady sensation of soft laughter across her skin. “Not going anywhere,” Alex replied and Maggie found herself tightening her hold.

When she pulled away with a quick clearing of her throat, she saw the shift in Alex’s gaze—the recognition of something still unspoken, still caged by fear and hurt left behind by those undeserving, unforgiven, and painfully unforgotten.

With a soft kiss against the detective’s cheek, Alex tangled their fingers together, backing toward the bathroom. “Come on, Mags. Let me take care of you.”

Caught off-guard by the gentle request, Maggie merely nodded and followed the brunette’s lead.

The shower that followed was unquestionably the most thorough and enjoyable Maggie could ever remember. She was also certain after that shower that no one could ever make her swear more in her first language than Alex Danvers.

Arriving together at the DEO almost an hour later than Alex’s regular start time, Maggie grinned at how the agent had yet to release her hand, even as they made their way through Ops and up the stairs toward her lab.

“Oh, thank Rao!”

No sooner had Alex heard the words shouted from halfway across the med bay than she found herself lifted into the air. Instinctively, she grabbed onto broad shoulders even as she registered the
secure sensation of her sister’s biomatrix holding her steadily in place. “Kara, what the ever-loving hell are you doing?” Below, she registered the sound of Maggie and Eliza snickering while Cat muttered something about “super-powered impatience.”

Utterly unfazed, Kara stared into Alex’s eyes with a mixture of frustration and pleading the brunette knew would always be her undoing. “You put in my medical file that I can’t return to duty until you’ve cleared me! Then you were late this morning! You’re never late, Alex!”

By the time the hero was finished speaking, she had landed once more, releasing Alex and crossing her arms against her chest. Unable to resist, the brunette gestured toward her sister’s outfit. “I’m sure the Super pose would be way more intimidating right now if you were in your uniform instead of that.”

She snorted in amusement at the sight of her sister wearing workout pants and a T-shirt emblazoned with the breastplate from Wonder Woman’s famous armor. “Guess even superheroes succumb to a little hero worship, huh?”

Kara rolled her eyes in a way that made Cat instantly smirk at the familiarity while Maggie replied, “Says the woman who once spent an hour furiously detailing all the ways Batwoman is the better vigilante than Batman.”

A muscle jumped along Alex’s jawline, the only indication she was willing to grant that she’d registered Maggie’s teasing. “I’m sorry I’m late, Kara.” She forced herself to ignore the burn in her cheeks as pleasant memories of why she was late flickered brightly through her mind. “Let me get everything set up and get you cleared, okay?”

The hero nodded, embarrassment slowly settling her previous displeasure. “Sorry I barely let you get through the door.” She gestured vaguely over her shoulder. “I saved you a cinnamon crunch muffin if that makes up for it.”

“Such self-control, i.e. te.” The brunette laughed at the sight of Kara’s embarrassment deepening, her arm wrapping naturally around the hero’s waist as they began toward the nearest exam bed. “Come on, Wonder Girl. Let’s get you checked up, and then I want to run a couple of tests with you in the training room.”

As the sisters moved together toward the med bay, Alex paused to offer her mom a one-armed hug. “Good morning.”

“Good morning, sweetie,” she smiled as she wrapped both arms around her older daughter. “We did our best to keep your sister preoccupied until your arrival. I’m pretty sure Cat was ready to take her to your training room herself.”

As Eliza released her hold on her older daughter, she shot a playful wink toward Kara. Alex snorted at the comment. “My money would’ve been on Cat.”

Kara’s attempt at a scandalized glare quickly melted into laughter. “Mine, too,” she agreed, laughing even more at the way the smaller blonde clicked her tongue dismissively.

Catching sight of Maggie skirting her way around the cluster of Danvers women, Eliza quickly reached out to halt her movement. “Not so fast, Detective Sawyer,” Eliza laughed as she pulled Maggie in for her own hug. “How are you this morning?”
The detective remained quiet a moment longer, relishing Eliza’s strong, encompassing embrace. Each time, she knew she needed the extra silence to let the emotion that rose in her throat settle. As she began to pull away, she paused, knowing Eliza always gave her a little extra squeeze before letting go.

Dimples deepening with her smile, she replied, “Doing better. I definitely needed some time to decompress after last night.”

Eliza felt the unexpected shiver through Maggie and rubbed her forearms in a soothing motion as she pulled away.

Beside Alex, Kara frowned, her body instantly going tense. “What happened last night?”

The brunette increased the pressure of her grip around her sister’s waist, continuing to guide her toward a bed. She considered once more whether she should have contacted Kara the previous night to fill her in on the scene she and Maggie had worked after Cat had taken her home. However, the emotional state Kara had been in after her confrontation with Lar Gand had made the agent’s decision for her. Both she and Maggie agreed it would be for the best to let Cat take care of the hero for the evening and start fresh in the morning. “Let’s start your exam first, okay?”

The crinkle between her eyes deepened even as she let Alex continue to guide her. Hopping up onto the bed, she patiently watched her sister collect several items including a tablet she handed to Maggie.

As the brunette began with a blood draw that made Kara scowl at the kryptonite tourniquet Alex apologetically strapped around her arm, Maggie started, “We actually wanted to talk with you about this anyway—see if you could give us input the DEO database can’t answer.”

The hero clenched her jaw at the rush of emotion Maggie’s words drew. “Did you find another alien body dump?”

“No. We found Garrick.” The detective swallowed convulsively. “At least, what was left of him.”

“What was left?”

Alex grunted in response. “Yeah, let’s just say we were more than willing to cancel our dinner plans after finishing that scene.” Kara watched her sister’s and Maggie’s expressions shift simultaneously under the memory of whatever shared images they carried in their heads. “When I ran the blood sample I collected from Garrick’s body through our database, I got one hit off a substance mixed in the sample, but it doesn’t make any sense.”

Kara frowned as she studied the prison record Maggie showed her on the tablet. “A Vi’itraavi?”

“Yeah, sure, what you just said,” Alex teased. “The records we collected from Fort Rozz listed two prisoners with that classification, both sentenced for illegal arms dealing. The prison records only included one photo, though, which the DEO was able to use to identify a body discovered not long after Fort Rozz crashed.”

“Were the organs—liquefied?”

Alex shuddered at her sister’s question. “Y-yeah, for the most part—what was left of them, at least. It was that way with the Vi’itraavi corpse and what we found left of Garrick’s body—and a dozen
other unidentified bodies various local PDs have found since Fort Rozz crashed. So, I’m assuming we’re looking for the second Vi’itraavi for these murders?”

Kara squinted slightly as she considered her response. “Actually, I’m pretty sure there was only one Vi’itraavi on Fort Rozz.”

Looking up into a quartet of stares ranging from confused to curious, she explained, “Technically, the Fort Rozz prison records are correct. What the DEO originally found was just the Vi’itraavi host—just like the rest of these bodies, including apparently Garrick. The Vi’itraavi are actually symbiotic invertebrates that survive by—well, by entering a host body and interlinking with their central nervous system. Typically, the joining is mutual and peaceful, with both beings so in-sync with one another, you wouldn’t be able to tell they were anything other than one species. I remember my father saying the Vi’itraavi do have the ability to take over the host body, which is what they believe happened with the Fort Rozz prisoner, but most are content merely to live off their host.”

“Until the host turns to Jell-O inside?”

Kara wrinkled her nose in disgust. “Some of us actually like Jell-O and would appreciate you not ruining that with gross analogies.”

“Like that will stop you from eating a whole packet by yourself.”

She flinched at the feel of Eliza pinching her arm. “Focus, Alexandra.”

With a sigh, Alex gestured for her sister to continue. “The Vi’itraavi home world’s atmosphere is predominantly hydrogen-based. Whatever happened to Garrick and the others, I’m sure it stems from the Vi’itraavi’s desperate attempt to draw enough hydrogen from each host body to survive in Earth’s atmosphere.”

Maggie tapped a finger against the edge of the tablet contemplatively. “So maybe that’s why we couldn’t find any trace of Garrick at his house—Dr. Luthor’s been keeping him somewhere, trying to keep the Vi’itraavi from destroying his organs completely before she was finished using him.”

“Yeah, well, whatever she was doing to keep him alive, it was barely working. He always sounded one cough away from projectile-vomiting his lungs ever since I first met him.”

“Alex!” The hero made a series of disgusted sounds while plugging her ears. “Too vivid,” she groused, the crinkle between her eyes too tempting for her sister to resist poking.

“Sorry, sis.” Her smile soon shifted back to her previous pensive scowl. “So now that Garrick’s dead, I’m assuming the Vi’itraavi isn’t going to survive long on its own?”

“No, they need a host body to survive. On their home world, there were pools in which they could live temporarily in between hosts. If Dr. Luthor understood this, she might have been able to accommodate this need for a little while—but sooner or later, she’s going to have to find another host.”

“Great, something else to worry about from the CADMUS Creepshow.”

As Kara shifted to accommodate Alex’s stethoscope work, she focused on Maggie. “Would NCPD’s lead investigator on this case like to make a statement about Garrick for CatCo
Maggie chuckled at Kara’s *double entendre* even as she caught the proud sheen in Cat’s eyes. “Of course, Dynamic. But are you sure you want to be the one to report on this? It’s going to be more bad press for aliens.”

Jut ting her chin defiantly, Kara gave no hesitation in her reply. “All the more reason to make sure we report it. This way, no one will be able to accuse CatCo of hiding the truth because of pro-alien bias. Plus, even if we don’t have enough to link her specifically, we’re still documenting Dr. Luthor’s crimes as they occur. We keep building the chain and sooner or later, it’s going to connect to her.”

Eliza glanced askance toward her younger daughter as she scanned Alex’s notes. “And will Supergirl be making any official statements in this article? Give readers assurance she’s all right and ready to defend National City once more?”

The hero rubbed her hands nervously along her thighs as she forced herself to make eye contact with Cat, who noticeably piqued with curiosity as she watched Kara. “Actually, I don’t think I should quote Supergirl in my articles anymore.”

Detecting the slight, uncertain lilt at the end of the statement, Cat moved closer, her head tilted to one side. “Why is that?”

Kara instantly saw the knowing sharpness behind Cat’s question. Bolstered by the CEO’s challenge, she straightened her posture and responded in a more confident voice, “Even though only a handful of people know it’s me, I can’t claim true objectivity as a reporter if I’m quoting myself, especially if I’m unable to balance it with a counterpoint or even support my statement with a second form of confirmation—which I’m not going to be able to provide on anything that involves only the DEO.” Her nose and eyes both crinkled with the face she made. “Besides, I’m not really going for gonzo journalism, so there’s something hinky about me quoting myself.”

Golden flecks glimmering in approval, Cat stepped forward enough to kiss the hero. “I’ve watched lifelong journos struggle their whole careers with what you’ve just said.” She pursed her lips and affected a mock serious expression. “In fact, minus the questionable choice of the word *hinky*, it sounded close to guidance I would have given you.”

“Of course,” Kara laughed, even as she caught the self-admonishment within the CEO’s final statement. Reaching out, she gripped one of Cat’s hands in her own to keep her close. “I know if you had been at CatCo, you would have told me. But,” she pressed when she saw the internal rebuke rise once more in Cat’s expression, “I was your assistant for two years, Cat. I attended every editorial meeting, heard everything you said to every reporter there. Even if you weren’t speaking directly to me, I still heard every bit of advice and every correction you gave. You started teaching me how to be a great reporter even before I knew that’s what I wanted to be.”

Cat inhaled sharply at the unexpected sentiment even as she allowed Kara to tug her closer. Resting her chin against the smaller blonde’s shoulder, she smiled brightly at how even the unflappable Cat Grant could be blindsided by praise.

Finished listening to her sister’s lungs, Alex laid the stethoscope down on the exam bed, her lips finally curving upward with relief. “I’ll need final bloodwork results for confirmation, but everything sounds perfect, Kara.”
Releasing Cat, the hero sprang happily from the exam bed with a fist pump and a breathy, “Yes!”

Before she could get farther, Alex tugged her fingers into the neck of Kara’s shirt and teasingly tugged her sister along behind her. “Not so fast. Next is the training room, remember?”

As Kara audibly huffed at Alex’s statement, she twisted enough to wave to the trio of women watching the Danvers sisters depart. When she turned back around, she happily leaned into Alex’s embrace.

Moving into the training room, Kara perched on the edge of the center platform and watched as Alex reactivated the security protocols for the room. Warmth stole through her at how careful her sister always was to protect her whenever they entered the room with the power to weaken her. It never mattered to Alex that they were in the middle of the DEO, surrounded by agents trained to protect their own—she would never take Kara’s safety lightly.

Nodding in satisfaction, the brunette turned and drew to a stop before Kara. With an expression settled between observant and cautious, she asked, “So, how are you doing?”

Kara pressed her lips together at the question, her face a portrait of confusion. “Alex, you literally just finished telling me how I’m doing.”

With a shake of her head and an exasperated sigh, Alex tried again. “I mean emotionally, ya goof.” She chuckled at the way Kara dipped her head to the side, a shy smirk gracing her lips. “It’s been a really rough couple of days, I know.” She tucked a lock of hair behind Kara’s ear. “I just want to make sure you’re okay.”

The hero leaned back, blowing air between compressed lips. “I’m—not a hundred percent yet,” she confessed. “But I’m in a good place, thanks to you and Cat and Eliza.”

Settling in beside her sister, Alex reached down and intertwined their fingers. “Good.” She smiled at the way Kara leaned into her side. “You know I’m serious about moving sister night to the top of the queue, right?” She pressed a kiss against Kara’s temple. “I miss my little sister.”

“I miss you, too.” Alex heard the uncertainty. “I just—"

“Kara, you don’t have to give me any reason why you want it to just be us. Maybe later on, we can introduce Cat and Maggie to the joys of a night of bad food and worse movies.” She reveled in the way Kara giggled at the thought. “Or we can keep sister night just for us and restart game night with everyone?”

Pivoting her hips, the brunette drew her sister’s attention with a finger beneath her chin. “Of course, Kara.” She frowned at Kara’s sigh of relief. “You didn’t even have to ask.”

“I know.” Alex heard the uncertainty. “I just—”

“Kara, you don’t have to give me any reason why you want it to just be us. Maybe later on, we can introduce Cat and Maggie to the joys of a night of bad food and worse movies.” She reveled in the way Kara giggled at the thought. “Or we can keep sister night just for us and restart game night with everyone?”

Kara shifted to meet Alex’s gaze, a happy smile lifting her mood instantly. “I’d like that.” A sudden thought struck her. “And game night would be a great way to include Carter in our group when he comes home in the summer.”

At her sister’s mention of Carter, Alex smiled and tightened her hold on Kara’s hand. “Sounds like
a great plan, Kara.” She hesitated before finishing, “Cat seems incredibly on-board about you having a prominent place in Carter’s life.”

“She knows I love him and would do anything for him.”

Alex nodded as she absently chewed her bottom lip. “I-I know it’s not the same, but you’re really good with him, Kara.”

Kara caught her sister’s sudden trepidation and understood. Brow furrowing with the effort to control her emotions, she replied, “Cat—sh-she knows—”

The moment Alex heard Kara’s voice break, she pulled her into her arms and hugged her with unshakeable fierceness. She felt her sister’s hands grip her tightly, felt the shudder of Kara’s body as she drew in a stuttering breath. “I love them both so much, Alex.”

The brunette nodded at the softly whispered confession, understanding the terror lurking beneath its surface. “And we’re going to do everything we can to keep them and you safe, I promise.”

Shifting to sit up beside her sister, Kara wiped at her eyes and sniffled several times. “She’s had to be strong so many times in her life.” She laughed, a thick, humorless sound. “She once told me that I inspired her.”

Alex gripped the back of her sister’s neck, fingers kneading a soothing pattern against impenetrable skin. “You inspire me all the time, Kara.”

The hero shook her head, keenly aware of boundaries and secrets she never wanted to betray with Cat. “Sh-she told me some things the other night—after her panic attack.”

Kara felt her anger rising at the thought of Joe Morgan. “She made me see some things a lot more clearly than I was letting myself see them.”

Continuing to massage Kara’s neck muscles, which she’d felt unexpectedly tighten, Alex asked, “About what?”

“You can sometimes do far more lasting damage with words than with fists.”

“And Lar Gand, and about how I let him treat me.”

Alex made a point to keep her expression neutral. Even before they’d learned about the depth of the Daxamite’s lies to them, she’d known his behavior toward Kara had been inexcusable. However, the hero had continued on, absorbing his cruelty and protecting him in all the ways Alex realized they should have been protecting Kara from him.

“I just feel—stupid,” Kara finally sighed. “The things I let him say to me—if I heard someone out in public speaking to anyone like that? I’d step in and stop them!”

Her shoulders folded inward under the weight of this realization. “So why didn’t I protect myself?”

“For the same reason you wanted to apologize for breaking Jake Parker’s wrist when he tried to pin you down in the back seat of his car.”

Kara swallowed against the emotions Alex’s comment stirred within her. “I-I didn’t have to be so
rough. I knew I could stop him.”

“But he didn’t, Kara.” Alex placed a hand against her sister’s cheek, putting enough pressure in her push that Kara acquiesced. Meeting gazes, Alex stated, “You stood up for yourself, Kara, and you have nothing to apologize for.”

The darkness of remorse clouded the brunette’s gaze. “I wasn’t there to protect you from Jake, but I should have stepped in with Lar Gand.”

Kara gripped Alex’s bicep slightly too tightly. “No way. If I’m not taking blame for him, then you sure the hell aren’t.”

The brunette shook her head in angry dismissal, but Kara refused to give in on the point. “No, Alex. You didn’t do anything wrong. He’s the one who chose to lie to us, to use our kindness against us, and to treat me the way he did—and I let him, for all the wrong reasons. I thought I could show him by example a better way to treat others and convince him to help them. But he never wanted that.”

Alex settled briefly into the silence of the moment, fingers once more massaging Kara’s neck. With a soft clearing of her throat, she finally stated, “You once said the prince of Daxam was the worst of the worst.”

Kara’s lips pulled back into a disgusted grimace even though she tried to shrug off the statement. “There were rumors.”

“They must have been pretty bad if you’d say something like that.”

“They were,” Kara finally allowed.

When her sister refused to elaborate, Alex sighed but nodded in acceptance. “Whatever he was rumored to have done, he won’t get the chance to do any of the same again here, Kara. Even if he refuses DEO assistance, we’ll keep him under surveillance and make sure he’s not using his powers in any illegal or harmful way. We can’t punish him for what he did on Daxam, but we can make sure he doesn’t hurt anyone here.”

The hero chewed the inside of her cheek as she considered her sister’s words. Finally, she nodded, releasing a breath neither sister realized she’d been holding. She gave Alex’s hand a squeeze and rose from the dais. “Okay, so let’s fire up the kryptonite emitters and get started. What kind of training are we going to be doing? And, more importantly, should I change? Because you are not ripping my Wonder Woman T-shirt.”

Alex smirked in amusement while shaking her head. “Oh, no, no, no, Supergirl. This not a typical training session.”

At the curious tilt of Kara’s head, she stated, “First off, the last thing you need right now is a kryptonite workout right after a solar flare. Second—well, I need you at full strength for what I want to work on with you.” She rested her hands on broad shoulders. “I want you to show me how you lifted Cat with your biomatrix in the alley.”

Kara’s amusement quickly morphed into a mildly panicked stare. “Alex, I-I don’t have control over the speed or strength of my biomatrix’s pull yet.” Her eyes watered as her mind conjured once more the images of the bruises Cat’s body bore. “I could hurt you the way I hurt Cat!”
Pressing down on Kara’s shoulders with a tight grip, Alex adamantly shook her head. “When are you going to get it through that beautifully thick Kryptonian skull of yours, Kara? You saved Cat—and don’t you dare argue that point with me or I’ll call her in here right now and you can try to argue it with her.”

She ran her hands down her sister’s biceps. “Also, this is why we practice—so you can gain more control over your powers and abilities. Besides,” she joked with a wink, “this can be your payback for all the times I’ve shot you during our Super Skeet sessions.”

At the sound of her sister’s slightly wavering laugh, Alex backed away, a hitch to her eyebrow and grin growing steadily on her lips. “So, come on, Supergirl, show me what you can do.”

Kara exhaled a shaky breath, allowing herself to float up off the training room floor and away from her sister. As she hovered, she fell into position, arms extended slightly away from her body, one leg bent akimbo to the other. Alex appraised her questioningly. “How much farther away from Cat were you than this?”

“Um, the training room isn’t long enough for me to be that far away.” The worried furrow of her brow grew. “Maybe we should wait until we can try this somewhere bigger?”

“Nope. Plenty of room right here. Besides, if you do drop me, I want to be close to the med bay—and Mom.”

“Alex!”

The brunette’s laugh quickly cut into a startled inhalation at the feel of sudden lift-off from the training room floor. A charged warmth wrapped completely around her as she shot up into the air. As she neared Kara, she reminded herself to relax rather than tense as she prepared for impact.

The hero watched her sister’s ascent, her brain quickly calculating trajectory and speed and adjusting her position accordingly. Drifting back enough to match Alex’s angle of approach, she caught the brunette with only a slight under-compensation.

Fingers latched around Kara’s biceps as Alex settled into her sister’s embrace with a breathy oof. As soon as she realized she’d stopped moving, she glanced down with giddy laughter. When she looked up to meet Kara’s worried gaze, she wrapped her arms around her shoulders and hugged. “Holy shit, Kara, that was amazing!”

“You—you think it was okay?” She ran her hands appraisingly along Alex’s arms. “I didn’t hurt you?”

“Not at all. Kara, that was perfect.”

The hero laughed shyly as she floated them back to the floor. Releasing Alex, she asked, “What does it feel like?”

“All-over warm and kind of tingly. It’s like—like being blasted all around by hot tub jet sprays.”

“Really?” Kara chuckled at the description.

Alex bumped her sister’s shoulder but paused at the click of her earpiece. “Agent Danvers,” Cat
began, “would you be so kind as to unlock the training room door? Today’s special guest to the DEO has arrived and would like to greet Supergirl before heading off to assist Winslow.”

Catching Kara’s curious glare, Alex chuckled as she crossed the training room. “Give me a second.”

After tapping in the release code, Alex moved toward the doors, laughing once more at how quickly Kara hurried to her side.

With familiar savoir-faire, Cat strode into the room, eyes instantly devouring her hero. “Glad to see Alex hasn’t broken you so soon after getting your powers back.”

Alex snorted in protest, but Kara had already shifted her attention to the woman approaching along the CEO’s left side. Her lips parted with a surprised inhalation. “Secretary Sommers?”

The Secretary of Education smiled brightly as she moved forward to hug the hero. “Supergirl, it’s been too long.”

When she stepped back, she moved her hands along the hero’s forearms before releasing her hold. “Don’t think I’ve forgotten about our conversation in December. My staff has been working on several initiatives we think would greatly benefit from the Girl of Steel’s support.”

“O-of course,” she stammered, delighted to hear the Secretary was serious about wanting her assistance. “I would be honored to help in any way I can.” Her gaze shifted toward Alex and Cat, both quietly observing the hero’s interaction.

“This meeting isn’t about me working with the Secretary of Education though.”

Jaime’s expression lifted into another one of her easy smiles. With a quick exchange of glances with Cat, she gripped one of the hero’s hands with her right hand. “It is, but not the way you mean,” she teased. “CJ and I had an interesting text conversation a few days ago. She mentioned you and the DEO could benefit from my expertise.”

The hero’s mouth opened to reply, continued to drop open even further at the unexpected feel of the Secretary’s grip tightening to what would have been bone-crushing strength were Kara human.

“How?”

Jaime laughed at the hero’s breathless wonder. “I believe CJ told you about my former employer? The Office of Scientific Intelligence?”

Gaze shifting between Jaime’s expectant expression and the hand still gripping hers with stunning strength, she gasped, “You’re bionic!”

“Partly,” she confirmed. “Both legs, one arm, and one ear. Plus an upgrade a few years ago to provide me with enhanced vision.” She shrugged and winked at the hero. “I don’t have nearly the range you do, but I make do.”

The hero’s mouth moved several times, questions tripping through her thoughts with such speed, she had no idea where to begin. “There’s—there’s so much I want to ask!”

“And you will get your chance, Supergirl,” Jaime laughed as she finally released her hold on
Kara’s hand. “I’m going to be here a few days to help the DEO with sensor calibrations.”

She flexed her right hand. “True to her contract with OSI, Ms. Luthor turned over all of the alloy L-Corp created for us as well as the formula, which means I currently have the only other bionics built using it.”

Alex stepped slightly forward, her expression composed but curious. “Being able to scan the actual alloy will help us immensely in calibrating another way to search for the stolen bionics.”

She knew Winn was growing increasingly more frustrated by his inability to access and restart the trackers Lena had embedded into the now-missing bionics. Perhaps getting a break from that task and focusing on sensor calibrations with Jaime Sommers would be the chance to give himself a fresh restart.

“I’m curious, though, as to why the Secretary of Education would need such an upgrade.”

Laughing in a manner even the agent found irresistible, Jaime explained, “Even though I’ve long since retired from my OSI service, I still consult for them—and reap the benefits of that position. I guess you could say I’m the OSI’s unofficial bionic guinea pig. My limb replacements had started requiring more and more repairs than anticipated, so I agreed to help with testing and calibrating the new bionic implants for everyday use in exchange for the upgrade.”

Kara’s confused frown shifted in realization. “Your skiing accident last year?”

“At the time everyone thinks I was clumsily tumbling my way to two broken legs and a dislocated shoulder, I was actually getting new legs and a fancy new arm.”

She leaned forward and affected a conspiratorial whisper. “It was quite difficult for me to accept the cover story, as I’m actually excellent at skiing.”

Joy radiated from the Secretary as she watched Kara dissolve into laughter. “I’ve been working with OSI ever since to provide them with the readings they needed to improve the new design.”

“Does L-Corp know you’re the—the—”

“Bionic Woman?” Another affable grin lifted Jaime’s expression. “No, they don’t. Only a handful of people know about my bionics. L-Corp provided the alloy and agreed to run stress tests on the bionics once OSI finished creating them. However, they had no idea who would be receiving the parts, either for mine or the other set OSI designed.”

Kara studied the Secretary’s arm using her X-ray vision, taking note of the complex tech hidden beneath the sheath of deceptively realistic skin. The sound of Jaime softly clearing her throat jarred the hero from her scrutiny. With a nervous wince, she whispered, “Sorry. I-I didn’t mean to stare.”

“No harm, Supergirl. I don’t mind. In fact, I can make it easier for you.” She extended her arm with her palm pointed upward. “Watch this new trick,” she joked.

Kara noted how Jaime flexed her fingers and thumb toward her palm in a complicated sequence. When finished, she opened her hand completely. Kara gasped at the sight of a seam opening along the inside of Jaime’s forearm, which the Secretary flipped open further to reveal the tech hidden beneath.
“Shut the fuck up!” Alex leaned in closer, resting her hands on Kara’s shoulder for balance as she peered excitedly at the bionics now on full display.

Cat snorted in amusement at the brunette’s unabashed excitement. “Tactful, Agent Danvers.”

The CEO’s words broke Alex’s concentration enough for her to realize what she’d just uttered in front of Secretary Sommers. Blanching slightly in mortification, she began to apologize only for Jaime to wave her efforts away with a pointed smirk toward Cat. “Please, CJ. Even before I had bionic hearing, I’m pretty sure I heard you up in the stands several times, saying things that would’ve made Bobby Riggs blush.”

Cat shrugged casually, adding a subtle eye roll. “I was an invested fan.” Catching the endearingly identical confused frowns from the Danvers sisters, she explained, “Jaime Sommers was once one of the greatest women’s tennis players to hold court, if you’ll pardon the pun.”

She smiled even as the woman in question huffed in protest. “Took down Chris Evert several times and even beat Billie Jean King.”

“Once,” Jaime immediately emphasized. “I beat Billie Jean one time.” She paused before laughing, “I did kick Chris’s ass a few times, though, didn’t I?”

“ Fucking right, you did,” Cat emphatically agreed, much to Jaime’s amusement. “The sport was never the same when you had to retire.”

The Secretary demurred as she once more sealed the skin around her bionic arm. “Yeah, well, it definitely wouldn’t have been the same if I hadn’t retired.” She winked at the hero. “It’d be like me trying to go up against the Girl of Steel.”

Briefly distracted by Kara’s shy smile that always made her heart flutter, Cat nearly missed the curiosity to brighten Alex’s gaze. Controlling her expression, she inclined her head toward the brunette. “Agent Danvers, why don’t you finish escorting Secretary Sommers to Winslow’s secret lair? I need to update Supergirl on some things.”

“O-of course,” the agent stammered, practically tripping over her sister in an attempt to move around her. “Ready, Secretary Sommers?”

“As I’ve told Supergirl several times, I’m just Jaime.” Shooting a bit of side-eye toward the hero, she finished, “Maybe if I can convince you to call me that, it’ll encourage her to do the same?”

Hearing the soft sniff of amusement beside her, Jaime reached out with her right hand, giving Kara’s forearm a solid squeeze and enjoying the rare treat of being able to use her true strength. “Before I head back to D.C., we should all have dinner.” She gestured toward the hero’s shirt. “I could even tell you some stories about her that I’m sure she’d be horrified to know I’d shared.”

Alex had never seen her sister’s eyes go wider than they did in that moment. “You—you know Wonder Woman?”

“Back when I worked for OSI full-time, I had the honor of serving on a few missions with her—which I will happily tell you all about when we have lots of time and plenty of wine,” the Secretary added as soon as she saw the hero excitedly gearing up with what she suspected was a barrage of questions. “I can even tell you a little about what I saw of her home and people.”
“You’ve been to Themyscira?” At the Secretary’s nod, Kara quietly asked, “I-is that where she is now? Back home?”

Jaime tightened her grip on Kara’s forearm, her smile warm with understanding. “She’s actually still here. I don’t think she’s ever going to stop trying to help humanity. Just like you, she has the heart of a hero—as long as that heart beats, she will continue to protect and defend. But she grew weary of being out there, on the front line, bearing witness to the worst of it all.”

The Secretary saw the darkness of understanding rise in the hero’s gaze. “One day, I’ve no doubt she’ll don her bracers and greaves once more—maybe even stand side-by-side with you on the battlefield. But for now, she’s content to serve in—different ways.”

“The ultimate public servant,” Cat sighed, causing the Secretary to glare with gentle admonishment at her.

With one more full-strength grip on the hero’s arm, Jaime turned her attention to the agent eagerly waiting to escort her.

Kara watched them leave, smiling at the soft click of Cat’s tongue. “Your sister and Winslow are going to bombard her with a million questions before they let her leave today, aren’t they?”

The hero chuckled as she pulled the smaller blonde into her arms. “Oh, definitely. We might need to pull off a rescue mission.”

With an amused hum, Cat pressed a series of increasingly deeper kisses against the hero’s lips. When she paused, she cocked an eyebrow at how Kara struggled to re-center herself. “You know,” she purred as she began to nibble along Kara’s neck, “we could start a tally of places we’ve had sex here at the DEO.”

Kara’s responding shiver shook straight through Cat, who simply held on with a low laugh and a playful bite. “Th-this would be a perfect place,” she stammered at the sensation of Cat’s mouth sucking the spot where her neck and shoulder met. “N-no one can open the door—oh, Cat—to this training room except for Alex and m-me.”

The words slowly seeped past the desire spurring Cat to continue ravishing Kara’s neck and lips. She slowed finally, frowning in confusion. “This training room—why is that?”

Seeing the sudden hesitation, Cat drew back further, locking onto Kara with one of her unblinking stares that could always turn the hero into a terrified, rambling mess. “Kara? What is so special about this training room?”

Kara felt her mouth run dry as Krypton’s Kid-Mar Valley. Pointing toward the seams running in vertical lines along the walls, she explained, “It, um, it has kryptonite embedded behind the lead lining.”

Cat’s expression shifted with a mixture of fear and revulsion. “The DEO intentionally exposes you to kryptonite in a lockable training room?”

“Yes—but the room is programmed with failsafes including biometric activation only Alex and I can control and an automatic shutdown that prevents the room from being active more than thirty minutes at a time.” With an uncertain step, Kara drew closer, placing her hands on Cat’s hips. “I know it sounds terrible—”
“Kara, kryptonite can kill you! It sounds far worse than terrible!”

“At full-strength, yes, you’re absolutely right: It can. In controlled doses, though, it allows Alex to train me without the fear that I might kill her!”

Still not placated, Cat queried, “And is this the only place in this facility where they keep that much kryptonite?”

“No.” Closing her eyes briefly, she finished, “They keep the bulk of the kryptonite they’ve collected in locked underground storage lockers at Desert Containment. Only J’onn, Alex, and Lucy can open them. But J’onn keeps kryptonite restraints and weapons in-stock here: bullets, knives—swords,” she added in a pained whisper.

Seeing the fire in Cat’s glare intensify, Kara shook her head. “I know this upsets you, Cat, but it is a necessary evil. I have already fought Kal-El on this, and he wasn’t able to make me budge. Neither will you.”

She ached at the memory of their argument when Kal-El had attempted to take the DEO’s collection of kryptonite after Metallo’s attack. He had fought her with all the zeal and stubbornness of his father—neither of which could match her own still-fresh terror at the thought of leaving those she loved defenseless against her, should anything ever break her control the way red kryptonite had. In the end, it had been one of the few times Kara had pulled rank as the elder of their House.

“We need checks and balances. We cannot be unstoppable. If something were to happen to turn us or make us lose our control, there needs to be a way for humans to protect themselves from us.”

The hero’s eyelids fluttered against a swell of tears. “The Kryptonians from Fort Rozz were reason enough why the DEO needs kryptonite. They could have done far worse things than what they did if the DEO hadn’t had kryptonite to stop them.”

“She said she was gonna give him an honorable death. And I reacted. Because that’s what I was taught to do.”

“I trust Alex with my life, Cat.” She drew the smaller blonde close against her, comforted by the way their bodies meshed so perfectly together. With a wavering breath, she whispered, “I also know she can make the hard decisions when she has to, and I trust her to do what needs to be done to keep me from hurting others.”

Resting her forehead against Kara’s shoulder, Cat let her eyes slip shut against the pain that ripped through her heart—at the memory of Kara weakened by kryptonite the night of the Myriad attack, at the possibility of Kara one day taken from her by the poisoned remains of the hero’s home world, and at the brutal, unforgiving duty Alex bore upon her shoulders as Kara’s sister and most trusted protector. With a shake of her head, she wrapped her arms more snugly around her hero and focused instead on the strong arms that returned her embrace.

“Sorry I killed your lady-boner.”

Cat nearly bashed her head against the hero’s chin with how quickly she looked up in surprise. The CEO instantly began to laugh in the full, uninhibited way Kara hadn’t heard from her since Christmas morning and the infamous “dancing bear” story. Kara laughed as well, relieved she
could break the tense mood that had settled so heavily around them.

“Jesus, Kara, where on Earth did you pick up that line?” She quickly held up a hand and sighed, “Let me guess: Either your sister or Detective Dimples.”

“Actually,” Kara chuckled, “it was Lucy. Between those three and you, I’ve learned all kinds of English that was never part of my studies when I first arrived.”

Pulling the smaller blonde into her arms once again, the hero spun them up from the floor as she planted a passionate kiss against Cat’s mouth. When she brought them back down, she grinned at the way Cat pressed her lips together while flexing her fingers against the soft cotton of her shirt.

“All right, Supergirl, it’s time to get back to work.” She huffed at the need she heard trailing through her words. “I’ve got data to review from Winslow, and you have an interview with Maggie to take care of. I’ve alerted Snapper that he should expect something from you by the mid-morning deadline.”

“Mid-morning?” Kara’s lips twisted to the side. “For the Tribune?”

“Yes, darling. This story is far too time-sensitive for the magazine.” She patted the hero’s chest in a calming rhythm. “It won’t be the headline article, but I’ve asked Snapper to consider making it one of the top clicks for today’s series of articles on the precinct attack.”

“Do you really think I’m ready for the Trib?”

Cat tilted her chin up slightly, hearing the unspoken underlying worry in the hero’s question. “Kara, the Trib was my very first purchase for CatCo. As much as I grouse about it, I love that goddamned paper far too much to recommend someone’s work if I didn’t think it was worth posting—no matter who they might be or how much I might love them.”

The way Kara’s expression relaxed instantly confirmed for Cat that she’d addressed the hero’s concern perfectly. “So get out there, get the interview, get the article, and keep making me proud.”

The CEO observed the excited shine to light Kara’s eyes. “Do you know where Maggie is?”

“In your sister’s lab—alone with Eliza, much to Alex’s clear discomfort.” She caught the empathetic crinkle of Kara’s features.

“Ooh, I better get over there before Eliza decides to start telling Maggie about Alex’s punk phase.” She started for the room exit, caught herself, returned for one more lip lock with the smaller blonde, and hurried off to the sound of Cat’s laughter.

Kara located the detective and Eliza easily enough and redirected her glide to take her up to the second floor. Landing beside where Maggie sat at one of Alex’s microscopes, the hero couldn’t control her elation as she asked, “You ready to face the press, Detective?”

Maggie frowned at Kara as she scooted out the neighboring stool and patted it. “You sure are chipper for someone getting ready to write an article about the grossness of Captain Jell-O Guts.”

The frown broke instantly at the way Kara bumped into her with a grimace. “Please stop ruining Jell-O. Seriously.”
Dimples suddenly on full display, she complied, “Sure thing, Dynamic. So, what do you need to know?”

Grabbing a memo pad and pen from her sister’s workstation, the hero replied, “I definitely need a rundown on the basics so I’m up to speed.”

“Sure. Call came in around nine last night. Joggers over in Byrne Park had the misfortune of finding the body along one of the riverfront trails.”

“Riverfront? Did he wash ashore?”

Maggie caught the connection Kara was making with the body dump they were still trying to identify. “No, he didn’t.”

The detective was still disappointed, mostly in herself, for putting Kara through the pain of viewing that corpse, only to learn the hero didn’t recognize the alien species.

Kara worried her bottom lip as she speed-sketched the path of the river through National City and several surrounding cities, placing marks in the location of Garrick’s discovery and the previous one. “You’ve studied the files on the bodies located in nearby cities, right? Weren’t several of them located along the river?”

Maggie took the pen from Kara and began marking along the river’s path, mentally noting the incredible detail Kara had been able to render in her drawing. “Yeah, the Jorvanian, the Ortrexian, and the unidentified alien were all found by the river along with at least six others I can think of off the top of my head. Only the unidentified body and one other body washed up from the river, though. The rest were found where they’d been dropped.”

Kara eyed the line of marks Maggie had drawn in relation to hers. “Minus the two that washed ashore, the rest of these marks all look like they line up with nearby industrial areas.”

At the curious glance she caught from Maggie, she explained, “I fly along the river on patrols.”

“And Kara has an extraordinary eidetic memory,” Eliza added from where she had been quietly analyzing several specimen slides.

Maggie smiled at the hero’s blush. “What are you thinking, Kara?”

“Well, we know Dr. Luthor has been working with Roulette. And Roulette has been able to keep hiding from the police by relocating all the time throughout these industrial areas after hours—when the bodies show up as well, right?”

With Maggie’s nod, Kara traced her finger over the marks. “What if Dr. Luthor is using Roulette’s fighters to get rid of the aliens she’s experimented on? Maybe Roulette sends them out to collect the bodies during fights and they dump them on the way back.”

Her brow creased in concentration as she muttered almost to herself, “But why wouldn’t Dr. Luthor just have one of her staff do it for her?”

“Could be several different reasons, to be honest. Most likely, though, she doesn’t want anyone directly linked to her caught making a body dump. Clearly, though, she doesn’t care if an alien gets caught.”
Seeing the despondence darken Kara’s eyes, Maggie reached out and gripped her bicep, using far more strength than she would ever normally use. The response she received, however, was worth it as Kara shot her a grateful smile.

“I like where you’re heading with this, Kara. The million-dollar question, though, is where are the bodies coming from? Where’s Dr. Luthor hiding?”

Kara studied the map once more. “Only a few of the bodies were actually dumped here in National City. Most of them were found further upstream. Maybe that’s because Roulette is keeping a low profile here after getting busted.”

“Oh maybe it’s because Roulette is picking locations closer to where Luthor is.”

Both women turned at the sight of Eliza abandoning her work to move to where they sat. As she studied the map Kara had drawn, she softly asked, “Do you think she could be this close?”

Maggie and Kara exchanged glances, sharing their understanding of what Eliza was holding back from asking. “Based on the range and frequency of the body dumps, we’ve been working from the assumption she’s somewhere within no more than a hundred-mile radius—at least in terms of wherever she’s running these experiments.”

The scientist nodded her head as she considered Maggie’s explanation. “And there’s no telling how many facilities she actually has—or who’s at what location.”

“Not yet, Eliza. But we’re not stopping until we find all the doctor’s secrets.”

Eliza cupped a hand against her daughter’s cheek, eyes bright with appreciation. “I know, sweetie.” She reached out and gripped Maggie’s shoulder as well. “I know you’re all doing everything you can.”

The detective held Eliza’s hand in place, hoping to offer some comfort to the scientist. Eliza’s responding smile was tight but true as she patted Maggie’s shoulder once more and placed a kiss against Kara’s cheek.

As she returned to her work, she called over her shoulder, “You two make quite the Super-sleuthing pair, you know.”

Maggie chuckled at the way Kara brightened at her foster mother’s words. “Yeah, we do,” she agreed, feeling a certain sense of pride at Eliza’s words.

Clearing her throat, the hero forced herself to refocus. With a nod toward Maggie, she stated, “Okay, so back to Garrick.”

“Right.” Maggie snapped back into detective mode, although it still took her several moments before the sharpness of emotion finally smoothed in her voice. Trying to be as sparing as possible regarding the more visceral aspects of the previous night’s crime scene, she gave Kara as much detail as she could—even throwing in a few lines she knew the hero would be using as official quotes.

“This is all great, Maggie. Thank you.”
“Anything for my favorite reporter.”

With a puckish grin, Kara pointed out, “I thought I was your favorite superhero.”

Maggie clapped the strong line of Kara’s shoulder as she rose from her seat. “You know you can be both, right?” As always, she felt her emotions for the hero deepen at the sight of her shy response. “If you need anything else for your article, just give me a call. I’ve got to get over to the precinct—I’ve got a team deep-diving their way through Garrick’s activities, and I need to meet with them for an update.”

Catching the sparkle of curiosity in blue eyes, Maggie nodded and waved a hand behind her as she strolled away. “Don’t worry, Dynamic, I’ve got you on speed dial if there’s anything newsworthy.”

As the detective disappeared down the stairs, Kara shared a smile with Eliza before grabbing her notes and settling in at Alex’s workstation computer. For several minutes, she sat motionless with her notes before her. Eliza could tell, however, her gaze was turned internally as she processed her thoughts. When finally her younger daughter began to type, she grinned at the indistinguishable blur of fingers furiously flying over the keyboard.

Almost as quickly as it had started, the frenetic typing ceased and Kara shifted back to read her work, reworking bits and pieces through the next several minutes.

Finally, with a pleased hum, she called to Eliza, “Want a sneak peak of one of today’s Trib pieces? If Snapper approves it, of course,” she added with a twinge of dread in her tone.

Eliza moved to stand behind the hero, resting her forearms against Kara’s shoulders as she leaned close to read. On reaching the end, she hugged her daughter exuberantly. “You improve with every article, Kara.”

The hero glowed at the statement from her foster mother as she saved her final draft and emailed it to Snapper. “Thank you, Eliza.”

Logging out of the CatCo VPN, she got up and, giving Eliza one more hug, headed back out of the lab. Pausing on the walkway right outside, she scanned the surrounding rooms on the first and second floors, smiling when she located Cat tucked away in one of the smaller conference rooms.

The CEO had surrounded herself with stacks of printouts and tablets and looked as though she were muttering to herself. Kara refrained from eavesdropping, content instead to watch for a few seconds more. Even as just Cat’s assistant, she had always loved watching the smaller blonde at work—it was both inspiring and soothing to the hero.

When she went back to using her regular vision, the first thing she noticed was James outside on the second-floor balcony. Turning on her heels, the hero headed toward him, expression cautious as she made enough noise to alert the occupant to her approach.

James shifted his weight at the sound, his smile enough to encourage Kara the rest of the way over to his side. “Hey, how are you feeling?”

Broad shoulders loped upward as he leaned against the balcony ledge. “Just frustrated at this point. No offense to the DEO, but I’m kind of ready to go home.”
With a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, Kara gestured toward the sky and asked, “Want me to break you outta here?”

Chuckling at the thought, James shook his head. “Nah, I think I’ve had enough excitement the past few days.”

James watched the light dim incrementally in Kara’s gaze as she considered more closely his words. “Hey,” he called, drawing her back from the thoughts he knew she wouldn’t be able to avoid, “I’m sorry about Agent Hawthorne. But,” he pressed, “I was there, Kara. What happened in that alley was a calculated hit that only failed because of his quick reaction. Cat’s still here because he was a damn good agent.”

The hero nodded once instinctively, but James could see an anguish gathering in her gaze he’d never seen within her before. Wrapping her arms around herself in a protective hug, she looked out across the city, eyes sparkling in the midday light.

When her silence stretched to a discomfiting length, James swayed uncertainly on his crutches in an attempt to move closer. “Kara?”

This time, she shook her head in response. When she finally turned to face him, sorrow streamed freely down her cheeks. James’s lips parted at the sight, awed by the purity of emotion in the hero’s gaze. Uncertain of anything other than wanting to provide his friend with some kind of comfort, he reached out and gripped her shoulder. “Winn said you crossed the country in under ten minutes.” He gave her a slightly askew smile. “Clark’s never been that fast.”

The hero huffed, a thick sound that barely cleared her throat. James studied her for a moment, the sight of her raw emotions rendering him briefly speechless. With a squeeze to her shoulder, however, he sighed, “Love has a way of unleashing powers we didn’t realize we possessed though.”

Reaching up, she pressed her hand against his. “I never wanted you to get hurt, James.”

James allowed himself the slightest smile. “Nothing that won’t heal with time.”

Kara matched his expression at the comment, quickly drying away her tears as best as she could. With a slightly too-loud swallow, she leaned against the balcony railing to face James.

“So, I-I was wondering.” She paused, fingers scratching nervously along the back of her neck. “I know it’s a moot point at the moment because of your leg, but I was wondering if you were thinking about ever going back to being the Guardian.”

The surprise James felt at the unexpected question radiated off him in almost palpable waves. “Why?”

Kara shifted her gaze to a point over his shoulder. “Because you’re right,” she softly conceded. “Having powers doesn’t automatically make someone a hero. You can have amazing powers and still end up being a lazy, selfish jackass.”

Surprised laughter tumbled from James at the sound of Kara’s clear frustration. The hero caught herself laughing in reply, regardless of the sharp slice of disgust embedded in her words. “I know you have a great suit, thanks to Winn. And I know you know how to protect yourself. But sometimes, out there, even the strongest, most competent fighters can be caught off-guard—and if
the wrong person gets the upper-hand, not even Winn’s suit will be enough.”

James began to bristle at what she realized were words far too close to the repudiation she’d leveled at him when she first learned his secret. Refocusing on his gaze, she finished, “Would you let me train you?”

The thunder in his original reply instantly fell silent at Kara’s unexpected question. With a perplexed frown, he repeated, “Train me? I thought you wanted to stop me.”

“I did,” she acknowledged. “I kind of still do,” she confessed. “I’m scared for you, James. I still believe that all it would take is one misstep—one human error.” She swallowed the emotion she felt forming in her throat—that formed whenever she allowed herself to dwell too long on the excruciating thoughts of how unfairly fragile and finite human life was.

“But,” she hurried on, refusing to let her fears get the better of her once more, “it’s hypocritical of me to try to stop you when I never try to stop Alex—mainly because she would kick my ass five different ways if I did try.”

James finally relaxed into an amused snicker at the hero’s comment. “It’d be way more than five, and you know it.”

“True,” she conceded in between laughter that felt so good to share once more with her friend.

“I really appreciate the offer, Kara.” Sighing pensively, he shrugged. “But honestly? I don’t know if I want to go back to being the Guardian even after my leg heals.”

Unable to hide her surprise, she queried, “What happened to not living in Super shadows anymore?”

“I’m still living in shadows,” he allowed. “But instead of red capes, I’m hiding behind a really uncomfortable metal mask.” He quickly cut his gaze toward the balcony entrance before whispering, “Don’t tell Winn I just said that—but that damn thing chafes.”

Hearing Kara’s snort of amusement, he shot her a sheepish grin. “Besides, Cat’s intervention back at the holidays reminded me that our responsibility to uncovering the truth is heroic and noble in its own right. I let my focus on becoming the Guardian blind me to that.”

“She’s always had a way of drawing our best selves to the surface.”

“Or of reminding us of the power we already carry within.” He turned to meet the hero’s gaze. “I was wrong, Kara.” He bowed his head at the confusion he saw in his friend’s expression. “I once told you Cat would never recognize you as Supergirl because she never really saw you.”

Kara nodded while laying a hand on James’s shoulder. “Turns out, she’s always seen me—and now she’s finally let me see her.”

“And you’re happy?”

Not quite able to hold back his melancholy undertone, the photojournalist frowned at himself admonishingly.

“I am happy, James.”
“Then—that’s—that’s good.”

Hard-soled boots hitting concrete caught the balcony occupants by surprise. Turning clumsily on his crutches, James focused on the approaching DEO agent. “Mr. Olsen, we need you in the med bay.”

Worried by the odd urgency to the agent’s request, Kara stepped forward. “Is everything all right?”

“Yes, ma’am.” The agent turned toward James. “Sir, we just need to collect some samples from you.”

He glanced at Kara, who stared back with equal bewilderment. “What for?”

“I’m not sure, sir. Dr. Hamilton knows the specifics of the request. She can explain it to you.”

Once more exchanging curious glances with the hero, James finally capitulated. Swiveling around on his crutches to follow the agent, he gave a tiny wave before hobbling off in pursuit.

With one final look out over the city, Kara left the balcony, striding quickly down the stairs into the command area. As she approached, she caught sight of Cat and Winn conversing at his workstation. Curious about what they were discussing, she contemplated listening in only to have the ping of an incoming message sideline her thoughts.

Pausing at the bottom of the stairs, she slipped out her phone. Laughter instantly tumbled from her mouth, drawing the attentions of several agents and Cat. Kara caught the sound of the CEO’s approach just as she sidled up alongside her. As she peered over the hero’s shoulder at the phone screen, Kara couldn’t help but make the mental comparison to Cat and her feline namesake.

As if sensing the hero’s thoughts, Cat nudged her sharply with a knuckle. “One curious cat joke at my expense and we go back to that special training room of yours, Supergirl.”

Sniffing in response, Kara tilted the screen to give the smaller blonde a better view of the text she’d just received from Snapper: *Whoever you’ve paid to write this article, keep paying them, Ponytail. They actually know what they’re doing, and they can spell.*

With a loud click of her tongue, Cat muttered, “Poly-blend asshole.”

Kara quickly shot back a string of the happiest, cheesiest emojis she knew would irritate Snapper. Finished, she slipped her arms around the smaller blonde and asked, “Fly with me?”

Cat found herself unable to look away from the full teeth-baring smile parting Kara’s lips. “What do you mean, darling?”

“I want to get out of here—out of the city. I just need to feel the wind and the sun—and your arms around me,” she added softly, hopefully.

“Well,” she sighed with an exaggerated sense of contemplation, “I do need a break from all the data Winslow off-loaded onto me for review.”

“Is that what you two were just discussing?”
An odd glint gathered in Cat’s verdant gaze. “Now who’s the curious cat?” Instead of waiting for a
response, she flicked her fingers at a random spot over Kara’s shoulder. “Change into your suit and
let’s be gone, Supergirl. You can’t offer to sweep me off my feet and then not come through.
Chop, chop!”

Before the sound of Kara’s laughter had stopped ringing in her ears, Cat found herself scooped into
the safety of the hero’s once-more uniform-clad arms. Hovering several feet off the DEO’s main
floor, she waggled her eyebrows friskily. “No one can speed-sweep like me.”

Cat wrapped her hands around the back of Kara’s strong neck. “Oh, we are in a mood today, aren’t
we?”

With a bright smile and a happy hum, the hero planted a series of kisses along Cat’s jawline while
steadily drifting toward the opening bay doors. “Always in the mood for you.”

Once outside, the hero twirled them upward before accelerating to a speed that would carry them
out of the city quickly but comfortably for Cat. She did make certain, however, that her flight plan
took them past CatCo Tower. The pride gleaming in Cat’s eyes as she took in the sight of her
empire’s HQ was worth every extra second of diversion.

Out beyond the glare and roar of the city limits, Kara felt the tension of constantly being on alert
slough away. Flying outside the confines of the urban grid always relaxed her—released the lines
of her body and gave her a far more fluid, more playful range of movement.

Cat clearly noticed this as well, laughing in response to the barrel rolls the hero had just thrown into
their flight. “Feisty is as delightful on you as brazen is.”

Drawing to a halt, Kara hovered them high above the desert floor. Warm currents swirled around
them, tousling Cat’s curls in a way that caused Kara to bite her bottom lip. The smaller blonde
catched the tell, lips instantly lifting at the sight.

“Whatsoever are you thinking right now, Supergirl?”

“Same thing you are, Ms. Grant.”

“What? Can you read minds now?”

“I think I’m getting fairly good at reading yours.”

Leaning in, she began a slow exploration of the smaller blonde’s mouth that drew the most
wondrous sounds from her. Taking advantage of the distraction, Kara carefully tilted back until she
was parallel to the desert below them, Cat nestled comfortably and securely atop her.

When she realized their new position, Cat mumbled against the hero’s lips, “Looks like you can
read my mind after all.”

Hands slowly drifted down Cat’s sides, along the edge of her sweater and then beneath it to rub
patterns against the bare skin of her back.

As Kara’s hands slipped higher, Cat whispered, “Want to start our very own Supergirl Mile High
Club?”
The groan her comment drew from deep within the hero set motion to the smaller blonde’s hips. Feeling the twitch and wanting to encourage it, Kara increased the pressure of her kisses as she shifted her hands up to palm Cat’s breasts.

The unexpected click of her earpiece caused the hero to stiffen slightly. Cat instantly felt the tension, lifting her head to study Kara’s expression.

“Supergirl, you do realize you are preparing to canoodle the Queen of All Media in a restricted air space under DEO surveillance, right?”

At the sound of Lucy’s mischievous warning, the hero squeaked in surprise, hands jumping to more appropriate locations on Cat’s body. Seeing Cat’s expression shifting through the spectrum of responses, from concern to consternation, Kara began to stammer out an explanation. However, Lucy once more chimed in through her earpiece, “If you’re not down here in five minutes, I’m reporting you to Alex.”

The audible gasp was loud enough to spark a chuckle from the feisty major. “See you soon, Supergirl.”

Knowing she was blushing deeply enough to match her cape, Kara forced herself to meet Cat’s gaze. “We, um, I’ve been ordered to report to the DEO.”

“Why the hell is Alex—”

“It’s not Alex,” Kara softly interrupted, her embarrassment growing the closer they came to the ground.

Cat frowned, first at the hero’s response and then at the realization they were descending. Finally shifting her attention, she inhaled at the sight of a moderately camouflaged compound. Understanding clicking into place, she queried, “Desert Containment, I presume?”

At Kara’s nod, she hitched her brow in surprise. “This is where you used to have to fly after all those workday Super saves? No wonder I spent so much time questioning where the hell you were.”

Boots sinking slightly into sand as she settled in place, Kara smirked at the smaller blonde still safely in her arms. “I used to make it from here to CatCo in under two minutes without even trying!” She pressed her lips together to hide her smile. “It was the sticky bun stop after I got back that always slowed me down.”

Unable to resist the hero’s abundant adorableness, Cat leaned up for a kiss she made certain Kara would feel all the way down to her toes. “I’m definitely bribing whoever makes those damn sticky buns for the recipe,” she mumbled against the plush pout of Kara’s lips.

At the sight of a decidedly stunned superhero, Cat pivoted and began walking toward the nearest bunker. “Come along, Supergirl. Mustn’t keep Major Lane waiting.”

Once inside the main building, Kara took Cat’s hand and led her down toward the command center. As they descended further into the subterranean facility, Kara pressed her lips together to hide her amusement at the CEO’s growing disdain over her surroundings.

“Honestly, this place would be OSHA’s wet dream. And whose brilliant idea was it to assign the
sun-charged super alien to the underground lair? You’re not Batgirl.”

“Sorry, Ms. Grant, but this is a no-snark zone.”

The two blondes shifted their attention toward the form marching brusquely toward them, a happy squeak bubbling from the hero even as Cat carefully caged her response. “Oh, Little Lane, I can’t imagine you’d last any longer than I would under such barbaric conditions.”

The major’s expression broke into a full-on laugh as she came in for a hug, first with Cat and the more exuberant embrace she knew to expect from the hero. As she tightened her grip on Kara while feeling the hero drift upward, she replied, “Actually, you’ve commandeered the snarkiest of us all.”

Kara resettled them on solid ground, frowning in confusion at Lucy. “You clearly need to spend a little more time with Vasquez, Supergirl. Once you get her going, she’s got snark for days—might even give your in-flight entertainment a run for her money.”

Hiding her laugh behind an exaggerated tongue click, Cat chastised, “Are you prepared for the fallout from making the Girl of Steel spontaneously combust from embarrassment?”

The major winked while turning and leading them back toward the command center. Gesturing toward a cluster of seats gathered around an empty workstation, she settled in with a content sigh and a wicked smirk. “So, just out for a randy romp through the desert?”

Cat patted Kara’s arm affectionately as she watched the hero’s cheeks darken to the color of her cape. “We both needed a little reality break.”

The major’s expression sobered at the statement and she nodded in understanding. “I know we’re not exactly right around the corner, but you’re both welcome here any time, for whatever the reason.”

“Generous,” the CEO clipped, but Lucy caught the appreciative lift of her lips. “So why exactly have they stationed you all the way out here in Dracula’s grotto?”

“As much as I sometimes wish I could stay in the city—especially on days when I just crave some good takeout without having to send in a Black Hawk to pick it up—it actually makes more sense for someone with my legal expertise to run Desert Containment.”

An elegant brow arched at Lucy’s statement. “I’ve heard of lawyers who chase ambulances, but UFO chasing is a new one, Major.”

Lucy huffed as if scandalized by Cat’s insinuation. Catching Kara’s attempts to stifle laughter, she rolled her eyes while explaining, “The perk of being the director of this facility is the DEO and Supergirl usually bring the aliens all right to me.”

“For what exactly?” Cat felt her good humor souring at the thought of the facility’s purpose. “This isn’t some kind of alien Gitmo, is it?”

Settling back into her chair, Lucy waved her hand in an encompassing gesture. “To be honest, that’s kind of what we want people to believe about this facility—at least people like Lillian Luthor. We’d like to keep her under the delusion the DEO still operates the way Hank Henshaw ran it: capturing and detaining aliens who might pose a threat to Earth.”
She dipped her head, unable to meet Kara’s gaze. “Which, to Henshaw, meant ever\text{y} alien.” Anger pulsed through her at the thought of Kara or J’onn detained—locked up and forgotten in the darkest corner of a place like Desert Containment.

Or worse. Lucy suppressed the shiver Project CADMUS always licked along her spine.

“However,” she continued, shaking herself free from CADMUS’s darkness, “When J’onn took over, he brought some decidedly non-DEO practices to the table. Instead of indefinite incarceration, he put into place a system of rehabilitation and integration assistance.”

Cat perked instantly at the familiar words. “This is where the Petulant Prince should have come?”

Regret slowed Kara’s movement as she finally gave a nod. Lucy reached out and punched the hero’s bicep playfully. “If he does ever end up here, I can assure you, he’s going to wish he’d pulled his head out of his ass and let you train him instead. J’onn might have put up with his shit, but I’m not running some alien B&B out here.”

The major beamed at the sight of Kara laughing at her comment. She turned her attention back toward Cat, noting the familiar journalistic spark she’d seen often enough in Lois’s eyes. “What J’onn put into place is a system designed to protect and help the aliens we bring in. We do detain them long enough to run them through our databases. Many are Fort Rozz escapees. If the alien we apprehend is one of these prisoners, we need to confirm whether or not their crimes were serious enough to consider continued incarceration.”

Cat frowned as she shifted her attention to Kara. “You said Fort Rozz was Krypton’s prison and that your people kept it in vrrosh :dokhahsh.” At Kara’s nod, Cat’s scowl deepened. “But you said time didn’t pass there.”

Kara swallowed against the anxious knot in her throat. “It—it doesn’t.”

The reporter’s jaw moved several times as she wrestled with her response. It was Kara who finally spoke. “Krypton’s High Council thought this was a humane way for criminals to serve their time without losing valuable years from their lives.”

She shook her head, her countenance crumbling sorrowfully. “If any of them had been forced to spend even the shortest sentence in vrrosh :dokhahsh, they would have understood how wrong they were.”

“I think you stared into miles of pitch black space until everything good inside of you died.”

She drew a quavering breath. “All that nothingness. All that qui\text{et}.” Realizing peripherally the exchange of worried glances between Cat and Lucy, Kara shook her head as if physically trying to shake free from the damask of dark memories. With a slightly steadier voice, she sighed, “All I had left of my family was the purpose they sent me here to fulfill: to protect Kal-El and raise him to know himself and his heritage. vrrosh :dokhahsh took even that from me.”

Cat reached out and gripped her hand as tightly as she could. Kara’s gaze shifted at the sensation, instantly captured by the smaller blonde’s resolute stare. “You fulfill your purpose every day, Kara. It might not be Kal-El you protect, but I think protecting an entire world qualifies as exceeding all of your family’s expectations.”
Lucy nodded in agreement. “I’d say you’ve fulfilled that purpose a billion times over, Kara. None of us would be here right now if it weren’t for what you did—and all you were willing to sacrifice to stop Myriad.”

She forced back the memories of watching Alex plead with Kara not to go through with her plan—of watching the brief moment of Alex’s near-total dissolution before setting her mind on flying Kara’s pod to save the hero. What Lucy saw in Alex’s expression in that moment, however, still left her in awe of the sheer depth of love shared between the Danvers sisters.

“Listen to Lucy, Kara. Remember, this is the Lane who got the brains as well as the looks.”

Kara snorted in response, but quietly filed away the affected shine in Cat’s gaze and the fear-tattered edge to her voice.

“So,” Cat pressed, not wanting to dwell any longer on the memories of Myriad, “tell me more about what J’onn has changed about the DEO.”

Relieved for the request, Lucy leaned back in her chair, folding her arms across her chest. “Like I was saying, he’s implemented a system of assistance rather than indefinite incarceration. Once we’ve confirmed the alien we’ve apprehended isn’t dangerous, we offer them whatever help they need, legal or otherwise, to integrate into Earth society.

“Prior to President Marsdin’s Alien Amnesty law, we could really only offer full integration assistance to those aliens who could pass among humans. For those who either couldn’t or didn’t want to pass, we offered them safe haven at any of the protected compounds the DEO operates around the world.”

Cat perked at the major’s statement. “Around the world?”

Lucy hummed in confirmation. “The DEO is a U.S.-based department, but we work in collaboration with several related international organizations. We help aliens relocate wherever they want, learn skills they’ll need to support themselves, and gain whatever other assistance they might need to make their new lives on Earth as welcoming and fulfilling as possible.”

She nodded toward Kara. “Things have gotten even better with President Marsdin’s new law and kick-ass ambassador.” Pleased by the beautiful blush her comment conjured, Lucy continued, “Now, we can offer all aliens the option of living among humans—not just those who could hide as a human.”

“And what happens if those who can’t pass choose to continue living apart from humans?”

“We continue to help them and provide them with safe places to live and work. Many aliens have found work on our compounds they enjoy and that allows them to support themselves while not having to interact with humans at all.”

An approving huff from Cat surprised Kara. “What? I’d give my whole empire some days to not have to deal with some of the humans I’ve had the misfortune of encountering.”

Chuckling at the CEO’s comment, Lucy poked Kara’s bicep as the hero pouted. “Clearly, this is an alien concept for Kara.”

“Ha ha, Luce.”
Cat couldn’t help but smile as she reached out and swept a lock of Kara’s hair behind her ear, causing Lucy to roll her eyes theatrically. “You two are seriously going to turn my agents soft with all these mushy smiles and touches.”

She focused on the CEO. “I already knew Kara was just a big squishy teddy bear at heart, but I thought the Queen of All Media was made of sharp blades and strong booze.”

“Oh, I am all that and more, Little Lane,” Cat countered. But when she looked once more at Kara—her hero with starlit eyes and soft smiles—she shrugged. “But even the sharpest edges can be smoothed with time and patience.”

“Okay, you two can leave now.” Lucy’s words held absolutely no bite and she wore a smile that couldn’t possibly be any wider.

“Actually, I think it’s the perfect time to head out,” Cat agreed, “if we want to make it in time to our next stop.”

Kara’s brow furrowed. “Where are we going?”

She let Cat take her hand and guide her to her feet. “I was thinking we could go see Carter for dinner. That is, if you wouldn’t mind.”

“Yes, of course not!” The excitement in her voice was only surpassed by the brightness of her expression. Looking down, however, she sighed, “We’ll need to go home so I can grab a change of clothes.”

“Or you can just pick from what you left here.” Seeing Kara’s confusion, Lucy expounded, “You know you left like three outfits and two pairs of shoes here, right? Including that cute yellow sleeveless dress Cat always glared at you for wearing to the office because she could never focus when you did.”

The CEO said nothing—simply shot the major a pointed look that made Lucy laugh and shake her head before turning back to Kara. “Don’t worry—I took them home and washed them when I found them. They’ve been hanging in my office ever since.”

Kara hurried over and scooped Lucy up into an encompassing hug. “You’re the best, Luce.”

“Tell me something I don’t already know,” she laughed. “Now put me down and go get your clothes. You can borrow my rucksack to hold stuff if you need it.”

By the time Lucy’s hair had settled from the wake of Kara’s speedy departure, the hero was already back, rucksack in hand.

“She’s a show-off,” she huffed as she hugged the hero once more. She then hugged Cat. “I’m so glad you two sorted out your shit.”

The CEO stepped back with a slight smile, but Lucy could see the flicker of joy brightly lighting the gold in Cat’s eyes.

As the two blondes began once more toward the exit, Kara paused. “Alex and I talked about it this morning. We’d like to restart game night. You interested?”
“You bet your ass,” Lucy immediately responded. “Just tell me the time and place, and I will bring the wine and the win.”

The echo of Kara’s laughter rang down the hallway as she and Cat made their way once more outside. Quickly slipping the rucksack onto her back under her cape, the hero drew Cat once more into her arms and locked her safely into place with her biomatrix. With a slow, deep kiss, she lifted them both off the ground and pointed them north.

Kara aimed her trajectory in a straight line, flying high enough to minimize people spotting her but low enough to avoid planes. She reveled in the feeling of one of Cat’s legs curled around her calf and the smaller blonde’s lips pressing firm kisses against her neck. Flying had always been her favorite power; flying with Cat, however, was beyond compare.

Reaching their destination far too soon for the hero’s liking, she brought them down behind an equipment shed along the farthest edge of campus. Kara quickly changed into the clothes she’d brought, packing her boots and uniform in the rucksack she slung over her shoulder.

She smiled at the way Cat quirked her lips when she saw it was the yellow dress.

“My Sunny Danvers,” the CEO whispered as she kissed the hero’s still-smiling lips. She smoothed the fabric along Kara’s shoulders before taking one of her hands in her own and leading them toward the main buildings.

“Carter’s final class should be ending in ten minutes. I texted Vasquez to ask his agent to lead him across the quad to return to his dorm room. There are several benches there where we can wait.”

Kara felt the heat rise in her cheeks at the way Cat observed her. “You seem quite acquainted with the layout of this campus and Carter’s schedule.”

“I’ve already admitted to patrolling here,” the hero replied, feeling suddenly self-conscious under Cat’s scrutiny.

The CEO slowed to a stop, tugging for the hero to join her. “I never told you thank you for that— for keeping watch over Carter the way you have.”

“And you never have to, Cat. I will always do whatever it takes to protect Carter—and Adam.”

“Even if it means choosing them over me?”

Kara’s brow furrowed deeply at the question. “I don’t ever plan on having to choose.”

The mood between them shifted beneath the press of Cat’s fear. “We plan and the universe laughs.” Seeing the hero’s confusion, she shook her head, eyes gleaming ferociously. “You need to always put my sons before me, Kara. I won’t live with the burden of thinking you would ever choose me before Carter or Adam. No parent would.”

A million refusals ignited and died in the silence Kara took to process Cat’s statement. The smaller blonde saw the moment of acceptance, however, in the rush of tears and the broken tremble of Kara’s chin, and smiled sadly while pulling her into her arms. The warmth of Kara’s sob trailed across her skin and Cat tightened her hold as much as she could.
Tangling her hands in Kara’s hair, she pulled the hero in for a kiss, rough and filled with the anguish she felt sliding freely down Kara’s cheeks. “Thank you, my darling.”

The hero rested her forehead against Cat’s, nodding hesitantly in reply. Remembering the smaller blonde’s words from the previous day, she whispered, “I want this, Cat—to-to be right beside you and to be there for Carter and Adam both, in every possible way. To love and protect them as—as m-my unah-o.” She locked gazes with Cat, the final words falling from her lips in hushed reverence: “My sons.”

Even with her enhanced hearing, her name barely touched the air around them as it wisped from Cat’s lips. The weight of meaning in that apparition of sound, however, shook the hero enough that she had to reach out, hold onto Cat just to tether herself to the ground she already felt slipping away from under her feet.

She felt Cat’s hand cup the back of her head and she willingly let the smaller blonde guide her into her embrace, unable to resist the pull of gravity that had always held the Girl of Steel in her orbit.

“Ours to love, and ours to protect.”

The confirmation felt dizzying and grand, the greatest high she suspected she would ever feel without the aid of one of M’Gann’s more dangerous alcoholic concoctions, and she laughed in awe of the feeling.

When they separated, minus the strong grip Cat maintained on one of the hero’s hands, and began walking once more toward their destination, the CEO suggested, “You know, you can talk about this with Carter—if you’d like.”

She caught the gasp from beside her but continued to look ahead, allowing Kara a moment to process the sentiment. She caught the slight but resolved nod the hero gave to herself. “I would like that very much,” she finally stated, the vein of strength in her voice bringing a smile to Cat’s lips.

Squeezing the hero’s hand, Cat mused, “I wonder if he’ll actually be able to knock you over with the strength of the hug you’ll get.” She paused, eyes twinkling in the late afternoon light. “Adam might be a bit of a harder sell,” she teased, “all things considered there.”

Kara sniffed in response. “He’ll come around. After all, it’s rude even in Earth culture to disrespect one’s elders.”

Halting in mid-stride, Cat cocked her head to one side as realization settled in her thoughts. “As much as I am loathe to focus on such things, how old are you exactly?”

The hero chuckled at the question. “Are you sure you want that answer?” Catching the rise of an elegant brow, Kara explained, “Well, our ahmzeht were a bit more than a quarter longer than Earth years. When I left Krypton, I was thirteen ahmzeht, which means I was closer to eighteen here.”

“You were pretty tiny for eighteen.”

“Hey!” Fists came to rest on Kara’s hips, her expression morphing to mirror the playful one studying her. “We developed more slowly on Krypton. Red sun, remember? Besides,” she contended impishly, “I could still lift a school bus here if I wanted to, even when I was that tiny.”

“It’s sexy as hell when you own your power, Supergirl.” The joy in Cat’s expression when she caught the hero’s blush slowly shifted as she considered her next question. “Your time in vrrosh
“No, Eliza calculated that in Earth years based on Kal-El’s pod records regarding his travel time and arrival.”

Kara watched Cat’s gaze narrow even more, the answer she sought slowly coming into focus. Rather than indulge the grief she felt at once again considering Kara’s time trapped alone in vrrosh :dokhahsh, she wrapped her arms around the hero’s waist while practically purring, “I’ve never dated an older woman before.”

Kara melted into Cat’s embrace, laughter instantly clearing the tension from her expression. “Glad I can be your first in some capacity.”

“Oh, darling, you already held that claim before this revelation.”

“How so?”

“Well, you are my first alien—although I did date a couple of guys in college who were gropsy enough, I would have sworn they had more than two hands.” She tilted her head to one side as she considered another thought. “And then there was that girl at my first internship who could do this thing with her tongue—”

The rest of her thought poured into Kara’s mouth with a muffled huff as the hero captured her lips with swift, soft speed. Several moments and some admittedly impressive tongue work from the actual alien in her arms and Cat was smiling and running her hands along Kara’s back. “Touché, darling,” and she kissed the hero’s nose in a manner Kara would never find anything less than adorable.

In a tone slightly more serious, the smaller blonde added, “You are the most important first for me, Kara. You are the first to push beyond my barriers and actually want the person you found beyond them.”

She rested her head against the hero’s shoulder at the confession, content to enjoy the comfortable fit of their bodies. She felt Kara press a kiss against her temple and snuggled more deeply into the embrace surrounding her.

“Mom? Kara?”

The two women turned in unison as they drew apart, their expressions shifting into equally joyful smiles at the sight of Carter running toward them. Opening her arms wide, Cat laughed at the feel of her son tumbling into her embrace. “My beautiful boy,” she sighed as she held him. “I’ve missed you so much.”

She heard the soft snuffle against her shoulder and hugged him more tightly as she ran her hand through his curls. She felt his hands flex against her, fingers digging into the still-bruised skin of her back. Pressing a kiss against his forehead, she soothed, “We’re okay, Carter. I promise you, we’re both okay.”

Kara moved closer, resting a hand between his shoulder blades at the sight of Cat nodding in approval. “Hey, buddy,” she whispered. When he looked over from his mother’s embrace, Kara smiled brightly. “It’s so good to see you.”
In one seamless move, he pivoted and fell instantly into Kara’s arms, his hug strong enough to cause the hero to exhale in surprise. “You’re my favorite hugger,” she sighed as she rested her cheek against his curly mop of unruly hair.

She felt his laughter shake them both. When he pulled back, she carefully swept her thumbs beneath his eyes and, without giving it a second thought, kissed his forehead as well.

Eyes shining in a way his mother rarely saw, Carter gripped Kara’s biceps and held her gaze. “You saved my mom, Kara.”

The hero gave a jerky nod in response, emotions constricting her throat. He wrapped his arms once more around her neck, leaned in, and whispered, “Thank you for my mom’s life.”

From where she stood, Cat couldn’t make out what Carter had said, but she knew, whatever it was, it had enough emotional punch to level the Girl of Steel. Reaching over, she wiped away the tears flowing from Kara’s shut eyes.

The hero finally released her hold with a hearty sniffle and a huge smile. “ukiemodh w rrup eh, unah te.”

Eyes widening in surprise, Carter began to question the hero on what she’d just whispered to him. A hand on his shoulder, however, caused him to pause. With a steady grip to keep his focus, Cat reminded him, “Perhaps you would like to introduce your friend to Kara?”

Startling at the statement, Carter whirled in place to face the young woman who had finally caught up to where he had run. Cat noted with a subtle nod the agent positioned far enough away to grant them privacy.

“Sorry, sorry!” Carter gestured nervously between Kara and the young woman beside him. “Kara, this is my friend Nelia Valmero. Nelia, this is Kara Danvers, my mom’s—”

At the sudden stop, Kara swallowed nervously while Cat merely tipped her head to one side as she watched her son.

A soft pink rose to the apples of Carter’s cheeks as he faced his mother and Kara. “Do you prefer to be called girlfriends or partners?”

Lips pressed together as Cat fought to restrain a laugh at the delightfully surprised squeak from the Girl of Steel. Instead, she rolled her eyes while wrapping a hand around the hero’s bicep as if trying to tether her before she could float.

“I can only speak for myself, but I believe after certain conversations we’ve had recently, ‘partner’ would be the more appropriate word. Do you agree, darling?”

Forcing herself to remain solidly standing on the ground, Kara nodded her agreement enthusiastically. “I-I think that’s perfect.” She extended her hand toward the young woman beside Carter. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Nelia.”

The young woman stepped closer with a nod and nervous smile. Taking the hero’s hand, she replied, “Nice to meet you, Ms. Danvers.”

When she released her hold on Kara’s hand, she turned her attention toward the CEO. “I’m happy
to see you’re all right, Ms. Grant. It was scary for all of us, waiting on news about what was happening in National City.”

“Thank you, Nelia. I’m glad Carter had good friends to be with him.”

Even as she averted her eyes shyly at Cat’s statement, she brightened at her next thought. “The Tribune reported that Supergirl saved you.”

The CEO caught the thrill of adulation in the young woman’s voice. “She did.”

“That’s so amazing! National City is so lucky to have her.” Her cheeks darkened slightly but she maintained eye contact with Cat. “I have every issue of CatCo magazine to feature articles on her—including the recent holiday issue—and I’ve saved every Tribune article on her.”

Cat caught the way her son glanced slyly toward Kara. “She is quite amazing. If you’d like, I think I could get an autographed copy of her first appearance on our cover.”

Kara watched Nelia’s features break into the widest, most enamored grin she’d ever seen. “You could? Oh, Ms. Grant, that would be so awesome!”

Seeing the way Kara drew herself to her full height, something she rarely did when affecting her human persona, Cat knew she would have a copy of said magazine, undoubtedly signed in Kryptonese writing, before the next time they saw Carter. “I’ll let Supergirl know of my request the next time I speak with her.”

“Thank you so much,” the young woman enthused. When her elation settled a bit, she fidgeted nervously with one of the strap pulls on her backpack. “I really am so relieved Supergirl was there for you, Ms. Grant.”

“Me, too, Nelia.” Resting her hand on Carter’s shoulder, she stated, “We were going to take Carter to dinner. Would you like to join us?”

Once more, the young woman offered the trio her brightest smile. “Thank you very much, but I think I’m just going to head back to my dorm. I’m slammed with assignments.” She tipped her head slightly to meet Carter’s gaze. “Besides, I—I think you all deserve some family time.”

As she stepped away, she waved to Carter, instantly causing his cheeks to redden even as he waved in return. Without looking away from watching Nelia leave, he sighed, “Not a word, Mom.”

Kara snickered at the way Cat feigned shock before she wrapped her arm around her son’s shoulders. “We can revisit this another time then. Where would you like to eat?”

The young man perked at the question. “There’s this really great Mexican place a couple blocks away. You’ll love their fajitas.” He shifted his attention. “Kara, do you like Mexican food?”

Pointedly ignoring Cat’s smirk, she nodded happily. “Love it, buddy.”

“They have these really great burritos, so huge none of us can ever finish one. I bet you won’t have a problem though.”

Even feeling the glow in her cheeks from his teasing, Kara fist-bumped with Carter. “Challenge accepted.”
“Awesome! And you’re going to love their buñuelos.” He perked as if suddenly remembering something. With a wave, he stated, “I almost forgot! Mom, I want you to meet my new agent. She said President Marsdin assigned her specifically for me. She’s the head of the President’s personal detail!”

As he finished, the two blondes turned to greet the agent now standing right before them. At the moment of recognition, Kara inhaled sharply, earning surprised looks from both Grants and a knowing grin from the agent.

Without pause, the dark-haired woman extended a hand to the CEO. “Agent Gina Toscano. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Ms. Grant.”

Cat shook the hand while studying the agent. “Pleasure, Agent Toscano. You’re from Olivia’s personal detail?”

“Yes, ma’am. With the recent events, she wanted to provide you with a bit more peace of mind concerning Carter’s safety. So I’m here taking point with the agents the DEO has assigned him.” A slight smirk crooked the side of her mouth upward. “It’s the best protection we can provide him next to Supergirl herself.”

Cat nodded once, impressed by Toscano’s avoidance of glancing at the suddenly fidgeting hero. “Please give Olivia my personal gratitude for sparing the head of her detail for my son.” Wrapping a hand around Kara’s forearm, she finished, “This is my partner, Kara Danvers.”

Redirecting her attention finally, Toscano shook the hero’s hand. “Ms. Danvers.”

“A-Agent Toscano.” The hero worried her lip as she stared at the agent. “Thank you for taking care of Carter,” she finally decided on for her reply.

“He’s a really great kid,” Toscano replied, shooting a quick wink toward the fiercely blushing young man in question.

“Come on, Kara.” Carter tugged at the hero’s elbow. “That burrito isn’t going to eat itself.”

Kara followed with a chuckle, giving one more quick glance toward Toscano before allowing Carter to pull her along. When Cat fell into step beside her, she couldn’t help but wrap an arm around the smaller blonde’s waist and lean into the warmth beside her.

As Carter had predicted, Cat loved the fajitas and Kara made shockingly quick work of their largest burrito. Even the restaurant owners were stunned by the hero’s ability to pack away a whole half pound of carne asada along with everything else they’d loaded into the burrito—so impressed, in fact, they gave the table a free order of buñuelos as reward.

After making sure to share his portion with Toscano, who had taken a post at a nearby table, Carter sat once more opposite Kara and his mother. Both women could tell as he worked his way through his portion of sweets that he was in the process of carefully considering his words.

Finally, he looked up at both of them, an unsettling tightness around his eyes. Cat folded her hands in her lap while Kara nervously readjusted her glasses. They were thankful they’d opted to sit outside on the relatively empty patio, away from the other patrons.
“You’re both really okay? You’re not just lying to me, right?”

Nodding without pause, Cat reached out her hand, which Carter took in his own. “It was extremely frightening, but as I told you that evening, sweetheart, we’re both okay. I promise.”

Kara jumped in with eager agreement. “You’ve got an incredibly brave mom, Carter.”

Pausing to process their reassurances, he asked in a much lower voice, “Can you tell me now what happened to you, Kara? The videos I saw showed you getting hit with something from a drone—and then they showed Alex shooting you!”

With a nervous swallow, the hero turned uncertainly toward Cat. The smaller blonde simply nodded, letting Kara know it was all right to tell her son the truth. “The drone carried a modified red kryptonite. When Alex learned CADMUS had gained access to the red kryptonite formula, she made all agents assigned to work with me carry the original antidote with them. That’s what you saw Alex shooting me with.”

“So why did you have to blow out your powers?”

“CADMUS altered the formula and the original antidote didn’t work.” She took a deep breath. “So I did what I knew I had to do to make sure I didn’t hurt anyone again with my powers.”

Seeing the anger and fear in her son’s expression, Cat tightened her hold on Carter’s hand to get his attention. “It’s all right, Carter. Eliza and Alex figured out the correct antidote before the end of that evening.”

Ignoring Cat’s statement, Carter pressed, “There are people out there who still don’t trust you after the first time you encountered red kryptonite.”

Cat had refused to lie to Carter about what had happened to Kara after her first encounter with Lord’s synthetic abomination—or her frightening encounter with the infected hero. And while he had taken several days to process what his hero had done to his mother, Cat would always be proud of her son’s capacity for forgiveness and understanding. If only all of National City could have been like him.

“Why are they trying so hard to make people afraid of you?”

The hero laid a hand over Cat’s and Carter’s, nearly sobbing in relief when neither pulled away. “My differences scare them, Carter. I’m an outsider to this world, and they think that means I shouldn’t be trusted—that I’m going to use my powers to take something away from them or hurt them.”

“All I see is them hurting you.”

The fragility of his voice shattered Kara’s heart.

“What if—what if they decide they can’t hurt you enough directly, and they start to hurt the people you care about?” His eyes glistened. “What if they figure out who you really are and start coming after the people Kara Danvers loves?”

The silence from both his mom and Kara was all the answer he needed. “They already know.”
At the hesitant nod Kara gave in return, Carter pressed, “So they can come after anyone in your life now.”

“Carter—”

“No!” The young man glared at his mother with fire in his gaze. “If they know who Kara is, they can come after anyone in her life. And if they’ve figured out who she really is, how much longer before they figure out more of her secrets? How long until they find out about your relationship?”

The young man shifted his gaze back and forth to both women before refocusing on his mother. “They’ve already come after you just because they know you’re investigating them.” His wide blue eyes began to shimmer more. “What will they do to you if they knew it would hurt Kara?”

“We’re all doing everything we can to keep your mom safe, Carter. I swear it.” Kara tightened her grip on their hands slightly.

“I know you mean that, Kara,” he countered, his voice growing raw with upset. “But can you guarantee it? Can Alex?”

Cat was out of her seat and beside her son even before the hiccup in his voice had hit her hearing. Tugging him close, she held him so tightly he could barely get enough air into his lungs. He made no move to stop her, instead finding comfort in her fierceness.

“Sweetheart, I’ve got protection, just like you do. Alex assigned my security detail herself, and I have absolute faith she would only trust the DEO’s best agents.”

He sat in silence for several beats, focused on pulling back from the emotions threatening to overwhelm him. Cat held steady in her embrace, her eyes locked on the pain-filled baby blues helplessly observing both Grants from across the table.

“I’m scared, Mama. I can’t lose either of you.”

At the sound of her son reverting to what he’d first called her when he was very little, Cat’s expression crumbled into a portrait of pain.

“My brave, beautiful boy. I’m scared, too. But I also know nothing will ever shake my faith in Kara. I know it’s asking a lot, but I need you to keep having faith, Carter.”

Kara circled around to settle in on Carter’s other side. Cat glanced up, her pain deepening at the sight of tears running down the hero’s cheeks. However, she couldn’t help the slight smile at how Carter reached back and tugged the hero close, never once budging from his mother’s hold. Obediently, Kara leaned in, wrapping her arms around both Grants and resting her head against the back of his.

“I do have faith in you, Kara.”

The hero pressed a kiss against his curls. “I hope I never lose that, buddy.”

When she sat back against the bench, Cat caught the determined shift in her expression. Sensing something as well, Carter sat up and turned expectantly toward Kara. “What I said to you earlier, in Kryptonese.”
She swallowed nervously but Cat could see the change in her posture—the glimpse of proud bearing normally only seen while Kara bore the sigil of the House of El upon her chest. Softly, she repeated the words to him: “ukiemodh w rrup eh, unah te.”

“What does it mean, Kara?”

She cupped his face reverently. “I love you, my son.”

Breath caught in her throat, Cat watched the silent communication passed from blue gaze to bluer, Carter’s face growing so serious Cat began to worry at what he might be thinking.

“You really mean it?”

“With everything I am, Carter,” she grinned as tears slipped from beneath her glasses.

The young man fell silent once more as he processed her words. Finally, he nodded and leaned into Kara’s now-open arms. “I love you both.”

“And we love you, sweetheart.” Cat rubbed her hand up and down his back as she watched Kara hold onto him with a recognizable protectiveness. “We’re going to be all right, Carter.”

With a sigh of relief at his nod, Cat gave her son’s back an affectionate pat before she slid off the bench. “Let’s get out of here and head back to your dorm. You can tell us all about how things are progressing with your friendship with Nelia.”

“Mom!”

Both blondes shared a knowing smile at his response. As the trio headed back inside the restaurant, Cat noted how Toscano had moved to stand by the door through which no server or patron had come in a conspicuously long stretch of time.

As she passed the agent, Cat nodded. “Your discretion is appreciated, Agent.”

“Of course, ma’am.”

Kara snorted at the smaller blonde’s disapproving sigh. “Remind me to introduce you to my agent sometime. I think you’d like each other.”

Toscano simply arched a brow before falling into step behind them.

Though they all made a special effort to take as much time as they could in their stroll back to Carter’s dorm, soon enough, Cat and Kara knew it was time to say their goodbyes.

Wrapping her son up in her tightest embrace, Cat closed her eyes and relished his return hug. “Soon enough, it’ll be spring break, so start thinking about what you’d like to do, okay?”

“Yes, ma’am,” he teased, laughing loudly at the way his mother tickled his sides in retaliation.

Then he hugged Kara, his cheeks turning a ruddy shade as she watched him work up the courage to ask her something. “What you called me at the restaurant.”

“unah te?”
Nodding, he chewed at the inside of his cheek and shifted his gaze downward. “If-if I wanted to call you s-something other than Kara, what would I call you in your language?”

Kara softly brushed back his hair. “ieiu would be the appropriate Kryptonese word.”

Mouthing the word silently, he finally looked back up into Kara’s gaze. “Thank you for bringing Mom up and spending time with me.”

“All time, buddy.”

Giving him a fist-bump and a wave, she stepped back beside Cat and watched Toscano escort him inside his dorm.

When the hero turned to walk away, Cat reached out to halt her. “No one I’ve dated since Joe and I split has ever done for Carter what you did tonight.”

“Another first for the alien.” Cat’s gaze shifted upward at the statement to be met by the hero’s understanding smile.

“Insufferable alien,” Cat rejoined before kissing the hero soundly.

The two then made their way to a safe place where Kara could change quickly and take once more to the skies.

Landing on the balcony outside Cat’s bedroom, Kara activated her comms link. “Vasquez, Pink Panther is back in her lair. What’s your position?”

Even as she felt Cat’s incredulous glare, she focused on the sound of Vasquez’s reply. “Positioned outside the lair’s main entrance, Supergirl.”

“Understood. Please do a perimeter sweep, check in with street surveillance, and then you can—do whatever it is you do off-duty.”

The hero caught the soft snicker through her line as Vasquez signed off. She knew the agent was already set up in one of Cat’s guest rooms. With a nervous tug at her bottom lip, she wondered about the acoustics of the master bedroom in relation to where the agent was staying.

The pointed throat clearing behind her finally broke the hero’s introspective worries. Turning, she caught the full brunt of a Cat Grant glare, complete with hands perched on perfectly tilted hips.

“Pink Panther? This is my code name?”

With a burst of speed, Kara scooped the CEO into her arms, laughter softening her movements and lighting her features. “Winn thought it was an appropriate tribute to the CatCo mascot.”

“Of course he did.” Kara caught the lack of sting in her rebuttal. “Why don’t we both change and relax?”

As Kara set her down, she finished, “It’s been an incredibly long day, and I’m looking forward to decompressing.”
“Me, too,” and with a quick stop at one of the drawers Cat had set aside for her clothes, Kara collected sleepwear and hurried off to hang up her suit and change.

Crossing from the ensuite back into the master bedroom seconds later, Kara grinned at the smaller blonde as she finished slipping on her nightshirt. “So, I was thinking about grabbing a snack. Would you like anything to eat?”

The consuming darkness of Cat’s pupils was nearly instantaneous. Before Kara had enough time to process the moment, she found herself bending to the fierce will of the woman pushing her backward and pressing her down onto the California king in the center of the room.

Wordlessly, she undressed the hero, hands massaging every dip and angle of revealed skin with a roughness that left Kara hopelessly pliant. Lips and tongue soon blazed trails across sun-gilded skin as Cat abandoned her own clothes, desperate for the direct touch of Kara against her.

Splayed out beneath the intensity of Cat’s gaze, Kara felt a tightening within her abdomen—strings finely tuned by the fingers of a maestra now ready to play.

Kara shifted, legs spreading to allow Cat to settle more comfortably against her unyielding form. Her eyes trailed along the indecipherable set of Cat’s expression, lips parting with curiosity.

And then lips parted fully, jaw falling slack as Cat’s mouth trailed a tortuously slow path from the hollow of her throat, between the soft rise of her breasts, over the hard ripple of abdominal muscle, and, oh, the way she paused in her journey, refrained from continuing to her clear destination—lips curling into the rumor of amusement as she let her tongue linger frustratingly too far away...

“sokao– lizrhom.”

Cat needed no translation for the desperation in Kara’s voice. Feeling the full weight of Kara’s gaze upon her, she continued downward, the lazy swirl of her tongue pulling the most glorious sounds from the hero. Teeth then scraping along the line of a strong thigh, Cat couldn’t resist drawing out her descent just long enough to elicit one more high keen of desperation.

And then her fingers gently spread and stroked Kara’s soft, beautiful folds and ridges, feeling the hero tense and shiver beneath her.

“,cathryn,.”

The smaller blonde inhaled sharply at the sound of her name, both full and foreign, from Kara’s mouth. Unwilling to make the hero wait any longer, Cat slipped lower, settling between Kara’s legs. Green gaze sharp and unyielding, she finally leaned in, let her tongue twist and twirl its way along Kara’s ridges.

As Cat unleashed unrelenting attention on the hero’s most intimate uniqueness, she felt the body beneath her quiver, then tremble when Cat wrapped her lips around Kara’s swollen heat. Gaze still locked on eyes more black than blue, Cat sucked in just enough to feel the hero shake and struggle to stay in place. Cat pulled harder and Kara’s body finally arced, her abdomen tightening at the zenith, her shoulders and feet pressing into the bed with an audible tearing sound.

When Cat’s tongue pushed up, caressed and then flicked feverishly against the ridges across the pulsing bundle of nerves, she knew without looking that Kara was beginning to lose all sense of weight or tethering. Without pausing, she wrapped her hands around the hero’s thighs and shifted
up onto her knees to keep up her relentless attention.

“Let go for me, Kara.” She leaned in once more, this time letting her teeth scrape the sensitive flesh.

The hero’s body writhed in mid-air, limbs loose and serpentine, her fists clenching the disintegrating remains of ridiculously expensive Egyptian cotton sheets. As the supernova of ecstasy burst and burned within her chest, she glanced down toward the woman driving her ever higher, both literally and figuratively. The sight of untamed blonde curls fanned out across her thighs was the hero’s final undoing.

Cat finally sat back at the feel of Kara coming undone, releasing her hold to allow the hero total freedom of movement. Jade gaze shifted hungrily over Kara’s body and Cat knew with undeniable certitude she would never see anything more perfect than the sight of Kara suspended in mid-air, succumbing to the pleasure she’d just unleashed.

Muscles flexed and tensed beneath golden skin as she continued to ride through the sensations flaring through every nerve in her body. When she felt feather-light kisses along her inner thigh, she forced her eyes back open, instantly falling prey to the rakish beauty of Cat’s very pleased expression.

“I unmoored you.”

Focusing on her current position, the hero landed once more on the bed, laughing heartily at Cat’s statement. “I think that’s a fair assessment.”

The smaller blonde’s cockiness grew even more at the sound of Kara’s voice, rough with exhaustion. Crawling up the hero’s prone body, she nibbled at the strong, gorgeous lines of Kara’s neck while grinding a slow tempo against one of her thighs.

Kara responded immediately, floating once more to shift their positions so that Cat was lying down with the hero hovering slightly above her. “I’ll definitely have to remember to be careful who we’re around if this is what happens when I ask you if you want anything to eat.”

The smaller blonde reached up and ran her fingers along Kara’s jawline while smiling at her statement. “I felt like we’d gotten far too serious today and needed to break the tension.” Leaning back further into the bed’s copious pillows, she trailed fingers down Kara’s sternum.

The hero followed the motion, allowing it to draw her closer. “We should probably do something more to lighten the mood.”

Sighing in agreement into the rapid-fire kisses Kara pressed against her mouth, Cat hitched a brow and husked, “So, surprise me, Supergirl.”

As soon as the words left her mouth, they were followed by a gasp as Kara quickly pinned the smaller blonde’s hands above her head. The smirk that adorned the hero’s lips at the sound did nothing to slow the tempestuous ache Cat felt deepening within her.

“I found your collection of toys in our closet.”

A growl, guttural and urgent, struggled from Cat’s throat at the hero’s confession. “Just because I’ve been single for a while doesn’t mean I don’t like a little variety.”
The hero hummed in acknowledgement, a sweet, soft sound that tickled against the sensitive spot beneath Cat’s ear where she had switched her attention. With fluid ease, she shifted so one hand captured both of Cat’s wrists in one wide, even grip.

The fingers on her free hand then began to move so deftly and yet so lightly over the smaller blonde’s skin—merely the suggestion of touches shifting swiftly wherever the hero could reach. Cat swallowed back an undignified whimper as she tried to center herself, but the hero’s fingers were far too fast and her tongue was twisting and twirling once more against the spot below her ear in ways Cat was certain human tongues simply couldn’t manage.

Desperate to give herself some relief, she canted her hips upward, seeking the friction of Kara’s abs against her. Instead, the hero floated down enough to press Cat into the bed, refusing her any movement at all.

“Not finished,” she whispered, grinning wickedly against flushed skin at the vexed rumble she felt beneath her tongue. As her fingers skirmed again across one of Cat’s rock-hard nipples, she felt the desperate shift of the body beneath her, heard the hiss of frustration close against her ear.

“Goddammit, Kara, please—just fuck me!”

And then Cat felt the fingers of Kara’s free hand dipping lightly through her wetness, once again so teasing in her touch the smaller blonde practically sobbed from the intensity of the throbbing pulse between her legs. When the hero drew her hand back up to eye level, she traced her fingers along Cat’s bottom lip, leaving it glistening in the low light. Her tongue then followed the path where she’d touched. “mishidh,” she sighed before kissing Cat fully, deeply.

Finally ready to give the relief Cat practically begged for, Kara wasted no time in unpinning her from the bed and penetrating her with three fingers. However, instead of the familiar rhythm she knew Cat wanted, she paused and waited for the smaller blonde to once again focus on her. Lips curling around the secret she could barely contain, she whispered, “I hope you like this variety.”

Before Cat could question the statement, her words morphed into a groan, first of shock and then of pure pleasure as she felt the surprising sensation of Kara’s fingers vibrating inside her. When she felt the addition of similar sensation pressing against her clit, she lost all hope of forming any actual words in response to what Kara was doing.

Head falling back, the smaller blonde sucked her bottom lip between her teeth and scrunched her eyes tightly shut. The hero continued to tease her, allowing her to come right to the edge of satisfaction, only to shift her efforts just enough to reset the sensation. Each time, Cat felt the need to be deepened inside than she could ever remember another lover pushing her.

Kara devoured everything about the smaller blonde in those moments: the way she clenched rhythmically around Kara’s fingers, the way her blood pulsed beneath the sweep of the hero’s thumb, the inarticulate noises she couldn’t suppress any longer, the way her hands stretched outward as though unconsciously trying to grab what Kara deviously kept shifting just beyond her reach.

And then Kara allowed the circuit to complete, the electrical current fully harnessed, alive, connected, and focused in ways Cat would swear to every deity across the entire universe she’d never felt before. Muscles paralyzed by pleasure held her rigidly arched, head buried deep into the pillow beneath her, and Kara could catalog every ligament in her neck standing out in perfect relief.
against flushed skin.

Body twitching to pull away, the smaller blonde instead looped her legs around Kara’s hips, every instinct betrayed by that decisive move pulling her closer, surrendering herself to the relentless vibration of whatever Kara was unleashing inside her.

Kara felt the steady quiver of Cat’s thighs as her sharp cries of enjoyment filled the hero’s every thought. Only when the last cry tripped from the smaller blonde’s lips on a ragged, exhausted breath did the hero finally relent in her movements.

Carefully, she withdrew her fingers as she helped Cat relax into the bed, kissing her softly when she still whimpered at the sensation of loss. Settling down beside the smaller blonde, she pulled what was left of the top sheet over them and followed it with the duvet.

Moving purely on instinct at that point, Cat curled into Kara’s side, her head coming to rest atop the hero’s strong heartbeat. “We’re framing what’s left of these sheets and bronzing the bed,” she mumbled, barely still conscious.

Kara chuckled at the words. “And why are we doing these things?”

“To commemorate the first time I fucked you into flight and the time your magic fingers gave me the best orgasm I have ever had in my whole life.”

Still laughing, Kara slid down all the way into the bed and wrapped Cat in an embrace the smaller blonde barely felt before she slipped into the deepest of sleeps.

When Cat once more awoke, slivers of sunlight were slipping across the bed and she was still nestled safely in Kara’s arms. Not wanting to wake Kara, she ignored the stiffness in her neck so she could enjoy the peace and warmth of the sleeping hero.

Nearly back to sleep herself once more, Cat suddenly felt Kara’s body stiffen, right before gasping at the abruptly empty spot where the hero had been. Already in her uniform before Cat could even collect her thoughts, Kara hurried out into the hallway outside the master bedroom. “Vasquez?”

Boots thumping on hardwood resounded toward them as Cat heard “Here, ma’am,” in response.

The smaller blonde noted how Kara positioned herself between the agent and her, clearly aware of Cat’s state of undress. “Something’s happened—massive explosions somewhere within the city. I need to go.”

“Understood, ma’am. Team Leader is on comms now.”

With a nod, Kara flicked her earpiece. “Alex?”

“I know, Supergirl.” The hero could hear the tightness in her sister’s voice. “We’re getting reports of multiple explosions downtown.” She paused. “Several reports are pinpointing CatCo as the epicenter.”

Spinning on her heels, Kara focused on the curious expression watching her from the bed. “Oh, no.”

“What is it, Kara?”
“Supergirl, we don’t know for sure if the explosions are actually at CatCo. We're still trying to confirm.”

The hero nodded absently at Alex’s words filtering through her earpiece. She could see the fear beginning to contort Cat’s expression. With a soft dismissal of Vasquez, she shut the bedroom door once more and sped to the smaller blonde’s side. “I have to go, Cat. There’ve been several explosions somewhere downtown. I need to go help.”

As the words settled in her brain, Cat shifted her gaze out her bedroom windows. Furious blooms of black smoke blotted out the bright blue sky behind them. Brow twisting in realization, she declared, “That’s over where CatCo is.”

Swallowing back her initial response, Kara instead leaned forward to kiss the smaller blonde’s cheek before lifting off the ground and floating back toward the balcony doors. “Lock these behind me, okay? I’ll be in touch as soon as I’ve finished helping with whatever’s happening. I love you, Cat.”

Even as she shot off toward the heart of National City, she heard the smaller blonde’s responding “I love you.”

Slipping from between the crumpled remains of the top sheet, Cat quickly located attire suitable enough to face the DEO agent she could hear loitering patiently outside the bedroom door. She began toward the exit, pivoted in mid-movement to lock the balcony door per Kara’s request, and continued on to swing open the door. “Agent Vasquez, report.”

The agent straightened as she fell into step beside Cat. The two headed for the living room and the large flat screen that took up most of the accent wall. With a stabilizing breath, she replied, “Agent Danvers has just confirmed: It’s CatCo, ma’am. She’s also ordered me to bring you to HQ as a precaution.”

A horrifying rush of panic and fury blindsided the CEO as she grabbed the remote and flicked on CCN. Live coverage was already rolling, including shots from the CatCopter she could now see hovering just beyond the reach of angry tendrils of smoke.

“Again, we can confirm that at least three massive explosions have occurred within CatCo Tower, the headquarters of CatCo Worldwide Media as well as the location of CCN’s main studio. We are continuing to broadcast through our L.A. satellite. At the moment, we cannot reach any of our National City staff other than our chopper pilot who is providing us with the footage you’re seeing right now. We can report that Supergirl entered through one of the explosion points and has been transferring employees down to arriving EMTs. So far, she’s brought down four people, including one woman who looked severely injured.”

As Cat clutched the remote in her hand so tightly she could hear the plastic creaking beneath her hold, she caught the sound of Vasquez quietly communicating with whoever was relaying information to her through her earpiece. She jumped at the sound of another explosion, broadcast through the television feed, which was followed by the excited response of the reporter on scene.

“We’ve got another explosion coming from somewhere inside CatCo Tower! Fire and Rescue are pushing back the crowd gathered outside as more debris falls. Supergirl stopped some of the debris after the initial explosion but is back inside the building now!”
As the camera crew on the ground zoomed on the location of the latest blast, a large chunk of exterior crumbled and slid down toward the ground. Gritting her teeth, Cat felt her stomach knot painfully at the thought of bystanders not being fast enough to avoid the debris. The fact that Kara hadn’t come back out since the last blast ramped her worry even further. The hero would never ignore the panicked shouts she could hear through the broadcast from CatCo Plaza—unless something far more serious was keeping her inside the building.

Heavy, rapid banging from the CEO’s front door once more caused her to jump and spin toward the noise while Vasquez immediately unclipped her service weapon and took point between Cat and the disturbance on the other side of the door. Flicking her earpiece, she calmly stated, “Street surveillance, report your positions.”

When only silence met her call, she clicked back over to the previous channel where Winn had taken point while Alex switched to her sister’s channel. “Tech One, confirm all comm lines are working?”

“Oh! I’ve got an unexpected arrival outside, and I can’t raise street surveillance on comms.”

As she spoke, she turned and wrapped a hand around Cat’s arm, directing the CEO back toward her bedroom. “Ms. Grant, until I can confirm who’s here, I need you to go back into your room and lock the door.”

She knelt down and unstrapped the Glock she carried in an ankle holster. Pressing the weapon into Cat’s hands, she firmly stated, “Lock this door. Do not open it until you hear me say glockenspiel.”

Under different circumstances, Cat knew she would have teased the agent about “creative safe word selection.” Instead, she gripped the gun and gave Vasquez a nod before slipping behind the door the agent was already tugging shut behind her. Fingers trembling, she managed to lock the door just as she heard the ear-splitting sound of splintering wood, followed by what she realized with sickening clarity was the sound of Vasquez taking a solid-sounding hit and growling in pain. Seconds later, she heard the agent gasp out, “Tech One, Henshaw’s here! Need immediate backup! Repeat: Henshaw—”

At Vasquez’s sudden silence followed by the sound of breaking glass, Cat ran into her walk-in closet and grabbed the rope for the pulldown ladder that led into her attic space. Checking the safety on Vasquez’s Glock, she tucked the weapon into the band of the yoga pants she’d thrown on and began up the steps.

Her hands shook as she clutched the ladder’s edges, and she cursed softly when her foot slipped from one of the rungs at the sound of a loud slam against her bedroom door. Righting herself, she scurried the rest of the way up into the attic, pulling up the ladder as she heard another loud crash and the sound of more wood splintering.

With the ladder easing back into place, she crawled quickly away, shoving wardrobe bags aside as she headed toward the window at the opposite side of the space. Her eyes struggled to acclimate to the dimness, but the breeze from the open window at least cleared the air of its usual stagnancy.

The realization froze her in place, one hand hovering above the floorboards as she once more lifted her head to look at the open window. Shivers shook through her as she struggled to suppress the frightened sound she felt rising in her throat. Hand slowly reaching toward the weapon tucked
against her side, she settled back on her heels, body curving into itself as if trying to shrink from view right then. Eyes flicked back and forth, scanning the darkness of the attic space ahead of her. Minus the normal detritus of stored clothing and holiday decorations, she couldn’t make out anything out of the ordinary.

Behind her, however, she caught the whisper of swift movement. Before she could shift to track it, she felt the weight of a solid form slam into her, knocking her forward before she could reach the gun. Forearms scraped against the unfinished boards beneath her and she felt the point of her chin connect with the floor in a way that clacked her teeth together painfully.

And then she felt herself jerked back up onto her knees, a hand wrapped tightly in her hair and holding her in place. As soon as the grip released her, she began to slip once more downward, only to be caught by an arm slithering around the front of her throat. When the other conformed around the back of her neck, she felt them locking her into a grip that pressed forearms precisely against the carotid arteries on either side of her neck. Cat’s hands barely made it up to grab hold of one of the arms, the sensation of unconsciousness fogging her brain with alarming speed.

As she felt her body slump traitorously, a voice familiar and unsettling whispered, “I’ll be sure to let Yale know all your latest complaints about me, Ms. Grant.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m sorry it took so long for this chapter. It’s just been a perfect storm of diminished time and diminished… focus? Desire? I don’t know. I’m having a difficult time holding on to the… hope of the show, I suppose. It’s hard when all the great things I loved have slowly disappeared or changed in unrecognizable ways. I miss Supergirl a lot. I miss Cat Grant even more.

However, I really do love this story. It’s become so incredibly special to me—a journey on which I honestly never expected to embark. I realized when I stepped away from this story how much I missed it. I have so much more I want to write and so many more places I want to take you all with these characters.

So…since I’ve been gone so long, I made an executive decision with this chapter: I let it be as long as it wanted to be. It’s hella long, but to be honest? I’m really delighted with this chapter. It surprised me so many times, with some really fun, and sometimes unexpected, character interactions.

A couple of things about some of the decisions I made in this chapter. First, the kryptonite discussion between Kara and Cat. I believe there always needs to be someone the Supers can trust who can stop them with kryptonite if they have to. I know Batman has been that person for Superman in the comics (although it might be Wonder Woman now; I never read those comics that paired them together as a couple). I can’t imagine Kara trusting anyone other than Alex (and, by extension, J’onn) to do the same with her. And I truly believe she would insist on someone having the ability to stop her—or kill her if they had to. Kara believes too deeply in her duty as a protector not to want someone to be able to stop her if they needed to.

Second, congrats to those of you who pegged that Jaime Sommers was more than just a fun addition to the first part of this series. I simply couldn’t resist adding the Bionic
Woman to the mix. I have plans for her beyond this, but I wanted her return to be fun—just like her show was. Also, if you liked her show and the Lynda Carter Wonder Woman, then I highly recommend the graphic novel Wonder Woman 77 Meets The Bionic Woman. That’s actually what I’m referencing when Jaime says she worked missions with Wonder Woman during her time as an OSI agent. It’s a great series, and I hope they consider doing another one.

Oh, and really quickly, in my story, Kara and Maggie not only get along with each other but they also work together to reach solutions. If Kara didn’t understand on her own (which she would as the daughter of Krypton’s chief adjudicator) how important it was not to interfere with the process of the law and its enforcement, you damn well know Alex would have drilled that into her head while training her. The show’s attempt to inflict bogus internal conflict on us from all angles, including this one, grew so exhausting so quickly. If you tell solid stories, you can get all the conflict you need externally. Just saying.

Finally, I’ve actually been waiting for a couple of moments in this chapter, but the one I’m particularly pleased with is the Desert Containment section. More Lucy, which is always a treat, but also—I hated that the show never really addressed what the DEO did with the aliens they caught. However, in S2, we all of a sudden start seeing aliens living in National City among humans. So, I decided J’onn wouldn’t have come into command and continued whatever barbaric tactics Henshaw would have used. Instead, he would have helped the aliens who could be helped and kept only the aliens too dangerous to free. Another one of those silly head canons I fixated on that I decided to drop in here—plus, it’s going to come up again. Spoilers!

I hope you enjoy this chapter. As you can tell by the ending, things are…going to be rough the next few chapters. I hope my prolonged absence is forgivable, as is what I have planned for our heroines, and you’re willing to continue along with me. I’ve missed you all and look forward to hearing from you!
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

CADMUS Test Subject Interlude 9

Chapter Notes

This one's a tough one to deal with. Nothing too graphic...but nothing nice either.

Test Subject CDS-17-060

“You’re much smaller than I expected you to be.”

The words filtered slowly through the cottony fog clouding her head. Her brow furrowed against light beating down on her so brightly, the darkness behind her eyelids glowed crimson along the edges. Wanting to shield herself, she struggled to no avail to lift a hand to her face.

“I had to tighten the restraints to their smallest setting for you. Tell me, are they comfortable?”

Surprised by the question, she finally forced herself to open her eyes. It was a regretful decision, the blinding intensity of the surgical light positioned above forcing her to blink away the tears that slipped down into her hairline.

When the light swung away from its position above her face, she squinted into the equally disorienting darkness. As she waited for her pupils to readjust, she made out an imposing silhouette standing along the edge of her vision.

“Do you really care about my comfort?”

When she spoke, she felt the bruising along her chin from where it had struck against the attic floor. Her voice snagged against the dryness of her throat and she struggled to swallow down the reflexive cough. The action made her grimace against pain in her neck muscles.

“Not really.” The dark delight she heard in the words pierced her with dread. “Although you should show me a little gratitude.”

Shadows slipped away from familiar features as the speaker moved closer. “Eve wanted to garrote you properly when I sent her to collect you.” Her lips thinned into a maliciously amused curve. “You’re lucky I need your voice.”

Shivering involuntarily, she forced herself not to try to shift away from the woman who now stood right beside the exam table edge.

“It’s odd how we’ve never been in the same room together before. You destroyed my husband’s life and yet we’ve never actually met until now.”
“Lionel destroyed his own life with unscrupulous business decisions.”

Shoulders rose in an indifferent shrug. “Perhaps, but you were the one who chose to use those
decisions to boost your own career. One could argue you were equally unscrupulous.”

Unable to control the disgusted curl of her lip, she sneered, “Only a Luthor would consider
exposing the truth as dishonest.”

Ignoring the comment, the doctor continued, “You know, if Lionel had listened to me back then,
so many things would be different right now—including the fact that we would have been spared
the rise of the Queen of All Mediocrity.”

She leaned closer, the stoniness of her expression unnerving. “If he’d listened to me, Cat Grant
would have been nothing more than a meager footnote in the Daily Planet’s article archives: a
forgettable gossip columnist who thought she could be more—before meeting an untimely though
well-deserved ending.”

She slipped her hands into the pockets of her lab coat. “He was never good at seeing the details,
though. Ultimately, it was his big picture bravado that unseated him—you merely took advantage
of his hubris.”

With a shaky exhalation, Cat turned her head until she was staring up at the ceiling instead of at
Luthor. “I suppose you believe some version of that same lie for why your son is in prison now?”

The painful jolt that raced through Cat’s body was unexpected and swift, the cold glare on
Luthor’s face lasting far longer. “My son is in prison because he trusted the empty promises of a
Kryptonian.”

She hissed the word with venomous seething. “He waited too long to do the right thing, and now
he’s being punished for finally seeing through the lies that blind too many from the truth: This is
our country—our world. We need to protect ourselves by any means necessary. We need to
eliminate these aliens before they turn on us and try to take what is ours.”

“You aren’t just eliminating the aliens who come here. You’re butchering them for your own
enjoyment!”

“I’m learning from them,” Luthor corrected. “I’m making certain we know what we face from
these intergalactic intruders and have the ability to defeat them.”

Slate gray eyes cooled with repulsion. “Unlike traitors like you, willing to let one of these creatures
defile you.” Lips contorting in disgust, she sneered, “You reek of perversion.”

“It’s called sex, Lillian. I suspect you haven’t had opportunity—”

With another flick of her finger, Luthor watched as a series of spasms contorted Cat’s body so
violently against the restraints, the metal edges easily scraped and tore the skin around her wrists
and ankles. After several seconds, Luthor flicked the remote in her pocket once more into its off
position.

A sob of agony wrenched free as Cat’s muscles released and she sank back against the exam table.
She felt the rising burn of bile within her throat and had to force herself to swallow several times
against the fear of Luthor allowing her to asphyxiate if she were to actually become ill.

“Your value to me is limited to luring Kara here and keeping her in line. That value is not
contingent upon having to listen to you.”
She glanced down at the remote she now held within eyesight of the still-shaken CEO. When she looked back up, her eyes gleamed. “Remember that the next time you feel inclined to engage that sarcastic wit of yours.”

“What—”

The sound of her own voice, distorted by the pain still coursing through her veins, silenced Cat long enough to at least temper the unsteadiness she could hear.

“What have you done to me?”

“I’ve decided to help my daughter, regardless of what a disappointment she continues to prove herself. She has so much potential and yet she squanders it on these pointless philanthropic endeavors of hers, instead of honoring the Luthor legacy.”

She paused, finger slipping along the remote as she waited for the acerbic riposte that surprisingly never came. She frowned at the depth of her disappointment. “I’ve taken her work on nanotechnology, duplicated it, and improved upon it. I’ve removed the safeguard programming that was interfering with the full development of sentience.”

Her frown finally broke with unexpected satisfaction. “You’ve already encountered the nascence of this tech’s path to self-realization. The bots I injected into Mr. Rieger were operating on programming I gave them, but once I initiated the root commands, I allowed them to determine on their own the best way to follow my orders.”

Cat couldn’t fight the trembling that began through her at the horrific memory of Thomas’s final moments—or at the realization that she now contained the same technology that had brought about his violent end.

“That’s right,” Luthor replied, “you were there to witness Mr. Rieger’s demise. I wish my drones had arrived to the scene by that point for full-color coverage. My little bots were quite the show stoppers in their separation from Mr. Rieger.”

Unable to stop the tears forming in her eyes, Cat glared at Luthor. “You speak of protecting humanity, and yet you celebrate the suffering and horrific death of an innocent man.”

“He wasn’t innocent. Even if his one crime was in wanting to make you suffer, he was still defective. But you know all about that, don’t you?”

She watched Cat swallow, a muscle twitching in betrayal along her jaw. “It’s so easy to access medical records when you have the proper resources. I know all about your own defects. I assure you, we have no room in our new world for the weak or the broken.”

She leaned closer, her words slithering into Cat’s ear. “Once you serve one final purpose, I will eliminate you—and those who might carry on your defective genes. Tell me, should I start with the boy you kept or with the one you threw away?”

Heart rate spiking until it felt as if the beat would burst straight through her chest, Cat roared in fury, “You will not touch my sons! You won’t—”

Straightening to her full height, Luthor watched muscles contract once more under the searing surge of another wave of pain. She listened as the CEO’s screams fractured into guttural gasps and sobs, the merciless sensations leaving her unable to sustain anything more. She observed the bloody hue of the metal cuffs slicing even deeper into wrists and ankles desperate to be free.
At the end of a five-count, Luthor switched the remote back into its off position. Expression impassively set, she continued to study the CEO now shaking on the exam table. When she once more leaned closer, she allowed herself a moment of satisfaction at Cat’s immediate instinctual need to recoil. Raw keening tumbled from a mouth finally left wordless.

“I warned you, Ms. Grant. And now the nanotech inside you is learning that pain is what I want for you every time I activate them. Is that truly the lesson you want them to learn? Wouldn’t you much rather die quickly and with some dignity left?”

When no answer came, Luthor withdrew, moving to the lab entrance. Leaning out into the corridor, she summoned, “You can take her to the holding cell. I’m finished with her—for now.”

When she returned to the exam table, she began to release Cat. Brow arching slightly as she unlatched the magnetic ankle restraints, she queried, “How are things going in National City?”

“Supergirl is still preoccupied.”

As Cat pinpointed the voice she was hearing, Hank Henshaw moved into her line of sight. She felt nauseous once more as she took in the familiar features now utterly devoid of the kindness or courage she would normally ascribe them.

“She’s the only thing keeping CatCo Tower from crumbling to the ground right now.” His eyes flashed an electric blue as he watched the CEO for a response.

“Too bad she’s saving it for nothing.” Fingers angled with artistic flair as Luthor flipped up the wrist restraints. “Without its leader or its pet superhero to boost sales, how long do you think CatCo will last? Not that it will need to, what with no heir left to inherit the family business.”

Disappointment once more shaded the gunmetal gray glare now bearing down on the frustratingly silent CEO. “And here I thought you’d be much more of a challenge.”

Cat simply closed her eyes, her lips pressed into a trembling line against the agony and terror struggling feverishly to escape. She could feel the sharp cut of her panic deep within her chest—knew it was only a matter of time before it completely severed her already tenuous control.

With an almost petulant sigh, Luthor stepped aside to allow Henshaw to pull the CEO roughly to her feet. Fingers dug into her bicep, forcing her to groan in pain.

“Careful,” Luthor jeered. “You’re handling royalty.”

With a disgusted sound, Henshaw moved to the door, dragging Cat along at a pace barely slow enough for her to match.

The CEO staggered and tripped along under Henshaw’s unyielding grip as he marched her further into the facility. At one point, she stumbled and nearly fell to her knees. The cyborg jerked her harshly back up, indifferent to the harsh pop of her shoulder joint or the mangled cry she couldn’t completely suppress.

Reaching the detention area, Henshaw used the biometric scanner to unlock the door and roughly escorted Cat inside. Shoving the CEO into one of the cells, he slammed the door shut with a thunderous clang, already gone from view by the time Cat had finished steadying herself and pivoting to face where he had been.

Assuming she was alone, she finally gave in to the sobs that shook violently through her. She sank down against the bars behind her and curled inward, arms shaking as they wrapped around her
knees. Her cries echoed down the corridor, heard only from the shadows of the adjacent cell, its occupant bearing silent witness to the breaking of a Queen.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Dr. Luthor makes her play for what she wants most...

Chapter Notes

There is violence throughout this chapter. That's going to be the standard warning for the next few, I'm afraid. The descriptions aren't too extreme for the most part (although the scene at CADMUS near the end is fairly intense), but if any kind of violence isn't your thing, please take heed.

Alex settled in at the workstation beside Winn as they both nursed coffees the tech agent had picked up on his way into the DEO. Outside, the morning sky was starting to brighten, the air tinged with all the chill southern California saw fit to inflict in the name of winter.

As he pulled up the overnight satellite scans, Winn laughed at the story the brunette was finishing. “Lucy is never going to let her live that down!”

“Nor should she,” Alex laughed, easily able to envision her sister’s expression at being busted by Lucy while compromising Cat.

“Aw, cut her a little slack.” Vasquez’s voice came through the secured comm line, mischievous though still tinged with sleep.

“And why should I do that, V? Feeling overprotective after a few nights of sleeping in a bed that probably cost more than all our rents combined?”

Beside her, Winn snorted and even Vasquez could be heard chuckling. “Yeah, yeah. You know what? The bed here is hella comfortable—better than anything I’ve ever slept on, for sure—which is a good trade-off, all things considered.”

Alex scoffed as she reviewed the incoming police scanner activity for anything that might need Kara’s assistance—or that might require Maggie’s interception. “What the hell’s that mean?”

Even without being able to see the other agent, Alex could hear the bold grin. “Means I don’t get the full princess sleepover package you think I get. Let’s just say I’m sharing quarters with a very healthy and very vocal relationship.”

Coffee sprayed across the tech agent’s workstation as he snorted the scorching liquid painfully out of his nose. Alex shifted quickly out of range, her choked protests mingling with Winn’s mangled coughs.

“A little warning next time,” Winn finally spluttered, wiping coffee from beneath his nose and off
his chin. As he searched for napkins, he caught sight of Alex frowning while staring forward. “Uh-oh,” he whispered theatrically to Vasquez, “I think you crossed a line with that last bit.”

Alex tilted her head enough to side-eye Winn. “Please. As one of the very few preeminent experts in Kryptonian physiology, what V just said is sadly just another bullet point in a long list of things both Supergirl and I wish I didn’t know about her healthy relationship.”

At the sound of Vasquez’s incredibly undignified snort, Alex couldn’t help but do the same. Still, Winn pressed, “Okay then, what’s causing that crinkle?”

“What crinkle? I don’t have a crinkle!”

“Yeah, and Maggie doesn’t have dimples.”

At the sight of Alex slowly swiveling to face him, Winn swallowed and shifted back in his seat. “You been checking out her dimples, Schott?”

As Winn stammered helplessly, Vasquez happily offered, “I know I have.”

“Come on, V!” The brunette fell back into her seat with a surprised laugh, feeling the sear of embarrassment wending upward through her cheeks.

“What?” She scoffed teasingly. “I swear to god, you burst out of the closet and right onto the top floor of Gays R Us. You better make sure you hold onto her, or you’ll just being going down from here—and not in the good way.”

Watching Winn’s face cycle through every known color of red on the spectrum was absolutely worth the mixture of shyness and pleasure Alex felt at Vasquez’s words. “Even if you were next on my hit list?”

“Yeah, like you could even handle me.”

Blowing an undignified noise through the comm link, Alex muttered, “Like you could handle me,” and purposely ignored the responding chuff through the line as she returned her attention to what had made her frown in the first place.

Winn edged closer, his face still flushed enough to catch Alex’s eye. “What’s wrong?”

She pointed to an energy spike showing on one of the scans he’d pulled up. “This spike from last night—I saw a spike like that in yesterday morning’s scans, too. What are they?”

Rolling back into position in front of his system, the tech agent typed in a series of code that transposed the spikes onto a street grid of National City. “Looks like they occurred down by the Cameron Heights apartments.”

The brunette’s lips instantly pulled back into a sneer. “That’s where the agents assigned to Lar Gand followed him two nights ago after his regular stop-off at the alien bar.” Her voice grew low with disdain. “He hasn’t left since.”

Alex knew from pulling up a residents list for the building he went to that he was more than likely with Eve Teschmacher. She knew from Kara that Eve, while sweet and attentive, had also recently taken to showing the Daxamite far more favor than he deserved.

She checked the time of each spike and confirmed they both occurred after his arrival—once not long after he had arrived and once more last night. “What the hell is he doing that’s causing spikes
The moment she asked the question, she grimaced in disgust. “You know what? I don’t actually want to know the answer to that question.”

Winn continued to examine the spikes while shaking his head. “I’m going to need some time to clean up the readings—something’s distorting the energy signature—but I don’t think these are biological in nature.”

“Do it. Whatever the spikes are, I can’t imagine it’s a coincidence the Drunk Tank Prince is at the epicenter.” Swiveling away with a perturbed huff, she snapped, “Figure out what they are and let me know if I need to have him brought back in.”

At the sound of Winn’s rapid typing in response to her order, the brunette rolled her chair back to her own workstation. As she prepared to keep up the teasing conversation with Vasquez, she felt the floor beneath her buck and tremor. Grabbing the desk edge to steady herself, she glanced over at Winn, who returned her look with wide eyes.

“What the hell was that?”

“Felt it here, too,” Vasquez confirmed in a fully alert voice. In the background, Alex noted the sound of her sister calling the agent’s name.

Turning to address Winn, Alex switched to full mission focus and clipped, “I need information, now.”

Fingers flying across his keyboard once more, Winn began scanning the various windows he pulled up. “Getting multiple reports of explosions in the business district.”

His jaw fell open before clacking shut in a worried grimace. “A lot of the reports are naming CatCo Tower as the location of the explosions.”

“Give me eyes.”

As the tech agent pulled up the DEO satellite and began programming it with coordinates, Alex heard her sister’s voice come through the comm line. “Alex?”

She instantly heard the vulnerable tremble in her sister’s voice, breaking her name into sharp shards that cut Kara’s fear deep down into her own marrow. “I know, Supergirl. We’re getting reports of multiple explosions downtown. Several reports are pinpointing CatCo as the epicenter.”

She heard the panic rising in her sister’s voice as she exhaled an unsteady, “Oh, no.”

Catching the equal rising in Cat’s voice in the background, Alex gently warned Kara, “Supergirl, we don’t know for sure if the explosions are actually at CatCo. We’re still trying to confirm.”

She could hear Kara trying to keep her voice calm as she explained the situation to Cat.

“Alex.” Switching her comm link to simplex so Kara wouldn’t hear, the brunette turned to Winn, shocked at how pale he’d gone. “It is CatCo.”

She followed where he was pointing, sucking in a sharp breath at the sight of the satellite image of CatCo Tower. Massive clouds of smoke billowed out of a hole blown outward from the top floor, while she could see more dark tendrils writhing up from the adjacent and opposite sides of the
building. Seconds later, she saw her sister fly into frame.

Keeping her side of the comm line muted, she gasped, “What the fuck happened?”

Winn snapped to at the urgent slice of Alex’s query. As he worked to zoom in, he pulled up the live feed from CCN. “Looks like multiple explosion points—we’re going to need Supergirl to tell us where exactly.”

Switching over to Vasquez’s line, Alex stated, “V, we’ve confirmed it’s CatCo Tower. Secure your location. Have street surveillance sweep the perimeter and your onsite DEO vehicle. You’re transporting Pink Panther to HQ. There’s no way this is coincidence, which means I don’t want her where anyone expects her to be right now.”

She paused, considering her next move. “I’m also calling in NCPD to see if they can provide additional escort protection. If this is CADMUS willing to blow up a fucking building to distract us, Luthor’s coming in hot with whatever she’s got planned next.”

She frowned as she texted the request to Maggie, mentally berating herself for pushing back at the detective’s earlier suggestion of including NCPD in Cat’s protection. She knew Maggie would have assigned only the most discreet officers to Cat’s detail. However, Alex’s constant overprotective streak when it came to her sister’s identity had extended to Cat and her relationship with Kara. The protection of secrets in that moment seemed so insignificant in light of what she now feared.

Shaking off the thoughts, she refocused on Vasquez. “I’m switching you to Tech One. I need to take point with Supergirl.”

“Understood, ma’am. Tech One, I will confirm when street surveillance is finished with their security sweeps and we are en route to HQ.”

“Thank you, V.” Alex switched back to her sister’s comm line, watching the CCN coverage of Kara hovering just beyond the reaching curl of smoke tendrils pouring from CatCo Tower.

“Alex?”

Clicking back into duplex mode, she called out, “I’m here, Supergirl. Tell me what you see.”

Activating her X-ray vision, the first thing Kara did was scan the floor where she knew the company daycare facility was located. With a shudder of relief, she could see the area was empty. Shifting her gaze, she caught sight of several Noonan’s staff helping the daycare workers lead and carry children far away from CatCo Plaza.

Swallowing the emotion she felt struggling to rise within her, she refocused on the building and relayed, “I’m seeing explosion damage in the CCN studio, the corporate accounting division, and the daily reporter section of the bullpen.”

She gritted her teeth as realization hit her. “Alex, these are all areas guaranteed to have the most employees this early in the morning.”

CCN live coverage started daily at five, which meant staff responsible for the early morning shift was typically the first to arrive at CatCo Tower. Kara knew the accounting teams liked to get in early as well, mostly because Cat had always dealt with financial issues as soon as she received them. This often meant she sent requests and queries late into the evening that she wanted addressed first thing before her day began. Staff simply continued this early schedule even after Cat had taken her sabbatical.
Kara flew to the top floor and through the hole blasted through the side of the building, where she knew Snapper and his team of daily reporters sat. Cat had arranged the bullpen specifically to keep the dailies on the opposite side of the floor from her office. As she had once informed the hero, “I’ve served my time, Kiera. My days of having to listen to harried beat reporters yelling spelling questions about words like ‘massacre’ and ‘bloodletting’ are happily behind me.”

As she floated through a thick plume of smoke, she scanned the damage. Alex chimed in, confirming her suspicions. “Whoever did this clearly knows CatCo’s work rhythms. What else are you seeing, Supergirl?”

A shifting crash of a crumbling partition wall caused her to whirl in mid-air. Her throat clenched at the sight of several of the daily reporters—her coworkers, her friends—sifting through the rubble along the edge of the bullpen where a portion of the outer wall had collapsed inward.

Snapper was at the forefront of the activity, shoving aside a large chunk of concrete with a deep growl. She could see blood soaking through his shirtsleeve from a large gash that ran down his arm.

Quickly scanning the rubble, Kara cried out and immediately glided over to the gathering. Touching down in front of them, she held out her arms to stop their feverish actions. “Please, let me help.”

With swift but gentle moves, the hero carefully finished moving aside several chunks of detritus. As she did, she uncovered the prone form of one of the investigative reporters who had actually taken Kara under her tutelage, even though they weren’t on the same beats or schedules.

“Oh, Abby.”

Snapper heard the reporter’s name fall softly and painfully from the hero’s lips. With a rough clearing of his throat, he stepped between Kara and the other reporters. “Can you help her?”

Kara looked up into eyes unexpectedly glassy and an expression she’d never seen before on the normally irascible features: anguish.

Listening, she could make out the faint beat of Abby’s heart. She turned her X-ray vision on the reporter’s body to catalogue the extent of her damage. “I—I need to get a backboard and an EMT to help us.”

She stood and finished, “She’s got two crushed vertebrae, one in her neck and one in her back. She’s also got a fractured tibia and several bones broken in her right wrist and hand, and I wouldn’t be surprised if she wasn’t also bleeding internally. I don’t want to move her without medical help.”

Snapper gave a brusque nod. “So go to it, Supergirl.”

Before rotating and heading once more off the floor, the hero turned her attention to the reporters watching her. Scanning the group, she noted two had significant enough injuries that required attention as soon as possible.

“You and you,” she pointed to her colleagues, Chandra and Evan, noting their instant surprise overshadowed the pain and fear previously in their expressions. “Let me take you with me so the EMTs on-scene can begin to treat you.”

As she waited for the two to move beside her, she nodded almost shyly toward the group. “I can take a third person—on-on my back.”
The news chief turned, a scruffy eyebrow hitching. “Cat Grant said you were learning new parlor
tricks. I didn’t realize one of them was impersonating a clown car.”

Kara felt the heated tint rise in her cheeks and sighed at how easily Snapper could get under even
her bulletproof skin. Resisting the urge to respond, the hero instead shot him a quick eye roll,
which earned her a full-out snort and the skittering hint of recognition in his squint.

Ignoring the final bit, she instead waved to another of her coworkers, a ruddy-complexioned crime
reporter named Marlowe. “Come on, just sling your arms around my shoulders. I’ll take care of the
rest.”

Pleased at how easily Marlowe followed her request, she wrapped her charges in her biomatrix and
levitated, drifting easily back toward the blast point. “I will be back as soon as possible.”

Snapper grunted in reply as he struggled to kneel beside Abby. Descending as quickly as possible
with her passengers, Kara met a group of approaching EMTs coming to assist.

“I need help. There’s a woman up there with two crushed vertebrae, several other broken bones,
and more than likely internal bleeding.”

She caught the shocked expressions to strike across her coworkers’ faces. Pushing past her own
roiling emotions, she looked to the EMTs. “I need one of you to come with me, and I need a
backboard and whatever else you think I might need to transfer her back down here.”

One of the EMTs broke away from the group without hesitation, jogging over to the nearest
ambulance. Grabbing a backboard from the rig along with a neck brace and triage kit, she hurried
back to the hero’s side. “Let’s go, Supergirl.”

Kara traded off her injured passengers for the EMT on one side and the backboard on the other and
hurriedly took flight once more. As she rose, she expanded her X-ray vision to scan the whole
building. What she saw instantly set her heart to hammer painfully in her chest.

At the sound her sister’s frightened breathing coming through the comm link, Alex finally broke
back into the conversation. “Supergirl, talk to me.”

Shaking herself back into focus, Kara finished transporting the EMT to where the remaining
reporters had gathered protectively around Abby. With a “hold on” gesture toward the technician,
she answered, “Stand by. Preparing to transport an injury.”

She set the backboard down and described to the EMT the location of the spinal injuries. The tech
instructed the hero in how to stabilize Abby’s neck while she slipped on the brace. They then
worked together to secure her to the backboard.

“Okay, Supergirl, she’s ready.” Grabbing her kit, the tech hitched a thumb toward Snapper. “While
you transfer her back down, I’m going to take a look at this injury—and then I’m going to come
with you to help with other injuries as we find them, okay?”

The hero frowned, her gaze shifting down to the badge on the tech’s jacket. “Alvarez?” At the
EMT’s nod, she continued, “We haven’t cleared the building of any more explosives yet—”

“You’re going to find more injuries like this, Supergirl—maybe even worse ones. I can help you.
I’m experienced in combat triage, with two tours as a field medic in Afghanistan under my belt.”
She reached out to grip the hero’s shoulder. “Let me help you.”

“Say yes, Supergirl.” Alex’s voice came through the line, soft and encouraging. “You need help.”
Nodding mostly at her sister’s words, Kara sighed, “Okay, but you stick with me and let me make sure the area is safe before we proceed anywhere in this building.”

“No problem.”

With a nod, the hero focused on lifting the backboard as gently as she could. Even after extending her biomatrix before lifting to reduce the chance of jarring Abby in any way, Kara had to swallow back tears at the sound of the reporter groaning in pain even while unconscious. Cradling the board carefully, Kara lifted her feet and drifted backward, eyes fixed on Abby’s expression.

The descent once more to the ground seemed interminable; however, the hero was surprised to find herself surrounded by EMTs waiting with a gurney to take control of Abby’s care the moment she touched down. One tech explained as she helped Kara unload Abby to their care, “Alvarez signaled you were coming—with Abby, correct?”

Kara nodded haltingly, struggling to push aside her rising emotions. The tech squeezed the hero’s shoulder before turning away. “Thank you for bringing Abby this far, Supergirl. We’ll take care of her from here.”

Unable to reply, Kara simply nodded once more before she moved away from the cluster of activity. Certain she’d relocated to where no one could hear her, she whispered into her comm link, “Alex?”

“I’m here, Supergirl. Talk to me. Tell me what you saw.”

“There are lead boxes scattered all through the building.” She ran another scan with her X-ray vision. “I’m seeing seventeen in total—four of them are down on the foundation level.”

Even with Kara’s voice lowered, Alex could clearly hear her panic. “Okay, most importantly, you are not to approach any of these containers.”

“Alex, I can—”

“Supergirl, no.” Her voice came through the line strong and unwavering in her certitude. “Whoever planted these boxes knows enough about you to know how to counteract your vision. This screams CADMUS, which means you have no idea what’s inside those containers. What if one of them has more Red K in it—or worse? Who the fuck knows what Dr. Luthor has cooked up next for you!”

Fighting down her fears for her sister, the brunette forced a calm into her next response she most definitely did not feel. “We need to loop in NCPD’s Bomb Squad on this.”

Kara listened as Alex redirected her words to someone nearby. “Get us patched in to whoever is in charge of the NCPD Bomb Disposal Unit. We’ve got to update them immediately on the situation at CatCo Tower.”

Kara heard the affirmative response and realized it was Winn with Alex. Her sister then began speaking to her again. “Supergirl, tell me where you see these boxes. As soon as I’m connected with Bomb Disposal, I can relay the information to them.”

With as much accuracy as she could, the hero began explaining the location of each container. When she finished, Alex replied, “Great, this is perfect, Supergirl. I have Commander Tasley looped into our comm line. He’s head of Bomb Disposal.”

A rough baritone voice filtered through the line. “Thank you for helping us pinpoint the locations, Supergirl.”
The hero scanned the crowd, finding Tasley and the rest of the Bomb Disposal responders at the far edge of CatCo Plaza. The commander gave a small nod when he saw Supergirl looking in his direction. “A thorough sweep of a building this size would have taken us hours. We’re prepping our team and our robots right now. I need you to focus on getting people out of the building as safely and quickly as possible.”

By that point, Kara had floated over to join Tasley and his team. “Commander, the boxes positioned over the foundation—”

“We’re sending our robots in for those first, Supergirl.”

“But I can—I can speed the rest of the boxes out of here—just grab them all up and carry them off before they hurt anyone.”

She heard her sister sucking in breath to reply, but Tasley beat her to the draw. His voice dropping noticeably in volume, he asked, “Supergirl, if that were an option, you would have already done that without even waiting for us, am I right?”

He paused at the way the hero flinched and looked away before carefully asking, “Can you not see into these boxes?”

The hero’s responding silence and tense clench of her jaw were all the confirmation he needed. “Right. Not knowing what’s in these boxes means no one goes in there half-cocked—not even you. There could be pressure triggers inside any one of the boxes that would detonate the moment you moved it, and you would end up doing more damage than good in that scenario.”

“And what if one of these boxes contains enough explosives to level this building?”

Alex finally interceded. “Which is why you need to stop focusing on them and focus on getting everyone still trapped in the building out. If there is a bomb that strong in CatCo Tower, we need to make sure if it goes off, all it does is brings down an empty building—not kills everyone left inside.”

Tasley nodded in agreement. “We now have confirmation of more possible explosives onsite, which means we can’t let the EMTs or firefighters enter the building until my unit can clear it of all threats. Those who were injured badly enough in the original blasts that they can’t make it down on their own have only one hope of making it to the help waiting for them.”

Blinking back the tears of frustration shining in her gaze, Kara sighed. “Okay, but you both need to stay connected and keep me in the loop on how the bomb extraction is going.”

Tasley grunted an affirmative. “I’ve got my squad officers heading in now to the upper-level locations you identified, and we’ve got disposal robots rolling in two down to the boxes in the sub level.”

An idea struck the hero. “I can at least transport your officers up to the box locations, to help expedite things a little.”

Tasley nodded in approval and turned to two of his squad who were ready to go. “Tydings, Jimenez, you’re hopping a ride with Supergirl.”

The officers jogged over to their commander and Supergirl, taking position on either side of the hero. “Yes, sir.”

As Kara prepared to tell Tasley she could handle a third officer, another shockwave rippled
outward from CatCo Tower, showering down debris from midway up the building.

“Supergirl!”

Shooting upward to catch a large chunk of debris before it struck the first responders and onlookers, the hero scanned the building and replied to her sister’s cry. “It’s the twentieth floor this time!”

The hero noted mentally how that was the location of CatCo Legal—another division known for arriving early, to begin addressing all the legal claims and counterclaims involving both the company and its CEO.

Dropping the chunk of building safely to the ground, she hurried and collected the bomb unit officers, taking them up with her to the latest explosion site. She used her freeze breath to extinguish several fires and clear the floor of smoke.

As she surveyed the rubble-strewn floor before her, she drew a stuttering breath, exhaling a silent prayer of thanks to Rao that no one was still on the floor. “I, uh, I need to go get the EMT who was helping me upstairs so we can clear the rest of the floors of injuries.”

She glanced toward the bomb techs beside her and tried her best to steady her quavering voice. “There’s a box on the seventeenth floor and another five floors above us.”

Jimenez nodded while adjusting his face shield. “I’ll take the one downstairs. Tydings, go on with Supergirl on her way up.”

The trio headed for the nearest stairwell, with Kara and Tydings pausing long enough to watch Jimenez disappear down one flight before Kara lifted Tydings up to the twenty-fifth-floor landing. Peering through the stairwell doorway, however, she held up a protective arm. “The container is knocked over—must have fallen during one of the previous explosions.”

Turning enough to face Tydings, she steeled her voice for the bomb tech and those listening through the comm link. “Let me go in first.”

“Supergirl, don’t—”

Kara cut off Alex’s protest. “The box is already knocked over, which means no pressure trigger.”

As she spoke, she entered through the stairwell door, Tydings hovering in the doorway to allow for quick flight if necessary. Taking in deep breaths to steady her rising panic, she moved around so she could see inside the container. Her fear shifted to fury. “Dammit!”

Back at the DEO, Winn nearly crushed his mouse at how rapidly Alex shot up from her seat at Kara’s exclamation. “What is it, Supergirl?”

“The box is empty! It’s a decoy!” Alex knew the metallic squelch she heard through the comm link was her sister crushing the box in her grip. “How many more are empty? How much time are we going to waste because I can’t see what’s in these containers?!?”

Alex fell back into her chair, struggling to come up with a reply that would calm her sister’s frustration. As she rubbed at the pain stabbing against her forehead, she caught frenetic movements beside her. Shifting her attention, she realized Winn was motioning for her to cut her connection with Kara. “Supergirl, hold on.” Without additional preamble, she cut the line to simplex mode.

“Alex, I’m picking up that energy spike again—this time up by the neighborhoods near National
City Harbor, nowhere near Cameron Heights."

As the brunette began to speak, Winn frowned, holding up a finger and switching his link with Vasquez back to duplex at the sound of the tactician’s query.

“Tech One, confirm all comm lines are working?”

The tech agent pulled up the feed readings, all showing green. “Everything looks good here. What’s happening?”

“I’ve got an unexpected arrival outside, and I can’t raise street surveillance on comms.”

He listened to Vasquez escort Cat to safer quarters while she dealt with whoever was outside the penthouse, shoving back from his station with a frightened shout seconds later. Alex was instantly at his side, gripping his shoulder. “What is it, Winn?”

He tapped his earpiece, words stalling on his tongue as his eyes grew wider by the second. Alex clicked over to his link with Vasquez, hearing the last part of her cry: “Need immediate backup! Repeat: Henshaw—”

Shattering glass sliced her words into pained grunts that had Alex gripping Winn’s shoulder with painful force as she yelled, “Vasquez!”

Nothing came through the line except for the crunch of glass. Meeting Winn’s panicked stare, she snapped, “The spike is Henshaw?”

“H-he must have some way of modulating the energy signature of his power source now.” He checked the sensor readings and confirmed they had just registered another spike, right at Cat’s penthouse.

“Fucking CADMUS!” Shooting her glare through Ops, she singled out Paulson. “Pull together Green Team and get over to Cat Grant’s penthouse, now!”

As she remembered where the spikes first occurred, she pulled up the comm line linked with the agents watching Lar Gand and growled with even more fury, “Red Team, you have orders to retrieve the Daxamite and return him to HQ by whatever means necessary. I don’t care what condition you bring him in, but I want him in a cell before the hour is up!”

By the time Alex finished with her orders, Paulson and several other agents were already on their way to the equipment room to suit up. With an angry stab of her finger toward Winn as she backed away from Ops, she stated, “Lock Henshaw down! I need you to be able to track him if he leaves before Green Team’s arrival.”

Winn nodded, his throat bobbing as he struggled to swallow against the fear scratching its way up his throat. “His modulator must be malfunctioning, which is what’s causing the spikes. If I can lock onto the next spike, I might be able to—”

“Just do it, Schott!” She knew the tech agent had the tendency to ramble just like her sister when nervous. In that moment, she needed him to focus. They were not losing Cat if Henshaw got out of there before Paulson and his team arrived. “And take point with Kara—but do not say one word about what’s happening right now at Cat’s. I’m with Vasquez.”

Spinning in place, she ran off toward the conference room across from Ops. As Winn pulled up Kara’s comm link, he shook at the sensation of another bomb blast rippling through HQ.
This latest rumble came from deep within the heart of CatCo Tower. For several painful beats of her heart, all Kara could do was stare straight down through the floors that separated her from the wreckage still settling within the lowest levels of the building.

At the sensation of shifting all around her, Kara whooshed past Tydings and shot down through the center of the stairwell, floors passing her in one elongated blur as she plummeted toward the building’s now destabilized foundation.

With a massive shove, she burst through the stairwell exit into the lower-most level of CatCo Tower. Debris rained down through the smoke that filled almost the entirety of the level. Kara quickly located the blast point diagonal to her location, her breath hitching at the sight.

"Tasley, get everyone as far away from CatCo Tower as possible!"

As she spoke, she flew over to the bomb-ravaged remains where one side of the building used to connect to the foundation. Carefully, she positioned herself to bear the weight where once there were solid walls and pilings, her presence the only thing now keeping the building from continuing to tilt until it completely toppled. Concentrating, she extended her biomatrix until she could feel the vibrations through the crumbling concrete stabilize against the strong line of her shoulders. As she held her breath for what seemed like far too long a time, she listened to the building slowly cease its creaking protestations and settle into place once more.

"Supergirl, what happened?"

Finally drawing a shaky breath, she replied, "One of the sub-level bombs detonated! Right now, I’m all that’s stopping CatCo Tower from collapsing. You’ve got to get everyone away. Commander! If another bomb goes off down here, I might not be able to stop this whole building from coming down!"

"Can you see around you, Supergirl? Can you see if any of the bots are functional? We were in the middle of working on opening two of the containers."

Kara scanned the area, noting another container knocked over on its side, its emptiness yet another mockery to her visual limitation.

"I see an empty container, a crushed container, and both bots crushed under debris. One box remains standing, though. Commander, you’ve got to get out of here."

She could hear rustling through the open line followed by accelerated breathing and rapid footfalls. "We’re going to compromise, Supergirl. I’ve got my team pulling back with the other first responders right now. But I’m coming in where you are."

"Commander, I told you, I might not be able to help you if this final box contains a bomb that destroys more of the foundation!"

"Which is why I’m helping you, Supergirl."

She could hear Tasley in the stairwell. "I promise I won’t let the media blame you if I end up blowing us all to bits."

"Hilarious," the hero huffed as she rebalanced the building weight with her biomatrix. "Just be careful, Commander. The bomb that just detonated down here took out enough of this building’s support structure that it should be nothing but rubble right now."

The metallic scrape of the stairwell door grinding open drew the hero’s gaze. As Tasley came into
view, Kara watched his expression darken at the damage inflicted already on CatCo Tower.

“Now do you believe me, Commander?”

For several beats, Tasley simply stared up at Kara, his eyes slowly widening behind his face shield with the realization that she was the sole support bearing the weight of the entire building. Finally, with a visible bodily shake, he replied, “So if there’s a bomb in that final box, I’m just going to have to hurry in disarming it. And if this goes sideways on me, well, I hope your Black Ops friends will consider swooping in and saving the day.”

With a tight grin toward Tasley, she replied, “What say you, Black Ops friends?”

To the hero’s surprise, Winn responded through her comm link rather than her sister. “You know we’ve got your back, Supergirl.”

Frowning at the shake in Winn’s voice, Kara queried, “Where’s Alex?”

At HQ, Winn shot a worried look across Ops to where Alex had sequestered herself away on another comm line she hoped her sister would be too distracted to overhear. “She’s, um, she’s updating the Director.”

Behind the closed doors of the conference room, Alex leaned heavily against the table, yelling into the now-quiet comm line, “Vasquez, goddammit, respond!”

What she heard instead of words were pained grunts and the shock of splintering wood.

Several desperate pulls of air followed and then “Got to get up,” cut in shattered gasps through what Alex was certain were gritted teeth.

Every one of Alex’s instincts wanted to tell Vasquez to stay down, to stay alive—but she knew the tactician wouldn’t stop in her mission to protect Cat until someone else stopped her.

Another series of groans mingled with the sickening sound of hard strikes against flesh and words growled in fury from Henshaw. “Fucking weak—that’s what that alien has made my DEO!”

When Alex heard more fracturing wood, she clenched her jaw painfully as she pictured Vasquez’s body crashing through the remains of whatever barrier still stood between Henshaw and Cat.

With a click of her earpiece, she barked, “Green Team, what’s your ETA to the lair? We’ve got an agent in extreme danger who needs you there now!”

The pulsating thwump thwump of the Black Hawk’s blades roared through the line as Paulson responded, “Coming into visual range of the lair now. We’ve got NCPD presence responding on the ground. Looks like—shit, looks like we’ve got bodies down below, Team Leader.”

Grabbing the nearby conference call speaker, Alex ripped it from its wiring and hurled it against the far wall. “Goddammit!”

Several agents froze outside the conference room at the sound of plastic cracking and crashing in pieces and Winn stuttered in shock.

“Winn?” Fear ratcheted up in Kara’s voice. “Winn, what’s wrong? What’s going on? Is Alex back?”

“Supergirl, Team Leader is-is supervising reinforcements, but she wants you to focus on your
situation. She needs you to keep things under control there—f-for Pink Panther.”

“Of course,” the hero replied. Winn could hear her uncertainty—hoped it was only from his poor attempts at deflection and not because she’d heard Alex’s orders before he silenced his mic as the brunette sprinted from the conference room toward the equipment bay.

“Green Team, scan for Henshaw and pursue! Tech One is sending sensor readings to you now that are from his power source.”

As she said this, she pointed toward Winn with a fierceness that had him nodding and complying before she’d finished her statement. As she continued down the hall, she paused to order, “Pull up Cat’s DEO tracker feed and connect it to Green Team as well. And you are now the sole communicator with Supergirl. Lock down her line to yours. She knows nothing about Cat and we’re keeping it that way.”

“Line locked now.” He pounded away on his keyboard, frowning at whatever readings he was seeing as he connected with Paulson’s group. “Green Team, I’m also sending you a live feed of Pink Panther’s subcutaneous tracker. Something’s interfering with its signal—might be Henshaw’s modulator—but it’s a much more stable signature than Henshaw’s spike. I’m showing her tracker heading east, already past National City limits.”

Alex grunted in approval, quickly calling out as she once more began for the equipment bay, “Tech One, patch me in to Desert Containment.”

As soon as she heard the line connect, she stated, “Desert Containment, this is HQ. We’re sending you the live signal from Pink Panther’s DEO tracker. I need you to scramble a Hawk for a search and rescue. Be warned, Hank Henshaw has her. He’s out near your location, so you have a better chance of catching him before he reaches whatever is his destination. We’ve got another Hawk coming your way to help in the search.”

“Understood, HQ.” Alex could hear the fear pressing against the thin command veneer Lucy was maintaining in her voice. “Hawk scrambling now. Pink Panther’s tracker just pinged twenty miles due north of our location—should be a quick intercept.”

“Confirm as soon as you complete retrieval.”

Hearing Lucy’s affirmative, she looped Paulson’s line into the conversation. “Green Team, Desert Containment has just deployed a Black Hawk to help in locating Pink Panther and Henshaw. Both teams, you are ordered to use whatever force necessary to stop Henshaw and recover Pink Panther—but keep in mind Henshaw has no problem in causing harm to cause chaos. If you can take him down, do it, but do not put Pink Panther in any more danger than she’s already in right now.”

“Understood, Team Leader. Received readings from Tech One as well as live feed on Pink Panther’s tracker. Offloading Green Team Beta to lair balcony and ground now and syncing aerial scan and pursuit with Desert Containment.”

The brunette continued to suit up in tactical gear as she listened to several agents clear Cat’s penthouse room by room, noting only the voices of Green Team Beta and no others.

Finally, one of the agents reported, “Team Leader, we need medical transport, stat. Confirming Vasquez is alive but unresponsive and critical. Confirming Pink Panther and Henshaw are no longer in the lair. Signs of a struggle in the attic indicate he overpowered her there.”

Another agent interceded, “Also confirming from the ground that all six members of street
Alex had finished strapping on her thigh holsters and securing her weapons by the time the agents onsite finished. “Jesus wept,” she muttered, the sick burn in her gut nearly doubling her over. Refusing to surrender to the rip tide of emotions rising within her, she pushed to focus. “Med bay, we’ve got a Code 10 at Pink Panther’s lair—it’s Agent Vasquez. Green Team Beta is requesting medical transport, now.”

Hearing footsteps behind her, she barely registered the affirmative response from med bay staff as she focused on the approach of J’onn, her mother, and, most surprising of all, Secretary Sommers. Before Alex could formulate an appropriate response for the unexpected trio, J’onn ordered, “Report.”

Swallowing against the panic desperate to overtake her, she forced herself into soldier mode. “CatCo Tower is one Kryptonian away from being nothing but rubble. Henshaw has Cat. He’s also taken out all of street surveillance and has—has left Agent Vasquez unresponsive and critically injured.”

Her breath caught on the last words as she replayed the sounds of Vasquez’s final moments of consciousness, causing J’onn to reach for her in sympathy. Instead, Alex shook free of his reach, averting her eyes from all three gazes watching her with worry and fear.

“Green Team Alpha and Desert Containment are trying to locate Cat using her DEO tracker and intermittent readings from what Winn thinks is a signal modulator masking Henshaw’s energy signature. Kara’s not going anywhere any time soon because of CatCo’s condition, so I’m going to take another team to help in the search.”

“No.” Alex startled at the sharp rebuttal from her mother. Locking gazes with her daughter, Eliza could see the churn of fury and guilt in her eyes She wanted nothing more than to reach out, provide comfort to her daughter—crush the guilt she knew Alex would let devour her whole for her internalized failing in protecting Cat. Instead, she shook her head and firmly stated, “I know you want to go after Cat and bring her back, but you need to go get her sons, Alex. If I were in her place right now—”

She shook her head against the emotion to rise involuntarily at the thought of Cat’s unknown fate. When she spoke again, emotion roughened her voice. “Cat would want you to make her sons’ safety your priority right now. You need to bring Carter and Adam here.”

Nodding in agreement, J’onn morphed into his Martian form. “Alex, you go get Carter. He trusts you and he’s going to need that when he learns what’s happened. I’ll get Adam. I’ll dispatch agents from the East Coast bureau to Opal City to secure him until I can get there. I’m fast, but not quite as fast as your sister.”

“Understood, sir.” She sighed, clenching her jaw before continuing, “Kara doesn’t know CADMUS has Cat.”

“She shouldn’t know that right now.” Alex turned toward the Education Secretary. Her brow wrinkled as she realized Jaime was wearing DEO fatigues.

With the slightest quirk of her lips, the Secretary responded to Alex’s unspoken question. “The Secretary of Education is safely still in Ojai, having extended her stay there as a last-minute decision. As of an hour ago, OSI reactivated my operative status—with presidential approval, of course.”
“I’m going to go to CatCo Tower and see what assistance I can offer there. I might not be as strong as Supergirl, but I can hold my own. I’ll do my best to keep her focused on CatCo.”

Alex’s expression shifted at the thought to hit her suddenly. With a gesture for Jaime to hold on, she ran out of the equipment room, coming back a moment later holding several wrappers. “These are energy bars especially designed for Supergirl’s caloric needs. Could you make sure she eats them? She’s going to be expending her energy reserves exponentially fast right now, holding up a building with her biomatrix.”

Jaime accepted the bars, slipping them into her cargo pockets. “I promise I will take care of Supergirl, Alex.”

Alex narrowed her gaze, catching the flicker of knowing in the Secretary’s expression. “Take care of my sister, Jaime.”

The Secretary nodded. “I would be breaking presidential orders if I didn’t.” She looked to J’onn. “Mind if I hitch a ride with you to CatCo on your way to Opal City?”

The Martian nodded, but before he could reply, Alex was thrusting a bulletproof vest toward him. “For Adam.” She then retrieved a half-mask respirator for Jaime. “For you—to make sure no one doubts the Secretary of Education is still in Ojai.”

Jaime took the mask with a smile. Alex then grabbed another bulletproof vest—as small as they had in-stock—and steeled herself back into soldier mode. First, however, she hugged her mother, whispering as she did, “Cat’s going to be all right, Mom. We’ll find her and bring her home.”

Without waiting for a reply, Alex turned rapidly and ran on toward the nearby elevator bank, ordering through her comm link, “I need a pilot and cover for the MH-6! We’re retrieving Pink Panther’s California kitten, so prep for short run.”

Bursting through the roof access moments later, the brunette charged toward the Boeing MH-6, nodding in acknowledgement of the two agents loading into the back. The brunette pulled out her mobile, dialing Maggie as she fastened herself into her harness and ordered the pilot, “Take us up! Let’s go!”

The detective answered before the first ring had even ended. “Danvers, what the fuck is going on?”

Alex glared at the rapidly passing cityscape below as she curled her fingers tightly around her mobile. “Cat’s gone, Maggie. Luthor—Luthor blew up her fucking building to bait Kara away.”

She compressed her lips together tightly to lock away the words she wanted to say—to scream into the ether with all the fury she felt burning through her like a supernova sun. She had fallen for Luthor’s bait and Kara and Cat would pay for her mistake with devastation—or worse—and there wasn’t a fucking thing Alex could do to protect either one of them. Her sister’s whole life had been filled to capacity with loss and heartbreak, and she feared she’d just helped add the heartbreak that might finally shatter her sister for good.

Brow furrowing with the effort to keep control, she continued, “She sent Henshaw in for Cat—he killed six agents, maybe seven if Vasquez doesn’t—can’t—”

The brunette bit the inside of her cheek until the taste of copper flooded her tongue. She would not break—not in front of her agents.

“I need you to go to Cat’s. I need you to run that scene. CatCo was a fucking decoy but it’s got Kara locked down until either someone can help stabilize the building or the whole thing collapses
on her. I’m heading up to get Carter, and J’onn’s on his way for Adam. I need you to be the one at Cat’s in case Kara makes it back there before I return with Carter. I need someone she trusts to be there when she—when she—"

“I’ll be there, Alex.” The detective’s voice softened, her words perfectly filling the fissures in Alex’s fracturing heart. “Take care of the kiddo. I’ll take care of Kara if she shows up. I swear it.”

“Thank you, Mags.”

The words barely made it through the line over the rotor roar around her, but she knew Maggie would hear it. Without another word, she disconnected her call.

With several deep breaths, she reconnected with the team members at Cat’s penthouse. “Green Team Beta, report on Vasquez.”

“Medics are on-scene and working to stabilize her for medevacking back to HQ.”

Clearing the rough clench from her throat, Alex replied, “Detective Sawyer is on her way. You’ll work the scene with her, but you’ll let her take point. We need to let NCPD run this—as soon as word gets out what’s happened and who’s missing, this is going to become a media shit storm. We cannot be in the lead on this.”

“Understood, Team Leader. It’s already happening. I’m seeing several news trucks downstairs including one from CCN.”

The end of the agent’s words drowned out in Alex’s ear as the familiar open-air roar of chopper static filled the line. “Team Leader, this is Green Team Alpha.”

“Go, Green Team Alpha.”

“We have a visual of Desert Containment Team in pursuit of Henshaw. We can confirm he does have Pink Panther—and he’s one evasive fucker,” Paulson added with a frustrated growl.

Hands clenching tightly against her thighs, Alex ground out, “Relay video feed to my mobile. What is Pink Panther’s status?”

“She appears unconscious. We also confirm another passenger with Henshaw. Blonde, female, petite build. She’s strapped in against Henshaw’s back while he carries Pink Panther in his arms.”

Waiting for the device to connect to the Black Hawk’s mounted camera, the brunette focused on the white noise of rotor blades all around her, trying to ease some of the tension thrumming through her body. It was a short-lived peace, however, before alarms and shouts ripped through the comm line.

As video began streaming to Alex’s phone, she heard Paulson yell, “Team Leader, Henshaw has just shot down Desert Containment Team!”

She watched the twirl of black smoke spiral up from what was left of the rotor assembly atop the Desert Containment Black Hawk as the chopper shifted and lurched dangerously downward. In the distance, she could see Henshaw hover long enough to confirm his damage to the chopper before pivoting and shooting off in a sickening blur. More sickening, however, was the brief sight of Cat, slumped in Henshaw’s hold, her body folded downward against the press of his arms against her waist.

At the sight of the cyborg flying off into the distance at a speed she knew was potentially
dangerous to a human, she forced herself not to punch the seat in front of her, instead calling, “Green Team Alpha, status of Desert Containment Team?”

“Hawk has crashed, Team Leader. Team reports all crew is fine—minimal injuries. Moving into position to onboard team now.”

“And then you are to resume pursuit of Henshaw.”

The delay in Paulson’s response sharpened Alex’s patience to a fine point. “Negative, Team Leader. We’ve just lost signals from both Henshaw and Pink Panther.”

Unable to stop the anguished noise to escape her, Alex snapped her eyes shut as she let her head fall forward. She could feel the fraying within—could feel the encroaching break she knew she needed to abate. The image of Cat’s prone body, helpless in Henshaw’s grip, drew tears she couldn’t find the energy to shake away.

“Team Leader?”

The weight of concern in Paulson’s voice pushed Alex to focus. “Green Team Alpha, complete rescue mission and then run patrol, see if you can relocate the signals.”

“Confirmed, Team Leader. We will keep you apprised.”

Clearing her throat, the brunette replied, “Affirmative. Limit reports while we transport Pink Panther’s California kitten. Team Leader out.”

Unable to address the worried expressions burning into her from her team’s gazes, she quickly shifted over to Winn’s secondary line. “Tech One, confirm secure channel.”

After a brief pause, she heard the tech agent’s worried confirmation. “I’m on simplex with Supergirl. You’re safe to talk.”

Expelling a shaky breath, she asked, “How’s she doing?”

“I think she knows something’s happening beyond CatCo, but she’s not really talking a lot right now. She’s starting to sound really tired.”

With a nod out toward the middle distance, Alex confirmed, “I’ve got nutritional reinforcements coming her way, but if someone can’t get in there and stabilize that building soon, we’re going to have to get some portable sun lamps down there for her. We can’t let her blow out her powers—especially when she learns what’s happened.”

In the ensuing silence, Alex caught the whisper of words through her comms. “I heard Green Team Alpha’s report.”

He drew a weary breath. “I’m so sorry I lost her, Alex. I—I should have figured out the spike source faster so we would have known it was Henshaw coming for her.”

“Hey.” Her staccato interruption was sharp but filled with the worry she shared with the tech agent. “When I get back to HQ, I’m going to have a very frightened boy with me, and he’s going to need all of us to be strong for him, okay? And he’s going to need you to let go of whatever might get in the way of you focusing all your incredible skills on finding his mom and bringing her home—because that’s what we’re all going to do. We’re bringing her home.”

Even with the wind roaring past her, she caught the sound of his tremulous sigh. Unable to handle
Alex’s kindness in the moment, the tech agent finally mumbled, “It sounds like something’s happening on Supergirl’s line. I-I’ve got to switch over.”

Before Alex could respond, Winn cut away in time to catch the end of an overjoyed exclamation from Tasley. “Hey, Supergirl, we’re all clear!”

Expelling a breath of relief, Kara shifted her biomatrix as she turned to face Tasley better, startled when she felt a waver in her energy output. “Really glad to hear that, Commander.”

The commander began moving toward where the hero continued to hover in-place beneath the bomb-ravaged remains of one corner of CatCo Tower. “You’re going to love this even more, Supergirl. My team has finished clearing the rest of the building, thanks to your identification of the container locations. There were five more actual bombs, but we’ve taken care of them without any of them detonating. The rest of the containers were empty.”

Kara turned her attention upward, her vision no longer detecting any of the lead containers once scattered throughout the tower. “You’re right,” she finally smiled. “I do love that even more.”

As she continued to scan the building, she added, “I’m no expert on structural integrity, but things look and feel pretty steady throughout the building, Commander. I think if we can get a crew in here to somehow stabilize the part of the building I’m currently under, we might be okay.”

Tasley removed his face shield and loosened the upper part of his protective gear with a tired sigh. Kara could see sweat slipping down his face and soaking into the already darkened fabric along the collar beneath his gear. “I’m actually a step ahead of you on this one, Supergirl. I called in help right before coming down here. My team says there’s a construction crew up on the surface now, waiting to come down once I give the all-clear. Ready for them to set you free?”

Kara gladly replied, “Please.”

Chuckling at the hero’s eager response, Tasley began directing into his comms, “Disposal Team, this is Tasley. Final bomb here in the lower levels is no longer a threat. Go ahead and send down the construction crew so we can stop using Supergirl as a building piling.”

Moments later, the clattering commotion of construction workers echoed down the stairwell—a sound that filled Kara with enormous delight and relief. As the crew came through the doorway, hauling all variety of tools and supplies, her face brightened into a huge smile of recognition.

One of the workers caught the sight of the hero smiling specifically at him. Breaking away from the group, he approached with an overjoyed laugh. “Hey, don’t worry, SG, me and my crew, we’re here to help you.”

He tapped his bicep where she knew her House crest adorned his skin. “Stronger together, right?”

With a soft smile, she replied, “ehl, magharrah.”

“You got it,” he winked while adjusting his hard hat. “We’re going to come in and set up jack posts to take the place of the damaged foundation pilings—and to free you from serving in their stead. We’ve also got two more crews topside: one bringing in a crane like mine to set up additional supports, and one surveying the building for any other major structural damage we’ll need to stabilize. It’s gonna be a hot minute before CatCo Tower will be open for business, but thanks to you, it’s still standing. And now we’re going to get you out of here as soon as we can, Supergirl. Count on it.”

Relief shining brightly in her gaze, she sighed, “Thank you, Diego. And think of how impressed
your little girl is going to be now when you tell her you helped save Supergirl this morning.”

The crane operator’s smile practically lit the space between them. “I think Sofia would be more impressed with meeting you than with me helping you,” he teased. As he turned away to join the rest of his crew, he called over his shoulder, “Hold tight, SG. We’ve got you.”

With one final glance at Diego’s retreating form, Kara shifted her attention to more movement from the stairwell. A frown slowly darkened her features as she watched someone entering the damage-ravaged space wearing DEO fatigues, a military cap pulled low over their forehead, and a respirator covering the lower half of their face.

Softly, she called into her comm line, “Winn, is there—did you send someone here for me? Please say you did.”

“Team Leader sent something specifically for you with that—uh, agent.”

Lips tugging downward into a curious frown at Winn’s hesitation, she continued to watch the mask-clad figure approach. When they stood close enough for Kara to address at a normal volume, she queried, “So, should I just use my vision to figure out who you are? Or should we play a game to figure it out, since I’ve still got some free time—and a whole building—on my hands?”

The laughter to reach her hearing, even through the mask’s distortion, rang familiar to the hero. Pointing upward at several pieces of rebar protruding from the blasted-out remains of concrete around Kara, the agent asked, “Are those secure?”

Frown deepening, the hero turned her attention upward toward the twisted spikes. Two hanging down close to her left side had curved in toward each other in the blast, nearly close enough to touch. Examining them with her X-ray vision, she confirmed they were still anchored within the concrete.

With a couple of quick bursts of her heat vision to weld the pieces together, followed by a blast of freeze breath, she called back, “That would be an affirmative, Agent.”

Glancing toward the construction workers who had just returned with more jack posts, she sighed, “I don’t see a ladder—but I bet they have one topside you could use to lean against the rebar.”

The agent stepped closer until positioned right beneath the rebar handle Kara had created. The hero watched as the agent squatted low and then pushed off the ground with a burst of power that propelled her high into the air. Easily grabbing the half-moon handle, the agent dangled beside the hero, right hand wrapped around the rebar in a secure grip.

Jaw instantly dropping open, Kara stared in awe and confusion at the powder blue gaze observing her from above the half-mask. With a quick glance back toward the construction workers who were still hauling equipment in preparation to free Kara, the agent pushed the mask down, revealing a smile for the hero. “How are you holding up, Supergirl?”

The warmth and care radiating from the woman before her was like a balm Kara didn’t realize she needed so desperately. “Really glad to see you, Jaime.” She laughed despite the situation at how pleased the Secretary appeared at Kara’s use of her first name.

“You’re doing amazing. You’ve stabilized the building so well, an EMT who was apparently already in the building has been leading survivors down, and a few others have joined in helping her.”

Kara smiled in relief that Alvarez was all right and taking point in rescuing those the hero couldn’t.
Digging into her pockets, Jaime withdrew one of the energy bars Alex had given her. The moment Kara realized what she was doing, she nearly groaned in relief. “Oh, thank Rao,” the hero breathed.

“Agent Danvers informed me you might be in need of a caloric jumpstart,” Jaime teased as she ripped open one of the wrappers with her teeth. “I’m pretty sure Alex loaded me up with all the bars she could find, so you just let me know how many you need.”

Kara caught herself blushing in embarrassment as she reached out with one hand to accept the energy bar. “Feeding me isn’t exactly how you expected your trip to National City to play out, I’m sure,” she mumbled before taking a healthy bite. Even with the slight awkwardness of the situation, Kara couldn’t help her joyful response to much-needed food.

“Happy to do my part, Supergirl—especially if it helps you keep this building from coming down around us all.”

As soon as the hero finished the first bar, Jaime was reaching for another—and two more after that before Kara finally shook her head. Shifting her biomatrix once more, she sighed in relief at how she could feel her strength once more stabilizing. “I’m good for now, thank you.”

Jaime offered the hero a comforting smile. Below them, they heard the construction workers finally noticing her presence. With a wink, she tugged her mask back into place. “Time to finally give these fancy new limbs a proper workout.”

Before Kara could reply, Jaime released her hold on the rebar, dropping gracefully back down to the ground. With a playful wave to the workers staring at her with slack-jawed surprise, she asked, “How can I help?”

Their initial shock quickly settling (thanks to Diego’s teasing comment about how, of course, Supergirl’s friends would be just as amazing as she was), the workers coordinated with Jaime in clearing space for the jack posts. Kara watched as the Secretary used her bionic strength to shove or kick aside much of the heavier detritus, now and again assisting with well-placed shots of heat vision to break up larger chunks of the building into sizes more manageable for Jaime’s bionics.

Winn monitored the efforts at CatCo quietly, relieved that Jaime and the construction workers were keeping Kara so engaged and focused on the task at hand that the hero hadn’t thought to ask him any further questions about Alex’s location—or Cat’s.

The thought of the CEO caused the acid burn of his panic to rise once more. Green Team Alpha had failed in making any new contact with Henshaw and Cat once they finished retrieving the Desert Containment team. The location of their last signal readings was nothing but empty desert terrain and nowhere near where any of them had suspected a CADMUS outpost to be located. Green Team Alpha was still in the area, sweeping the ground for signals, but Winn feared they wouldn’t find anything before needing to head back in to refuel—which would leave only his own infuriatingly futile efforts at HQ to relocate Cat’s tracker.

Kara calling his name through his comms caused him to jump, his mouse skittering across his workstation as he accidentally shoved it aside. Quickly reactivating his mic, he stammered, “S-still here, Supergirl. Things look really good topside at CatCo Plaza.”

He checked the CCN feed running on one of his monitors. “Everyone is out of the building and one of the construction crews is nearly finished with the crane they brought in to help with stabilization efforts.”

When Kara didn’t respond to any of what he’d said, he felt fear prickle the hairs along his neck.
However, his next words hung on his tongue as Kara asked in a voice strained with worry, “Winn, where’s Alex? Why isn’t she back on comms? All the reinforcements are here.”

“Supergirl—”

“Please, Winn.” He caught the way her voice trembled through the line. “I—I’ve been listening and I can’t hear Cat. I’ve been trying to hear her heartbeat or—even her voice. It’s not—I can’t find her. Please tell me what’s happening.”

As the words left her mouth, the hero shivered, suddenly frightened by the possibility of Winn’s response. Something—some insurmountable fear had been churning beneath the maelstrom of events she’d been fighting ever since her arrival at CatCo. Now, as the request hung intractably in the air, the hero realized she didn’t actually want to know—couldn’t handle the possibility of her ephemeral fears being made damnably real.

From below, Jaime’s hearing had caught the sounds of the hero’s increasing distress. Switching back to the comm link to which she’d been assigned, she heard the end of Supergirl’s statement and, looking up, she watched the hero shift her gaze as if trying to clear her eyes of tears.

Setting down the jack post she’d been carrying to its new position, she called over the worker she’d seen conversing with the hero when she had arrived at CatCo. “Do you think we can try to see if we’ve installed enough posts for Supergirl to release her hold on the building?”

With a quick glance around at all the posts they’d already positioned—much faster than they’d ever anticipated, thanks to the team effort by the hero and this unexpected extra assistance standing beside him—he nodded hesitantly. “Let me radio up topside and see if that might cause any problems. If not, she can start slowly and see what that does.”

Jaime smiled gratefully and gave the crane operator’s arm a squeeze, certain to regulate her strength back from the level she’d been using to haul the posts into position. “Let me tell our Girl of Steel we might be close to freeing her.”

She stepped back to her earlier position beneath the rebar handle Supergirl had created for her and jumped, easily gaining enough air to grab the handle. Eye to eye once more with the hero, Jaime could see the sheen of tears barely contained in bright blue eyes.

Gaze losing focus, Kara bowed her head and forced herself to breathe deeply. When she felt a hand cupping her cheek, she did nothing to stop the tears from finally breaching her eyelids.

“I need you to listen to me right now, Kara.”

Even with the tendrils of terror taking root deep within her, binding her in their strengthening tangle, the hero’s head snapped up at the sound of the Secretary using her true name.

“Your sister is bringing Carter to the DEO and J’onn has gone for Adam.”

Reading Kara’s instant and terrified understanding, Jaime pressed her lips together briefly before continuing. “Carter will need you, Kara. He will need you to be strong for him, because he’s going to be so scared right now.”

Kara moved her jaw as though preparing to say something, couldn’t in the end find the words to convey all the whirling emotions within her—but Jaime understood. “Your construction friend down below is checking right now to see if we can test the jack posts and hopefully let you go from here.”
She slipped her hand down to grip the back of the hero’s neck. “Cat is the number one priority right now, Kara—not just with the DEO.”

She waited for Kara to process her words, seeing the light of understanding beneath the fear. “President Marsdin?”

“She would be here right now with us if she could be.”

Micro-shifts of deeper comprehension flickered across the hero’s features before she nodded.

Jaime continued to grip the hero’s neck firmly to help keep her grounded. “I need you to promise me that, when you can leave here, you will go straight to the DEO. Go to Carter. Take care of him first. Trust that the DEO is doing everything it can to find Cat.”

The answer Jaime earned were soft hitches and whimpers as Kara struggled to keep control. Jaime ached at the sight, the plaintive pain pressing itself through the visibly breaking hero, and softly sent up her plea for Cat’s safety once more to whatever universal intervention cared enough to listen and take heed.

“I promise,” finally came the tattered whisper and in that moment, Jaime would have been happy to let the building crumble around them if it allowed her even a moment to hug the hero and try her hardest to hold her together a little while longer.

Below, Diego called up cautiously, “Hey, SG, I got some good news.” He watched with a pang of guilt at interrupting what he realized was a conversation that was causing the hero some kind of emotional distress.

With a super-speedy whip of her head, Kara cleared her eyes of vestigial tears before refocusing her attention. “Bring it on, Diego.”

“The crane is in place and stabilization efforts on the ground have proceeded far enough that they think we might actually be able to let you let go—slowly,” he added with a low chuckle. “Don’t want to ruin all your hard work.”

Offering Diego a noticeably muted smile, Kara breathed deeply and queried, “Ready?”

Getting a nod of approval from him, she steadied herself and slowly began to shift her biomatrix, pulling it back ever so slightly from its encompassing hold.

For several achingly slow moments, Kara continued to withdraw her biomatrix, listening intently to every sound to emanate from the structure as she did. When she finally had nothing more than a physical hold on the building, she sighed a nervous breath and focused on Diego. Purposefully, she released her grip on the jagged concrete above her and began to float downward.

She caught the moment Jaime released her hold and dropped down as well, meeting the Secretary on solid ground a few seconds later. Kara could practically feel the electric tension among the group around her as they all waited for something to occur.

When Diego’s radio squelched into the silence, every single person jumped at the sound. “Hey, Diego, you tell Supergirl she can finally let go?”

The crane operator laughed as he activated his two-way. “We’re officially on our own, Rogers. Supergirl is free and clear.”

Hearing the words spoken aloud acted as a catalyst to Kara’s responses. With a wide, watery stare,
she turned toward Jaime. “I’ve got to—I need—”

“Go, Supergirl,” the Secretary replied, once more reverting to her alter ego’s title.

The words barely finished passing from Jaime’s lips before the hero was gone, a cloud of dust twirling in the wake of her departure.

Back inside the DEO in mere minutes, Kara touched down, eyes instantly scanning for her sister and Carter. She caught movement at the top of the stairs, turning in time to see Carter running down from Alex’s lab, Agent Toscano pacing him as Alex and Eliza followed closely behind.

When he was within reach, Kara held out her arms, desperate to hug him close. To her surprise, however, he pushed her away with an angry growl.

“I told you both this would happen! I told you!”

DEO agents stood along the periphery, quietly observing as the hero shrank backward from his fury.

“Carter, we’re going to find her!”

When she tried again to reach for him, the hero flinched at the way Carter instantly struck a defensive pose, shoving back against her shoulders with all his strength. Without hesitation, she bowed in rhythm with his rage, accepting his anger as penance for her failure.

The noise he made in response struck straight through Kara’s heart. “Stop lying to me!”

Kara caught the swing of Carter’s arm in time to prevent him from hitting her again. “You promised me she would be safe, and now she’s gone! She trusted in you—she said nothing would ever make her lose her faith in you.”

Tears continued to stream down his cheeks, but Kara caught the moment of hardening in his blue gaze. “I bet she’d have something different to say now—if she were here.”

Kara stumbled backward, his words striking her with a precision she couldn’t block. Carter could see the damage of his verbal blow—the fracturing of spirit in the hero’s crumbling expression. Shaking his head, he backed away from her. “I want my brother. I want my family.”

Alex was by her sister’s side just in time to catch her before she tumbled to her knees. Eliza moved to stand between Kara and Carter, calming her voice before she spoke to him. “Adam will be with you soon, Carter.”

Clearly coming down from his adrenaline and anger surge, Carter gave a half-hearted nod as he wiped furiously at his damp cheeks. When his chin wobbled and his lips parted to release the cries he couldn’t hold back any longer, Eliza was there to pull him into her arms.

“Let it out, sweetie.” Eliza refused to offer empty platitudes or promises she was uncertain could be kept. She’d never done either with Kara and she refused to dishonor the young man in her arms similarly.

The crush of failure bowing her body, Kara stared at the scene of Eliza comforting Carter. Beside her, Alex whispered, “Mom will take care of him, Kara.”

Lower lip quivering, the hero could only stand to watch for a few seconds before the guilt within her felt as though it might crush her lungs. Alex felt the tension spike through her sister’s body,
knew she was preparing to leave.

“Kara—”

The hero shook her head violently, feet already off the ground before Alex could say another word.

Knowing she only had one chance before Kara fled from her reach, Alex instinctively grabbed the folds of her sister’s cape, hoisting herself upward even as she felt herself lifting from the DEO floor. She immediately felt the tension stiffen her sister’s muscles as she fought the urge to shake Alex free and take off on her own. The thought made Alex double down, clutching the indestructible alien material as tightly as she could.

She also felt the moment of Kara’s capitulation. Her biomatrix finally locked Alex against her as the brunette wrapped her arms around broad shoulders and ducked her face against the sudden rush of wind Kara sped through once she cleared the DEO’s bay doors.

The erratic path of her sister’s flight left her stomach roiling and flipping. Finally, the brunette lifted her head in time to catch a glimpse of the hard angle and silver sheen of the L-Corp logo. Kara cut closely around the corner of the last building she’d saved from collapse at the hands of CADMUS, landing with a jarring thump and practically shoving Alex from her back with the force of her biomatrix.

The brunette staggered as her boots hit the ground, but she quickly righted herself even as Kara whirled on her with a furious glare. “You shouldn’t have done that, Alex! You shouldn’t have come here with me!”

Ignoring her sister’s anger, Alex grabbed Kara’s bicep while squinting toward the office beyond the balcony doorway. “We need to leave here, now.”

“No.”

“Supergirl, we—”

“No!” Face tear-streaked and voice roughened by fear, she pulled her arm out of Alex’s grasp and spun away. “I need to see her! I need her to tell me—”

“Tell you what, Supergirl?”

Both Danvers sisters turned toward the sight of Lena Luthor holding open the door into her office, her expression alight with confusion.

The hero bolted forward, hands grabbing onto Lena’s shoulders with a strength the CEO could tell was barely controlled. “Please, Lena, you have to know where she is!”

Alex moved to intercept at the sight of Lena gasping, either in fright or pain. Wrapping her hand around one of her sister’s forearms, she steadily began to apply pressure. “Supergirl, we need to leave.”

When the hero made no move to relinquish her hold on Lena, Alex tugged firmly on Kara’s arm and set her words in her most commanding tone. “You need to release Lena now, Supergirl.”

Lena’s brow furrowed as she shifted her gaze between the hero and Alex. “It’s—it’s all right, Agent Danvers. If there’s something Supergirl thinks I might be able to help her with—”

“Your mother.” The hero ground out the two words through teeth clenched tightly enough to snap
through titanium. “I need to know where she is.”

Lena let her eyelids slip down over translucent green eyes, paling at the realization of the hero’s reason for coming to her. “CADMUS bombed CatCo.”

She was uncertain which truth sickened her more: how easily her mother chose to cause destruction and death in retaliation against Cat Grant’s persistence, or how quickly such an act had brought Supergirl to interrogate her—as if being a Luthor automatically equaled complicity.

“She took Cat.”

Speaking the words aloud for the first time gave them truth the hero wasn’t prepared to bear. Hands slipped from Lena’s arms as Kara stumbled backward, her every movement dulled and weighted by unbearable terror. She hugged her arms around her midsection, sickness churning within her as the words twined through her insides like barbed wire.

“She has Cat.”

Speaking the words again leveled her to her knees. All the images of the torture Lillian had inflicted upon those in her capture assaulted Kara with technicolor vividness. Unable to rise beneath the visual assault, she doubled over until her forehead hit the floor, breath leaving her in desolate ululations that no human tongue could ever mimic.

Anguish settled into the crease between Lena’s eyes as she watched the heartbreaking dissolution of control before her. She looked to Alex for some clue as to what she could do to help in some way—any way.

With a shake of her head, Alex crouched beside the crumpled form of her sister. She listened for several seconds before realizing Kara had begun to murmur a Kryptonian prayer between her cries, beseeching Rao’s mercy and protection for Cat. She carefully pulled the hero up into her hold, wrapping her in the tightest hug she could manage.

“I know you’re scared,” she whispered, so low she was certain only Kara could hear. “But we need to be strong for Carter and we need to stay sharp for Cat.”

The hero began to shake in her sister’s hold. “I-I can’t hear her—can’t hear her heartbeat. What does that mean, Alex?”

“It means you’re exhausted and overwhelmed right now. That’s it. Nothing else.”

She hugged her sister closer, knowing the sound of her own heartbeat would help soothe Kara, if only slightly. “You know Cat is a fighter. She’s strong and resilient and fierce. And she isn’t going to give up on anything without a fight—especially if it’s a fight to get back home to the people she loves.”

The brunette fell silent as she glanced guardedly toward Lena, startled to see the stricken way the CEO was watching the hero. She knew, however, whatever Lena might not understand completely in the moment, she was cataloguing it all for later examination—and Lena Luthor didn’t strike her as the type of person to let go of even the most tenuous of threads until she had traced it all the way to its source. Alex needed to get Kara away from L-Corp before Lena had enough threads to completely unravel the Girl of Steel’s truth.

Blinking against the glassy shimmer blurring her vision, Lena shuffled forward carefully, keeping enough distance so as not to startle the hero. With a soft sigh, she stated, “The last time I went to see Kara Danvers at CatCo.” She paused, unnerved by how quickly Supergirl turned toward her. “I
thought I saw someone I recognized—but I blew it off as unimportant.”

Feeling her sister tense expectantly in her arms, Alex pressed Lena to continue. “And you’re now reconsidering?”

“My brother—he had a personal assistant. Very few people actually knew about her. She didn’t like the attention, so she stuck mostly to background work. I-I only saw her maybe three times in-person.”

Lena gripped her biceps as she crossed her arms. “Right before Lex was arrested, she disappeared. I never saw her at his trial—never even thought about her again, really, until that morning at CatCo.”

“Lena, please.” Kara hovered up to her feet and approached the CEO. Hands trembling from the exertion of control quickly crumbling, she once more gripped Lena’s shoulders. “Who was his assistant?”

Standing so close to the Girl of Steel in her unguarded state, seeing the raw emotion that stripped away the hero’s usual reserve around her when in uniform, Lena couldn’t miss all the tells that would betray her so easily to anyone who knew her outside of Supergirl. Realizing who stood before her, she felt her heart shattering for her best friend—felt unworthy even of trying to offer her what little she could to abate some of the suffering inflicted upon her by her own mother.

“I never knew her full name,” Lena whispered, apology thick in her voice. “But my brother always called her ‘Evie.’”

The hero’s knees buckled so suddenly, Alex barely made it in time to keep her upright. Lurching backward as she struggled to keep both of them on their feet, she braced herself against the ragged howls tearing from her sister’s lungs.

Kara gasped desperately to pull in breath around the piteous wails pouring from her mouth. “It’s Eve, Alex! It’s Eve, and I hired her. Cat trusted me—and I-I betrayed her.”

The brunette let her sister cling to her with too much strength, breathing deeply to stay calm for Kara. As the hero’s tears slipped down her face in quick-flowing rivulets, Alex activated her earpiece. “Red Team, this is Team Leader. Re-deploy immediately to Cameron Heights apartments. Supergirl and I are on our way there to meet you now.”

She realized quickly who Henshaw had been transporting along with Cat. However, she added as a precaution, “We could be engaging a potentially dangerous suspect if the site isn’t clear, so suit up and come locked and loaded.”

“Team Leader, please confirm orders.” She could hear the confusion in the responding voice. “We’ve retrieved the Daxamite and confined him at the DEO.”

“Understood, Red Team. Orders remain unchanged.”

“Confirmed, Team Leader. ETA in ten. Out.”

Alex turned to face Lena. The haunted cast in the CEO’s gaze revealed the truth of her understanding to the agent. “Lena—”

She fell silent at how Lena simply shook her head. “I want to help in any way I can. I hope you and Supergirl can believe that.”
With a brusque nod, the agent focused on helping her sister stand on her own. She watched as Lena cautiously reached out to help steady the hero before quickly pulling back. Shame sharpened her stare, loosened the quiver in her chin as she watched her friend’s inconsolable pain, brought about by the wicked legacy of her own family.

Kara turned one final time toward Lena, eyes red-rimmed and blurred by ceaseless sorrow. “Thank you, Lena.”

The CEO shook slightly at the words, unable to accept any kindness from the hero.

Feeling her sister’s tug at her elbow, Kara allowed Alex to guide them once more toward the edge of the CEO’s office balcony. “If you don’t think you can handle dealing with this raid, I’ll understand. I can have the chopper swing by—”

Shaking her head adamantly, Kara swiped her sleeve across her eyes and did her best to steady her voice. “I can do this, Alex. I swear I can.”

The brunette slipped her hand beneath Kara’s cape, rubbing circles against her back to briefly reassure and calm the hero. “Okay, we’ll do this together then.”

Earpiece clicking into activation, Alex flinched at the sound of Winn’s overzealous cry. “Alex, we’re picking up that energy spike again! Henshaw is somewhere near your current location!”

The brunette barely heard all of Winn’s exclamation before she felt her body fold painfully around the force that slammed into her and lifted her completely off the ground. Breath rushed from her lungs as she soared upward off the L-Corp balcony from which Henshaw had so easily snatched her.

Hands clawed for purchase against the cyborg’s back as he weaved and darted through the city center, his erratic movements and increasing speed a nauseating combination for the agent in his hold. Finally steadying herself with a double-fisted grip against Henshaw’s shirt, the brunette fought to raise her head against the currents pressing her uncomfortably against him.

What little was left of her breath rushed from her lungs in a frightened groan. Her eyes tracked the sight of her sister in pursuit, devouring the distance between them with relentless speed. Even with still being too far away to make out Kara’s expression, she knew the hero wasn’t going to stop until she’d overtaken the cyborg currently charging through the skies at speeds that made every joint in Alex’s body ache under the pressure.

She also knew Kara wouldn’t do anything to put her in danger. She knew her sister could have blasted Henshaw several times over by that point with her heat vision. However, the cyborg’s constant evasive maneuvering made it impossible for Kara to lock on with any certainty that he wouldn’t shift again and place Alex in the line of fire.

Furious at her own human fragility, Alex forced herself to shift and shove as much as she could against the restrictive grip holding her in place—to provide Henshaw with a passenger unwilling to let him continue to run without at least putting up some kind of fight.

From her position behind Henshaw, Kara saw her sister struggling against the hold the cyborg had on her. “Dammit, Alex, stop it!” She wasn’t certain whether or not her sister’s earpiece still worked or was even still in-place, but she had to try to reach her.

Instantly, she heard Winn come through the line. “Supergirl, we lost Team Leader on comms back at your last location.” Kara felt her heart constrict at the words. “Report, please.”
“Henshaw has her—grabbed her from Lena’s office balcony before I could stop him.” She cursed herself for being so distracted that she missed the cyborg’s approach until it was too late. “Where the hell is he leading me, Winn?”

She glanced down long enough to note the rapidly changing terrain beneath them. National City was far behind them and their trajectory was leading them out toward the open ocean.

“We’re tracking you sixty miles past National City limits,” Winn confirmed. “Heading upland toward—”

The tech agent stopped mid-sentence at the sudden veer he detected in Kara’s course. “Supergirl, confirm you are now heading due east from your previous trajectory.”

“He’s heading back inland, Winn! I can catch him easily, but what do I do once I overtake him? He’s got Alex—she’s trying to fight him, but she-she’s just going to get herself hurt!”

As if confirming he were listening to the hero’s conversation, Henshaw shifted Alex in his grip, compressing his arm around her midsection until he felt the give of ribs beneath his hold. The brunette’s expression instantly contorted in pain and Kara watched as she lost the grip she’d been holding on Henshaw’s shirt.

“Winn, help me! Tell me where he might be heading!”

The tech agent’s fingers flew across keys with a harsh clatter, his eyes sweeping the readings popping up on his screens. “I-I don’t know, Supergirl.” He could feel the weight of frustration digging in between his shoulder blades as he hunkered over his workstation, furiously seeking the answers Kara needed.

As he glared at the topography map on the center monitor, he startled at the sudden rush of static to come through Kara’s comm link. Before he could call out to her, he watched as her tracker and Alex’s disappeared completely from view.

“No, no, no!” Slamming his fist down onto his desk, he began fervently typing away once more, desperately searching for the signals for either Danvers sister.

On the other side of the now-scrambled communication line, Kara cried out, “Winn! Please respond! Henshaw’s changed course again! We’re now heading northeast—no, wait! He’s—he’s flying right at me!”

Barely finishing her exclamation in time to move, Kara lunged starboard as Henshaw flashed past her, only missing a collision by mere feet. With a tight aerial roll, Kara shot back into pursuit once more, gaining enough momentum that she was able to grab Henshaw’s ankle.

Alex’s pained cry instantly caused Kara’s head to snap upward. Unable to detect any visual signs of damage, Kara scanned her sister with her X-ray vision. Immediately, she saw freshly fractured ribs and when she extended her hearing, she could hear the pained breaths Alex struggled to draw.

“Give it up, Girl of Steel.” Even speaking at normal volume, Henshaw knew the Kryptonian would hear him. “Let me go and follow like a good little alien and I might keep from breaking any more of her bones.”

As Kara released her grip on Henshaw and began to slow her speed to distance herself from the cyborg, she met gazes with Alex. The brunette could see the storm building in her sister’s expression, but she steadfastly shook her head at the sight.
The hero dropped back even farther, her whole body jittering with the effort not to overtake Henshaw and rip his cybernetic appendages from his body. She knew catching Alex would be no problem if she did just that—but at what cost to Cat?

Gritting her teeth against the fear cresting within her, she paced the cyborg as he led them due south. As she forced herself to focus on the surrounding terrain, she noted the river wending its way down toward National City in parallel to their current course.

Another change in direction had them coasting east toward the mountain range rising up rapidly before them. Henshaw dropped lower as he glided in and circled around toward an outcropping on the eastern edge of an interior rise.

Realizing Henshaw had stopped and was hovering before her, the hero matched his movement several yards away. She could hear how the way he continued to hold Alex, slung gracelessly over his shoulder, forced her sister to struggle for breath.

“You’re hurting her holding her like that.”

“Ask me if I give a damn.” He hefted the agent effortlessly, smirking at the sound of her trying to restrain her grunt of pain. “I could toss her down this ravine right now and not bat an eye. Even if you couldn’t save her, it wouldn’t matter. We’ve already got who you really want.”

Cued by his words, a scream rang through Kara’s ears, buried so deep below the mountain she knew only she and Henshaw could hear it—but loud enough to the hero to physically buffet her in midair.

“What are you doing to her?”

The cyborg laughed at the sight of Kara’s eyes flickering impotently with white-hot rage. “You’ve done this to her, Kryptonian.”

He began to descend slowly, his gleeful grin horrifying to the hero. “Every bit of their suffering is your fault,” he jeered before touching down on the ledge beneath the outcropping and disappearing.

Quick to follow, Kara landed forcefully enough to crumble the ledge beneath her boots. A door had slid back to reveal a dark path leading into the mountain. Henshaw was already several strides inside, not even bothering to check if she was behind him.

The shrill shock of another scream shuddered through Kara, jolting her into motion.

“Better hurry,” the cyborg called over his shoulder. “Dr. Luthor is particularly persistent when she’s enjoying herself.”

Scanning ahead, Kara struggled to pinpoint the location of the screams. Every wall she encountered reflected back the frustrating opaqueness of lead lining.

“Almost there,” Henshaw called as he palmed the print reader alongside the closed door before them. As the door hissed back into its frame on recognition, the cyborg continued on, Kara closely at heel.

In the subdued lighting, the hero immediately recognized the nth metal cages that lined either side of the room’s central path. She swallowed against the panic bubbling up her throat and instead focused on the familiar heartbeat pounding fierce and fast ahead of them.
“You’re back sooner than I had hoped.”

Lillian Luthor stood in profile to the approaching cyborg and Kara, her gaze cast downward toward the floor of the open cell she faced, something clasped loosely in her right hand.

“I was looking forward to a little more time with Ms. Grant.”

Kara followed Luthor’s line of sight, immediately rushing into the cell with a furious growl. Dropping to her knees, she hovered her hands over the smaller blonde curled onto her side, terrified and uncertain of how or where was safe to touch her.

Henshaw sneered at the sight as he pushed past Luthor to the adjacent cell. With a quick shift of weight, he dumped Alex to the ground, smiling in satisfaction at the sound of her body striking the concrete with a pained trill.

Luthor finally addressed Kara. “Ms. Danvers.” She reached forward and shut the cell door. “So happy you could join us once more. There’s still so much I want to do with you.”

“So do it,” the hero choked, finally settling on stroking back sweat-slicked locks of Cat’s hair. “But let them go. They’re human.”

“They’re traitors.” She turned to address the brunette. “I offered you a chance to join us—to stand with your father. Instead, you chose to betray your blood for this invader.”

Pressing up with both hands, Alex struggled to take in enough air to respond. “She’s my sister.”

Luthor sighed in disappointment. “Still that brainwashed little girl, I see. The Danvers gene must be defective in this regard.”

Tilting her head to study the brunette’s growing rage, she offered, “It’s not too late, Alex. I’ve succeeded in convincing your father of the error of his ways. Let me do the same for you. You can be with him again right now, helping us purge our world of this filth.”

“You don’t deserve to even speak about him. My sister and I will be leaving here, together, and we’ll be taking Cat with us.” She gulped down several gasps of breath before finishing, “And when we return with the DEO and NCPD, you can bet your stock villain ass I’m taking my father home.”

As Henshaw moved out of the cell and slammed the door shut, Luthor shot her a condescending grin. “He already is home, Alex. He’s completely committed to our mission to eradicate the alien presence here on Earth. So continue to believe in your traitorous cause, but do so knowing he would view your actions as a betrayal.”

Shifting to take in the sight of Kara hovering helplessly over Cat’s still-fetal form, she continued, “I also would advise you to say your goodbyes now, just in case—especially to Ms. Grant. I’m afraid she wasn’t quite built for these less forgiving conditions. Perhaps you should have better prepared her for the consequences of fucking the enemy.”

With an easy spin, Luthor pivoted to face the cell across from Cat and Kara’s. “Enjoy your new cell mates while they’re here—and think quickly about your role in what comes next. The revolution is beginning.”

The doctor gestured to Henshaw, grinning with satisfaction when he fell into step beside her. As they passed once more into the hallway leading away from the cells, Alex watched with sinking hope as a guard positioned himself on their side of the closing door.
Pushing herself the rest of the way up to her knees, the brunette shuffled over to the line of bars that separated her from Kara and Cat. She couldn’t choke back the sympathetic cry the moment her sister looked up, eyes bleeding anguish.

“Alex, what do I do?”

The devastation in Kara’s voice broke her from her fog, refocused her on the need at hand. “Have you scanned Cat yet?”

Shaking her head, the hero turned her gaze downward to run her X-ray vision over Cat’s body. Her chin instantly quivered even as she slapped her hand over her mouth.

“What do you see, Kara?” Alex felt the intensifying squeeze of fear coil cold and tight through her body.

“Th-the nanobots—they’re all through her.”

“Whatever the hell that shit you just said is, that psycho doctor tortured her with them for about twenty minutes straight before finally getting her to scream.”

Both Danvers sisters swiveled toward the voice coming from the strangely outfitted cell across the walkway. When the occupant moved closer to the bars, Kara snarled, “Livewire!”

The delicate curl of fingers around Kara’s forearm froze any other words in her throat. “Don’t humor Leslie with that ridiculous sobriquet. She’s insufferable enough already.”

“Cat!”

Cat’s name sounded as if it ripped straight from Kara’s heart. Thin fingers reached upward, stroked through the course of tears shining trails down the hero’s cheeks. “It’s all right, darling. Leslie has actually been the saving grace of my stay here so far.”

The smaller blonde’s intent at levity failed, Kara’s face contorting into such agony it made even Leslie gasp softly at the sight.

“No, my darling. Don’t.” Cat’s hand shook even as she pressed it against Kara’s face. “You found me.”

Pain clouded her eyes, but she still managed to smile. “I know you’ll always come for me, Kara.”

The hero bowed her head until she could touch her forehead against Cat’s shoulder, a broken keen hitching from her lungs.

“Cat?”

Alex’s voice drew the smaller blonde’s gaze away from where Kara was soaking her shoulder in tears. Cat gently stroked her fingers through Kara’s hair in an attempt to bring some peace to the hero.

Overwhelmed by the sight of Cat, clearly in pain, comforting her sister, Alex couldn’t even get breath past the tightness in her throat for several beats. Finally, with a tear-thickened voice, she blurted out the only thing she could think of that could give comfort back to Cat. “Carter and Adam are safe. They’re with the DEO.”

Cat allowed her eyes to shut for a second, relief breaking the mask she was barely strong enough to
maintain anymore. When she refocused on the brunette, she softly rasped, “Thank you, Alex.”

Keeping her voice a strained murmur, she then asked, “You wouldn’t happen to have anything in all those charmingly utilitarian cargo pockets that might help Leslie regain her charge, would you?”

“What?” The brunette struggled to shift her thoughts to focus on the unexpected query.

“Leslie has lost her light, so to speak. No sparkly fingers. No dramatic departures and arrivals. No ‘Fireworks.’ Just Katy Perry hair. Completely unacceptable.”

By the time Cat finished, she was barely whispering as she pulled in pained sips of air. Leslie leaned against her cell door, her eyes glimmering brightly even without her spark. “You’re losing your touch, Cat Lady. Katy Perry jokes are definitely last season.”

Alex startled when she realized the shock jock was staring at her, beseeching her to help the smaller blonde.

Reaching through the bars, Alex wrapped a hand around her sister’s bicep. “Kara? Come on, I need your help. I need you to tell me what the nanobots are doing.”

“No.” With a glare more suitable for a board room than a prison cell, Cat pushed herself upright. Kara was quick to move with her, wrapping her in as gentle an embrace as possible. Once she was sitting up in Kara’s hold, she turned that glare fully on Alex. “You are helping Leslie.”

“Cat!”

“Alexandra Danvers, I will haunt you the rest of your life if you don’t stop wasting time—”

The smaller blonde gasped in mid-sentence, fingers curling around the forearms pressing her into Kara’s embrace with increasing strength. “Darling, shh. It’s all right. Just loosen your hold a little, okay?”

“It’s not a waste of time.” The words ruffled Cat’s hair as Kara buried her face into the smaller blonde’s neck. Her grip loosened slightly but she clung to Cat with a desperation the smaller blonde could feel shivering through her whole body.

“Okay, Kara. Okay. Alex will help me—after she helps Leslie.” She turned her head enough to press a kiss against Kara’s temple before focusing once more on the brunette.

Steeling herself against the pain devouring her control, she stated, “The cell she’s in—it’s rigged with some kind of dampener that’s shut down her ability to conduct or transform into electricity.”

In a voice soft and strained, she finished, “Kara, look at Leslie’s cell and tell us what you see about the generator attached to it.”

The hero shook her head, unwilling to stop clinging desperately to the smaller blonde cradled in her arms.

“Please, Kara.” The words scraped from her throat on ragged breaths. “Tell us how we can shut down the generator and set Leslie free.”

Alex leaned on her cell bars, steadying herself against the agonizing grind of broken ribs, so she could address Cat without being overheard by the guard. “Even if we could get Livewire out of her cell, there’s no guarantee she’d be able to get out of here. There’s no way they aren’t monitoring
that generator for any fluctuations. If we mess with it in any way—if Kara does anything to set Livewire free—Cat—those things inside you right now—Dr. Luthor could—”

“Doesn’t matter,” Cat interrupted, not wanting Alex to verbalize the rest of her thought. “Leslie and I had a lovely ‘come to Jesus’ conversation before Lillian decided to post the CADMUS Gestapo in here with us. She’s agreed that if she can get out of here, she will go find Maggie and lead her and the DEO back before Lillian can get her hands on Kara—but we have to make our move now.”

Alex saw the determination hardening Cat’s gaze, but it was the resignation behind it that made her ache worse than her broken ribs. “Cat, please.”

She could hear the weakness in her voice, but she didn’t care. The smaller blonde, however, gave no quarter for such sorrow. “We need to get Leslie out of here, Alex. She’s our best bet to save Kara.”

Only able to meet Cat’s stare for a moment before crumbling beneath its fierceness, Alex forced herself to nod. “Kara, I need you to scan Leslie’s cell and tell me what you see.”

At the feeling of Cat sliding a hand soothingly through her hair, Kara complied with her sister’s request. Staring silently across the walkway for several moments, she finally muttered, “The generator is producing some kind of electromagnetic shielding all around Leslie’s cell.”

“And what would happen if you blasted the generator with your heat vision?”

“I-I don’t know. I mean, I could knock out the generator easily enough—but what if they’re monitoring the generator or her cell for energy spikes? What if—what if disabling it somehow hurts her?”

From across the walkway, Leslie leaned against her cell door, glaring in frustration at Cat as she persisted in pushing herself with little regard for what was happening within her. She knew from her time in the close quarters of their adjacent cells that the CEO wasn’t just suffering from whatever Dr. Luthor had done to her—she was dying.

She also knew, with furiously anticlimactic acceptance, how much she actually didn’t want Cat Grant to die.

Regardless of the very public and mutual antagonism they had shared throughout their association, Leslie had never once questioned Cat’s loyalty to or belief in her—two qualities consistently lacking from nearly all her prior relationships. Cat’s devotion, in fact, soon became something Leslie loathed to admit needing.

It was no wonder or surprise, then, that feeling as though she had lost it had been enough to tempt her to darker actions when she realized the power she had inherited from the Girl of Steel.

The unintentional cause of their fallout.

The insufferable beacon of hope.

The hero with whom she now realized she shared more than just whatever genetic mutation the Kryptonian’s DNA had caused to her.

She watched Supergirl gently cradle Cat against her chest, tears slipping without notice down the hero’s cheeks, and allowed herself a moment to feel the same deep stab of sorrow and fear she could see reflected in Supergirl’s eyes.
With an exhale she felt shake from her lungs, the shock jock forced herself to refocus her attention onto anything but the emotional tableau occurring across from her. She caught the shift of the guard now stationed within the cell block, obviously assigned to keep watch over the newly arrived superhero.

As her gaze shifted along the lines of his uniform, she smirked in realization before turning back toward the cell across from her and calling out, “Maybe instead of snuggling with your pet Kryptonian, you can teach her how to get us the hell out of here.”

She caught the way Cat rolled her eyes at the statement. However, her attention remained peripherally focused, relieved to see her taunting had riled more than Cat’s amusement.

“Back away from the door and shut up.”

The three cell occupants across from Leslie startled at the unexpected approach of the guard.

With a dismissive huff, the DJ snapped, “And why don’t you just fuck off, you overcompensating asshat?”

The guard bared his teeth in a snarl of fury, his hand reaching down to the weapon on his belt Leslie had hoped he would choose. “You will back away now, and if you come close to this cell door again, I will Taser you.”

“Only way I’d ever get any kind of jolt from you,” she sneered even as she took several steps away from her cell door.

With a growl that barely masked the epithet he hurled toward her, the guard marched back to his position by the entrance.

“Still channeling your inner Tonya Harding, I see.”

Leslie glared from the shadows of her cell but said nothing as she listened to Cat gasp through several wet coughs.

Kara watched in horror as blood speckled the back of Cat’s hand, stained the corners of her mouth. When her coughing abated, the smaller blonde slumped back into Kara’s embrace, shivering slightly.

Finally, Livewire stepped forward once more, her eyes shimmering as she locked onto the CEO. She shifted her gaze toward the guard long enough to signal her intent before replying, “You know, I never realized how old all your references are, Cat.”

At the feeling of Kara tensing behind her, Cat tightened her grip as much as she could and shook her head. “Leslie is merely trying to distract me with her ageist millennial snark, Kara.”

Leslie huffed at the statement and turned away, clenching her hands into fists at the tears stinging her eyes. “Whatever, Cat Lady. You know, I wouldn’t even be here right now if you’d just told me you were getting your panties in such a wad over Supergirl because you were banging her.”

Sniffling audibly, she turned and once more pressed herself against her cell door, taunting, “Guess I know now why my digs about her sexuality really cut so close.”

She caught the swift strides of the guard seconds before she felt the barbed probes from his Taser embed into her skin, bringing with them the full shock of the weapon discharging into her.
Rather than incapacitate the DJ the way he intended, the guard watched in stupefied silence as Livewire absorbed the Taser’s entire charge, electric arcs snaking brightly along her body, head falling back as she relished the power finally satiating the hungry ache that throbbed all the way down through her cells.

Currents crackling from her fingertips, she refocused on the guard with pupils once more blown wide with power. “That hit the spot,” she smirked. “Only fair I return the favor.”

Blue-white coils of energy unspooled from her fingertips and pierced into his chest hard enough to blast him off his feet and into the adjacent cells. With what was left of the charge she’d pulled from the Taser, she reached out and palmed the generator panel, dispersing what was left of her energy. The resultant explosion knocked her backward into her cell where she collapsed to the floor with a pained grunt.

Cat struggled to sit up in Kara’s hold, the full force of her glare focused on the immobile shock jock. “So help me, Leslie, if you don’t get the hell up—”

“Back off, Cat,” came the pained response, which Cat swore puffed from Leslie’s mouth in a swirl of smoke. Several seconds ticked rigidly by as the DJ continued to lie prostrate in her cell, gasping to steady herself.

Noting the guard had yet to move at all, Alex called to her sister. “Kara, is the guard—is he dead?”

The hero’s head instantly shook as she scanned him. From her side of the walkway, Leslie finally rose on shaking legs, her body visibly vibrating as she continued to draw electricity from all around her. “I didn’t have enough juice to take him out completely.”

Both hands splayed outward, electricity curling and flickering as she wiggled her fingers playfully. “I can fix that now though.”

Cat could see the heady intoxication of the power once more racing through Leslie’s veins—could see how it tempted her with the vengeance that had been her motivator since her villainous alter ego’s inception.

Feeling the smaller blonde struggling to rise, Kara quickly floated them both to their feet, never releasing Cat from her embrace. With waning strength, Cat reached out a hand toward the opposite cell. “Leslie, please. Leave now before they can block your powers again.”

The shock jock froze, her acerbic response fizzling away at the unexpected plea. Cat leaned forward, staring intently into the inky darkness of Leslie’s eyes. “She will torture and kill you if you don’t get out now. Please, go!”

Lightning arced throughout Leslie’s body as she stared down the CEO, but Cat could see how her features softened at her words—just as they had when Cat had blindsided her with a similar request during their last encounter, in National City Park.

“I’m not asking for myself. I’m asking for my boys. I’m all they have. Please don’t take their mother away from them.”

“Not going to beg for her life then?”

The smaller blonde shifted backward, letting Kara bear most of her weight as she curled her fingers once more around the hero’s forearms. “I have faith you’ll do what you believe is best.”

Snorting in response, the shock jock shook her head, her expression frustratingly indecipherable.
“Later, Cat Lady,” and with a crackle and spark, she morphed completely, shooting upward into the facility’s electrical system in a vortex of energy.

The cellblock doors had barely parted enough for Henshaw’s entrance before he plowed through, Luthor close on his heels. Cat shivered violently at the sight of the doctor, muscle memory of pure pain pressing her deeply into Kara’s protective embrace.

The dual focus of their fury, however, lay at Henshaw’s feet, still reeling from Livewire’s blast.

Drawing back his boot, the cyborg kicked the guard hard enough to slam him into the bars of the now-empty cell. “Goddamned fool,” he roared above the screams and snapping bones to fill the space.

Unwilling to suffer any stammering excuses or pleas for mercy from the guard for his inexcusable incompetence, Luthor gave the cyborg a wave of dismissal as she walked away.

Kara felt Cat’s legs give beneath her the moment Henshaw reached down and, with a fierce twist, turned the guard’s head until his lifeless gaze pointed toward them.

Lips set in a cruel white line, Luthor activated the cell block’s communication system and called out, “Did we stop her?”

Through the open line, a voice replied, “Yes, Doctor. She never made it past the discharge gateway we installed. We have neutralized the threat.”

Cat shook with the effort to contain her response even as she felt Kara slowly lower her back to the floor of their cell.

Closing the line, Luthor let her head tilt forward slightly. Her disappointment was practically palpable. “She was the perfection I have tried so hard to attain.”

When she looked back up, she glared for several moments toward the cells that held the remaining prisoners. No longer amused by her captive audience, Luthor finally turned and made for the exit. “Bring Agent Danvers to my lab.”

Kara’s response was an instant blur across her cell to grab hold of her sister’s arm through their cells. Adjusting her grip to be firm but gentle, she shook her head while glaring at the approaching cyborg. “Don’t! Whatever Dr. Luthor wants her for, do it to me!”

Henshaw savored the sound of the hero’s desperation as he took the agent by her other arm. “You’ll let her go and wait your turn, alien.”

Wicked delight pulsed in his fingertips as he watched Kara shake her head and he flexed his grip around the agent’s wrist. “That’s right, hold her tight, Girl of Steel.”

Blur of motion and Alex was screaming, her hand an aberrant angle atop broken bones. “Keep your sister close.”

Twist and shift and Alex collapsed into dueling holds with a shattered shriek, her radius and ulna both snapping like matchsticks within Henshaw’s grip. “Show her the true reward for a life wasted protecting alien filth.”

Before he could cause more harm, Kara relented, releasing her sister’s uninjured arm with a violent, wounded sob. The agent dropped at an awkward angle on release, all her weight coming down on where Henshaw now gripped her bicep.
As the cyborg dragged the barely conscious brunette away, Kara rushed beside them inside her cell, pressing desperately against the bars as they passed from her reach. Struggling to hold her head steady, Alex locked gazes with her sister and gasped out, “Take care of Cat. Shut down your hearing. I love you, Kara.”

Rage flared bright and wild in eyes that steamed, her tears evaporating in the glow of barely contained heat vision. Intent clear, she surged forward, a scream of fury and terror clawing its way up and out.

And then Cat stood between her and the last sight of Alex disappearing through the now closing door, shimmering like a mirage in the heat wavering from her eyes.

“Don’t, Kara.” The smaller blonde shook from the exertion of standing. She could see similar tremors shaking the hero as she fought to keep her control.

Taking a small step forward, Cat reached out, pressing her hands against Kara’s flushed cheeks. Her fingertips scorched against the heat simmering beneath the skin around Kara’s eyes, but she didn’t pull away. Voice tight with pain, she whispered, “Don’t give them any more reason to hurt her, Kara.”

The hero’s tortured wails echoed through the detention area as she finally broke within Cat’s arms.

Chapter End Notes

Seems like it takes longer and longer between chapters anymore. Summer is a really rough time, work-wise, for me. I hate it for many reasons, but I definitely hate how it slows down my pace here.

This was a difficult chapter to write, for many reasons. From a technical standpoint, I made a decision when I first started writing this series that I wasn't going to use section breaks within chapters. I don't know why, really, but I've had a fun time coming up with ways to shift action and focus organically. This chapter was the first major challenge to this choice. There are lots of overlapping action moments, taking place in different places and with different people. Getting them to sync up long enough to transfer focus was...interesting. I hope I did the shifts justice. I honestly kind of wanted a frenetic feeling to this chapter, so continuing with the organic shifts kind of adds to that desired effect, I think (I hope).

I also hope I gave you a good amount of action without overdoing it. A lot needed to happen in this chapter for it to end where I knew it would. A lot more sprang up as necessary as I moved through. Some characters came forward more while some pulled back. One character really surprised me. I won't say which, but I'm really looking forward to writing more for them.

Also, there are a lot of moments in this chapter with characters (mostly Alex) having to make split-second calls. It's okay if you disagree with some of her calls (or all of them!). All the training in the world sometimes isn't going to help when faced with situations as personal as these. I'd like to think Alex made the best calls she could, but it's all right to question them. It's also all right to yell at me for them ;-)

I hope this chapter was worth the wait. I promise I am going to do my best to get the
next chapter up in less time than it took for this one. As the good Tenth Doctor would say, "Allons-y!"
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

CADMUS Test Subject Interlude 10

Chapter Notes

The more I write Lillian Luthor, the more I find her "realness" to be horrifically unsettling. She unleashes a lot of that in this chapter, which is otherwise mostly free of anything physically graphic. Just be warned that Lillian is completely in her twisted element here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Test Subject CDS-17-061

Incredulity and displeasure mingled in her cool gray glare as she watched the new arrivals to her lab. “I asked you to bring her to me, not break her in the process.”

Ignoring the disapproving tone, Henshaw dragged the agent the rest of the way into Luthor’s lab, shoving her into the chair beside the doctor’s workstation. A pained groan broke from Alex’s lips at the sensation of her broken ribs grinding in protest. Trying her best to shift into a tolerable position, she cradled her broken arm and wrist close and focused on breathing through her pain.

Luthor watched the brunette’s struggle peripherally as she began to collect several items from her workstation. Gaze flickered along the line of vials in the refrigerator beneath the table as she listened to the shallow breaths Alex pulled with clear difficulty. “I was actually indecisive on which one of these I wanted to test on you first,” she offered as she removed one of the ampoules. “Seems Henshaw has made my choice for me.”

When she stood once more, she snapped at the cyborg, “Fix your damage. Realign the bones in her wrist and forearm and then get out.”

Before he could move toward the agent, Luthor held up a hand in warning. “Do not be sloppy. I need the alignment to be solid so I can get proper results with this test.”

Henshaw bristled at the order but sneered a gruff “Yes, Doctor,” as he moved once more to the agent’s side.

Seeing the cyborg reaching for her, Alex struggled to hold her arm as tightly against her as possible. Luthor sighed at the sight. “Agent Danvers, I’m trying to help you, but I can’t do anything until you let Henshaw fix what he has so unceremoniously broken.”

“P-pain.” She growled the warning in the hopes Luthor would show even the barest mercy.

With a half-nod, the doctor responded, “I am sorry you’re in pain, Alex. But I need you clear-
headed for my experiments. Anything administered to alleviate your pain at this point would interfere with my results.”

She almost sounded earnestly contrite, but Alex could see an unsettling eagerness growing in her expression that left the agent even more nauseous.

Seeing no alternative, she released her hold on her broken arm. Henshaw surprised her with a gentle touch as he straightened her arm out before her as much as possible. Activating his X-ray vision, he scanned the breaks, pleased to find clean simple fractures ready for realignment.

“Brace yourself, Agent Danvers. This is going to hurt.”

Before his words had completely entered her brain for processing, Alex was screaming in agony. The cyborg continued to use his vision to watch the bones in her forearm and wrist reconnect in as precise a way as possible. By the time he was finished, all he could see were the hairline fracture lines as proof of any breaks.

Alex slumped forward, teetering precariously between throwing up from the pain and passing out completely. Tears rolled down her cheeks, but even Henshaw was impressed by her renewed silence. With a clap to the shoulder on her undamaged side, he announced, “I actually might keep you around at the DEO when I take it back.”

Panting through the pain, her eyes still clenched and her head still pointed toward the floor, the brunette managed to snarl, “Go...fuck...yourself.”

Henshaw’s raucous laughter lit up the silence of the room. With one final affirmative glance toward Luthor, he knelt by the agent’s side and locked her ankles to the chair. He then locked down her one good wrist and loosely fastened the restraint on her other before turning and leaving, positioning himself in the hallway outside the lab.

For several minutes, Luthor moved about in silence, allowing Alex time to calm herself from Henshaw’s efficient if not brutal bone resetting. Wheeling over a heart monitor, she carefully pressed the agent back into the chair and unzipped her uniform top to apply the monitor’s electrodes. The sound of the monitor’s tracking of Alex’s frantic but strong heartbeat soon filled the lab. After a bit more work, Luthor finished inserting and adjusting a catheter into the back of the brunette’s hand and checking the attached line for the saline IV she’d set up for her.

The agent’s head listed slightly to one side, her eyelids struggling to stay at half-mast over pain-clouded eyes. “Why bother with safety protocols? You’re just going to kill me, right?”

Ignoring the question for the moment, Luthor placed all the items she needed into a collection tray and sat on the stool beside Alex. She took the trauma shears first and cut away the sleeve covering Alex’s unbroken arm.

“You impressed Henshaw. I didn’t actually think that was possible any more.”

She carefully looped a tourniquet around the agent’s arm, watching with pleasure as a healthy vein revealed itself under the pressure. After she tore open an alcohol swab and wiped down the newly revealed vein, she removed a digital recorder from her pocket.

“Test subject is an adult human in her late 20s. She is currently suffering several simple fractures to her left wrist and forearm. Also suspect several broken ribs from earlier altercation. Heart rate elevated, most likely in response to pain, but still within acceptable range for the purposes of this test. No pain management in effect at this time.”
She placed down the device in her tray and snapped on a pair of gloves. Removing a twenty-gauge needle and the ampoule of serum she had chosen to test on the agent, she continued, “I will be injecting the maximum two milliliters of *kryptosanguis* serum and observing all reactions.”

As she filled the syringe to the chosen dosage, she smirked at Alex. “Do you still want to insist you and the Kryptonian are sisters?”

The brunette glared defiantly through the blur of pain throbbing through her body. “Kara *is* my sister.”

“Then let me help make it a true blood bond.”

Luthor swiftly slipped in the needle, delivering the full dose of serum directly into Alex’s vein. “Congratulations, Agent Danvers. I’ve just injected you with a serum derived from the blood I drew from your *sister* when she was our guest the first time.”

Alex’s eyes widened fearfully as she absorbed Luthor’s words. “What—what is that going to do to me?”

An unsettling smile slowly slipped across Luthor’s lips. “We’re going to find out together.”

She placed a bandage over the needle mark and began cleaning up. “After analyzing Kara’s blood, I’m fairly certain the only properties within it of value to our cause will be her accelerated healing ability. If my formula for this serum came out properly, you won’t have much longer to worry about those broken bones.”

Tossing her gloves into a medical waste bag, she swiveled back around to face Alex. The brunette’s skin still held a waxen hue and sweat dripped down along her temple and jawline. “I’m assuming the rest of Kara’s powers come from the way those extra organs of hers process our sun’s radiation.”

Hearing the agent’s surprised gasp, Luthor continued, “What did you think we were doing with the Kryptonian while she was here? Before your retrieval team unceremoniously interrupted our time together, I had gotten through most of my preliminary examinations: blood draws, X-rays, brain scans. Phase One collection gave me plenty of data to analyze and experiment with, but Phase Two is going to provide us with far more substantial resources. Once I can get inside and collect a variety of genetic samples, I can begin the work necessary to build her powers into our own soldiers.”

Alex was certain the sickness she felt in her stomach was no longer in response to her physical pain. Seeing the growing unease in the agent’s expression, Luthor shook her head in disappointment. “This is why you never name the lab animals.”

“Shut up!” Alex lunged forward against her restraints, instantly regretting it as pain exploded through her whole arm. However, Luthor noted how her reaction was far less traumatic than she would expect from someone with such severe injuries. She also noted the slow return of color to the brunette’s cheeks.

With a disapproving scowl, Luthor continued, “Your parents never should have brought her into your home. They should have turned her over to the DEO instead of indulging the idea she was worthy of opportunities that belonged to human children.”

Her expression shifted with an unexpected compassion. “Don’t you see, Alex? The life you have been forced to live ever since her arrival is a cruel imitation of the life you deserved.”
“No. You want me to see your point of view? All I see is someone who wanted to dissect a child! Kara was no older than your own daughter when she arrived on Earth, and she was barely here more than a year before you sent Henshaw to retrieve her!”

Issuing a dismissive sniff, Luthor stared down the line of her nose at the agent. “Do you really think bringing Lena into your argument will somehow help humanize Kara? Or perhaps reach me on some emotional level that will make me see the error of my ways? All it does is remind me of how neither actually belongs to the families who foolishly took pity upon them. Lena is not my daughter. Kara is not your sister. Neither one deserves the privilege of the rights they claim.”

Alex shook where she sat, the anger she felt surpassed only by her growing terror for her sister’s safety. “She’s one alien—one, on a planet of billions of humans.”

“Yes, one. And one becomes a hundred, becomes a thousand—becomes a whole world overrun with invaders who believe themselves entitled to what we work so hard for, simply because they are refugees.”

Crossing her arms, the doctor observed Alex once more in silence for several moments. She could hear the way the agent’s breathing had become less labored by pain and how she no longer held herself rigidly in an attempt to minimize the movement of her ribs.

“Tell me how you feel right now, Alex. What’s your level of pain versus what it was before I injected you?”

Alex frowned in confusion before readjusting her focus onto analyzing Luthor’s question. Carefully, she wiggled the fingers of her left hand, shifted her wrist with the smallest movements she could. “It still hurts, but it’s like a five now instead of a fifty.”

Luthor nodded, pleased at the agent’s honest admission. “This is the Kryptonian’s worth to us. Soldiers who can self-heal without having to leave the battlefield. Snipers with telescopic vision. Firefighters able to stop conflagrations with their breath—no more searching desperately for water sources. Super strength powered by the sun. Maybe even the ability to fly! All this learned from studying one alien.”

“Dissecting one alien.”

“Yes, dissecting her. Taking her apart and studying what fuels her abilities could have unimaginable benefits for us.”

Luthor leaned closer, her steel gray eyes burning with excitement. “You’re a scientist, Alex. Stop anthropomorphizing the test subject and focus on what we could do to help humanity.”

She sat up straight. “Your father finally understands this.”

“Stop it.” Alex instantly seethed once more with fury at the doctor’s words. “My father is a good man. He would never want to bring harm to Kara.”

“Jeremiah Danvers is a good man who has finally seen his way to becoming a great man. He has relinquished his hold on the lies that held him back—the same ones that keep you from attaining your own greatness. You’re a brilliant scientist and an exemplary soldier, Alex, but you’re wasting your potential. You are the preeminent expert on Kryptonian physiology. You’ve surpassed even your own parents in your expertise.

“Join CADMUS. Join your father in helping us ensure Earth’s safety. You can not only help us build unstoppable soldiers but you can also lead those soldiers into victory after victory against any
alien who dares try to assume we are weak and ready for their invasion. You can be at the forefront of leading Earth into a new millennium of superior strength. You can help us establish Earth as the dominant force not just in this galaxy but in all galaxies.”

Alex felt the roil of revulsion and horror churning within her as she watched Luthor’s expectant expression. “You’re a monster.”

With an unsurprised though still disappointed sigh, Luthor retorted, “I’m a patriot—and when I unlock the Kryptonian’s powers for all of humanity, I’ll be heralded a hero.”

She rose and went to collect several new vials and needles in her tray. “You, on the other hand, Agent Danvers, will soon be nothing more than a forgotten test subject.”

Retrieving her recorder, she continued, “Initial test of kryptosanguis serum successful. Subject is showing signs of steady healing, although not at the speed of a full Kryptonian. We will need to perform X-rays to confirm the full extent of healing in her bones. However, proceeding with next stage of testing.”

She filled a fresh syringe from a new vial. “One of the unexpected bonuses of working with a variety of alien life forms is discovery of the various diseases they bring with them. I’ve collected some of the most lethal viruses imaginable in my research.”

Flicking the syringe and depressing the plunger to clear it of any air bubbles, she finished, “Tell me, Agent Danvers, how many of these viruses do you think your newly enhanced healing abilities will be able to help you survive? I imagine you’ll make it through the lesser diseases easily enough—but I’m not certain you’ll survive them all. Any guesses on how many it will take before you become one more corpse for the NCPD to pull from the river?”

When the agent offered only silence in response, Luthor merely gave a disaffected shrug. Jabbing the needle once more into Alex’s vein, Luthor unloaded the full amount of the syringe with a sickeningly satisfied smile. “Guess we’ll just have to find out the hard way.”

Chapter End Notes

I think the most frightening thing about Lillian Luthor isn't what she does, but why she does it. Her statement from "The Darkest Place" about being "a patriot" was probably the most haunting line from the whole episode--because it's so in line with the pernicious attitudes of far too many in power here today.
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

The search and rescue begins for Cat, Kara, and Alex.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Maggie remembered well the first time she had taken a bullet. Six months out of the academy and she was a rookie beat cop, running after a carjacker who’d ditched his hot ride when he couldn’t shake the pursuing cruisers. He was trying to make it off the streets on foot when Maggie and her partner caught sight of him. During pursuit, the perp pulled a piece and took a lucky (unlucky) shot that landed dead center of her vest, knocking her down in mid-stride.

As her partner dragged her behind a battered Dumpster while radioing for backup and medical assistance, all Maggie could focus on was curling around the hard lump of pain that pressed against her lungs until she gasped for breath, pressed outward against her heart until she feared it might disrupt the rhythm itself.

When her partner had asked her at the hospital what it had felt like, her instant reply had been, “Like someone shot a baseball bat into my chest using a rocket launcher.”

Standing on the balcony of Cat’s penthouse, gripping her phone tightly enough to make the case creak, she felt that pain again—felt the way it forced the breath from her lungs, felt the way it once more made her fear her heart might stop beating any second.

“Detective Sawyer?”

“Yes, I’m—I’m here.” She despised how shattered her voice suddenly sounded to her. “I apologize, Ms. Luthor, but I needed to move to a more private location. I’m currently working an active crime scene. Please, could you repeat what you said?”

The voice to respond sounded equally damaged as the CEO rushed out, “I need your help, Detective. I need to reach the DEO. The only information I have is the name of two of their agents, but the information I need to tell them is about one of those agents—Alex Danvers—and Supergirl. You said you worked with the DEO sometimes, so I was hoping you could help me.”

Unconsciously, Maggie glanced over her shoulder toward where several DEO agents were still processing Cat’s penthouse. “What do you need to tell them about Alex?” She ignored the fact she used the agent’s first name. She hoped Lena ignored the obvious weight of emotion in her voice.

“Hank Henshaw—he just took her. He grabbed her off my office balcony. Supergirl immediately followed after them, but it only took a few seconds for me to lose sight of where they were heading.”

Pressing fingers against the spike of pain just above her eye, Maggie asked, “How long ago did this happen?”

For all she knew, Kara and Henshaw could have flown all the way to the other side of the Earth by
Maggie waited until the CEO finally stopped and took a breath the detective heard shiver through the line. Forcing a calm she knew damn well she wasn’t going to actually feel until the moment she laid eyes on Alex, felt Alex in her arms, heard Alex tell her she was all right and safe, she pressed, “I need you to calm down so you can tell me what happened, okay? You said both Alex and Supergirl were there at L-Corp. Why were they there?”

“Supergirl brought them—though it was very clear Agent Danvers didn’t want to be here. She and Supergirl started arguing about leaving the moment they landed.”

As Maggie listened to Lena, she caught sight of the balcony door opening. Turning, she saw two DEO agents approaching. She could tell by the set of their expressions, they’d learned what had happened at L-Corp. Holding up a hand to stop them in place, she pulled her phone away from her ear and switched to speakerphone.

“Ms. Luthor, I’m actually with two agents from the DEO who will be coming with me to L-Corp as soon as we conclude this conversation. First, I need you to secure your office and close off the balcony. Do not go back out there and do not let anyone else in until we arrive and can secure the scene for processing.”

“She’s staying there with me, Detective. I’ve already told my assistant to clear the rest of my day and tell any drop-ins I’m unavailable.”

“Ms. Luthor, I’m actually with two agents from the DEO who will be coming with me to L-Corp as soon as we conclude this conversation. First, I need you to secure your office and close off the balcony. Do not go back out there and do not let anyone else in until we arrive and can secure the scene for processing.”

“Of course, Detective. I’ve already told my assistant to clear the rest of my day and tell any drop-ins I’m unavailable.”

“Good. Now, you were saying Agent Danvers tried to get Supergirl to leave as soon as they arrived on your balcony?”

“Yes, but Supergirl wasn’t going to leave until—until she could ask me—she thought I might know where my mother was.”

“Do you?”
She knew the question shot low and direct, but it was a question they needed answered quickly.

“I wish I did. I would have given anything to help. She looked so—broken.”

Maggie didn’t need to ask who Lena meant.

“I’m on my way now, Ms. Luthor. I should be there in no more than twenty minutes.”

Closing the line as soon as she finished speaking, she turned to the DEO agents. “What more do you know beyond what you just heard?”

One of the agents, Gibson, inclined her head as she took a more formal stance before the detective. “Agent Schott just updated us. We lost communications and trackers for both Agent Danvers and Supergirl approximately eighty miles northeast of National City. However, at the time of signal loss, they were changing direction. Henshaw intentionally made multiple course corrections while fleeing Supergirl before they all disappeared. Agent Schott is working on re-establishing links, but, according to his readings, a massive portion of the mountain range is cloaked by some kind of
oscillating jamming frequency. At the moment, he has no indication of where they might be.”

Blowing out a breath between tightly compressed lips, Maggie massaged her thumb against her right temple. “Okay. I’m going to leave now for L-Corp. Finish whatever it is you were working on inside and meet me there. If Henshaw left behind any evidence, we need to find it.”

“Yes, Detective.”

Maggie rushed through the penthouse, forcing herself not to look again at the damage left from Henshaw’s attack on Vasquez. Though it was already seared into her memory, she didn’t need the reminder of what he could do to a human body.

Slipping hastily into her cruiser, she switched to Bluetooth and zoomed into the flow of traffic with a fuel-injected roar and the flare of her emergency lights. She quickly had Winn’s number up and dialing before she’d even made it one block.

The moment she heard the line click live, Winn blurted out, “Maggie, I’m so sorry! I was just getting ready to call you—I wanted to call you first, but DEO protocol, I-I had to report out to the chain of command—and I wasn’t sure what that was, with J’onn still out for Adam and Alex—A-Alex is—”

His voice shook so badly as he rambled, Maggie felt her own throat clench with unbidden fear. “Winn,” she finally interrupted, “breathe.”

She listened to him take several shaky gulps of air before continuing, “The agents at Cat’s updated me on what’s happening, and I’m now on my way to see Lena Luthor. She was present when Henshaw arrived.” She pointedly sidestepped mentioning Alex’s name. “I’m going to see how much detail I can get out of her from what she witnessed.”

After a beat of silence, she asked, “How’s Eliza?”

“She, uh, she’s focusing on Carter right now. He lost it on Kara and he hasn’t been able to calm down since.”

Hearing the empathy beginning to warble his voice again, Maggie pushed him to refocus. “How long until J’onn returns with Adam?”

“They’re less than an hour away. J’onn had to slow down to accommodate a human passenger.”

“Oh, okay. I’m almost at L-Corp. As soon as I’m finished there, I’m coming to the DEO. I need you to keep searching for their signals, Winn. I know it’s hard—”

She clutched the steering wheel as tightly as she could at the sound of her own voice betraying her emotions. “But right now, we need to stay focused.”

Deep breath in, shaky breath released, Winn finally whispered, “I can do this.”

The wheels of Maggie’s cruiser screeched scribbles of rubber against asphalt as she whipped into L-Corp’s parking lot and slammed into a spot. “I’ll be there soon, okay? And contact me if anything changes.”

As she listened to Winn sign off, she slipped from her cruiser and ran toward the entrance. Security, already expecting her arrival, waved her through to the elevator waiting to take her to the top floor.
She nodded toward Jess as she hurried from the elevator and through the door the assistant held open for her. Entering the office, she saw Lena standing in the center, arms crossed around her midsection and an uncertain glint in her watery gaze. The sight of Maggie entering finally shook her into motion.

“Detective Sawyer, I’m so glad you’re here.” Lena turned toward her, the movements unnervingly stilted.

Maggie placed a hand on the CEO’s shoulder, realizing she needed some kind of grounding to pull her back from wherever her thoughts had been taking her. “You did right by calling me as quickly as you did,” she reiterated.

She saw the way the words lessened the darkness clouding Lena’s eyes.

“If you hadn’t trusted me to know you worked with the DEO, I don’t know what I would have done. Henshaw—he came out of nowhere—he just swooped in and slammed into Agent Danvers so hard, Supergirl didn’t even have time to grab for her before they were gone.”

Maggie pulled the inside of her bottom lip between her teeth to focus herself on the physical pain. With a guiding hand against the small of Lena’s back, she encouraged the CEO to take a seat. Pouring her a glass of water, Maggie settled beside her and watched as she carefully drank. The glass trembled in her grip even as she held it with both hands.

“Ms. Luthor, I need you to tell me everything that happened from the moment Supergirl and Agent Danvers arrived on your balcony. Can you do that?”

With a nod and another drink of water, the CEO gave Maggie as many details of the brief encounter as she could remember. Maggie was pleased to note how the longer Lena talked, the more focused she became on pulling up more and more details.

When Lena reached the part about her brother’s assistant and how she had thought she’d seen Eve at CatCo, she fell unnervingly silent. Maggie hesitated as she watched the CEO stare desolately down at her hands, now resting in her lap. “Ms. Luthor?”

Without looking up, the CEO softly asked, “How much of this could I have stopped if I’d just told Kara who I thought I saw that day?”

“Lena—”

The light of Lena’s office played along the dark lines of her hair as she shook her head. “I learned two things very quickly when my father brought me into the Luthor home: secrecy and paranoia. I let those gifts dictate far too much of my life, even now.”

Her fingers began to tangle into Möbius twists as she continued. “I should have told Kara the truth when she asked me that morning. She’s the one person in my life with the least reason to trust me—but she has more faith in me than I think I’ve ever had in myself.”

Maggie startled at the fear sharpening Lena’s peridot stare. Her voice shook noticeably when she spoke. “Please find her, Detective. Please don’t let my mother—”

Emotion choked the words from her throat, her lips pressing into a thin red line to hold her cries at bay.

Fear of a different sort began to wend through Maggie’s veins as she realized what Lena was confessing.
Lena recognized the expression, could already hear the denial building within the detective’s mind. She wrapped her arms tightly around herself once more, fingers digging sharp lines into her biceps under her intense grip. “Supergirl said something when I told her about Eve—something very revealing about her identity. I know she didn’t realize what she was saying. She was in so much pain.”

She bit her lip, the claret of her lipstick tinting the ridges of her teeth. “What she said will never leave this office, Detective. I swear it.”

Slowly, Maggie nodded her understanding, the tip of her tongue darting out to alleviate her suddenly parched lips.

Satisfied that she’d calmed the detective’s worry, at least for the moment, she continued, “They didn’t say a last name for Eve, but I believe if you contact CatCo and ask for the name of the employee who replaced Kara as Ms. Grant’s assistant, you’ll get what you need.”

Dark thin brows drew upward in a ponderous swoop. “And Agent Danvers contacted someone I’m assuming at the DEO right before Henshaw arrived. She told them to meet her and Supergirl at—at the Cameron Heights apartments.”

As Maggie finished scribbling down all the information into her notebook, she asked, “Do you have records on all the property owned by L-Corp?”

The CEO frowned at the question. “Unfortunately, I’m not sure. Lex destroyed several of the primary servers at the Metropolis office before the police could arrest him. There is information about this company I’m still working to piece together—and some I might never know.”

Seeing the disappointment dimming the detective’s gaze, Lena tried to offer her the slimmest glimmer of hope. “He didn’t get a chance to destroy the hard copies he kept in our offsite archives, however. I’ve had at least half of those records digitized since taking over the company. If needed, I can expedite the rest of the process.”

Maggie gave a sharp nod. “That would be very helpful.” She narrowed her gaze, considering her next words cautiously. “Can you pull together a list of all the locations you do know of now? I can take it with me to the DEO.”

Lena rolled her jaw slightly as she considered the detective’s request. “You think my mother might be using L-Corp property for CADMUS.”

“She was still accessing your servers without your knowledge.”

With a frustrated sigh, Maggie swiped her hands along the tops of her thighs. “We need help, Lena. Agent Danvers and Supergirl both have DEO trackers, but both their signals disappeared outside the city. My estimate puts their last location as somewhere over the Los Lobos Mountains. Is there any L-Corp property out there by any chance?”

With a shake of her head and a frown that reflected Maggie’s frustration perfectly, Lena sighed, “I don’t think we do—although Lex did enjoy securing locations that had quite the ‘evil lair’ flare to them. I did discover he purchased several decommissioned missile silos from the government several years ago.”

“Missile silos?”

“Yes. Two in California, one in Nebraska, and one in Utah—that I know of so far. He had extensive retrofitting done to the one in Utah, including the installation of lead-lined walls
At the thought, the CEO rose from her seat and strode to her desk. “Actually, he had another
c facility fitted with lead lining around the same time.”

She breezed through a sequence of clicks and taps until she pulled up the information she needed.
“Yes, another abandoned facility—a nuclear test site in Nevada. I assumed the lead was to protect
against residual radiation, but I discovered the government never actually used this facility. They
abandoned it several years after building it. I actually contacted the government to see if they might
want the property back. I honestly didn’t know government employees could laugh so much.”

Lena connected a flash drive she pulled from her desk to her laptop, swiftly transferring the
information Maggie requested. As soon as she ejected the device, she placed it into Maggie’s
suddenly outstretched hand.

“Thank you, Lena.” The detective gripped the drive tightly. “I’m going to get this and the
information you’ve provided over to the DEO.”

Rising from her desk chair, the CEO struck her familiar protective pose, arms hugging around
herself. “You need to act quickly, Detective. My mother—”

She paused, shook her head as if shaking loose the vestiges of a nightmare. “Lillian Luthor is an
unconscionable narcissist who worships her self-righteousness the way some worship deities. She
believes she is going to save humanity through her experiments, and nothing will convince her
otherwise.”

Tears rising within her bright gaze, she began to speak, reconsidered her words before finally
pleading, “Please stop her before she takes Supergirl away from us.”

Maggie nodded solemnly while backing toward the office door. She lifted the flash drive in her
hand. “Thank you for this, Lena—and for everything else you told me. Keep working on pulling
together locations L-Corp owns. I will be in touch with you soon, I promise.”

Knowing the CEO was too distraught to respond, Maggie pivoted and rushed once more for the
elevator. As she hit the main entrance and focused on getting to her cruiser, she caught sight of
Gibson and another agent marching toward her.

“Go on up,” Maggie directed as she drew closer. “Ms. Luthor is in her office and knows to expect
you.”

She then broke into a run for her car. As soon as she was back into the flow of traffic, she let her
muscle memory take control. Her thoughts spooled outward in a feverish whirl that filled her eyes
with a haunted, desperate cast.

Alex.

Cat.

Kara.

Kara at Project CADMUS.

Kara with Lillian Luthor.

“She’s never going to get close enough to get to you—or anyone you care about. We’ve got your
Gritting her teeth against the memory of her promise-turned-lie to the hero, she lowered her foot onto the accelerator, forcing herself to focus on weaving through traffic to her destination. As she pumped the brakes to slow for the turn that would lead her to DEO HQ, she realized she had begun to mutter beneath her breath.

“Focus on the case, Sawyer. They need you to focus.”

Cruiser screeching into the alleyway that led to the underground parking, she scanned the chip Alex had installed into her badge holder. The gate instantly rolled upward, barely fast enough to avoid scraping the car’s roof.

In record time, Maggie burst from the elevator up from the garage, racing across the foyer toward the operations center. She could see Winn at his usual post, hands gripping his head tightly as he stared at his screen. His lips moved, but Maggie could tell whatever he was saying wasn’t meant to be heard by anyone other than himself.

Taking pity on the tech agent, Maggie drew close to his side and rested her hand on his shoulder in an attempt to break his focus.

“Maggie!” Springing from his seat, Winn backed away, his face a reflection of misery and guilt.

Without waiting for any litany of undeserved self-abasement by the agent, Maggie stepped in and gripped his shoulder again. “I’ve got information for you from Lena.”

She handed him the flash drive. “These are the locations of all the properties she knows L-Corp owns. She needs time to finish it, but I thought this would be a good place to start.”

Winn struggled to focus himself on the task he realized Maggie had brought to help keep him on point. Slipping back into his seat, he plugged in the drive and began a standard security scan. “I-I’ll go ahead and overlay these locations with where we’re already searching and see if there’s any overlap.”

The detective nodded. Her gaze scanned Ops before drifting toward the stairway to Alex’s lab. “Where’s Eliza?”

Winn’s expression instantly clouded. “She’s up in one of the private rooms in the med bay with Carter. I think she finally got him to calm down, but it was a struggle.”

Before Maggie could respond, she caught sight of agents around her snapping to attention, right before she noticed the sound of boot steps marching toward them from the elevator bank.

As the new arrivals entered Ops, the lead agent made immediate eye contact with Winn, who was already out of his chair once more and rushing toward her. Emotions overwhelming him in the moment, he wrapped her in a hug and breathed, “I’m so glad you’re here, Luce.”

She immediately hugged him back, understanding how his fear for his friends—his chosen family—blurred protocol in the moment. “It’s going to be all right, Winn,” she whispered so only the tech agent could hear her.

She felt him tremble as he absorbed her words of comfort. When he finally pulled free of her arms, he offered her a thin though earnest smile.

Lucy then shifted her attention to the woman standing close to Winn’s side. Even before noticing
the NCPD shield affixed to the woman’s belt, Lucy knew from the barely contained emotions spiraling in her dark gaze who she had to be. “Detective Sawyer?”

She caught the way the detective’s eyes narrowed and darted toward Winn before she finally nodded in response.

“Detective, I’m Major Lucy Lane, Director of the DEO’s Desert Containment facility. I’m going to be taking lead on our search and rescue mission for Alex, Kara, and Cat while Director J’onnz is still in transit with Cat’s son.”

She waited as Maggie processed her words before adding, “This mission is our department-wide Alpha-One priority. We are even operating under presidential orders to put no other missions above this one until we complete it successfully.”

With another reserved nod, Maggie cleared her throat and replied, “I want to help in any way I can, Major. You’ve got as much firepower as I can bring with me from the NCPD.”

“Thank you.”

Turning toward Winn, Lucy’s gaze instantly grew glassy. “What’s the status on Vasquez?”

Lowering both his eyes and his voice, he sighed, “Dr. Hamilton rushed her into surgery as soon as she arrived. They’ve been in there ever since—no word.”

He held back on saying anything further, still not prepared to put into words even the brief glimpse he’d caught of Vasquez, strapped to a backboard with a neck brace and all variety of lines and bags and movement surrounding her as they brought her in.

“Okay.” Lucy paused at the clench of her throat that caused the word to barely eke out. With a deep breath and several rapid blinks, she pushed herself back into command mode. “Any progress on the tracker signals from Alex, Kara, and Cat?”

“No,” the tech agent replied dejectedly. He pointed toward the detective. “But Maggie just brought me a list of L-Corp properties that Lena Luthor provided her, that I’m getting ready to start analyzing against where they disappeared.”

Lucy shifted her gaze between Winn and the detective. “Do we trust Lena Luthor?”

“Kara vouches for her without hesitation. Alex is warily optimistic.”

Ignoring the slight hitch in Maggie’s voice at the utterance of Alex’s name, Lucy drew a breath and replied, “Okay. Get to it, Schott. I want to see something by the time I get back to Ops.”

She frowned as she let her gaze drift toward the direction of the holding cells. “Right now, I need to find out what our prodigal Daxamite knows about why Alex gave orders to return to Eve Teschmacher’s apartment prepared to engage a potentially dangerous subject.”

“Eve?” Lucy and Winn both turned toward the detective questioningly at her urgent tone. “Kara’s replacement as Cat’s assistant?”

Winn nodded. “That’s her.”

“Lena just identified her as Lex’s former assistant.”

Mouth agape, Winn stared at Maggie in total bewilderment as he wrestled with her revelation.
Even Lucy stumbled to abrupt halts each time she attempted to respond.

A furious growl from the tech agent finally broke the silence, causing both Maggie and Lucy to jump, right before he sprinted down the corridor toward the detention area.

“Winn, stop!”

Ignoring the major’s order, Winn continued into the holding area, to the cell where Red Team had deposited the Daxamite on their return to the DEO.

“Traitor!”

He yelled the word with such force, muscles corded along his neck beneath reddening skin.

At Winn’s unexpected arrival and even more surprising declaration, the Daxamite slowly opened his eyes. He turned his head toward the agent glaring at him on the other side of his cell, coughing out a taunting laugh as he sat up. “So the Kryptonian murderer’s little pet human has some gehvs after all.”

The two DEO agents who had been monitoring the detention area came into the cell at the sound of Winn’s outburst. Seeing him preparing to release the biometric lock on Lar Gand’s cell, they subdued the tech agent just as Lucy and Maggie entered.

“You told Eve about Kara and Cat, didn’t you?”

When Lar Gand merely continued to stare at him silently, he lunged against the grip of the agents. “Answer me, you coward!”

“Agent Schott, stand down!”

Winn resisted briefly, his expression full of a rage purer than Lucy had ever before seen in him.

“You betrayed her! After all she’s done to defend you—after all the shit she’s taken from you! You betrayed Kara and now CADMUS has her and Alex and Cat!”

His voice cracked painfully and he paused, tears finally streaming from his eyes. “Kara might die because of you—they all might—because you’re petty and small and couldn’t think about anyone but yourself. You led CADMUS right to them! You let them know how to trap Kara, how to hurt her!”

Even as she struggled to keep her emotions in check, Lucy forced a steadiness into her voice. “Winn, enough.”

Relaxing so he was no longer pulling against the other agents’ grips, he finally straightened his shirt and nodded his awareness of Lucy’s orders. “I’m—I’m okay,” he mumbled to the major, who nodded for the guards to release him.

With an angry swipe at the tears staining his cheeks, he started to walk away, turned his profile to Lar Gand and finished, “If any of them dies, I will make certain you spend whatever is left of your pathetic existence in a lead-lined cell in the darkest, dankest level of the DEO. I suspect there’s not one fucking person in the entire universe who would care.”

Agents and Daxamite alike all watched as he then moved once more out into the corridor. Maggie followed him, pulling him into a strong hug just as the door slid shut.
With a deep breath, the major nodded to dismiss the other agents before turning toward the cell. The Daxamite sat forward on his bunk, a complacent smirk adorning his expression as he studied her. “Another of Kara Zor-El’s pathetic human lackeys? Have you come to make idle threats, too?”

Resting her hands against her hips, she stepped forward and stated, “I’m Major Lucy Lane, Director of the DEO’s Desert Containment facility. I need you to answer some questions regarding your visit to Eve Teschmacher.”

“Why are you here and not the Martian who threw me out?”

Lucy tipped back her head slightly and explained, “I am currently in charge of this portion of our investigation into Project CADMUS. Now, I need you to answer my question: What exactly was the purpose of your visit with Eve Teschmacher?”

Lar Gand slumped back against the wall behind him, his hands dropping loosely into his lap. “She’s just another dull human female ripe for the taking—and I’ve taken her enough times to know.”

Expression remaining unfazed by the Daxamite’s crudeness, Lucy pressed, “So that was the purpose of going to her apartment?”

“Didn’t you hear me? The Martian kicked me out of here! I had nowhere else to go!”

“That’s not exactly true, though, is it? Director J’onzz didn’t evict you—he simply let you know you were no longer welcome here at HQ.”

Seeing the way Lar Gand’s expression was darkening into a petulant glower, she shifted back to her original line of questioning. “So you went to stay with Eve. How did you meet Ms. Teschmacher?”

“Kara insisted I work with her at CatCo. I met Eve there.” His lip curled in disgust. “Only part of that experience worth my effort.”

His voice pulled tight around a sudden thickness in his throat that he quickly coughed away.

“What did you tell Eve to convince her to let you stay with her?”

For the first time since their encounter began, Lucy caught a flicker of uncertainty in Lar Gand’s eyes. “I-I told her—I must have told her I needed a place to stay.”

“You don’t remember what you told her?”

The major watched him struggle with her question. Finally, he mumbled unconvincingly, “I’d stopped off for some drinks before I went to see Eve.”

“They must have been pretty strong drinks. When our agents came to retrieve you, they found you unconscious.”

Lar Gand shrugged off the major’s observation, but Lucy could see the growing confusion in his eyes. “So I drank too much last night. I think I had the right considering what happened here yesterday.”

The major narrowed her eyes at his words. “Your altercation here with Kara occurred two days ago.”
“What?” Arrogance finally slipped away as he grappled with the new information. “That’s not true.”

“I have no reason to lie to you, Lar Gand. You left here two days ago. When we retrieved you, you were unconscious. Should we contact the bar you visited and find out exactly what you drank?”

“It was nothing I haven’t had before.”

He slumped forward while rubbing his fingers into his eyes and down his face. The density of the scruff along his cheeks caused him to pause.

“I—I told her I’d been kicked out—Kara had me kicked out.”

“So you did mention Kara to Eve? Did you mention Kara’s relationship with Cat?”

As his fingers trailed down from his cheek to his neck, he flashed on the memory of pain jolting through his body. “She shocked me.”

He pressed his fingers into the skin of his neck in an approximation of prongs. “Eve—she had something that knocked me out with an electrical shock.”

“What?”

Huffing in a pique of frustration, he dropped his head forward into his hands. “I—she said I was a hero.”

He leaned up slightly, elbows resting on his knees, fingertips pressing into his forehead as though trying to physically press out more memories. Lucy watched quietly, hoping the silence would help him focus on whatever was beginning to surface.

Her patience paid off when Lar Gand sat up, recognition finally piercing through the haze of confusion. “She said I was a hero after I told her Kara was with that worthless dhohl’vah Cat Grant.”

The confirmation of Winn’s accusation slammed into Lucy’s gut with painful accuracy. She struggled to find a response that wouldn’t betray the anger sparking to life beneath her skin.

With a quick swallow to force down the burn of fury rising from her gut, she asked, “Do you know where Eve is now? Or do you have any idea where Kara, Alex, and Cat might be?”

With a dismissive sound that mingled with several soft coughs, Lar Gand glared across his cell with a satisfied smirk before returning to his reclining position. “Kara Zor-El and her useless humans can give their regards to all the Daxamites her people killed.”

Finally reaching her limit with him, Lucy turned for the exit before she said any of the things rushing to mind that she knew were inappropriate for her to say to a prisoner—no matter how detestable that prisoner was.

As the door slid shut behind her, she scanned the corridor. Winn and Maggie sat side-by-side several feet from the cell entrance. The tech agent had pulled his legs up against his chest, his forehead resting on his knees.

At the appearance of the major, Maggie shifted her attention, offering a small nod of acknowledgement as she continued to rest one hand against the nape of Winn’s neck. Softly padding over to where they sat, Lucy crouched before them.
Before she could speak, Winn softly muttered, “I’m sorry, Luce. I shouldn’t have lost my temper like that. I-I don’t know what I was thinking.”

Reaching out, the major rested a hand on one of Winn’s knees. “You were thinking you needed to do whatever it took to help save our friends, and there is nothing at all wrong with that.”

The moment broke at the sound of one of the guarding agents returning. “Major, Director J’onzz is back.”

Rising swiftly, Lucy smoothed down her uniform as she addressed the agent. “Thank you, Varma.” Glancing down, she extended a hand toward Winn. “Come on, Agent Schott. We have a briefing to give.”

The tech agent rose on his own, Maggie quickly following suit. Silently, the trio walked back to Ops. As they emerged from the corridor into the open command center, they caught sight of J’onn. He stood, still in his Martian form, beside Adam Foster, hand resting on the young man’s shoulder. As they approached, they heard him ask, “Are you certain you’ll be all right, Mr. Foster?”

“Yes, yeah, I’m fine. Just need a moment to catch my breath.”

Maggie knew Adam’s lie instantly. If his waxen skin and sickly sheen were any indication, she was certain he was about half a step away from either needing to sit down or throw up.

J’onn clearly didn’t believe him either, keeping his hand in place for several more moments, to help Adam stay upright. “I do apologize for the rocky flight.”

Adam waved away the Martian’s words, choosing to sink into a nearby desk chair rather than speak.

With a pat to the shoulder, J’onn eased back, changing once more into his human form. At the sight of Hank Henshaw’s face, Maggie unconsciously flinched, a surprising shot of anger piercing through her.

J’onn instantly looked toward her, his expression reflecting a regretful comprehension that shamed her. Not wanting to embarrass the detective any further, he simply inclined his head in her direction before turning toward Lucy and Winn. “Updates?”

Gaze flitting briefly toward Adam, the major gestured toward the conference room behind them. “Of course, Director.”

As they turned toward the room, he cast a glance over his shoulder toward where Adam sat, his breathing still coming in shallow puffs of air.

Maggie stepped forward. “I’ll stay with Mr. Foster—make sure he gets where he needs to go.”

J’onn offered a grateful smile. “Thank you, Detective.”

Once the agents had left, Maggie turned to face the newest arrival. “Mr. Foster, I’m Detective Maggie Sawyer with the NCPD.”

With an abrupt shake of his head and a disoriented frown, he replied, “You can just call me Adam. I’m not really into formalities.”

He glanced at the shield on her belt as he processed her introduction. “I thought the green guy was bringing me to something called the DEO. You’re National City police?”
“I am. I’m a detective with the NCPD Science Division. We handle local alien issues, which means we often find ourselves working with the Department of Extranormal Operations.”

Seeing that he was still struggling to regain his composure, she asked, “Is there anything I can get you, Adam?”

“Actually, is there any way I can get some Dramamine or something? The ride here was—not all that fun.”

“Of course. I’ll take you to the med bay. That’s where your brother is at the moment anyway.”

“Carter?” Adam’s brows drew together. “Is he okay? Was he hurt?”

“He’s physically fine. He just needed a quiet space to help him calm down after he learned about your mom.”

Fingers scratched nervously through his hair before flicking in the direction of the conference room behind them. “Is that what they’re in there talking about right now?”

Maggie nodded. “We’ve received some new intel we hope will help us pinpoint your mother’s location.”

He turned toward the detective, a nervous shine bright in his eyes. “I didn’t—I didn’t think it was this bad. I mean, I know Cat’s been rattling lots of locked doors with this CADMUS group—but they really came to her house? They took her?”

Maggie’s gaze shifted, her brain unmercifully pulling up images of the violent disarray of Cat’s penthouse. “I’m afraid so, Adam.”

“So where the hell was Supergirl?”

The angry pique of his tone jolted the detective from her somber thoughts, yanked her head back so they could meet gazes.

Not content with his one question, he urged, “For that matter, where the hell is she now? She’s practically CatCo’s mascot. Shouldn’t she be here? Or even better, shouldn’t she be out there, finding Cat and bringing her home?”

Lips parting then pressing together tightly, Maggie considered how best to respond. She finally opted for as much of the truth she could offer him without compromising Kara’s identity.

“You’re right, Supergirl is very closely linked to CatCo and to your mom. Unfortunately, that closeness is the reason CADMUS came for Cat. They used taking your mom as a means of luring Supergirl into their custody.”

Adam shifted back in his chair, his vertigo forgotten as he glared in near panic. “They used Cat to catch Supergirl?”

At Maggie’s almost inaudible confirmation, he once more blanched. “I’m never going to see her again.”

“Adam, you can’t think that way.”

“Why the hell not?”

She could see the fear straightening his spine and paling his skin. “Because Cat Grant is fierce and
smart—"

“And in the custody of people who apparently only wanted her as—as bait! So what happens now that they have who they really wanted? You think they’re, what? Just going to let her go? Let her call her driver to take her back home?”

“Supergirl will do everything in her power to protect your mom.”

Adam huffed his disbelief as he slumped back into the chair. He shook his head. “Sorry if I don’t quite buy that, Detective. If these CADMUS people can capture Supergirl, what makes you think she can protect Cat? Or even protect herself?”

His eyes darkened. “What makes any of you think we’re going to see either of them ever again?”

“Hope.”

The word was out of Maggie’s mouth before she even had time to consider it. She realized the moment she spoke it, however, how much she was depending on that one word.

“We cannot lose hope, Adam.”

Eyelids fluttered before he finally ducked his head with a shaky sigh. “Sorry. I’m pretty sure I lost my hope somewhere over Topeka.”

Maggie’s voice hardened. “Then fake it.”

At the sight of him snapping back up to stare in disbelief, she continued, “Your brother is upstairs, waiting for you, and he needs you to be positive about your mom—”

“She’s his mom.”

He slipped to the edge of his seat, chestnut colored eyes shining. “I-I have twenty-four years of not knowing her at all, and only like one year of both of us struggling to fill in the gaps on each other’s lives—and I know even less about him. We’ve had dinner together a couple of times. That hardly constitutes a family.”

Maggie breathed deeply as she studied the young man before her. She knew too well the rejection and insecurity that reflected in his broken stare.

“I don’t know all the details of your relationship with Cat or with Carter,” she conceded. “All I know is, he’s a damn good kid, and right now? He’s terrified he might never see your mom again.”

The detective’s words flinched across his face. Huffing out a humorless laugh, he turned away. “She couldn’t just stick to running her company and editing her stupid fashion magazines, could she?”

The fear behind his question burned brightly in his eyes. In a compassionate voice, Maggie replied, “Your mom is a journalist, Adam. Above everything else in her professional life, she has always fought to bring light to the truth. What CADMUS has been doing to aliens, including right here in National City? There was no way your mom could turn her back on this.”

“Why not?” He twisted back around to glare at the detective. “She gave up on reporting and a lot of other things years ago to focus on her company. Why change now?”

“Because CADMUS is dissecting and experimenting on aliens, and dumping what’s left of their
bodies like so much trash. Because the doctor who leads the project is willing to mutilate humans and aliens alike if it serves her purpose."

Her breath hitched in a way that made her blush and stumble before pushing onward. “Because your mom can’t sit by as people die in horrible ways, simply because they are ‘other than.’”

With noticeable hesitation, the detective reached out and gripped his shoulder. When he met her gaze, she finished, “Because your mom is a good person who has made mistakes in her life I’m sure she regrets—but one of her greatest strengths is how she keeps getting back up and keeps moving forward to fight for what she believes in.”

Head dropping forward, Adam barely breathed out his response. “What happens if she can’t get back up from this?”

The muscles beneath her hand trembled, and Maggie tightened her grip in response. Her gaze shifted briefly toward the conference room where she could see J’onn, Lucy, and Winn huddled together, deep in conversation.

“I’m not going to lie to you, Adam: I don’t know what’s going to happen. But I do know the DEO and the NCPD are going to do everything we can to find her.”

When his watery russet gaze shifted up to meet hers, she swallowed against the knot of dread snagged like barbed wire in her chest. “We can’t give up hope.”

Adam’s eyes narrowed slightly, not at Maggie’s words but at the noticeable urgency—the desperation to convince. He was certain it was not meant just for him.

Slowly, he nodded before rising from his seat. “Can you take me to see my brother now?”

“Of course.” Her smile was slight but true.

Up the stairs, Maggie led him back toward the med bay through Alex’s lab. Adam noticed a jolt in the detective’s stride as they passed through the space. Inside the med bay, Maggie asked an agent on duty where Eliza had taken Carter.

She guided Adam further along, to the room the agent told her. Rapping softly, she nudged the door open and peeked inside. In the soft glow of the lowered lighting, Eliza looked up from where she sat on the room’s bed. She had her arms wrapped snugly around Carter, his head resting against her shoulder and his eyes closed. Maggie could see the worried pinch of his brows even as he slept.

“Hey.”

Maggie focused on Eliza once more at the sound of her quiet greeting. Stepping inside the room, she moved to allow Adam space to step in beside her. He frowned at the sight of this woman he didn’t know holding his brother in an obviously protective way.

“Eliza, this is Cat’s son Adam.”

She greeted him with an understanding nod. “Carter’s been waiting for your arrival.”

Shifting uncertainly from foot to foot, Adam mumbled, “I, uh, I don’t—I mean, we don’t have to wake him or anything.”

“He just fell asleep about twenty minutes ago.” She unconsciously began combing fingers through the young boy’s soft curls.
Before Adam could voice any further protest, she leaned down and softly called into his ear, "Carter, sweetie, Adam’s here."

She only had to repeat herself once before he stirred, heavy eyelids lifting over a glassy blue gaze. "Adam?"

At Carter’s questioning call, Adam stepped forward. “Hey, Carter.”

He didn’t need to say anything else. Carter immediately sprang from Eliza’s arms, rushing toward his brother and latching on with a strength that surprised Adam. Feeling the way Carter cried was all it took for Adam to shove aside any doubts he might have had about how he should act or feel around the younger boy.

In that moment, he understood: He needed to be there for his little brother.

Movement drew his attention up toward the woman who had been sitting on the bed. She now moved quietly to stand beside Maggie. She offered Adam a smile, her eyes bright with understanding.

“Go ahead and stay in here. Carter should try to rest a little more. There are agents on-call out in the main med bay, if you need anything.”

She reached out and placed a hand on Carter’s back. “I’ll be back soon to check on you and your brother.”

When she saw his head bob slightly, she gave his back a pat before pivoting and following Maggie out of the room.

No words passed between them as they walked back through the med bay. It wasn’t until they found themselves standing once more in Alex’s lab that Eliza asked, “Any news?”

“Several things in the works,” Maggie offered. “J’onn’s getting briefed on them now. Nothing definite yet—but promising, I think.”

Seeing the start of the question Maggie knew she couldn’t answer, she quickly stated, “It must have been hard to get Carter to calm down.”

The slump of Eliza’s shoulders instantly filled Maggie with regret. However, she answered in a voice steeled with surprising strength. “He’s scared out of his mind. So am I, to be honest. But I know Alex and Kara are both smart and resourceful—and heaven help the fool who underestimates Cat.”

Maggie snorted softly in agreement.

“I have to believe they will do whatever they can to stay alive until you all can find them.”

Captured by Eliza’s sharp stare, Maggie could only nod obediently, unable to refuse the unspoken expectation.

Tone turning in a way that instantly unsettled the detective, Eliza soothed, “She’s always been a fighter, Maggie—brave and stubborn and more fearless than either her father or I has ever been.”

Knowing the emotions Eliza’s comment conjured would be her undoing if they took hold, Maggie moved toward the stairs leaving Alex’s lab. “I’m, uh, I’m going to check in with J’onn—see how I can help.”
She’d never run so quickly down those stairs—and never felt guiltier for the effort.

Once back in Ops, she hurried into the conference room where J’onn, Lucy, and Winn were still locked in deep discussion. Hearing her enter, the Martian glanced up, his expression reflecting his gratefulness at her arrival. “Thank you for what you brought to us from Lena.”

Waving aside his words, she sat in the seat next to Winn and across from Lucy. “How can I help you process the data she provided?”

Winn shifted beside her. “We were just discussing that. I’m going to run a comparison of the locations Lena provided against the area we’re currently searching, but if there’s no overlap then we need to back-burner her data while we focus on the more pressing issue. The oscillating jamming frequency that wiped out Alex’s, Kara’s, and Cat’s signals keeps corrupting my scan attempts. I’ve been trying to override the frequency before the oscillation kicks in and changes it, but it’s—it’s almost like the underlying programming is aware of me. As soon as I start to get too close, it changes the frequency and actually knocks me out of the code.”

He clenched his fists white-knuckle tight atop the table. “Working on this is taking all my bandwidth—so in addition to the chopper Lucy sent out from Desert Containment to run visual sweeps, I whipped up a program that has been going through our satellite imagery, comparing current and archived images for the area covered by the frequency. I’m trying to detect any major topographic changes that might mark activity we can focus in on.”

“Okay, that’s pretty impressive.”

Winn shot Maggie a half-smile. “Don’t be that impressed. Turns out, not only is this area under the jamming frequency’s protection, but something in the area is also broadcasting static imagery to satellite surveillance—even ours. I was able to override that easily enough, but at the moment, there’s still nothing different on the ground to catch my comparison program’s attention. Whatever they’ve been doing, wherever they are, they’ve done it without changing the terrain in any major ways.”

“So sounds like you need eyes for a manual scan.”

Lucy added, “About fifty sets of them would be most useful right now. The range masked by this frequency is massive.”

“And we don’t really have one section where we know we should start and spread out. We have no idea which direction Henshaw finally picked after the jammer knocked out Alex’s and Kara’s signals.” Winn slumped back into his chair with a disconsolate grunt. “We’re pretty much completely in the dark right now.”

“Don’t.”

All three DEO agents startled at the anger saturating Maggie’s one-word rebuke. “Alex, Kara, and Cat don’t have the luxury of any of us wasting time on sulking.”

Cheeks blistering red at the detective’s dressing-down, Winn fired up to respond. His voice hung in his throat, however, as he stared into eyes shining with dark emotions Maggie could barely keep from unraveling her.

“You’re right,” he softly conceded. “Alex would’ve booted me in the ass—literally—for talking like that. I’m sorry, Maggie.”

His words settled into the fissures of her breaking emotions, cementing them just enough to steady
her. All she could manage in response, however, was a clench of her jaw and single nod.

J’onn rose from his seat, inclining his head toward Ops. “All right, let’s get started, then, on a manual sweep. I’ll pull as many agents as we can spare. Winn, you’ll break up the area into grids. We’ll have one group start at the top of the area and one group start at the bottom. We’ll just keep at it until we find something or meet in the middle trying.”

With a dutiful, “Yes, sir,” Winn moved quickly from the room, Lucy and Maggie falling in step behind him. Lucy quietly observed how the detective was already back in form, her emotions once more submerged beneath a carefully replaced calm.

The tech agent quickly parsed out grid assignments to the agents J’onn pulled to help. Soon, everyone had settled in at various workstations to begin the methodical analysis of their grid sections.

Nearly an hour into their efforts, Maggie felt the buzz of an incoming call.

“Sawyer.”

As the detective listened, her expression shifted to a mix of confusion and alarm. Lucy and Winn both stopped their work at the sight, eager to know what she was hearing.

“And she’s asking specifically for me? By name? Okay, well, if she’s not causing any trouble, let her be. Just keep her under close surveillance, and go ahead and call in the NCFD. They know how to keep her in line. I can be over to National City Park in ten.”

Closing the connection, Maggie swiftly rose to her feet while slipping her phone into her back pocket. Lucy and Winn followed suit, the major asking, “Is this something we can help with?”

Maggie’s eyebrows slipped together into a confused arc. “I don’t really know.”

She rubbed her hand along the back of her neck, her dimples deepening with the massive frown adorning her features. “Leslie Willis is apparently in National City Park, asking to speak with me specifically.”

“Livewire?” Winn snapped instantly to attention. “How did she get out of Ordway?”

Maggie shrugged while subconsciously checking her side arm. “We’re still running checks on all of Garrick’s sign-offs.” She huffed reproachfully. “We had to expand our deep dive when we discovered he was pushing some of his orders off under other officers’ names. I’ll call the precinct on my way and have them run a check on Leslie Willis.”

“Run Siobhan Smythe’s name, too.” Winn shifted from foot to foot with nervous energy. “They were kind of a package deal last time.”

“Got it.” Adjusting her jacket once more over her weapon, Maggie gave Winn’s shoulder a squeeze before turning to depart.

With a quick wave to both agents, she bolted toward the garage. Moments later, she was tearing out from the DEO alleyway, sirens clearing her way toward downtown. As the metal and glass of corporate National City flashed by her in a silver blur, she relayed her request to one of the officers working with her on diving into Garrick’s recent work decisions.

After a frustrating pause, her colleague replied with noticeable hesitation, “According to our records, you signed off on a prisoner transfer for both Leslie Willis and Siobhan Smythe.”
“Me?”

“Yeah, from Ordway to—Glendale Manor? Isn’t that the fancy private institution just outside the city?”

Rather than respond to the question, Maggie skidded to a halt along one of the roads that skirted National City Park, grinding out furiously, “Garrick handed them over to her, right under our noses!”

She slammed her fists against the steering wheel, snarling once more at the sharp shudders the action sent all the way up her forearms.

“Add this to the list of Garrick’s fuckery,” she finally ordered. “And be on stand-by. I’m either getting ready to wrangle Leslie Willis back into custody, or I’m about to be lit up like the Fourth of July.”

Slipping out of her cruiser, she hung up and headed into the heart of the park, noting several black and whites positioned around a fire engine ahead of her. She could see several firefighters had unwound its hose and were aiming it toward a lone figure standing in front of them.

As Maggie approached the scene, she caught the tail end of what the woman before her was yelling to the firefighters.

“If I’m not using my power, all you’re going to do with that hose is piss me off. I’m not the fucking Wicked Witch, you know.”

She tugged at her top, which looked to Maggie like surgical scrubs. “Besides, you’ll just slow me down while I have to wait to dry—and I’m willing to bet the detective behind you really doesn’t want that.”

Maggie startled at the instant callout and the way the firefighters and officers on scene instantly turned toward her. Pushing aside her uncertainty, she kept moving until she was standing within arm’s reach of the shock jock.

“You know who I am?”

Livewire’s gaze shifted quickly over the detective’s form. “Let’s see: Tiny, feisty, and dimpled, with a butch swagger for days. I’m gonna say you’re Detective Maggie Sawyer.”

Even as she felt her cheeks flush at Leslie’s description, she pressed, “And who described me like that to you?”

Rolling her eyes at the question, Leslie crossed her arms and shot back, “Same person who once told me I dressed like a Salvation Army hedonist.”

Maggie couldn’t completely hide her amusement at the familiar snap of such a statement. Still, she proceeded cautiously. “How do I know you’re telling the truth?”

With a frustrated sigh, Leslie shifted her gaze to a point over the detective’s shoulder and mumbled in a slightly embarrassed tone, “Because Labrys’s former top ‘Power Crush of National City’ already told me she would kick my ass if I lied to you.”

Even as she felt the burn of tears in her eyes, Maggie released the laugh Leslie’s clearly practiced response elicited. With a wave toward the firefighters still training their hose on the former shock jock, she called out, “It’s all right. She’s not here to cause trouble.”
She turned back to Leslie, her gaze betraying her hopeful desperation. “I believe she’s here to help us.”

Catching the detective’s mood shift, Leslie settled her stance, her dark eyes revealing the relief she felt at being believed. “I thought she was crazy, sending me here with that as her proof.”

Maggie laughed. “Believe it or not, that was part of our first conversation.” Her expression sobered. “Is she all right? Was she alone?”

Leslie’s demeanor shifted curiously. She lowered her voice and muttered, “Supergirl and Agent Danvers were with her when I escaped.”

Maggie breathed a tremulous sigh at the DJ’s words. “Were—were they okay?”

“Malibu Barbie’s like the goddamned Energizer bunny physically.” She refused to address the Kryptonian’s far less invulnerable emotional state.

Lips turning downward into an almost apologetic frown, she finished, “But Agent Danvers definitely looked like she’d hit some hard turbulence while flying in on Cyborg Air.”

Frustration suddenly sparked against the hardness of Leslie’s glare. “She tried to get it through Cat’s overpriced dye job how important it was to get her out of there—but she was having about as much luck as I had before they arrived. All Cat wanted to focus on was getting Supergirl out of there safely.”

Maggie could see her jaw muscles clench beneath pale skin. “I didn’t want to leave her there. I wanted to—to circulate through the facility, blow out their power, torch the place if I had to. But she made me promise—”

The shock jock’s voice cracked. “Cat doesn’t have much time at all, Detective. She’s got something inside her—something that fucked-up doctor put in her to torture her until her screams brought Supergirl.”

She bowed her head quickly, but Maggie still caught the affected shine of her dilation-darkened eyes. “Fucking stubborn—insufferable…”

Her words petered out with a thick sigh before Leslie shook herself back into form. “We’re wasting time. Cat needs us to move now. I can lead you back, but we have to go. I already wasted too much time on my way here.”

Catching the confused frown as it formed on the detective’s lips, she mumbled, “I kind of dumped myself into a stream and had to wait to dry before I could convert.”

Her body still vibrated with the return of her powers after being freed from Dr. Luthor’s modified Faraday cage. The sensation of electricity had at first coursed through her veins, then morphed those veins until they were coursing, flowing, pouring through the wiring that stretched through the roughly hewn walls of the outpost. It had been so long since she’d last savored such power—let it entice her, enthrall her, devour her.

As she had zipped through the outpost’s electrical grid, she had considered ignoring Cat’s orders—considered taking her own approach to dealing with Project CADMUS. However, the closer she moved toward the main power supply, the better she understood Cat’s warnings and pleas that she leave as soon as possible. She had learned in her time since her conversion to Livewire how to detect various nuances within the electricity always surrounding her.
This electricity—this held an impurity she knew on instinct was toxic, dangerous to her.

Halting her momentum, she had shifted direction and zigzagged downward, disappearing from the main grid and instead ricocheting through the bedrock on which the facility sat. Coming through the other side, she felt the intense shift of humidity in the air—quickly reverted back into her human form on instinct before splashing down into a natural stream that had slowly hewn its way through the bedrock. By the time she had followed the stream to where it exited the tunnel into which she’d fallen, she’d dried enough to convert once more—but she’d already lost almost two hours.

Seeing Leslie’s desperation, Maggie brought out her phone and pulled up her map application. “Show me where they are.”

Dark eyes gleamed as she took the phone and began to use her fingers to zoom in on where they needed to search. “Cat warned me you’d be a hard sell.”

A spark of pride at the DJ’s words cracked through the fear encasing Maggie’s heart. When Leslie handed her back the phone, she studied the location, then quickly dialed Winn. On hearing him answer, she stated, “Switch your search. Focus on the western edge of where the Moracinda Mountains drop into Ram’s Horn Canyon.”

She could hear the frenzetic clatter of keys. “Are you sure? That’s—that’s nowhere near where we lost the signals for Alex and Supergirl. Just lots of empty space.”

With a subtle shift of her gaze over the pale features and obsidian eyes before her, she replied, “Definitely sure. Also, tell J’onn and Lucy I’m on my way back—with Leslie Willis.”

She caught the instant sting of Winn’s sharp inhalation. “Cat sent her, Winn.”

“A-are you sure?”

“She knows things only Cat could have told her,” she confirmed. Voice tightening, she finished, “She also says Cat doesn’t have much time, so we need to move.”

The sound of muted shifting and soft muttering came through the line before Maggie heard the phone go to speaker, followed by Lucy’s voice. “Detective, bring Leslie Willis back to the DEO. We’re prepping rescue teams now. Does Ms. Willis happen to know how many people are at this particular facility?”

When Maggie posed the question, Leslie snorted in dismissal. “I woke up in a hamster cage. The only people I saw before Cat and her entourage arrived were Siobhan, the cyborg, and that fucked-up doctor.”

“CADMUS has Siobhan, too?” Winn’s voice strained through the connection.

Shoulders shrugged indifferently, but Maggie could see the worry in the shock jock’s suddenly protective posture. “The doctor said she did something to Siobhan—something to do with giving her a-a ‘platinum upgrade.’ I never saw her, though, after they took her from her holding cell.”

Catching the soft curse from Lucy, Maggie stated, “We’re on our way back. I won’t keep you waiting, but please don’t leave without me.”

“Oh, you’re with me on this mission, Detective.”

Maggie couldn’t help the huff of relief at Lucy’s immediate response. “Thank you, Major.”
Clicking her line closed, she indicated with her chin, “My cruiser is this way.”

She began to lead the way, but halted and turned questioningly toward Leslie. “Do you—were they feeding you? There’s a burger place on the way. Want me to get you something?”

Staring in surprise at the detective until she nearly repeated her question, Leslie finally shook her head. “I’m—I’m good.”

She shot a curious side-glance toward Maggie as they began once more to walk. “Thanks for checking though.”

Once in Maggie’s car, the two women sped along in silence. Maggie could feel the electric crackle from Leslie’s body, teasing the soft hair along her arms to full attention. Even in human form, the scent of ozone lingered along the DJ’s skin, filled the confines of the cruiser.

When the shock jock unexpectedly broke the silence, Maggie barely stopped her own startled jump. “You’re friends with Cat and her Super squad?”

“Yeah, I am.” Her tone was cautious but curious.

“This doctor—she babbling on about how I was some kind of end game goal for her.” Snorting in disbelief, she added, “She called me the perfection she’s been trying to achieve in whatever experiments she’s been running—and it sounded like she’s been running them for a long time.”

Skin tightening around her eyes with her pensive squint, Maggie considered Leslie’s words. “She wanted you because of how that lightning bolt fused your DNA with Supergirl’s.” She quickly glanced toward the DJ. “Did she run any tests on you?”

“I woke up with needle marks on my arm and I felt light-headed for a while, so I’m assuming she took blood. I have no idea what else she might have done.”

Maggie caught the way Leslie shivered at her own comment. “So you think she’s going to try to duplicate whatever it is that happened to you?”

The two fell silent as Maggie turned into the alleyway and once more accessed the DEO’s underground parking. When she pulled into a spot and cut the engine, she turned to fully face Leslie.

The shock jock stared into Maggie’s eyes, blue-white currents arcing through the dilated darkness of her fierce glare. “I think she’s a twisted fucking psycho who tortured Cat until she screamed because she enjoyed it. I think she’s going to enjoy taking apart Super Blondie piece by piece even more.” She pointed furiously over Maggie’s shoulder. “And I think you better get these people to move their asses fast, because I’m not waiting to go back.”

She turned quickly to face forward, teeth clacking together to block whatever sounds wanted to accompany the emotion that tremored through her expression. “It might already be too late—I wasted too much fucking time.”

Angrily swiping away the tears that Maggie could actually hear sizzle and pop, she growled, “Let’s go. Cat Lady hates to be kept waiting.”

The duo hitched a ride up to the DEO command center, the elevator doors opening onto a chaotic whirl of activity. Exchanging glances, they fell into place behind a double line of agents decked out in tactical gear jogging back toward Ops.
“I need to see more hustle!”

Maggie couldn’t see her among the cluster of agents, but she could hear the imposing roar of Lucy Lane coming from somewhere in the epicenter. Checking that Leslie was close to her, she began to make her way through the crowd.

“We’ve got two Hawks from Desert Containment waiting to rendezvous with us. Fresh intel is pointing us toward—”

She halted at the growing murmurs in front of her, expression tensing at the sight of agents parting to form a semicircle around the two new arrivals. She eyed up both Maggie and Leslie before pivoting on the balls of her feet and marching off. Over her shoulder, she ordered, “Let’s get you both suited up. The rest of you, we leave in five!”

With a shrug, Leslie fell into step after the major, Maggie closely behind her. As the trio moved swiftly away from Ops, the detective caught sight of someone she thought at first glance was Eliza hurrying toward them. She frowned at the sight of the woman wearing a DEO uniform and tactical gear, but her disapproval quickly shifted to confusion and surprise when she caught full view of the woman’s face.

“Is—is that President Marsdin’s Education Secretary?”

Lucy gave an honest laugh at Maggie’s bemused question. “Long story.”

The sound of Lucy’s approach drew the Secretary’s attention away from the cell phone she’d been glaring at so intently. “Major, how close are we to leaving?”

“Nearly there. I’m outfitting these two and then we should be ready.”

Jaime’s gaze flitted over the detective and the DJ in quiet appraisal. “Good. Where is Director J’onzz?”

“He should be in Ops. He and Winn are syncing coordinates with all the choppers taking us in.”

She glanced toward Leslie. “We found tire tracks in the area you pointed us toward, which definitely should only have animal tracks.”

Jaime’s attention shifted, her pensive glare finally breaking. “Thank you for helping us.”

Reading the DJ’s discomfort at the unexpected attention, Jaime let the trio continue toward the armory while she headed toward Ops, refocused on the phone clutched tightly in her hand. She stared at the one-line text on her screen as she slipped through the crowd of agents: POTUS is drinking Tsipouro.

With a grimace, she tucked the device into her cargo pants and continued toward J’onnn. “Director, I need a few minutes and a secure location. I need to contact POTUS immediately.”

Sensing the deeper complications of Jaime’s request, he quickly led her to his office. “We’ll hold position until you finish.”

She watched until he had pulled shut the office door and waited until she heard him move back into Ops. Confirming she was alone, she pulled up the number she knew would ring in faster than any official one.

“You never call this line.”
The voice cut through the silence with hard edges and sharp tone.

“I received intel that you were drinking Tsipouro.”

Marsdin scoffed at the statement. “I see Danica needs firing.”

“You’ll do no such thing. You’ll finish what you’re drinking, you’ll put back the bottle, and you’ll thank Danica for saving you from a horrible mistake.”

“I need to—”

“You need to stay Olivia.” Jaime paused to let the statement settle in Marsdin’s thoughts. “I’m here and all ready to go.”

“You’re not going to be able to handle this.”

The Secretary’s surprised laugh somehow still managed to sound compassionate. “I’ll try not to be too offended by your lack of belief in me.”

“Jaime—you know that’s not what I meant.”

“You once trusted me with your life. Has that changed?”

Seconds passed on the soft breaths Jaime could detect with her bionic ear. “This is different. This is beyond you and me.”

“Then stop trying to make it about your guilt.” Jaime softened her tone. “She knows the consequences of this life—just like you do.”

“I should have protected her better.”

“You have protected her—and those like her—as best as Olivia Marsdin could.”

“We both know that isn’t enough.”

“It will have to be for now—because she and all the other aliens you have tried to protect with your law need Olivia Marsdin. Even long after President Marsdin finishes her service and fades from the spotlight, her laws will continue to protect the aliens who have and will continue to find their way here.”

“Lillian Luthor—she’s just like they were, Jaime.”

Marsdin hesitated as she gave in to memories long locked away—too painful to forget, too brutal to share. “I witnessed this all once before. How didn’t I see it coming again?”

Ache filled the Secretary at the sound of her friend’s plea. “Because your heart is still too kind to think so lowly of us.”

“Then damn my kindness if this is its result.” She tipped back the rest of the drink she held, savoring its familiar fire. “I never should have let Cat go after CADMUS—I should have stopped her the moment I heard her proposition.”

Jaime didn’t even bother to suppress her laughter. “You and I both know CJ has always been as controllable as a hurricane. Not even you can stop her when she sets her mind to something—and we both know that’s doubly true when it comes to her hero.”
“I’ve failed them both, Jaime. If anything happens—”

“Which is why you’re going to put back the Tsipouro and go back to the Oval Office so I can end this call and join the team that’s going to bring them all home. But before I do that, I need to know you aren’t going to do anything rash.”

She lowered her voice, her expression softening with the understanding of years and the knowledge of ages. “Please, basileia. I need your oath.”

She caught the immediate bristling from Marsdin. “Unfair tactic, adelphē.”

“I’ll take what I can get at this point.” Her tone sobered. “Your oath?”

As Marsdin’s eyelids slipped shut, a tear released down her cheek. “You have it. But mark my word, adelphē, the oath will become void with any of their deaths.”

“I would expect nothing less,” Jaime immediately responded, “and I will gladly have your back in battle.”

Jaime listened once more to the rhythm of Olivia’s breaths. “Never let your guard down. And don’t expect the battle to be fair.”

Jaime’s lips tipped upward at the familiar words. “I will be in touch soon, basileia.”

Ending the call, the Secretary took one final moment to compose herself before striding swiftly back into Ops. As she finished securing her tactical vest into place, she locked gazes with J’onn.

“Everything all right with President Marsdin?”

The tone of his question gave Jaime enough pause for the Martian to dip his head, a knowing downturn on his lips.

“Everything is as it should be with the President,” she replied.

Her confirmation smoothed the worry from his brow. Checking his weapons one more time, the DEO Director gave an encompassing wave as he called out, “All right, move out!”

His eyes flashed red as he watched the agents move in-sync toward the elevators. “Time to bring our family home.”

Chapter End Notes

I had no idea it had been so long since my last update to this story! Believe it or not, I’ve been working steadily on it since my last posting. Part of the delay was the fact that I’ve been working on my SuperCat Christmas in July story at the same time (yeah, I know, it's October, LOL; clearly, I'm a little slow in my writing at the moment).

The other part of the delay comes from a couple of things I’ve decided regarding this story that took me a little while to come to terms with. I'm at peace with my decisions now, and I hope you will be, too. First thing: I'm going to end this section of CADMUS Ascending after one more chapter. That wasn't originally my intention, but I realized that I needed to end this part of the story for a couple of reasons. First, it's
hella long. Second, it dawned on me that I needed to end it at its title: The Depth of Darkness. And the next chapter?

Well, that brings me to the second thing that's delayed my posting to this story. I took time to consider the comments you all posted on Chapter 24 concerning its disturbing tone. I always tried to emphasize that this part of the story was going to be dark, and I honestly have tried to pull back on some of my more gruesome ideas.

Clearly, I underestimated how much higher *my* tolerance for horror is in comparison to most people. That was my oversight. There are certain themes in this story that do need to be unsettling, but sadly they've become unsettling for how close to reality they strike. I don't need to add to that with my propensity for horror.

So I reworked a significant portion of what is now going to be the final chapter of The Depth of Darkness. It's the final CADMUS chapter; in truth, I always meant for it to be the final one, at least that focused on Lillian Luthor's experiments. I've been counting down to this chapter and this particular test subject right from the start.

It will still upset some of you. However, I will go no darker than where I go in the next chapter. I promise you that. There will be some moments in the next section that might be difficult to read, but they will be moments intended to move us ever further from the darkness.

This was the horror section. The next section will be a lot of action, angst, silliness (I've got some things in the works to help brighten our heroes' lives), surprises, and...well, guess you'll just have to wait to see ;-)

I hope you all consider continuing with me. If you choose not to, however, please let me thank you for coming this far. I've appreciated every single comment, kudo, and click from every one of you.
TW: This is the final CADMUS chapter for this series. It's the one chapter I've been slowly working us toward in this part of the series--Lillian's capture of the one alien she has prized above all others.

It's not going to go well for Kara.

I've set the tone for Lillian very clearly, so if that tone is too much for you, feel free to skip this chapter. There are things in this chapter that will set up action in the next section, but I will make it clear what previously happened and what is happening to certain characters because of it.

Test Subject CDS-17-062

Cat stretched slightly as she began to wake, smiling at the warm, strong arms that surrounded her and the steady heartbeat that echoed beneath her ear. For several gloriously hazy moments, she allowed her mind to believe she and Kara were still in bed at the penthouse, surrounded by plush pillows and soft sheets, waiting for morning to break across the horizon.

Blissful ignorance was short-lived as she shifted once more, awakening her body to the pain throbbing through her—back to the reality of their situation. She tried to jolt upright, but those same warm, safe arms kept her in place, soothed her with gentle caresses along her back.

“Shh, it’s all right, Cat. I’ve got you.”

She looked up into blue eyes that glistened in the low light of their cell. Kara at some point had positioned her so she was lying completely on the hero rather than the floor. Kara’s cape wrapped snugly around the smaller blonde, cocooning her in the warmth the hero generated so generously. With a sigh, Cat briefly let her head rest once more on Kara’s chest, allowing herself what she knew was the unjustifiable luxury of appreciating the long, solid press of Kara against her. But she ached in places she’d never once thought she would feel pain, and all her research about this horrifying place grounded Cat in the reality that she very well might not survive her stay.

So, if she wanted this one indulgence, then who was going to stop her?

She looked up once more and saw the fresh tear tracks that marred Kara’s cheeks. Reaching up, she brushed away some of the wetness with her thumb, but new tears quickly replenished the stream. She glanced to the empty cell next to them.

As if hearing Cat’s thoughts, Kara finally whispered, “Alex’s heartbeat.”

The hero’s voice was thick with pain. “It’s s-so fast. So strained. They’re hurting her. Her heart—her heart—”

Whatever resolve she had been desperately clutching throughout the silence of Cat’s sleep finally broke. Great heaving sobs shuddered through both their bodies, Kara’s expression crumbling under
an inconceivable agony. “Sh-she’s so close, but I can’t stop them from hurting her.”

Moving as quickly as she could, Cat knelt astride Kara’s waist, regardless of the pain it caused her, pulling the hero up into as tight a hold as she could manage. Kara’s head fell forward against Cat’s chest, her tears soaking through Cat’s shirt instantly, her sobs breaking over her like savage waves.

“She is strong, Kara. Alex is so very strong.”

Unable to reply verbally, the hero merely nodded. Her grip on Cat hurt the smaller blonde, but it was a pain she was willing to accept. She knew Kara needed physical connection more than ever when she was upset. Cat didn’t want to imagine how excruciating the past several hours had been on the hero, listening to Alex’s suffering.

The clang and scrape of metal followed by the click of approaching footsteps startled them from the moment. Kara quickly floated them both up onto their feet, positioning Cat behind her. She felt Cat press closely against her back, her hands tangling in the folds of her cape.

“All rested and refreshed, I hope.”

Dr. Luthor halted in front of the cell door, flanked by Henshaw. Kara instantly recognized the helmet the doctor held up in her hand. “Ready to resume where we left off? Or will I need to convince you the way I did last time?”

Kara felt the nervous flex of Cat’s hands where they had settled on her shoulders. “I will not let you hurt her.”

“Really?”

Luthor reached into a pocket of her lab coat, removing a small remote control. When she pressed a button on the control, Kara felt Cat’s hands clench fiercely against her shoulders, her entire body convulsing before slipping gracelessly to the floor.

“Cat!”

Kara dropped to the ground, gathering the smaller blonde into her arms even as the convulsions that felled her smoothed out into soft tremors through her body.

“What have you done to her?”

Dr. Luthor hummed in pleasure. “If I learned nothing else from my attempt at reconciliation with my daughter, it’s that one should always have a fail-safe. This remote controls the nanotech inside Ms. Grant. You might not want me to press this button again. I can’t say what the result might be, considering what level I’ve set this to.”

She indicated the helmet once more. “So, shall we? Or do I press this button and not stop?”

Tears streamed from searching eyes, bluer than any ocean or sky Cat had ever seen—so ephemeral, so alien, and yet so much more a home than Cat had ever dreamed of finding in her lifetime. She reached up, cupping Kara’s face, stroking the path of tears, memorizing the planes and relishing the softness beneath her fingers.

Kara leaned into the touch for the briefest moment, the agony of her decision seizing her features with heart-pounding dread. She then leaned down, pressing her lips close to Cat’s ear, whispering three words—her confession, her promise, and her lament—that shattered Cat’s resolve, a sob
rattling in her throat as she clutched desperately at Kara’s cape.

Closing her eyes, the hero reached up and unclasped her cape to Cat’s hold, rising before Cat could recapture another part of her suit. She turned, ignoring the hitching desperation of her name falling from Cat’s lips, and met Dr. Luthor’s observant gaze.

“Give me the helmet.”

Luthor’s lips twitched into a victorious sneer as she signaled for Henshaw to unlock the cell.

“Love is a fatal flaw, Supergirl. Think about how free you could be right now if it weren’t for your love for Cat Grant or Alex Danvers.”

She stepped backward instinctively at the sight of Kara moving toward her, her expression flickering for a moment with barely suppressed fear.

Refusing to respond, Kara instead grabbed the helmet in Luthor’s hands, knowing there was no other option—whatever it took to protect Cat from any further harm. She spared one quick glance at the smaller blonde, who was now pressed against the cell bars as close to Kara as she could be, before placing on the helmet and slipping the visor over her eyes. She waited for Dr. Luthor to activate the helmet and, with one shaky inhalation, she triggered her heat vision.

The vibration through her body started small as she pushed her power to its maximum level as quickly as possible. She could feel the sensation deepening, twisting into a sharp emptiness as she drained her solar charge. Without realizing it, she had begun to scream, the depletion of her powers an agony that shook her unmercifully in its crush.

Beside her, Luthor marveled at the power unleashed from the hero’s eyes. She had assumed, considering Kara’s recent solar flare, her powers would still be low enough to warrant a swift depletion. However, Luthor noted a sizable increase in both output and duration.

With one final brilliant flare of light, Kara’s eyes dulled behind the mask of the helmet, which clattered to the floor as soon as her head fell forward. Before she could fall as well, Kara felt Henshaw’s hands roughly grab her, yanking her upright by her biceps and arching her backward against him in an agonizing grip. Nothing ever prepared her for the shock of once again feeling pain. Trying to relax into the hold that felt like it was crushing the bones in her arms, she focused on breathing through the initial jolt of agony.

“Terrifying, isn’t it?” Kara tried to focus on Dr. Luthor through a blur of tears. “No longer being impervious to pain.”

She nodded once toward Henshaw, whose grip tightened well beyond any human tolerance levels.

At the wordless scream Kara choked out, Cat pressed harder against the bars, reaching toward the hero.

“Please stop hurting her! Please! I’ll give you all my research, everything I’ve gathered on CADMUS. I won’t look for another piece of information about this place ever. I swear it on my life. Just please…please stop hurting her!”

Luthor reveled in the sound of Cat’s contrition. “It’s never easy to accept that we have misplaced our faith in false gods, is it, Ms. Grant?”

Reaching out, she grabbed Kara’s face with one hand, twisting her head from side to side. Tears streamed down the hero’s cheeks but, Luthor noted, she refused to make any further sound.
“Even powerless, you retain a higher threshold for pain than I anticipated. Another of your abilities that could prove remarkably useful for our soldiers on the battlefield.”

With another nod, Luthor released her hold and stepped aside to allow Henshaw to drag away Kara. Lingering after they had disappeared from the holding area, the doctor once more retrieved the remote from her pocket.

Making eye contact with the smaller blonde, who clutched desperately to the cape in her hands, Luthor flashed a slow, devious smile.

“You’ve served your final purpose, Ms. Grant, and for that I thank you. Consider it payment for your company’s constant betrayal of humanity.”

Flicking several buttons on the remote, she watched as Cat responded to the awakening of the nanotech inside her. “And consider this your payment for what you did to my husband.”

She dropped the remote to the floor, crushing it beneath her heel before kicking it aside. “I made sure to set their activity to as slow a setting as possible. Then again, it took Lionel three years, five months, and fourteen days to finally die in his cell, so I suppose you should consider yourself lucky. Your end will come much sooner—and with much more flare.”

With one final disapproving scowl at the crumpled form of Cat Grant, Luthor turned and marched away. The staccato clack of her heels beat in time with the agony within Cat’s heart.

Entering the exam room where Henshaw had taken Kara, she caught sight of the hero pressed against the observation window looking into the adjoining quarantine room. Without turning away from the view before her, Kara choked out, “What have you done to her?”

A satisfied hum rippled within her throat as the doctor stared into the quarantine room. “Ever wonder what Kryptonian blood would do to a human?”

Luthor pointed toward the form slumped against her restraints. Kara continued to cry at the sight, her hands flattening against the glass separating her from Alex.

“She doesn’t have any of your more impressive powers, but she does now have a slower, slightly less remarkable form of your healing ability. We’ve injected her with four different strains of alien viruses so far. The serum I created using your blood has saved her life each time.”

She cocked her head slightly as she watched Kara continue to stare at the barely conscious agent, foreign words wisping outward on pained breaths.

“If your gods didn’t bother to save your world, what makes you think they care about one human?”

Unfazed by Luthor’s question, Kara continued to whisper as tears flowed from her eyes and dripped from her chin.

Turning away with a disgusted sound, Luthor caught Henshaw’s eye. “Not that she’s much for fighting at the moment, but get her strapped in. I need her immobilized.”

Luthor watched as the cyborg effortlessly hoisted Kara onto the table and shackled her wrists and ankles. Satisfaction twitched the corners of her mouth. “You’ll forgive any ill fit to your restraints. The last person on this table was much smaller.”

Luthor watched the alien’s eyes slip shut, the tears refusing to stop even against the barrier of her
eyelids. “You should forgive yourself whatever guilt you harbor regarding Alex Danvers or Cat Grant. Their choices are what brought them here.”

“You brought them here.”

The words barely rose loud enough for Luthor to hear. Still, the doctor sniffed her disapproval. “We’ll agree to disagree on this point.”

She disappeared briefly to one side of the room. When she moved back within Kara’s line of vision, she had donned a thick black smock along with surgical gloves. In one hand, she held a pair of trauma shears, which she used to cut down the length of Kara’s uniform, from neckline to belt.

The fabric fell open, exposing the hero’s torso to Luthor’s stony observation. She sneered while running a hand along the unblemished abdomen, muscles jumping in fear beneath the touch.

“You pass as human so easily. But beneath this human looking flesh is where you cannot hide your true self.”

She pulled a fresh scalpel from off the tray of nearby surgical equipment, the overhead light glinting sharply against the blade. “Let’s see just how different you really are.”

Chapter End Notes

And thus I leave you at the literal depth of darkness for this story.

This was a difficult decision to make. It's most definitely not an upbeat place to leave this story. In fact, I admit, it's quite grim, even after an extensive rewrite.

I think the darker tone of this part of the story was feeding heavily off my own darker views of what's happening in real life at the moment. I have taken a step back from this story (I've actually been sitting on this chapter until I could release the next chapter of No Matter the Name... at the same time; I wanted to give you some hope, even if it was elsewhere). I wanted to readjust my mindset--and I think it's worked. I've actually written some funny scenes for the next section (IMHO) as well as some pretty emotional scenes from some unexpected places.

I'm stepping away from CADMUS Ascending for a little break, though. I want to finish No Matter the Name... and then work on my Secret Santa story! I will be back soon, with lots of action, lots of angst, lots of surprises, and lots of SuperCat and Sanvers (and no horror, I promise!).

I also need to see how something hinted at on the show is going to play out, and whether it's going to overlap or duplicate something I've already written for this story. Even if it does, I probably won't change it, but I'd be really irritated if they stole my thunder ;-)

It's funny: Some parts of the next section of this story are paralleling some of the things currently happening on the show. I don't know whether that means they're getting better or I'm getting worse, LOL.

Finally, I know I say it often, but it should never go unsaid: I thank each and every one
of you for reading, for commenting, for leaving kudos. This story has become incredibly dear to me--so much so that sometimes I find it hard to switch out of my universe and back into the show's universe. I love this story and I love knowing that others have connected with it the way you have. Thank you, thank you, a million times thank you. I read all your comments and I appreciate every interaction I have here and on Twitter. <3

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!