Under The Same Sun

by IShipItAllAndThenSome

Summary
The device flashes red. She assumes she’s attached the wrong wires, completed the wrong circuits, but she's human. She knows she’s human. And if she’s human, red means human. Nothing else to say on the matter. She’ll make sure she attaches the wires correctly in the commercial model. She moves on and forgets about it.

II

Twenty four years ago, a queen who reigned under the red giant Valor escaped a planet besieged by her sister’s rubble. To begin again, she created an heir to hide amongst the local species, to rise amongst them and usher in a new age.
Jack told Lena he loved her. Lex Luthor tried to kill Superman. In his failed attempt, he blew up a sizable portion of Metropolis. He killed people. So many people.

Lena got on a plane once the air was clear enough to fly, Jack in her dust, sat through a weird detour, eyes fixed to her screen where Metropolis news played without cease. She stopped watching the news when Lex was locked up without trial. She knew he didn’t deserve one, but it hurt to see him in chains, snarling like a monster. It hurt to see what he’d become.

She moved into the National City Luthor Corp building. She put herself in an office with a big window and put her back to it. She had her new secretary - Jess, smiley Jess - defer all of Lillian’s calls. She worked on rebuilding. She worked on her device.

The sun beat down on Lena’s back through her window, but it was better this way. Her own shadow stopped the glare from hitting the delicate wiring she was putting together. On this, she could not risk an error. This project was too precious to make any mistake.

This project might finally win Lillian Luthor’s heart.

With Lex insane and rampaging, someone had to carry out the Luthor legacy in its new form. Someone had to make the world safe. Someone had to forewarn humanity of the dangers that lie out amongst the stars.

Lena soldered the last wire into place and turned off the iron, blowing a strand of hair out of her eyes as she set it down. She turned the thing over in her hands - just a circuit, some wires, and a lightbulb at this point - and smiled. She needed to finish the code mapping out any and all permutations of purely human DNA - allowing, of course, for standard mutations and genetic conditions - and comparing it to the provided biological samples, model an ergonomic chassis, and put everything together, but that wouldn’t be difficult.

Soon, she’d have a hand-held DNA scanner that could identify aliens in less than ten seconds. With a little workshopping, it could even be used to study alien genes, to create vaccines and cures for diseases that hadn’t even entered the solar system yet, to help every species that set foot on the planet.

*After all,* Lena reasoned, *they’re still living beings. Healthcare is a universal right. Just because they’re… different, it doesn’t mean they don’t deserve help.*

She couldn’t tell Lillian that. She couldn’t tell Lillian lots of things. She would, however, tell Lillian when it was done and she knew it worked and she knew it was perfect.

She sat behind her desk for the first time, and had only been there for about a day when in came a familiar face, side-by-side with someone new.

And my god, was Someone New cute.

Someone New was Kara Danvers, Not-Reporter, but she quickly became one. She, in her cardigans and her khakis and her practical leather belts and her thick-framed glasses always being fiddled with, she was coaxing answers to well-thought questions out of people. Out of Lena.
And she understood.

Lena wanted to tell her everything.

☆

She’d finally finished it. She’d finally finished the bio sampler. It was sleek, compact, and absolutely perfect.

*Something I could bring home to Mother,* she joked, more than a little morbidly, to herself.

Of course, she still needed to test it. Who better to test it on than herself, an immediately available subject with an existing known answer?

Lena placed her thumb on the collector pad, heart pounding in her chest. This was it. This was the moment that would change everything, that would determine the worth of every decision she’d ever made and the viability of every plan she had to redeem her name.

The light flashed red.

Lena tried again. Centering her thumb precisely on the pad, she pressed down and let out a heavy breath.

Red.

Lena sighed.

*I can’t believe I was so thoughtless as to mis-wire the fiber optics. Or maybe it was a coding issue? My god, I fucked up something as elementary as binary color coding!*

She raked her fingers over her scalp, through her hair, and slumped onto her elbows. This was a tiny, foolish mistake, with no real effect on functionality, but it wasn’t to spec. It wasn’t good enough.

When Kara came in, though, it seemed like it could be. Like, if this sunshiny woman approved her little mistake, it really would be a little mistake, not a big one that could ruin everything.

“Ms. Luthor.”

“Lena, please.” *God, why am I smiling so much? Am I smiling too much? “It’s good to see you again, Ms. Danvers.”*

“Well, if I’m calling you Lena…”

“Kara it is. Um, if you have a parking ticket, I can have it validated for you.”

“Oh, no, that’s okay, I flew here.” Kara blinked. “On - on a bus.”

“Well, I’m glad to see you gave reporting a shot. Although if you’re here on the same day the President’s in town to sign her Alien Amnesty Act, then…”

Kara winced, almost sympathetically. “Then I must be here to ask the sister of Earth’s most notorious alien hater her take on the President’s executive order.”

Lena’s heart was pounding again. She felt like she was unwrapping the best possible Christmas present while simultaneously watching someone else unwrap the same. She stood and fetched the device from her shelves and brought it back, trying not to feel like an overeager fetching dog.
“What is it?” Kara asked, rising to follow her.

“It’s an alien detection device that allows humans to find out who among them is not truly one of them.” Lena was boiling over. *It’s good, isn’t it? It’s a good thing!*

Something funny crossed Kara’s face.

“It’s not market-ready yet,” Lena rushed to say. “I mean, we’re still developing the prototype, but we aim to have this device in every store in every town across America.”

“How does it work?”

“Just a simple skin test.” Lena shifted the thing in her hands, treasuring the weight of it. “Let me show you what a negative response looks like.” She pressed her thumb to the collection pad - one, two, three - and the light settled on red. “See? Right? Now you try.”

Kara changed her grip on her little notepad - which, how charming! a notepad! what’s next, a tape recorder? a pencil tucked behind her ear? - and asked, “But won’t a device like this… Doesn’t it go against everything America stands for?”

Lena leaned back on her desk, turning the bio sampler over in her lap. “Such as..?”

“Well, freedom,” Kara chuckled, strained, cheeks pink, “against persecution, oppression… America’s always been a country full of immigrants.”

“It’s also always been a country full of humans.” Lena could feel her own cheeks burning - even her ears - and she set it down, clutching her hands in her lap.

Kara’s little laugh sounded somehow both easygoing and anxious. “Don’t you think this device will force aliens back into the very shadows the President is trying to shine a light on?”

“If aliens want to be citizens, that’s now their right,” Lena explained, insistent, clutching the device in her lap. “But if humans want to know which of their fellow citizens aren’t actually one of them, that’s their right, too.” She sank back a little. “I’m a businesswoman, and L Corp is in the business of making money, and this device is going to make us a fortune. But unlike my brother…” Lena stood, walking towards her seat. “I’m going to do it for the good of the world.”

She sat, and looked up at Kara fiddling with her glasses. Kara cleared her throat and said nothing.

“So?” Lena offered, trying to go for playful as she extended the sampler.

“Right! Um.” Kara stepped forward, looking wary, and placed her thumb on the collection pad.

“Here it goes!”

One, two, three.

Green light.

*Oh.*

Lena shrugged it off. “See! It works perfectly.”

Kara frowned, forming an adorable crinkle between her eyebrows. “So green is…”

“For aliens. Green is for aliens.” Lena stood. “At least in this prototype. I made a, um.” She
swallowed hard. “I made a little error. Probably in wiring the fiber optics. But it still works! I’ll just have to be a little less sleep deprived when I wire the next one.”

When Lena looked up, Kara was staring at her. Blue eyes wide, pink mouth open, cheeks rosy. “Um, uh, yeah. Yep. *I'm an... alien.*”

Lena bit her lip, heart pounding. "I'm not - I'm not going to tell people about that. It's just supposed to help with - with medical care. So aliens can have treatment for Earth's diseases before they wipe them out - Smallpox Blanket Syndrome."

"I'm sorry." Kara took a step back, a step towards the door, a step away from a monster. "I have to go."

"Ms. Danvers, wait!"

"Good day, Ms. Luthor."

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And it stopped again, that afternoon, when Lena read that article - objective, nonjudgemental. She felt understood, somehow. Like Kara could see every inch of her intent. She felt almost forgiven.

Kara came in, all cute and leggy - and why was her legginess suddenly pertinent? - in that maroon dress, business casual at its finest, apologizing for coming over unannounced.

“I just got the message you wanted to see me,” she said, stopping short. “Those flowers are beautiful.”

“They’re called plumerias,” Lena said, sitting upright and lowering the magazine, which she may or may not have been buried in, rereading that article again and again. She looked over at them, in their hand-thrown white vase, and smiled. “They’re pretty rare.”

She didn’t outright say that they were her favorite, that she’d fallen in love with them when the Luthor family had gone to Hawaii for her Christmas vacation with them. That when she was too excited to sleep, she’d look out at them under the moonlight. That her new father had carried her on his shoulders and they’d walked through the blooming bushes together, or that Lex had brought some into her room and pressed one into her favorite book at the time, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone,* where she found it on the plane, still sweet. That he’d smiled at her when she found it and put a finger to his lips, and it was the first secret they’d ever kept together, and she felt *family* for the first time since her mother died.

She didn’t need to say it. It was in her voice, in her eyes.

“They remind me of my mother,” Kara said, like she needed to explain. The look on her face was enough to cushion the reminder of Lillian - the sourness in the set of her mouth when Lionel came back to their vacation house with her on his back, laughing, or the need to keep secrets from her, or the perpetual disdain on her face whenever Lena so much as breathed - because the look on her face was pure love.

“Was she a writer, too?” Lena asked, lifting CatCo Magazine with a smile.

“No,” Kara said. “She was, um, I guess sort of a lawyer.”

Ooh. That was a nerve. Lena swerved away from that soft spot and said, “Well, you have a natural gift with words. The article’s amazing.”
Kara let out a soft laugh, smiling, and she was incandescent. She was starlight on flower petals.

“I knew you’d make a great reporter, but after this afternoon, I was afraid you’d do a hatchet job on me.”

“Oh,” Kara said, cheeks red, “I tried. I wrote a scathing article about your device.”

“And?”

“And my boss tossed it.” Kara shook her head, a sheepish little smile on her face as she sat. “He made me redo it.”

“Oh, well, that explains it.” Lena looked down at her hands, at her little picking fingers.

“The funny thing is, I’m glad he did,” Kara admitted with an oddly gleeful shrug. “I mean, not at first, but some things happened that made me rethink my position.”

Leaning in, Lena practically purred, “Do tell.”

Kara gave a nervous, breathless giggle. “I still think Alien Amnesty is a good thing, but there are bad aliens out there.”

Lena ran a hand through her hair, tension leaking away even as her cheeks burned. “Well, I’m glad you can see from my point of view.”

Something soft came over Kara’s face - something secret, something familiar, something fond. Suddenly, the scent of plumerias was more acute, more intense, in the air. She smiled.

“You know, when I was first adopted by the Luthors, I adored Lex,” Lena confided. “When he showed his true colors, I was crushed. I tried everything to reach him, to bring him back to the side of good - ” chessboards and storybooks and memories and flowers “ - but it was no use. I’d lost him.”

Oh, god, the lump in her throat, the burn in her eyes, the empathy in Kara’s.

“Finally, I realized that some people are just bad. And there is nothing you can do to change that, but you can learn to protect yourself.”

Kara looked at her. Just looked, and softly said, “Yeah.”

Giddily, Lena felt understood.

“I’m sorry about him,” she murmured. “I know what its like to… to see someone you love do hateful things. To realize they’re not who you knew them to be.”

And her hand was on Lena’s on the back of the couch.

“The truth isn’t always pretty, but sometimes it does good. It helps to know.”

Lena nodded, lip between her teeth.

“I just wish it didn’t have to hurt, too.” Kara squeezed her hand, so very gently.

“Well, that’s why you’re here, isn’t it?” Lena murmured. “To tell the truth. To help people.”

Kara nodded wordlessly. She opened her mouth, then closed it. “I, um, I gotta go. Office - work -
stuff."

She stood, collecting herself, smoothing out the skirt on that little maroon dress. She let go of Lena’s hand.

"I want to apologize. About the device. It's supposed to be Phase One of..." Lena swallowed. "Healthcare. Identifying species, understanding their physiology, developing treatments for them in the face of local diseases not present on their planets. Stop Smallpox Blanket Syndrome, you know? I wanted to say, earlier, but - I never meant to hurt anyone, and I'm sorry, for making you uncomfortable. For doing what I did. It's a breach of privacy, and it'll make people feel unsafe, and I - I went about it all wrong, and I'm so sorry."

Kara smiled, soft and sure. "It's okay."

"Will I see you again? Soon?" Lena asked, hope lilting in her voice.

"You will."

Lena’s heart fluttered at the promise.

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It went like that. Kara forgave her, came to her, spoke with her, kept almost saying something and never getting the words out.

They spoke of silly things - favorite foods (potstickers and pizza versus kombucha, specifically the honey-lemon-ginger variety, and kale salads, with a very specific champagne vinegar and orange dressing that she always made herself, because she couldn’t bring herself to indulge in actual sugar), movies (Kara’s fondness for movie musicals and romantic comedies rivaled Lena’s for ridiculous grindhouse horror and low-budget sci-fi and fantasy), music (nineties pop was a mutual joy, with a particular adoration for *NSYNC and most any female singer; Britney deserved better), and even colors (Kara loved primary colors while Lena had a secret fondness for pastels hidden behind her more public front of deeper tones). They spoke of serious things, too - the isolation one could feel in a new family that wasn’t truly theirs, the fight to be taken seriously in professional settings, living up to names and expectations.

Even with everything they’d discussed, even with Lena knowing how hard Kara worked to keep people close, even with Kara knowing how hard it was now for Lena to let anyone in, there were some things Kara couldn’t bring herself to say. Like how she never talked about her planet, how she came to earth.

It was only fair. Lena kept her own secrets.

No matter how deeply she trusted Kara, no matter how much she wanted to tell Kara everything, she couldn’t. But she would do everything in her power to earn Kara's trust, and hope that Kara could forgive her again.

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Lena heard Jess’ protests, but hadn’t taken notice until her doors swung open and there Kara was.

"I tried to stop her, Ms. Luthor, but she is so fast."

I bet she is.
“Lena, I’m sorry, this is my fault.” Even admitting guilt for something, Kara’s voice was even, despite the passion in it. “I just need to talk to you.”

Lena stood. Jess looked, to be honest, pissed, while Kara just looked urgent.

“Jess, will you make a note downstairs that Kara Danvers is to be shown in right away whenever possible?”

Both of them looked surprised, though Jess hid it better. “Yes, Ms. Luthor.”

“Really?” Kara’s eyes widened. “Thank you.”

Lena sank back into her chair and said, “Now… How can I help?”

The relief Kara felt was palpable, even as she wrung her hands together. “I… I think a friend of mine has gotten involved in something shady.”

Lena scoffed, gentle in her incredulity. “A friend?”

“No, an actual friend. And now he’s missing.” Kara paced up to her desk, that urgency, that passion, all the more evident up close. “Do you know a woman named Veronica Sinclair?”

Boarding school, Lena had hoped, would be like Hogwarts. She’d hoped to make friends and learn things and feel liked she belonged. She hadn’t.

Veronica Sinclair.

Roulette.

Lena could still feel the woman’s barbs. She could still feel her ten-year-old self, after skipping three grades, staring up at a towering, intimidating fourteen-year-old with laser-precise makeup and even more exact insults.

She’d grown skin so thick, it could rival Supergirl’s. She’d buried herself in her studies and managed to weasel herself into skipping another grade, which, unfortunately, put her in Veronica’s classes. She’d graduated at fourteen, gladder to get out of school than she’d been to get into it. She went to Yale, she went to MIT, she got PhDs in biology, engineering, economics. She escaped that bully, and everyone else.

And here Roulette was once again, hurting people.

Aliens.

People.

Perhaps she was coming to see Kara’s side, too.

“She caters to people in your, um.” Kara hesitated. “Circles.”

“Tight dresses, tattoos like Lisbeth Salander?” Lena nodded, a bitter taste in her mouth beneath the light teasing tone of her voice. “Yeah, I know Roulette. We went to boarding school together. I never liked her.”

“I need to find her.”

“Well, that’s the trick, isn’t it? Her little fight clubs stay mobile.”
“But do you know where she’s holding the next fight?” Kara looked away, looked at her hands where they were braced on the edge of Lena’s desk. “I wouldn't ask if I had any other option.”

Lena sighed, slumped, scrawled. “I’m a Luthor. Of course I’m invited to her little pop up.” Looking up, she said, “Not that I’m interested in her type of entertainment!”

When she handed the address to Kara, the journalist let out a sigh, like a massive weight had been lifted. “Thank you,” she breathed. “I owe you, big time.”

“Not at all.” Lena looked at Kara, found her eyes roving up and down the length of her. “I know you're doing the right thing.”

Kara bit her lip and nodded, walking away without looking away.

Lena couldn’t tell if that was fear or something else.

She looked over at the plumerias.

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Partially, it was that uncertainty, that curiosity, that drove her to CatCo after what felt an eternity of niggling in the back of her mind.

“Lena!”

Was that glee in her voice? Delight? Affection?

*How soft I'm becoming.*

Cheeks flushed, eyes sparkling, Kara asked, “Surprise visit to CatCo?”

“No,” and Lena’s cheeks were burning, “I’m here to see you, actually.”

“You are?”

“Yeah.” *Oh, god.* “L Corp is hosting a party this weekend. It’s a gala fundraiser for the Children’s Hospital after that horrific attack on their new building.” *Deep breath. Deep breath.* “Actually I was hoping you’d come.”

And suddenly, the besweatered man lazing behind Kara swings gracefully to his feet and slides over. “Gala - is that like a party?” he asked, Red Vine gesticulating for him.

“No. No, it’s not.”

There was an urgency in Kara’s voice, almost placatory, but something shifted, and Lena felt… something. Like something had moved. She remembered reading *The Giver* in lower school, and the description Jonas had given of seeing color for the first time flashed dimly into mind - *it was just different for a moment, then the same.*

“You are literally my only friend in National City,” Lena said, urgency rising in her, too. “Most people wouldn’t touch a Luthor with a ten foot pole.”

Lena bit her lip, and Kara again had that almost-telling look on her face.

“It would mean a lot to me if you were there.”
“Of course I’ll come.” Kara’s voice was soft - not in tone, but in texture, somehow. Like her very words were cozy. “I’m honored.”

And then that man - boy - whatever - spoke. “I love parties. Can I come, too?”

Kara shot a look his way and said, “No.”

Kara saying no would have meant Lena saying no ordinarily, but there, again, was that flash of different-but-not, and Lena found herself saying, “Oh, well, of course your friend can come.” She looked up at this weird, somehow familiar face and asked, “What’s your name?”

“Oh, uh, Mike. Of the interns.”

“Well, Mike of the interns, find yourself a nice suit and I’ll see you there.”

Kara let out an uncomfortable sort of sigh as she said goodbye.

Somehow, even though Lena was at the elevator doors, she could hear Mike of the interns say, “We are going to a party!” as if she were standing right next to him.

Strange.

She noticed it on the ride down, too. Like the pulleys were creaking extra-loud, like the door mechanisms were falling to pieces. Even her own footsteps were too loud, like every clack of her stilettos - which may have been selected specifically so she could be on eye level with Kara - was an ice pick through her eye.

And then the lobby, full of people, and oh, god, all the bustling and the footsteps and the paper shuffling and the coffee slurping and the talking, the fucking talking!

Lena hadn’t had a migraine like this since she was a toddler. Since before she’d been adopted. Her mother said they were probably stress-induced, and looked so guilty, lying there with her own splitting headaches like being sick was something she’d done wrong. The sicker her mother got, the worse her headaches were, but her mom always tried to make it better, always held her and hummed softly so she had one sound to focus on so she could block the others out. She was in pre-k, proving she could count past one hundred, when her mother died, and she could have sworn she felt it. There was a burning spike of pain, everyone counting like screaming and sandpaper on her bones, the lights blinding-searing-stabbing, the smells all cloying and putrid, and then it stopped.

She got in the car, slammed the door to keep the sound out and almost screamed with how bad it hurt. Thanking god and paranoia for the soundproofing, she sank into the upholstery as slowly as possible to minimize the noise. “Can you, um, can you put up the divider?” she asked.

“Of course, Ms. Luthor,” was her driver’s reply, and even that soft voice was murder.

“And please don’t turn on any music or - or let your phone ring. If you can keep it to silent, that would be… fantastic.”

“Of course. Where are we going?”

Only one place came to mind. Not her own apartment, though its barrenness might help with whatever this was, or her office. One place.

She managed to murmur the address, and ask that he loop the block until she said to stop, before lying down.
The engine, chosen for its silence and efficiency, purred beneath her. The sound wasn’t overwhelming - in fact, it sounded like her Mom’s car. Her real Mom’s car. She couldn’t remember much of her, but she remembered the battered Cutlass Oldsmobile with perfect clarity.

It was a matte brick red, rusting up yet reliable, with powder blue upholstery that smelled like antifreeze and lavender and a crotchety-sounding engine that always put her to sleep.

Lena didn’t sleep then. She took, perhaps, too many OTC painkillers, closed her eyes to block out the noise, and curled up as best she could, and thought with all the force of a crashing plane, *Please stop, please stop, please stop.*

It did. Eventually, it did.

She opened her eyes, running a knuckle under each one to check for any smudged mascara, any sign of tears, and sat up. There they were, outside of Kara’s apartment, and who else should be walking up the street?

Lena cautiously left the car, tiptoed slowly into the building, practically crawled up the stairs - just in case. When she reached Kara’s door, she knocked as quietly as she could, breath caught in her lungs. Even that sound was inescapable, abrasive.

Faintly, she heard Kara’s voice - *What is she doing here?* - and another voice - *Who?* - then footsteps, then the door opening.

And there Kara was, all sunshine and warmth and comfort. “Lena, hi! Come on in!”

Lena could breathe, just a little.

“I’m sorry to keep dropping in on you. It’s…”

There was that second voice. Angular, elegant features, a baggy red sweater that hung loose enough to see a collarbone. Lena had heard her before, seen her before.


“Special Agent Alex Danvers, FBI.” She offered a hand to shake, and Lena took it.

When Lena looked to her, Kara explained, “She’s my sister,” with a proud smile on her face, and Lena calmed a little.

“This city’s smaller than I thought,” she joked. It didn’t seem to fly over well. If not for the audible *everything,* Lena probably would have been more charming. “Well, actually, maybe you both can help me. You remember I told you about that stupid fight club last week?”

Kara nodded, concern flitting across her face.

“Well, now it’s my turn to ask you for a favor.”

“Anything, shoot.”

*Make it stop/Hold me/Oh god why am I thinking that?*

“I need to get in touch with Supergirl.”

Kara nodded, then looked over to her sister. There was a little glimmer, like an inside story, and then Kara touched her shoulder and said, “I’ll see what I can do.” Then, quieter, “Are you okay?”
“Yeah.” Does Alex know about Kara? Would Kara hate me if I voiced this stupid suspicion? “Yeah, I’m fine. It’s a, um, headache. I’m fine.”

Kara looked at her, looked her over, and gave her arm a little squeeze. “Okay. You should go get some rest. Is your driver downstairs? Do you need me to call you a cab?”

_A cab would feel like death right about now_, Lena thought, even as the sentiment warmed the cockles of her heart. “I’m fine. Thank you, though, Kara.”

Kara smiled, one of those little dimply ones, and said, “Of course, Lena.”

“Really. Thank you.”

☆

The city seemed to sleep - at least, the business district did. A credit to working late. Lena sat in her sterile office, the door open for the guest she desperately needed to arrive, lights dimmed, laptop screen almost black. The whoosh of the Girl of Steel’s cape was, thankfully, not too abrasive, but Lena heard it loudly enough to take note, and she turned her chair around.

There she was, peering in, almost looking lost.

Lena stood, heart in her throat. “Supergirl - you came.”

_Help me, help me, oh god, help me._

Supergirl put her fists on her hips in that classic hero pose and strode in, already different than she’d been when she landed. “You wanted to see me?”

“Yes, uh, thank you for coming.”

Her footsteps were so quiet, even with the heels on her boots - a casualty of super hearing, Lena supposed. You learn to be quiet.

“I, um, I have two things to ask of you.”

Supergirl’s hands fell from her hips as she turned to face Lena. “Of course, Ms. Luthor.”

“The first is a request,” she said, heart pounding. She could hear it, all of it, the rushing blood and the squeezy, squelchy sounds of muscles, and it hurt. She _needed_ to handle business first, and then…

“Name it.”

“I wanted to invite you to my party.”

Something crossed Supergirl’s face, a familiar shadow she couldn’t place. “Kara Danvers told me you were going on with the fundraiser. You can’t.” She shook her head. “It’s definitely going to be a target for this gang.”

“Well, that’s why I need you there - to protect it.” Lena swallowed, tried to laugh. “With Supergirl in attendance, I know my guests and I will be safe.” She couldn’t help the hope in her eyes, the need there.

“You like taking risks,” Supergirl asked, “don’t you? When Corben was after you, and now this? Why?”
“Well, you can’t live in fear,” Lena managed, voice low. “You, more than anyone, must understand that.” She stood, walked to Supergirl’s side. The carpet muffled her heels, and she’d never been more thankful for anything in her life than for that. “Time and again, you risk everything to see justice done. Is it so hard to believe you and I are the same? Or are you one of those people who thinks I’m nothing more than a Luthor?”

“I believe everyone should be judged on their own merits.”

“Then judge me on mine.” Before Supergirl could speak, Lena did. “This party must happen, and I am asking you for your help.”

There was something on Supergirl’s face, something soft and sweet and so familiar and why couldn’t Lena place it?

“I guess I have no choice.”

“Thank you.” Lena took in a shaky breath, looked down at the carpet. “Item the second is…”

“Ms. Luthor?” The concern in Supergirl’s voice was so raw that it hurt. Not like the lights, not like the sounds. It hurt in her heart. “What’s wrong? Kara told me you had a headache. She’s concerned.”

Lena looked up, vision blurred, and pressed the back of her hand to her lips to hide the bottom one quivering. “Something is happening to me,” she whispered. “And I think you’re the only person who can help.”

“Hey, it’s okay.” Supergirl’s hand was on her shoulder, on her waist, guiding her to her desk. “I’m here. I want to help. Just tell me what’s going on.”

A dry, jagged sob came out of Lena, and she said, “I don’t think I’m human.”

Supergirl stilled a moment, so fleeting you almost couldn’t tell, then asked, “Why?”

“I can hear - too much. Everything is too much. I can hear - I can hear my own blood, I can hear someone feeding the meter on the corner, I can hear the electricity in the wires, I can hear…”

“It’s okay. You’re going to be okay.” Supergirl knelt down so she could look at Lena, eye to eye, while she curled up in her chair. “How long has this been going on?”

“I - it started this afternoon, when I came to see Kara at work, but it’s happened before. My Mom told me they were migraines.”

“Lillian, or..?”

“My real mother. Her name was Marion.” Lena sniffled, buried her face in her hands. “She was dying, and she still tried to make me feel better when they hit.”

“What would she do?”

“She would - ” Lena scoffed. Supergirl had more pressing matters than this!

“Lena?”

“She would sing - hum. So I had something to focus on, so I could drown it all out. I would listen to her voice, listen to her heartbeat, and I would think stop as hard as I could until the headache was gone.” A little sob slipped out of her. “It didn’t work today. It’s worse than before.”
“Okay. C’mere.” Supergirl touched her knee, oh, so gently. “I’m going to move you, okay? Just to the couch on the other side of the room.”

“Okay.”

Supergirl picked her up like a baby, cradled Lena to her chest, and walked very carefully across the room, not jostling her or making a single sound. Then there was the faintest sigh of upholstery and stuffing, and they were on the couch, Lena laying on top of the most powerful woman in the world.

“Any requests?” she asked, the tiniest hint of humor in her voice.

Lena shook her head, closed her eyes. Beneath her ear, she could hear a steady, strong heartbeat, and then the soft vibrations of a hum. She tried to breathe slowly, evenly, and ignore every sound but those, and after a while, she managed it. Heartbeat and humming, heartbeat and humming.

Aeons passed, and then Lena laughed.

“What?”

“I didn’t know you were a fan of nineties boy bands,” Lena teased, shifting to look at her face.

Supergirl was blushing - just a little.

“I didn’t know you could do that, either.”

Supergirl’s cheeks were practically on fire. “Someone’s feeling better.”

Now it was Lena’s turn to burn with mortification. “I - thank you. For this, for…”

“I’m here to help,” was her soft reply. “This is only a stopgap, I’m afraid. Eventually, your concentration will slip, or something will startle you… I don’t know what other abilities you might have, but I know some people who can help figure that out.”

Lena swallowed hard. Supergirl, who was close with the only person in this city who cared about her, who had at least one power in common with her, was one thing. “Who are these people?”

“They deal with aliens. They hunt the bad ones and help the good ones.”

“And you trust them?”

Supergirl tilted her chin up and looked at her with those blue, blue eyes. “With my life.”

“Then I trust them with mine.”

Supergirl smiled, a little sheepish, a little lopsided. “We should go right now. They run a lot of tests.”

“Wait, how long will the testing take?” Lena asked.

“I - maybe twelve hours? A day?” Supergirl winced. “No more than two.”

“I can’t be gone that long. The gala.”

Supergirl’s eyes widened. “You can’t be serious.”

“I am. I can’t miss this, Kara. I’m… I’m the face of the company. I’m the CEO. I have to be there.”

“What if your concentration breaks?” Supergirl murmured, touching her shoulder. “What if that gang
attacks and the noise incapacitates you and - ?”

“I have you. You’ll stop them. You’ll protect me. And…” Another little secret. Something Lena hadn’t told Kara. Telling someone else when she hadn’t told her best friend felt… wrong, somehow, but there was a determined set to Supergirl’s jaw that told Lena there was no way she could make an appearance without convincing her it would be safe. “I have something that can stop their weapons.”

“Really?”

“It only works in close proximity, so if they don’t show, we won’t need it.”

Supergirl’s brow furrowed, and she finally gave in. “Alright. I trust you to put it into place, and after the gala, I’m taking you straight to the DEO.”

“So, Kara and I’ll be seeing you there tomorrow night?”

Supergirl gave a tight smile and nodded. “I will - see you - both.” She stood, toy ing with her fingers - another gesture Lena knew intimately - and asked, “Can I take you home? Do you feel okay enough to…?”

Lena stood and nodded. “I’m better now. Thank you.”

“Any time.” Supergirl started towards the window.

“Wait! Before you go…”

Supergirl looked back and nodded, waiting.

“Don’t tell Kara about this. I don’t… I know she’s forgiven me, but she might - if I tell her this, if she thinks I’m lying, or making some cruel joke, it would break my heart. But I - I want to tell her. When I know.” Lena swallowed hard. “When I know what I am. When there’s proof I’m not lying or crazy or cruel.”

Supergirl nodded, that familiar shadow on her face again. “I won’t tell her a thing, Ms. Luthor, but... Kara Danvers could never think that you.”

“You can call me Lena,” Lena said, but Supergirl was already gone.

She heard it anyway.

☆

Soft, silky jazz filled the air, and Lena focused on just the sax, chatting only as much as she absolutely had to. Still, there was one voice she could never ignore, one voice she’d always pick up on.

“Lena!”

Lena turned, and there Kara was, in a periwinkle dress and all her sunshiny splendor. “I’m really glad to see you! I’m really glad you could make it.” There, in the periphery, she heard Kara’s friend’s breathing, the footfalls of someone’s Italian leather-soled dress shoes, and suddenly the sax line was blurring into all the other instruments. Putting on her bravest, most normal face, she asked, “Um, have you seen Supergirl?”

Kara turned, as if scanning the skies, and said, “I’m sure she’s on her way.”
More footsteps - Louboutins in abundance, shuffling, stomping, peacocky strides - so loud she couldn’t even pick out the ones attached to the champagne flute spilling on her.

“I’m sorry. Did I spill this on you? Does anybody have any seltzer?”

So, so loud, and then that telltale whoosh, those silent boots. The crowd’s gasps were less prominent.

“Supergirl.” Lena keyed in on her heartbeat - a little fast - and felt a wave of relief. “So glad you could make it.”

Supergirl loped up to her, casually scanning the room, and said, “I still think this is a bad idea.”

“Well, why don’t we wait and see how the evening pans out,” Lena purred, back in control. She noticed, now that the noise was dimmed and she could focus, that she and Supergirl were the same height. At least, when she wore her highest heels.

Supergirl nodded crisply. “I’ll check the perimeter for any activity, and I’ll be back at the first sign of danger - or if you call me.”

Lena smiled, and Supergirl whooshed away. At normal volume, a pair of heels tottered up behind Lena, and there Kara was again, her own heart a little quick.

“Kara, you just missed Supergirl!”

“Did I? Golly.”

Lena turned, a little giddy bubble in her chest. “I bet you’ll be saying that again when you see the hors d’oeuvres.”

Kara’s eyes widened. “What did you get?”

“I may or may not have had a tiny part of the catering done by your favorite Chinese restaurant.”

Kara’s eyes were so wide they could have been hubcaps. “Lena, you are - without a doubt - the most wonderful human being on the planet - ” She froze for a second.

Lena froze, too.

"I mean," Kara scoffed, "behind me. Am I right, or am I right?”

Lena laughed, conceding. “You are, indeed, the absolute best. And being the absolute best means you deserve a reward, and yours is currently circulating. Go eat.”

Kara looked at her, looked through her. “I'm glad you're feeling better,” she said softly.

“Me, too. Now go!”

Kara skedaddled, and Lena let out a sigh. Secrets, secrets, are no fun…

All went well. She kept control of the sounds, she was the perfect hostess, and her black body field generator was in place. She looked up from a conversation with one of the hospital board members and saw Kara gracefully twirling about with Mike of the interns. There it was, that strange sensation, sitting right next to a jealous pang, and the champagne flute in her hand was half dust.

And then something exploded.
There he was: the big, bad, blaster-bearing bank robber. “My, my… Look at all the pretty things there are.”

Lena grinned, shaking her head reprovingly as she strode up to him. “Oh, you picked the wrong party to crash.”

Then he reached out and snatched her necklace from her throat. “I don’t think so, princess.” Then he raised it above his head and started barking orders.

“Did you really think I wouldn’t be here?”

*I’d know that heroic timbre anywhere*, Lena thought, and she couldn’t help but smile up at Supergirl.

“Actually,” he grunted, hefting his gun, “I was counting on it.”

He fired; Supergirl fired back; Lena dove under the table and got to work. She could hear all that screaming, she could hear Supergirl hit the pavement, and her flashlight snapped in her hand.

“Oh, not the time,” she gritted out, and someone rolled in behind her. “Do you mind?”

“Woah. Is - Is that a black body field generator?”

“It will be, if I can get it working, okay? And for that, I need light. Do you have your phone?”

“Uh. Uh, yeah.” The man scrambled for his phone, pulled it out, shone the light over her hands. “Is that good?”

“Perfect.” Lena started back in, then paused. “Didn’t you spill on me earlier?”

“Sorry about that.” Then, he looked at her, eyes wide. “This whole party - you set a trap for these guys!”

“Yes. A trap that will fail unless I can get this thing operational, and - !” He was breathing too loud, she was breathing too loud, the microscopic compressions of tile beneath feet was too loud. “Ugh! It’s so loud, I can’t - !”

“Here.” The guy handed her his phone and peered into the generator. “I’m gonna - just focus on my voice, okay?”

Lena nodded.

“So if the black body field generator is at equilibrium with the weapons, it can absorb the electromagnetic radiation and shut them down. This is genius.” Even with the excitement in his voice, the guy remained quiet and soothing - deliberately so.

“I know, but the frequency and the wavelength, they’re a match, so…” Lena let out a sigh, and the two of them spoke in perfect synchronicity: “The induction coil!”

He reached in and did the fixing, since her hands were shaking so badly, but they weren’t shaking badly enough to stop her from pressing the button, and wham.

The two of them crawled out amidst the screaming, and he offered her a hand up. “I’m Winn, by the way.”

“I’m pretty good with technology - ”

“I meant with…” Lena gestured vaguely, then caught sight of a familiar red and blue shape.

Winn turned, looked, and blustered, “Oh, no, we weren’t under there, so… We stopped it!”

Supergirl beamed at the two of them, and Lena listened, very carefully, for the sound of her heart.

It sped up, just a little, when she laughed.

“Well, if you two gentlemen will excuse us,” Supergirl said, all mighty and warm, “I’m going to escort Ms. Luthor to safety.”

Winn, and that man - James, who used to hang out with Lex and Superman! - shared a look, which Supergirl then shot down with a look of her own.

“Ms. Luthor?”

Lena stepped over a few chunks of rubble and put her arms around Supergirl’s neck, allowed herself to be cradled and carried away. “So you know Kara’s friends?” Lena asked.

“I - I do.”

The wind’s whistling didn’t interfere at all in them hearing each other speak - perhaps another benefit of super hearing.

“It’s a wonder we never met - socially, then.”

Supergirl’s heart sped up, a few inches away from Lena’s ear, and she swallowed. “I didn’t know if you’d want to see me,” she said.

“Because of..?”

“Yeah.”

For a while, Lena just listened to the wind, to Supergirl’s breathing and heartbeat, and then she heard that landing whooosh and let her feet down. They were, from the sound of it, on the balcony of a skyscraper to rival her own.

“This is the DEO?”

“There are other locations,” Supergirl said with a shrug, “but this is the current base of operations.”

The hand on Lena’s back gently nudged her inwards, and as the doors whirred shut behind them, Lena found herself craning to get a better look at everything.

“This is where you work?” she asked, breathless.

“Pretty much.”

“It’s incredible.”

“Come on. We need to get you to the med bay.”

They moved through a little sea of black polo shirts, little greetings here and there, and then there they were, in the promised med bay.
“Ta-da!”

“These are solar lamps,” Lena mused, walking towards the bed, touching the smooth white shells. “But… higher output than the generic commercial model.”

“Uh, yeah.” Supergirl came over to her side and tapped the bulb. “These are special. They’re for people like me, who get energy from yellow solar radiation. I’m super because of that stuff.”

“You’re super powered because of that stuff.” Lena twisted and looked up at Supergirl. “You’re super because of you.”

Supergirl blushed. “I’m gonna, uh. I’m gonna get one of the peoples who work here. For the tests. Stay put, okay? I’ll be back in one minute.”

Lena laughed, nodded, and watched her zoom away. She wondered if she’d ever have a power like that. If she’d ever enjoy it like that.

As promised, precisely sixty seconds later, Supergirl was back with a familiar face.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Lena tests the limits of her new powers.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Special Agent Danvers, FBI. I didn’t expect to see you here.”

Alex blinked, looking between her and Supergirl. “I didn’t expect to see you, either.”

“All, we, um…” Supergirl looked to Lena and gave a helpless sort of shrug.

“I’ve developed super hearing within the past thirty-odd hours,” Lena said bluntly. “And I may be developing super strength as well.” From within her dress pocket, she produced the mangled remains of her flashlight.

“You…”

“And I liked that one, too.”

Alex marched over, pulling on a pair of gloves. “When did this start?”

“Friday afternoon, I went to visit Kara at work, and suddenly I could… everything was so loud.” Lena let out a breath. “That’s why I came to see Kara. I needed to ask Supergirl for help. Alex, I’m - whatever was happening, I’m sorry I interrupted.”

Alex gave a little half-smile and nodded. “It’s okay. We’ve all got stuff, right?”

Supergirl opened her mouth, reached out, then stopped and withdrew.

“So, do you remember anything else?” Alex opened a sterile lancet and tried to take blood. The lancet broke. “Was there a flash of light, a - a certain smell? Any pain?”

“No. No, none of that. But…” Lena’s brow furrowed. “I felt this - I can’t describe it.”

“What happened?” And Supergirl was at her side, giving her shoulder one of those gentle, restrained squeezes.

“Kara’s friend. Mike.”

Supergirl’s hand twitched. “What did he do?”

“Nothing. I just. I looked at him, and there was this weird shift. Everything was totally different and yet completely the same.” Lena swallowed. “And then I was walking to the elevator, and I could hear him talking, and the pulleys, the doors, the people -”
“That used to happen to me, too,” Supergirl soothed, rubbing her back. “When I first came to Earth. I didn’t know what was happening, and everything was so - it felt like too much, all at once. So my adopted family helped me. My new father knew a little about Kryptonian biology - he worked with Superman sometimes - so he helped me put a damper on my powers. And my sister…”

Alex looked fiddled with her stethoscope, smiling.

“My sister listened to this weird punk music because she thought she was so cool,” Supergirl drawled, “and when I could hear every house for three miles like they were screaming in my ear, she would give me her big headphones and let me drown it out with angry gril music.”

Pressing the stethoscope to Lena’s chest where she’d pushed the collar of her dress aside, Alex scoffed. “Angry gril music?”

“Well, it was that or Pink Floyd, and I’m an Alanis Morisette girl more often than not. Plus Dark Side of the Moon isn’t a good idea when you can hear and see everything.” Supergirl huffed a laugh. “We learned that the hard way.”

Alex snorted, swallowed, and selected a swab. “Cheek.”

“Alright.” Lena opened her mouth and let Alex swab around. When she’d collected a satisfactory sample and retracted the swab, Lena asked, “So, does Kara know you work here?”

Another funny look came over Alex’s face, and she shook her head. “No. No, she, uh, she thinks I’m a Fed.”

“And she hasn’t figured it out yet?”

“Let’s just say, I got the lion’s share of observational skills in our house growing up,” Alex said with a shrug, grinning.

So Alex does know Kara’s an alien.

“Hey!”

“Something wrong, Supergirl?”

Grumbling, Supergirl jutted out her chin, all petulant, and said, “She’s not that bad.”

“She can’t even tell when people have crushes on her,” laughed Alex. “Not Winn, not James, not Cat Grant’s son…”

“Quite a heartbreaker, our Kara,” Lena joked, cheeks aflame.

“And a nose breaker. Skin.” Alex took another swab, ran it along the crease of Lena’s elbow. “Five of the boy’s she’s gone out with, she’s broken their noses.”

A cackle burst out of Lena, but she swiftly clapped a hand over her mouth. “Really?”

“Yup. Goodnight kiss gone bad, almost every time. Poor baby doesn’t know her own strength.”

Alex and Lena had a good giggle over that, while Supergirl fought a pout, hopping up beside Lena on the exam table.

Finally, the laughter petered out, and Alex said, “I’m gonna need a hair sample, too.”
“Oh! Um.” Lena nodded, eyeing the scissors on the exam tray. “Go ahead.”

“It might not work. If you’re anything like Supes over here,” and Alex tipped her head at the Kryptonian with a little smile, “these won’t work on you.”

Sure enough, the strands of Lena’s hair between those blades not only weren’t cut, but they sliced clean through the metal.

“Good thing I like this haircut,” Lena muttered.

Alex laughed again. “I like this one,” she said, looking at Supergirl, pointing at Lena. “Wish we could swap her out for Mon-El.”

Supergirl, eyes wide, nodded. “Oh, Rao, yes. He is - ugh!”

“Who’s Mon-El?” Lena asked.

“He’s another alien from my solar system,” Supergirl said. “Sister planets under a red star. He has powers like mine - not the same, but similar. Both our planets died in the same event.”

“Isn’t that a good thing? To have someone with, if not a shared, then a concurrent history?” Lena gave Supergirl’s hand a squeeze. “I mean, Kara and I bonded through a shared experience. Being adopted, I’m sure, is nowhere near as traumatic as losing your entire home, your culture, your story, but if you and this… Mon-El are linked like that, why not try and get to know him?”

Supergirl sighed. “I am. But our planets… they were sisters, not twins.”

“And sisters fight,” Alex said, emphatic. “And keep secrets, and miscommunicate…”

Supergirl looked at Alex, leaned forward like she wanted to do something. Instead, she spoke: “My planet was cerebral, cultured, artistic. Everyone sought to learn and create…” A warm glaze came over her eyes, a softness unseen on superheroes. “My father was a scientist. My mother, a judicator. They were good people, good parents, and they always tried to do the right thing.” She crumbled. “And they still didn’t manage it.

“And Mon-El isn’t trying. He’s manipulative, misogynistic, selfish, lazy… I’ve been trying to help him. I kept him on a tight leash, and when that didn’t work, I let him go, and that’s not working either.” Supergirl puffed out a sigh and slumped forward. “His planet… he wasn’t even responsible for how awful everything was. He wasn’t a member of the royal family. He couldn’t change anything. But he’s got the attitude of a Daxamite, and I think it’s just his personality.”

“For what it’s worth,” Alex said, “I agree. Mon-El sucks. Helping him is a good thing to do, but it’s not necessarily the right thing.”

Lena remained quiet while Alex ran tests - oxygen intake, lung capacity, heart rate - just listening to them chatter. It was clear Supergirl and Alex were close. They laughed at each other’s stories. They had a rapport.

But Lena wasn’t jealous. Certainly not.

“I’m gonna go run these,” Alex said, lifting the bagged hair and the swabs, “against the cell structures and DNA of all the humanoid species we have on record. While I do that, Supes, you wanna get Hank for the rest of it, or do you wanna watch her punch stuff?”

Supergirl’s face lit up. “I’ll do it. Oh, my god, this is gonna be so fun!”
It was fun.

Lena had to borrow some clothes, since she was in a relatively structured party dress, so after a quick change, she was in the kind of stretchy spandex stuff that just made a person walk a little taller. She shifted on the balls of her feet, ponytail swinging.

“So!” Supergirl whooshed in, landed silently. There was no capital-h Hero posturing, just a bouncy loping stride and a huge grin. “These,” she said, slapping a metal pole, “all have pressure and force sensors that feed into the computers here. See?”

She turned a tablet so Lena could see the screen, where a force reading came up for that effortless little pat.

“What the hell.”

Sheepish, Supergirl said, “Yeah…”

“No wonder you’re always so careful when you touch me,” Lena breathed.

“I…” Supergirl swallowed, cleared her throat. “So, when you’re ready…” She swiped and tapped for a moment, opening a blank file for Lena’s readings, “Have at it!”

Lena nodded. She circled the pole for a moment, inspecting it, and then swung a solid left hook that deeply dented the steel.

“Woo!” Supergirl clapped, beaming.

“That was really fun,” Lena breathed. “I mean. There’s fun like cobbling together a particle accelerator from the scrap box in your garage, and then there’s fun like… well, that.”

Supergirl nodded, giddy. “Yeah, yeah, it is… so much fun! Now, right hand, please, Ms. Luthor.”

“Gladly, Supergirl,” Lena said, and threw another punch, the steel buckling under her knuckles. “How was that?”

“Fantastic! You’re - ” Supergirl looked down at the readings, then back up at Lena, and breathed, “You’re almost as strong as me.”

“Am I?” That was thrilling. She could bend, even break, steel. She could grind glass to sand in her grip. She was almost as strong as Supergirl.

“Look at the results! Look, look!” Supergirl flew over and showed her the screen. “See, this is you…”

“Uh-huh.”

“And this is… me.”

A swipe and a tap, and Supergirl’s readings were laid over hers. There wasn’t much space between them.

“Oh, my god.”

“Yeah, oh, my god, are you kidding me?” Supergirl lifted straight off the floor, zooming around the
Lena watched her dizzying, delighted flight, pressing a hand to her mouth to mask the face-splitting grin she wore. When Supergirl landed, Lena bounded over and gave her a huge hug.

“What was that for?” Supergirl said, breathless.

“Thank you. For - for helping me. For bringing me here.” Lena let go of her and smiled, a fleeting thing. “I’m... Kara said something to me. About how the truth is supposed to help. And it’s helping. So thank you.”

Supergirl nodded and pulled her into another hug. It was a bear hug, tight and warm and bone deep, lacking the usual restraint of a Super embrace, and that was perhaps the best part of it.

Supergirl, smelling of brown sugar and ozone, squeezing her as tight as she could.

“You’re welcome,” Supergirl murmured before letting her go. “Now go kick some metal.”

Lena nodded, then wheeled on an undamaged steel pillar, burying her heel in it and ripping clean through. That foot hit the floor, and she swung the other at the next post over, cutting through it like soft butter.

“Oh! Rao, that was - !” Supergirl was looping through the air again, an anti-gravity happy dance.

“I take it that was good?” Lena asked, eyes alight.

“Good? Lena, are you kidding me? That was amazing!” Supergirl swooped down and scooped Lena up, flying around the room at impossible speeds. Suddenly, she stopped short, landing on the mats and letting Lena go. “I forgot. You hate flying. I’m sorry.”

“No! No, that was... I don’t mind flying with you.”

Supergirl grinned, gleefully spinning on the ball of her foot. “That was so cool. So. Cool.”

Lena ignored her burning cheeks and asked, “So, what’s next?”

“We’re gonna see how much you can lift.”

Over to the bench they marched. Lena laid down, gripped the bar. “Tell me when to go.”

Alright. Go.”

Lena lifted the bar, felt the resistance - greater than it should have been, given the bar’s apparent density. “Electromagnets in the bar?” she asked, extending her arms further.

“Actually, it’s this weird alloy from a moon about... eighty five lightyears away from here? I think. My interstellar geography’s the tiniest bit rusty.” Supergirl slid her fingers across the screen, cranking up the mass. “See, this stuff is naturally occurring there. They use it for absolutely everything, because they can make it lighter or heavier at will. It’s in their blood - byproduct of living somewhere. Your environment becomes a part of you.”

As the bar weighed heavier and heavier in Lena’s grip, she pushed back without much effort. “What am I at?”

“Five hundred and seventy... three pounds.”
Lena let out a breath, shifted her grip, and pushed up. “How heavy can it go?”

“We can’t go heavy enough to disrupt gravity,” Supergirl mused, pursing her lips as she pondered. Then she increased the weight again, dragging the slider up, up, up. “Is that alright?”

“I can go higher.”

Another slow slide, and Supergirl’s gaze could be keenly felt as Lena pushed back against the growing weight.

Lena’s cheeks were flushed from something other than exertion - from observation. “I’m good. Make it heavier.”

“You’re at half a ton, Lena.”

“How much can you lift?”

“We stopped at one hundred tons, but I could’ve gone further.”

“Gotcha.”

“Competitive,” Supergirl teased.

“You bet your ass.”

“You’ve only had your powers for, like, two days. They’re probably going to grow. You only started exhibiting super strength last night.”

“Last night?”

“Well. It’s… four seventeen a.m. right now. So… yeah.”

“Too late to sleep. Higher, please.”

Supergirl nodded. “Three quarters of a ton.”

Now Lena was starting to feel it. Just a little, along her inner forearms and the backs of her shoulders. The faintest of burns, more from holding the position than any actual use. “Keep going.”

“One ton.”

“Come on, Supergirl, I can take more than that.”

“Oh, yeah?”

Lena shot her a look. In response, Supergirl hummed - *NSYNC again - and flicked her finger over the screen. Then there was some real effort involved, and Lena grinned. “Where are we now?”

“A couple of tons.”

“As in exactly two? Or as in ‘more than one tons, but I’m not giving you the exact number for various reasons?’”

“Those reasons being..?”

“A,” Lena puffed, “you don’t want me to see how bad I’m doing.”
Supergirl scoffed.

“Or B, you don’t want me to get cocky.”

Another scoff, more exaggerated.

“Option B, then!”

“Smug.”

“I’ve earned my smugness. I’m lifting three…” Lena watched Supergirl’s face, watched her reactions. “Two… Five tons - no? No… Eight.”

“Eight and a half,” Supergirl grumbled. “You win.”

“I’ll win when I get to fifty,” Lena decided. “For today. I’ll get stronger.”

“You gonna try and outlift me?”

“Maybe.”

“You can try.”

Lena grinned. “Now who’s smug?”

“Nine tons.”

“Come on, Supes. Give me ten.”

“Coming right up.”

Ten tons didn’t sit any heavier than eight and a half. Lena extended her arms fully and shot Supergirl a look, egging her on.

“Giving you twenty.”

Lena let out a slow, steady breath and held the position, even with the doubling weight. “You gonna double it again?”

“I’m gonna give you a minute,” Supergirl retorted, eyeing her over the tablet, “and if you’re okay, I’ll double it.”

“Ten seconds and five tons,” Lena haggled. “And I’m giving you a bargain here.”

“Fifteen seconds.”

“Deal.”

Time came up, and Supergirl gave her the promised five. Lena started feeling it, just a little, but her muscles didn’t burn half as much as her stubbornness, so she realigned her grip, let out a breath, and persisted.

“Twenty five tons on you right now, Lena. How’s it feel?”

“Feels like I should have gone to the gym more,” Lena groused. “I don’t suppose you’d be willing to double up again?”
Gleefully, Supergirl chirped, “Nope,” and floated off the ground, crossing her legs like a kindergartener on a rug. “I’ll give you five more tons, if you’re up for it.”

“Oh,” Lena gritted out, “I’m up for it.”

Supergirl piled on the weight, just watching, something in her eyes that made Lena want to push one hundred tons, plus one 5’9” Kryptonian female. Maybe up against a wall.

"Is that all you’ve got?” Lena asked, maybe a little breathless, her heart pounding only slightly in her chest.

“Forty tons?”

“Gimme.”

Another ten tons, and Lena started to strain. She tightened her jaw and closed her eyes, narrowing her focus. She could hear the bar, a weird whistle as it bloated itself, and her own heart and lungs, and Supergirl’s, too. She honed in on that thudding beat and held steady.

“Going up to fifty,” Supergirl said, and Lena nodded, listening to the tiny changes in her heartbeat when she spoke.

Her arms were probably shaking, but she didn’t notice. She listened; she breathed; she pushed back.


“Mm-hm.”

“Going to fifty five. Tell me if it’s too much.”

Tha-thump. Tha-thump. Tha-thump. Tha-thump.

“Earth to Lena?”

“I’m not from Earth,” Lena grumbled, shoulders aching. “Fifty five tons, you said?”

“Uh-huh.”

With a sigh, Lena slowly retracted her arms. “Better than I’d planned,” she noted, stretching her arms, rolling her neck. “How’d I do?”

“You’re.” Supergirl made a little noise in her throat. “Amazing.”

“How do I stack up? I’m not as strong as you, of course.”

Supergirl floated down, and Lena scooted back so there was space for them both on the weight bench. “You’ll get there.”

Lena muttered mockingly, “Mleh mleh mleh,” setting off a round of familiarly snorty giggles from Supergirl. “No, but really,” she said, once the Kryptonian had calmed down, “how did I do?”

“Really?”

Lena rolled her eyes, braced her hands on Supergirl’s knees as she leaned forward. “Really.”
“Fine. You’re not as strong as me. Or my cousin.”

“Superman.”

“Yes, Superman.” Now it was Supergirl’s turn to roll her eyes. “My, uh, my friend J’onn J’onzz? He’s, like, just behind Kal-El, who’s just behind me.”

“Am I just behind him?”

Supergirl winced.

“How far behind him am I?”

Supergirl sucked in a breath through her teeth.

“Ten…”

The breath continued.

“Twenty tons behind him?”

“Twenty two and a half.”

Lena sighed through her nose. “I’ll take it. Oh! What about that, uh, that guy from your sister planet? Am I stronger than him?”

“Let me check,” Supergirl murmured, grabbing the tablet and swiping through a few files. “Oh! You’re stronger than him by, like, a lot. See?”

Supergirl passed the tablet into Lena’s hands, and Lena flipped it over, taking in the information on the display. Mon-El’s test, it seemed, had topped out at forty two tons and some spare change. The file revealed something a little more telling, though, by virtue of having an ID photo.

“Mon-El is Mike?”

Supergirl made a face. “Ugh, yeah. Yeah, he is.”

“Does Kara know? That she’s friends with an alien, an alien with the personality of…”

“Of a sexist foghorn? Of a bag of chips that’s, like, four fifths air?”

Lena snorted. “Of a broken hair tie?”

Supergirl laughed and socked Lena on the shoulder, then froze, eyes wide.

Lena slugged her back. “I’m good, Supes. I’m not a fragile little human. I can take a punch from the Maid of Might.”

Supergirl grinned, shaking her head. “That’s the worst epithet of them all. It’s so…”

“Comic book?”

“Yeah.” Supergirl let out a sigh. “I, um, I don’t know if she knows. It’s not my place to tell her about him. I know what it’s like, keeping a secret about - about who you really are. I wouldn’t want someone else telling people my identity, even if it was someone I trusted.” She made a useless little gesture with her hands before they fell back into her lap. “I mean, you want to tell Kara yourself,
right? I can’t - take that opportunity from someone.”

Lena nodded, gave her knee a squeeze. “That’s very noble of you, Supergirl.”

Supergirl shrugged one shoulder, looked up at Lena through her lashes. “I just don’t want anyone getting hurt.”

Someone’s heart fluttered. Lena couldn’t quite tell whether or not it was hers.

“Um. Come on. We have a few more tests to run, but, uh,” and Supergirl smiled, that giddy glow on her face again, “they don’t work too well indoors.”

“Am I going to fly?” Lena asked, scrambling to her feet.

“You’re gonna give it your best shot.” Supergirl hopped up, tablet in hand, and offered her free one to Lena. “Come on. We just have to grab someone.”

Lena realized there was a little pound in Supergirl’s chest when she skirted the truth.

“Someone?”

“Okay. Maybe, like, two people.”

☆

Supergirl and Lena flew out to the middle of the desert, and for a while, they just waited. Supergirl just floated, and they started humming nineties pop songs back and forth just to see if they could remember the lyrics.

It wasn’t too long, however, before a DEO issue black Jeep rolled up. Out popped Alex, shades and tactical cargo pants in place, from the driver’s seat. From the passenger seat emerged Winn.

“You work here?”

“You’re an alien?”

Lena crossed her arms, fighting a grin and a pout at the same time. “It’s new.”

“The - oh! The noise sensitivity! Super-hearing? Oh, my god!”

“Down, boy,” Alex drawled, closing the door behind her. “So! Here’s how this is gonna go down.”

Lena straightened herself up, assumed the neat posture she always did for Lillian or anyone she wanted to impress. Intimidation was an entirely different animal.

“Winn,” Alex said, gesturing to the aforementioned Winn, “will be recording these tests. These results will go in your file, here at the DEO.”

“Is it private?”

Alex and Supergirl shared a look, conversing without a sound, and then Alex sighed. “It will be anonymous. I can’t delete DEO files without someone noticing - ”

“Not this someone!” Winn piped up. “No, sir. Ma’am. Shit.”

“But! This will not have your name, your photo, anything that could be used to identify you without
extensive knowledge of astrobiology and access to your DNA. There is one person who fits that
description, and she is standing right here, promising not to tell.”

Lena nodded. “Close enough for government.”

Alex winked. “Supergirl will be our control group. She knows what powers she has, she knows
what species have powers like hers, and you two seem physically compatible enough to provide a
valid comparison.”

_Why did she have to say physically compatible?_ Lena bemoaned. To her left, it seemed Supergirl felt
much the same.

“I, of course, will be supervising.”

“Supervising? Come on, Alex,” Supergirl wheedled, “that’s what you’re going with?”

Alex pulled a face, and Supergirl pulled one right back. “Just. Ugh. First test - Winn, you
recording?”

“Yes, ma’am!”

“Test one: land speed. You will run laps when I shoot.” Alex pulled a gun out of her boot and fired
into the air, and Lena and Supergirl were off like shots.

Lena was an avid jogger on her own time. She ran charity marathons and 5Ks whenever she could,
always under a pseudonym, and she’d kept a treadmill desk in her office in Metropolis for when she
had more paperwork than patience, but this was a whole new level.

Judging by their files, Lena’s legs were stronger than Supergirl’s, but Supergirl had more practice
running like this - like she was sprinting on an atomic level - so Lena figured they were about evenly
matched.

The track was clear, even though it wasn’t actually there - a worn, pale ring in the sand - and it
blurred into dust behind them. After the first few loops around, Lena started laughing. She couldn’t
help it. She wasn’t tired, she wasn’t thirsty, she didn’t ache. She felt acutely alive, and beside her, she
was certain Supergirl felt the same. “Race you,” she shouted, and took off.

Supergirl gasped, then gave chase, hot on her heels for an endless go-round until there was a pop and
someone whooped in the background. Then Lena skidded to a halt for a good ten yards before
scrambling to her feet, kicking up dust while Supergirl slid neatly up to her side.

“Showoff,” Lena scoffed, grinning up at her.

“You, Ms. Luthor,” Winn said, wiggling, “just broke the sound barrier.”

“I did what.”

“Broke the sound barrier,” Alex said, pushing her sunglasses up into her hair and shading her eyes
with her hand. “Man, you’re fun!”

Supergirl let out a gleeful sort of screech and grabbed Lena by the shoulders, jumping up and down
on the balls of her feet. “I’ve done that flying, Lena, flying! You just ran!”

Lena felt herself get sucked in, and she clasped her hands over her mouth as she let out a giggle.
“Oh, my god.”
“I know.”

“Oh, my god.”

“I know!”

“We all know,” Alex chuckled, shaking her head. “And as cute as your little bromance is, we’ve got some more stuff to do.”

Supergirl sucked in a huge breath, perhaps the hugest gasp in history, and squeaked, “Flying?”

Alex nodded and affected a put-upon sigh. “Flying.”

Supergirl twisted up into the air, cape flying out around her, and let out a whoop.

“Oh, alright, I’m sorry.” Lena bit her lip, trapping another laugh, and readied herself to listen.

“So, what you want to do is get a running start - not too fast, because with your speed, you might launch yourself out of the atmosphere and into empty space, and we do not want that.”

Lena nodded.

“So, running start, and when you think you’ve got enough momentum, just sort of lift.”

“That’s vague.”

“I don't know - it's like you're jumping from the inside. Jumping helps, the first few times, but you’ll get the hang of it.” Supergirl gave a sunny smile and squeezed Lena’s shoulders. "You've got this. I believe in you.”

Lena’s heart fluttered. It seemed to do a lot of that - around just two people.

“Shut up,” Winn called.

Alex whapped him on the chest and hissed, “Whenever you’re ready, Luthor!”

“Aye, aye, Agent!” Lena replied before turning back to Supergirl. “I’ve got this?”

“You’ve got this,” was her firm, upbeat reply. Then, Supergirl backed up, falling in line beside Winn and Alex, and flashed a big thumbs up.

Lena returned the gesture, then jogged to the other end of the ersatz track. She took a breath, centered herself, and took off running. Halfway across, she rolled onto the balls of her feet and thought, as hard as she’d ever thought Stop for her headaches, Lift.

It didn’t work, and she skidded to a stop on her toes before running back to start.
“It’s okay! This time, uh, when you want to fly, extend your arms up and out, past your head!”

“Okay!”

“And you can jump, too! That’s fine!”

Lena took off like a shot, sank into her feet, and jumped, fists out like she was punching through the sky, eyes squeezed shut in case she couldn’t.

The next thing she knew was the sound of a plane’s engine, roaring closer, and the rush of gravity pulling her back to Earth.

She landed so hard she formed a jagged crater, the wind punched out of her, but it didn’t hurt. It was exhilarating.

Supergirl was at her side, helping her sit upright, brushing a lock of hair out of her eyes. “You okay there?”

“I almost hit a plane,” Lena said, eyes wide. “I almost hit a plane!”

“Is that good or bad?” Alex asked. “I can’t tell.”

“I’m guessing… good?” Win hedged. “Either way, the plane overhead right now is at 23,000 feet and I am wicked jealous.” He put up a hand for a high five.

Lena grinned and gave him one, pulling back at the last minute, suddenly aware that she could crush his hand. “23,000 feet, you said?”

“Uh, yeah. Twenty three k, buddy, that is sweet.”

Supergirl helped her to her feet, one hand on her back, the other’s fingers woven into hers - warm. She was so warm.

“Dare I say,” he continued dramatically, “super sweet?”

Supergirl snorted. “It certainly was a Winn-ing move.”

Alex clapped a hand over both of their mouths and shook her head. “Nuh-uh. Not on my time. You two wanna yuk it up on Game Night, play Evil Uno with Kara’s Kennel Club cards, make puns about everything in sight? Cool by me. But right now - ” Her eyes widened. “Did you lick me?”

Supergirl nodded.

“You know I’ve touched worse.”

Another nod, perfectly pink cheeks dimpling outside the span of Alex’s hand.

“You don’t know when I last washed my hands.”

Supergirl muttered something, muffled by Alex’s palm, but Lena was pretty sure she’d heard correctly.

“Uh, ‘I can taste latex, Alex, you’re a doctor, seriously?’”

Alex sighed. “I’m not getting a break with you two hanging out, am I?”
Behind her hand, Winn murmured, “You most certainly are not.”

“Hey!” Lena said, draping an arm over his shoulder. “With the three of us hanging out.”

Winn pumped his fist, and Alex finally moved her hands away, wiping them on her cargos. “Ugh. You’re animals.”

Supergirl did a little rabbity nose twitch, then turned to Lena and asked, “Do you want to try again? That plane should be out of range by now.”

“Oh, hell, yes.”

Everyone stood back, watching Lena cross the sand and drop like she was about to start a race. Supergirl started cheering, dragging Winn into it, and with a sigh and a roll of her eyes, Alex whooped, “You got this, Luthor!”

How strange it was, to hear that name sound like a good thing - or to have it feel like one.

Lena took off, vaulted over the crater, and bounded up into the air. This time, her eyes were open. She watched the sky come to meet her and melt away in her periphery, felt the air become thin, and all the while, she couldn’t remember feeling anything this good.

Eventually, she started to drop, and she didn’t fight it. She just let herself sink, let the wind resist her skin, her weight, her warmth. She just waited, catching a whisper that bloomed into words.

…ra, you have to tell…

…yet…

…she might not be Kryp…

…know that b…

It’s nice not to feel alone in the universe.

The air thickened, and Lena twisted in the air, landing in a crouch with one fist plunged into the earth, head down, dust flying.

She looked up after a moment, and saw wide-eyed slack-jawed expressions on all three faces. Only Alex bothered trying to school hers, leaving Winn and Supergirl like puppies who just saw a ball arc past their noses.

“Well,” Winn said after a beat. “You’re one helluva jumper, kid.”

Lena stood, rising to her feet as the dust settled. “But not a flier.”

“Uh, that would be a negatory.”

“I’m - ”

Lena and Supergirl were a little taken aback that they’d both tried to speak at the same time, that they’d started the same sentence: I’m sorry.

“You’re fine,” Supergirl said once she’d recovered her faculties, walking over, meeting Lena halfway. “You’re - I’m happy you know more. Okay? I don’t care what planet you’re from. You’re my friend.”
Lena smiled, breath catching, heart pounding, and said, “You’re okay? That I’m not… that we’re not from the same planet?”

“No, Lena - Rao, no!” Supergirl’s hands were warm on her shoulders, thumbs brushing against her neck where her pulse throbbed through her skin. “I don’t need you to be anyone or anything but you.”

Lena threw her arms around Supergirl’s waist and hugged her, tight as she could manage, nose buried in her collarbone, breathing in that brown sugar-ozone scent.

“Nobody’s said that to me in… a really long time,” she finally whispered.

Supergirl just squeezed her tighter, heart hammering against her ribs.

☆

“Clean bill of health, Legs,” Alex said, passing over a USB. “We don’t know, yet, but this is all we have.”

Lena frowned, turning it over in her hands. “This is the one I gave you with the oscillator specs.”

“Don’t worry, we didn’t delete the file. We just put another one on it.”

“Encrypted!” Winn called. “Like, really, really encrypted. There’s a moving lock, a string of numbers.”

“What’s the key?”

“Uh, c’mere.”

Lena padded over to his desk, tugging on her shoes with one hand on his shoulder.

“So, um, don’t be mad, but Kara talks about you, like, a lot, and she may have mentioned your favorite book, from when you were little…?”

Lena’s face turned pink.

“Only because we were talking about it already. The book. Not you. And it was total Bro Code, Cone of Silence, the whole shebang.”

“The page.”

Lena nodded, straightened up, gave his shoulder a calculatedly gentle squeeze. “Thank you, Winn.”

“Any time, Lena.”

He patted her hand, and she was off.

“Gimme a shout sometime!” he hollered.

“Use your inside voice!” she hollered back.

“Pot, kettle,” Supergirl said, jogging up alongside her. “Hey.”

“Hey.”

Grinning, Supergirl asked, “Do you know where the civilian exit is?”
“…No.”

“Want a lift?”

Lena sniffed and stopped short. “You’re the worst. Come on, then, give me a lift.”

Supergirl nodded and swept her up in her arms, soaring out the window. As she flew, she stayed carefully above the rooftops, avoiding anyone’s line of sight. “Where do you want me to let you off?”

“My office.”

Supergirl sounded shocked when she said, “It’s the weekend.”

“You work weekends.”

“I work on an as-needed basis,” Supergirl blustered.

“That’s even worse. I just go into work when I want to.”

“And when you want to is weekends.”

“Yes.” And then - “I can hear you roll your eyes at me.”

“Mleh mleh mleh mleh-mleh mleh mleh.”

They flew straight into Lena’s office, where Supergirl set her down by her desk.

“This was probably the best Saturday I’ve had,” Lena offered, looking up at Supergirl with the tiniest of smiles. “Like, ever.”

Supergirl beamed back. “Me, too.”

Lena leaned against her desk and bit her lip. “Um. When I open the - with the results…”

“I’ll be here,” Supergirl murmured, taking her hand. “I promise.”

Another brief hug, and then Supergirl was gone.

Lena took a moment to settle in. Her office felt different now. She’d escaped death. She’d made friends. She knew something about herself. She felt more herself.

Office surveyed, Lena took off running, blazed into the tiny suite she kept hidden behind a bookshelf - a little apartment that had the most spartan of amenities but felt cozier than her actual apartment. She showered, rinsing dust and sweat out of her hair, clad in her usual business dressy garb, her dramatic blacks and jewel tones, before heading to her desk. A day’s worth of emails - over a hundred - and phone calls were waiting for her, but the first thing she did was plug in her dead phone to charge.

The screen lit up, and Lena turned it on.

For a while, she didn’t get much on her personal phone - if anything. She got texts from Lex, once upon a time, but as he slipped away, he stopped reaching out. She’d never had much by way of friends, and they disappeared faster than light once they’d gotten what they wanted or realized they’d never get it. Her father was dead. Her mother hated her. Everyone else in her life was business.

But in recent weeks, that had changed. In recent weeks, she had Kara’s texts, which vacillated
between oddly formal and saccharinely informal and always had at least two emoji. She had her random selfies - her petting dogs left outside coffee shops and bookstores, her hugging a despicably deep pile of pizza boxes, her attempts at latte art, the braid she’d just done, a cardigan she might buy, a movie ticket below wide blue eyes, a frame of a movie past her pajama-clad kneecaps. She had those random voicemails - some serious, some casual, some of her singing along with *My Fair Lady* and stopping to critique Professor Higgins’ deplorable behavior.

Lena had a constant, warm, bubbly presence in her phone, crooning that *she could have danced all night* and cuddling with the borzoi outside of the Starbucks on 5th and 14th and wearing fleece PJs printed with sleeping sheep while she watched *What’s Your Number?*

It was surprising, then, that there was nothing there. No texts from Kara. No silly selfies with whipped cream on her nose. No baby pit bulls in her lap while she smiled her sunshine smile, Alex behind the camera. No voice mail, left at six in the morning, of her sleep-thick crooning: *Bye bye bye bye!* Not a single emoji.

Lena had never typed so fast - *kara are you okay* - but before she was done, a video call came up.

“Hi, Lena!” Kara chirped, breathless. “Oh, my gosh! My phone got crushed at the gala, and I just got everything fixed at the store, but there wasn’t anything from you on it, and everything was so hectic, and I didn’t see you leave the party, and I was - I was so worried! You weren’t in your office!”

“Kara: breathe.”

Kara breathed.

“I’m fine. I’m okay. Supergirl took care of me.” Lena smiled, leaning on her fist and gazing at her screen, at her perfect best friend gulping for air. “Are you alright? I - my phone. Too. I would have called, texted, something.”

“I’m good. I’m good. I’m…” Kara beamed, glowed, cheeks dimpling. “I’m glad you’re okay.”

Lena huffed a laugh and nodded. “I’m glad, too. Do you want to go get, um…” She checked the time and her eyes widened. “Brunch?”

Kara bit her lip. “Yeah, brunch sounds really good right now.”

“I know a great place on Union.”

“With people food?”

“With people food,” Lena quiesced. “And there’s a shelter down the block that takes volunteer dog walkers…”

“Oh, my god, I’m there! I just have to shower.”

“Okay. See you at two?”

“Two! Love you, Lena, bye!”

The call ended, and Lena sank back into her chair, sank onto her elbow. “Kara loves me,” she sang, pressing her fingers to her lips. Then, a crack - and Lena’s desk crumbled under her elbow. Lena barely managed to catch everything in time, but she did it, setting it all on the floor by the window and letting out a groan.
“Ms. Luthor!” In blazed Jess, eyes wreathed in shadow, clutching a clipboard.

“You only use clipboards when you’re having a bad day. Are you alright, Jess?”

“Am I - ? I haven’t heard from you in almost two days! Are you alright?”

“I’m fine. But, um…” Sheepishly, Lena gestured down at the rubble. “I believe my desk is not.”

“I’ll order a replacement right away!”

“No, that’s alright. I, um, I’d like to test something with this one.”

Jess looked a little befuddled, but she gave a sharp nod and an, “Of course, Ms. Luthor,” before slipping out of the room.

Lena retrieved her laptop and started cataloguing materials that could stand up to the force she could now exert. In the end, she had to start designing an alloy, thinking of the mass-modulating one at the DEO all the while, and ended up almost missing her brunch date. She ran instead, so fast she couldn’t be noticed as anything other than a stiff wind, and skidded to a stop at an intersection where she straightened her blazer before marching across.

There was Kara, waiting for her, bouncing in her canvas shoes, slipping her phone into her jeans pocket, tucking a stray curl behind her ear. When Lena came up to her, she wrapped her arms around Kara as tight as she could and just squeezed until she heard a crack.

“Oh! Oh, my god, Kara, I’m so sorry, did I hurt you?”

“No! No, no, no, I just - I slept on the couch last night. I fell asleep watching that German horror movie you loaned me, all - all bent up on myself.” Kara waved a hand. “You know how it is. Actually, that felt really nice.”

Lena sighed, relieved, ran a hand down Kara’s side. “You, Kara Danvers, are a vision.”

Kara let out a string of giggles. “You’re ridiculous. Come on, sit down. I got us a table.”

“I hope you weren’t waiting too long.”

“Oh, it’s okay, it was only a few minutes and there was this nice couple with twins and a Morkie, so I was well occupied.”

They take their seats, and Lena takes extra care not to put pressure on the table as she leans on it, looking Kara over - soaking up the sun.

“You,” she says, sipping her water, “are a sight for sore eyes.”

Another giggle, trapped behind Kara’s hand. “You - you’re the - sore eyes - hah!” She took a breath, steadied herself, gulped her own water so thoroughly it was gone in two seconds - including the ice cubes. “I - you look great. Considering - I mean, not considering - I mean, you always - Um.”

Lena grinned. “Well, thank you.”

“So, um, what’ve you been up to?”

“I - well - I - Supergirl took me home from the party. To make sure I was okay. And I was just sort of holed up. I didn't see anyone, speak to anyone, do anything.” Lena cleared her throat, downed the rest of her glass in one go. “At all.”
“I - me, too. Pretty much. Without the Supergirl part! I mean. You know.”

“Yeah, no, yeah, of course.” Lena set her glass down once she heard the tiniest of microfissures form and folded her hands in her lap.

Once again, there was something she needed to tell Kara and couldn’t, and this secret was harder to hide than a BBFG or the way everything lit up when Kara walked - barged - into a room.

Brunch was weird. Brunch was weird and awkward and Kara seemed to sense that, seemed to respond to it. When they stood to leave, Lena’s hug was much more careful as she breathed Kara in - brown sugar, always and forever.

“Do you, um,” Kara started, adjusting her glasses, “do you want to come to Game Night this week? It’s gonna be Uno and pizza and me and James and Alex and Winn and, um, and Mike.”

“Yeah,” Lena said, “I’d like that.”

☆

Indeed, there was pizza. Indeed, there was Uno - American Kennel Club cards, covered in Spaniels and Retrievers, flying furiously between Winn, Alex, and Kara, who seemed to play on a higher dimension than the rest of them. Indeed, there was James, soothing and vibrant and funny in the most subtle of ways, and Alex, competitive and compassionate and knowing, and Winn, who insisted that they needed to do Team Jenga next week and use their combined skills in physics and geometry to *trounce these suckers*. And, indeed, there was Mon-El, as Mike, eyeing Kara all the while like he either had x-ray vision or like he really, really wanted it.

Lena, almost defensive, spent the night glued to Kara’s side, trying to learn the rules of Death Uno and matching her slice for slice on pizza.

“Hungry?” Mon-El asked.

Lena picked up a stray crust and bit down on it - *hard*. “Absolutely.”

“Thank you!” James crowed. “Someone who understands the crust.”

“It’s free food! Who turns down free food?”

“I don’t,” Kara protested, “but this place always burns the crusts. I don’t like burned food.”

“That’s why you leave a little actual pizza on it,” Lena explained,” so the good parts disguise the not-so-good parts.”

Kara nodded, then started slamming down cards one after the other, lightning fast, before yelping, “*Uno-Uno-out! Yes!*”

Alex groaned, falling back in her chair. “You are brutal, Kara. You’re a monster.”

“Hell, yeah, I am. Up top!”

Begrudgingly, Alex high fived her. “Next week, I’m stealing both Winn and Lena for Jenga, and you can have *them* weigh you down.”

“I take umbrage,” James said, pointing a finger at her. “Just so you know. Umbrage.”

Words written for one voice came out in another: *I must not tell lies*. Lena’s head began to pound.
Pipes gurgling, lights buzzing, traffic, five other heartbeats besides her own to block out - it was a lot, verging on too much.

Kara wrapped an arm around her shoulders and squeezed gently. “Hey. Migraine?”

Lena nodded and murmured, “I’m fine.” Still, she leaned into Kara’s side, taking advantage of the proximity to hone in on her heartbeat. “I should - I should see a neurologist or something.”

Sympathetically, Kara nodded, and pulled her a little closer. “Hey, Winn, can you go get the Advil? Uh, bathroom, medicine cabinet - top shelf, right in the middle.”

“Gotcha, K.” Winn popped up, shuffled to the bathroom with the briefest of pats on Lena’s shoulder.

“You okay?”

“I’m fine. It’s a headache, it’s going away,” Lena smiled, opened one eye. “Thanks for asking, James.”

“No problem.”

Mike frowned. “Headache?”


“Oh.”

“Do they not have headaches where - ” Lena swallowed the rest of that sentence and concentrated on Kara’s heartbeat. “Can you look in some other direction? The male gaze makes migraines worse.”

Alex snorted, then scooted her legs off the coffee table so Winn could pass through. He set down a glass of water - well, a faded Disneyland novelty cup - and the bottle of Advil before flopping back into his seat.

“C’mon,” Kara murmured, pushing her upright with one hand, dosing out little blue gel caps with the other. She folded the dose into Lena’s palm, then held out the cup.

“Drink up, me hearties, yo-ho!” Winn tried.

Lena huffed a laugh, drank the water, swallowed the pills, all the while immersing herself in the steady *tha-thump tha-thump* of Kara’s heart. Eventually, it winnowed down to just that, and the razor blades rattling around in her skull stopped. She sat up, ran a hand through her hair.

“Nice recovery time.”

“You won’t be saying that when I kill you with King Charles Spaniels, Jimmy.”

Things went more smoothly, but Lena made a concerted effort not to acknowledge Mon-El. Something about him made everything so much worse. Something about him had set this whole thing off.

By the end of the evening, a grand total of ten boxes of pizza had been demolished, alongside a fair number of beers and an equally unreasonable number of sodas. Alex had won more games of Murder Uno than anyone, with Kara and Winn still arguing gleefully over who won second place. James had cracked about as many low-key jokes at Mon-El's expense as could feasibly be cracked, and Lena had given him a look for each one. They’d reached an understanding, it seemed - whoever
linked them and however they were linked, keeping Kara safe from that douchebag was the top priority.

Besides, Lena had always liked James, and she said as much when he was walking out the door, giving him the briefest and most restrained of hugs.

“Hey, I’m likable,” he chuckled, patting her on the back. “You, uh, I knew a guy with headaches like that. I’ll ask him some stuff.”

“Thanks. Oh, and next week?” Lena grinned. “You’ll be the one in pain when Winn and Alex and I crush you at Jenga.”

James shook his head, smiling. “Winn, am I still your ride?”

“No, I’m going to sleep on top of Kara’s fridge, like a cat.” Winn threw the last can at the recycling, missed, and sighed, putting it in the bag proper. “Yes, you are still my ride. Bye, all.”

“Bye.”

“See you tomorrow, Kara.”

“Bye, James.”

Before he left, he and Lena shared another look, and then there were four - two aliens, two humans, but only one jerk.

“Lena, do you need a ride home?” Kara asked, coming to her side, peering down at her face. “Are you feeling any better?”

“Yeah, I’m - I’m fine. I’m just going to… call my driver.” Lena did not say that she intended to sprint and leap tall buildings in a single bound all the way home. She just gave Kara a good squeeze and murmured, “Thank you.”

“I - any time.”

“Come on,” Alex said, tying off the recycling bag, “Mike, I’m driving you, right?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you go wait by the car while I handle our gracious hostess’ recycling.”

Mon-El made a face and went out into the hall.

Alex pulled an equally expressive face right at his back through the closed door and shouldered the bag. “Lena, seriously, if you need a ride, you have my number.”

“Thanks, Alex.”

Lena shrugged on her jacket and held the door for her best friend’s big sister, closing it behind them both.

“I suggest you actually call a car,” Alex murmured, “instead of taking a hop, a skip, and a jump.”

Lena shrugged sheepishly. “Was it that obvious?”

“A little bit.” Alex clapped her on the back and shrugged in response. “And I mean it about calling
me. If your hearing acts up, if you’re in trouble… I’m before 911 if any new developments are involved.”

“Understood.”

“And I look forward to Jenga next week. We’re gonna crush ‘em.”

Lena laughed. “Bye, Alex.”

“Bye, Legs.”

Alex went down the back steps, whistling, and Lena tripped down the mains. Once she got outside, she took a deep breath - clean air, rain coming - and smiled.

“Nice night we’re having.”

“Mo - Mike!”

There he was, leaning against an inconspicuous black car. “Lena.”

“Alex went down the back step with the recycling. She’ll be around in a minute.”

“Where’s your car?”

“I haven’t called it yet,” Lena said, a little haughty, a little condescending. She very precisely did not look at him.

“Not going to wait inside?”

“It’s a nice night.”

“Not going to - what was it? Take a hop, a skip, and a jump?”

Lena jutted out her chin and crossed her arms, defiant. “I didn’t take you for an eavesdropper, Mike. A slimy little toad, perhaps. I should learn to expect less of people.”

“Stay away from Kara.”

“What?”

“I saw you tonight. Crawling all over her.”

“A, she’s my friend. B, she put her arm around me. C, I had a migraine, and she was helping.” Lena bristled. “What about you? What about you, staring at her all night? That awful look in your eyes?”

Mon-El took a step closer, peeled himself off Alex’s sedan. “How do you know what my eyes looked like? You haven’t so much as looked at me.”

“I don’t want to look at you.”

“That’s rude. I know eye contact is polite here. Respectful.”

Lena wheeled on him, shoved a finger in his face, and said, “I don’t respect men who don’t respect women.”

Already, the sounds were deafening. Lena whirled away, back to him, and squeezed her eyes shut, and sought out a heartbeat.
There was a familiar one, coming closer, and Lena latched onto it - *tha-thump tha-thump tha-thump tha-thump*. It worked faster this time, this exercise had been speeding up with every use, and then she recognized the person in whom that heart beat.

“Hello, Alex,” Lena called, the world ceasing to spin.

“Lena! Your driver not here yet?”

“I’m actually going to get a coffee.”

“It’s dark out.”

“I know a place.”

“Lena.”

“I’m just walking, Alex, I’ll be fine.” Lena breezed past them both, giving Alex’s elbow the faintest of reassuring touches.

She kept that promise, and walked the whole way home, just barely missing the rain. She fell asleep just before the thunder started, and didn’t wake up at all through the night.

The next day was uneventful. She kept her head down. She was almost done with the specs for a desk that was nigh on unbreakable, and she’d given the formula for a few theoretical alloys that could hold up to her requirements. She’d handled a few little things, a few bigger things. She did her job.

Jess’ sub, however, did not do his, because there, in sedate pastels and rosy makeup with hair like a suburban soccer mom, was Lillian Luthor.

“I’m sorry I missed your party,” she said.

Lena stood, squared her shoulders, wondered if she could kick through Lillian like one of those steel pillars. “What else is new?”

“I tried to see you the next day, but you weren’t here.”

“I was needed elsewhere.”

“Oh?”

“So what can I do for you, Mom?”

Lillian’s responding smile was so tight and sickly that Lena could could feel it. She’d always hated that word, especially from Lena, so when Lena was strong enough to use it, it was a worthy weapon to wield.

“Well, since you’ve asked…”

Chapter End Notes
I said I would update Thursday; I lied. I forgot to set this as an incomplete story, and then I couldn't go back to edit and add that in, so... Two Chapter Tuesday!
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

2x06: Parasite and a new hero make their debut.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lena was bent over a slab, pouring what she’d decided to call marionite onto it, tongue caught between her teeth. She watched it harden, just enough, then started shaping it with her bare hands - roughly, at first, brute force and closed fists, and then smoother strokes. The metal, as it cooled, revealed a subtle array of colors and light, like a NASA photo had fused with the unpainted chassis of a classic car.

The desk was, probably, going to look like a space ship console, but Lena didn’t care. If she had to, she’d paint it.

Once a test strip had cooled, Lena tried to break it.

It didn’t break.

Now, she was elbow deep in molten metal, satisfied as all hell, and her phone chirped - Bye bye bye bye!

With one hand, Lena pulled out her phone and answered the call. “Kara! What’s up?”

“Lena! I’m floaty!”

“Kara?”

In the background, barely fuzzy, Alex said, “Kara, who are you calling?”

“I’m calling Leeeena, because Leeeena is my absolute very best friend in the whole wide world and all the other ones and I’m very, very fuzzy and I wanna share.”

Lena grinned. “Tell Alex I say hi.”

“Alex! Alex, Leeeena says hi.”

Alex laughed. “Hi, Lena.”

“Is Kara drunk?”

“Drunk is - um - um? When you’re floating but you’re not because you’re really good at not floating?”

Lena had a flash of realization: I’m never going to be drunk again.

“Yeah, Kara, that’s drunk,” Alex sighed. “You’re lucky Ma - you’re cute.”
“Truer words,” Lena muttered. “Have you ever been drunk before, Kara?”

“How’m I gonna get drunk? That’s funny. You’re funny.” Kara started laughing, a wheezy little giggle. “I get to punch Mon-El a buncha times, though!

“I’m very proud of you.”

“Like. All the times. Every one of ’em.”

“Is that wise? Considering..?”

“He took me to happy hour.”

”Did he?”

“Uh-huh. He knows how to drink drinks.”

“Sweetheart, I promise, I will drink you under the table someday soon.”

Kara giggled - snort-giggled, and who had the right to be that cute? Ever? - before slurring, “I could do some other stuff if I got you under a table…”

“Kara!”

“Kara, tell Alex you’re sorry.”

“Alex, Leeeena says you’re sorry.”

“Yeah, okay. Thank you for trying, Lena.”

After that, it was mostly Kara mumbling nonsense very fluidly, so much so that it almost sounded like an actual language until Alex managed to wrangle her phone away from her.

“I think she’s asleep now. Hey, Lena?”

“Yeah - ooh! - yeah?”

“I have much of this whole… what shall we do with a drunken Kara thing recorded, so. Let me know.”

“Gotcha. Ooh!”

“What are you doing?”

“I am up to my armpit in a metal I made that I can’t break and it is very exciting.”

“Good for you, Legs. Don’t die.”

“Cross my heart.”

Lena finished shaping everything, then submerged each piece in absurdly cold water, hypothetically, by using her super strength and jumping high enough that she dented the ceiling. Absolutely unconfirmed.

With nothing left but to assemble the pieces, Lena did exactly that. Yes, it was near one in the morning, and yes, she had work the next day, but no way in hell was she leaving this project unfinished. She wanted her new, fancy, bespoke, alien-proof desk.
Even so, at seven, bright and early and sleepless, Lena leapt to answer a call with Kara’s ringtone. “Kara! How’s that hangover?”

“Super fine, because I, uh, I gave Supergirl the right to punch Mon-El for getting me drunk, so now he’s gonna get beat up, and I thought you might want to watch. I know you and him…”

Lena stood up from behind her new desk and vaulted over it. “I’ll be there as fast as possible.”

“I’ll text Supergirl, she can pick you up.”

“Will, um.” Lena shrugged into her coat, pausing halfway through. “Will you be there?”

“I’m still not feelin’ too hot. Hangover stuff.”

“Ooh. Feel better. I’ll come by later, I’ll bring you something. Oh! I’ll record him getting whaled on!”

Kara laughed. “That will make me feel much better. See you later.”

“See you later, Kara. Love you.”

*That was normal, right? Friends say that all the time. Super normal.*

Seconds later, Supergirl was on Lena’s balcony. “Nice desk,” she said in lieu of greeting.

“I made it,” Lena said coolly. “No big deal.”

“Is that a tungsten-steel alloy with… What meteorite did you get it from?”

“I built a theoretical metal in a lab.” Lena bounded over. “What do you think?”

“I think you made an unbreakable desk,” Supergirl said, eyes wide, “and I think it’s really, really cool.”

“I accidentally put my elbow through my other one, so I made a new one.”

“From a molecular level! Ohh - okay! We have to go right now, but later, I want you to tell me everything about this desk.”

Lena nodded and slipped into Supergirl’s arms, allowed herself to be carried away. It was weirdly comforting, being held safely above the bustling, screaming mess of the world below.

When they landed, Supergirl parked her by Winn’s desk.

“Wait, am I not going to be in the room when you thrash him?” Lena asked, more than a little disappointed.

“Hazard. I don’t want to throw him into a wall and accidentally hit you.” Kara gave her hand a squeeze.

“I’m stronger than him. We’ve proven that.”

“True, but…”

“Please?”

“No! No, besides, you and Winn will have fun watching it together. You both like picking apart
movies! Um. According to Kara.”

Lena let out an exaggerated sigh and plopped down next to Winn, calling over her shoulder, “You got this! Kick his ass!”

Winn snorted. “If anyone can, it’s her.”

Lena grinned. “God, yes.”

He reached under his desk and, after peeling some tape away, procured a box of Junior Mints. “Snack?”

“Thank you.”

The next hour was a good, solid one, full of Mon-El being thrown into walls and through doors and onto floors by an ever-graceful and ever-brutal Supergirl while Winn and Lena picked apart his mistakes.

As Supergirl literally ran up a wall just to gather the momentum to whip him into the opposite one, Lena breathed, “That is so hot,” and immediately realized someone else had said it, too. She turned and shot Winn a look.

“Platonically, I swear. Like. Objectively, that was - I’m over that - it - her.”

“Okay, buddy.” Lena grinned, nudged him with a gentle elbow. “That was, indeed, objectively hot.”

Another bit of manhandling and Mike tossing, and then the fighting stopped. They paced around each other for a moment before going still.

“Wish I could hear what they’re saying,” Lena murmured.

“Well, we can safely assume that on one side,” Winn began, gesturing towards Supergirl, “we have hope and justice and compassion and faith in people. On the other, however, we know for a fact that there is…”

“Creepy, gross - ” Lena waved her hand in Mon-El’s direction and made a face.

“You are an articulate woman.”

“And you thought I didn’t notice the Twix poking out of your bag.”

“…Do you want it?”

“Keep your candy - something’s happening.”

And indeed, something was. Alex Danvers appeared - or, rather, the top of her head did; DEO surveillance cameras made it surprisingly difficult to surveil - and then she and Supergirl disappeared.

“Elvis has left the building,” Winn growled, trying for a sneer.

Lena swatted at his arm and bit her lip. “I wonder what they’re talking about. Do you think something’s wrong with Kara?”

“With - ? Oh! Um. Probably not.”
“It’s just, I talked to her on the phone before I got here and she said she still felt pretty rough.” Lena sank back in her chair and crossed her arms. “I’m glad Supergirl wiped the floor with Mon-El. It’s what he deserves for getting impressionable people drunk.”

Winn cleared his throat, and said, “You don’t say? Well, it’s probably - definitely not that. We got a weird distress call last night.”

“Oh,” Lena gasped, eyes lighting up as she spun her chair around to face him, “weird distress call?”

“Very found-footage horror flick. ‘Oh, god, help us, help us, it’s not human!’ That kind of stuff. Supremo creep-o.”

Lena popped a Junior Mint into her mouth and chewed slowly. “Can I poke around?”

“Um.” Winn looked over at her, tentative. “No?”

Lena nodded.

“No, like, I’m not allowed to let you. You’re not DEO. It’s against protocol.”

“Well, it’s alright! You do what you have to do. I’m not risking you your job because I’m curious.” Lena slapped him on the knee - just gentle enough - and gave it a shake. “It’s alright, Winn, really. No is a word that belongs in everyone’s vocabulary, and is oft underutilized.”

Winn snorted. “Oft?”

“Oft, Winn, is another good, solid word.”

He nodded. “I gotta start using both of them more. I might win at Scrabble once in a while.”

“Oh, is it James or Kara? Because Kara gets weird with vowels, but James always forgets about pluralizing and word scores.”

“You played James?” Winn looked over at her. “Did you beat him?”

“He hung out with Superman, Superman hung out with my brother… I have sat in on more than my fair share of game nights.” Lena gave a modest shrug. “Keep an eye on your S’s and watch out for the vowels. Oh! Trick them into playing Bananagrams instead. That will probably kill them both.”

“I’ll pitch it for the one after Jenga.”

☆

Again, the day was ordinary. Lena sat behind her big, beautiful, bespoke desk and did boring paperwork, doodling furniture on PostIts. There wasn’t much to do. She texted Kara on and off: sent a picture of her desk - look what i made!!!! - and received a long string of heart-based emoji in return, got an infinitely cozy selfie of Kara in a beanie and a turtleneck to which she responded with a picture that took far too long to take.

Eventually, she got bored, and she leapt some tall buildings in some single bounds - always in the shadows, always out of sight - until she caught sight of the restaurant by Kara’s work.

Noonan’s, she recalled. Kara waitressed here for a little bit.

Lena went in, ordered lunch, looked over a few contracts, sketched a marionite couch. Across the
room, someone familiar entered - James, by the sound of the footfalls - but she didn’t look up. By all appearances, he seemed to just be picking up a lunch order, and she didn’t want to waylay him.

Of course, then she heard his phone vibrate, and then another familiar voice relaying a message that broke her heart, just a little.

*Supergirl’s hurt, you gotta get to the DEO.*

James lost his grip on his food, and Lena dashed to grab it before it hit the ground, but by then, he was already off running. Lena pulled a few bills out of her pocket - small for real purchases and big, invisibly marked, for muggers - and laid them on the counter before taking off after him.

As she ran, Lena realized she’d never actually gotten to the DEO on the ground level. At every red light, Lena bounced up and perched on a roof or a traffic light, memorizing the route, scouting about for a familiar building. Finally, she saw the big, black glass spire and leapt - lateral, not longitudinal - landing silently in the space between it and the next building before sprinting in at a normal human pace.

Actually, she took a page from Kara’s book, and barged straight past any and everyone in her way until she got to the med bay, where Supergirl sat, wreathed by Alex and Hank Henshaw, looking *tired.*

Lena had never seen her look tired before, and asked, “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine,” Supergirl said, and to prove it, she stood. Of course, she immediately wobbled, and Lena whooshed over to steady her.

Winn swept in, spinning past Lena with a weird look on his face. “When did you get in?”

“Like, two seconds ago.”

“Allright! Anyway, I figured out which alien! *Parasitus alienus,* if we’re going by the Wile E. Coyote classification system.” He chuckled, a little nervous. “It’s an alien parasite, guys, come on. It’s probably from the Angon system, most likely got stuck here during the last Ice Age.”

“So it finds a host, feeds off whatever energy the host comes into contact with, turning them into those husks we found?” Hank summarized.

“But it - it’s more than just food,” said Supergirl, intense even in her weakened state. “The second he touched me, he got more powerful. The more he absorbs, the more dangerous he is.”

James rounded the corner and stepped into the doorway, asking, “Hey, uh, are you alright?”

Kara nodded this time, gave him a little smile. “I’m okay.”

“Agent Schott, go look into the other victims Dr. Jones might be targeting,” Hank ordered. Then he turned, and in an infinitesimally warmer tone, said, “Supergirl, you go home and rest. We’re gonna need your strength for the next fight.”

“I want to help.” James’ voice was clear, insistent.

Supergirl gave him a look somehow both hard and soft. “James. We’ve got this.”

With that, Super girl stood and started for the door. Lena braced her hands on the exam table and very carefully did not break it.
“I should come with you,” Alex said, “just to make sure you’re okay.”

“No, no. I’m okay, don’t worry.”

“Supergirl?” Lena called.

“I’m fine,” she said, and then she was gone.

Alex turned towards the two interlopers, quietly stalked their way, hands on hips, and asked, scrutiny on her face, “How did you two even hear about this?”

“Oh, you know,” Winn said, scooting out of his chair and over to James, “reporters, they have their anonymous sources. Ah, y’know, I’m gonna show you out, photojournalist James Olsen.” He grabbed James by the shoulder and started walking, leaving Lena and Alex alone.

“And what do you have to say for yourself?” Alex asked.

“I eavesdropped. Not on this place! I don’t even know if I could, distance-wise or… with whatever you have in these walls. For all I know, you’ve got them lined with lead.”

“You… eavesdropped.”

*God, she is terrifying.*

“That, I did, in fact, do.”

“On…?”

Lena may or may not have inclined her head towards their retreating backs before saying, “Another fact, this one up for debate, I may or may not be about to do so again.”

Alex shrugged, closed her eyes. “I don’t - I don’t care. I have to go talk to my sister.”

Lena looked up to Hank and hoped her face said *Well?*

He tipped his head their way in a subtle nod.

“Thank you, Director,” Lena whispered, and dashed off after them. As she suspected, they were not leaving the building. They were in one of the training rooms, arguing, and she crouched behind the doors to listen.

“But we’re out of time, man,” James was saying, voice rough, “I need that suit now.”

“When it's ready, I will let you know.”

“No. *Now*, Winn.”

"Are you serious? No, *no*. I’m not taking orders from you. Dude, I’m not your assistant, I’m not the IT guy -”

“I know, I know -”

“- I’m the guy who *knows what he’s talking about!*

James’ voice dropped to a whisper: “I know.”

“In fact, I am better at this kind of stuff than anyone else you will ever meet! And until I finish
making it all fancy, it's just gonna be a glorified Halloween costume!"

*Oh. Oh, shit.*

“So when I tell you the suit is not ready, that means, if you go out there right now, you’re gonna die! You will die. And then what?” Winn sighed, like it was the last breath in him. “You’re not gonna be helping anyone.”

“Okay.”

“James…”

“Okay.”

“Okay.”

Lena stood, silent, and slipped behind a jutting built-in pillar as they walked away, jaw tight. Supergirl being a vigilante was one thing. It was almost impossible to harm her, hurt her, to kill her. And for Mon-El, awful as he was, it was the same - he was practically indestructible; he didn’t even get hangovers.

But James was different. James shot with film when he felt lonely and if he crossed his arms when he was anxious, it was so he could run his fingers along his ribs to burn off that nervous energy, and he was the biggest softie around kids without any clue as to how he should act when they were nearby. He was frangible and finite and human. He could die, doing that.

There was, though, someone who couldn’t.

☆

Lena found one Dr. Rudy Jones, arctic expeditionist and climate change combatant. Then, she found where he worked, who he worked for, who was on his side, who was in his way.

She found one Rand O’Reilly, climate change denier with deep pockets and a sense of morality so shallow it was practically convex.

Strangely enough, she found him in an old email from her mother - apparently, he’d done business with L Corp back when it was Luthor Corp. Big spender, but then, he could afford to be.

She asked Jess to call Rand’s assistant, who in turn passed Jess on to Rand, who in turn promised Lena front row seats to his rally.

It only took an hour and a half to do, and then there was nothing left but to wait. Everything was in place.

There was a plan - place voice mails in Alex and Winn’s phones with all the information she had just in case, show up at the rally, punch Dr. Jones&Co. into unconsciousness, drag him to a DEO holding cell, fill out the necessary paperwork, and bring Kara a milkshake from Noonan’s alongside footage of Mon-El being pounded to a pulp - and an easily executed one, at that. Complete with a lazy but adequate vigilante disguise - nothing distinctive, nothing memorable.

This was a one time thing.

The plan ruffled itself a little when Lena’s backups kicked in.

It was easy enough to hack into the public CCTV, even easier to get into the private servers, so Lena
did just that, and watched and listened in case anything happened.

There was a plan. A simple, precise plan, ruined by the movement of Rand O’Reilly’s car and a parasite smart enough to track him, too.

Lena wasn’t even out of her chair by the time the fight was done, by the time Supergirl hung, limp, from that bloated purple claw. There wasn’t time.

Lena threw herself, and her plan, out the window and started running, intercepting the DEO vans at the last turn. They went in on the ground floor; she jumped up to the balcony and walked straight into the med bay.

How useless she was, watching them load Supergirl and J’onn J’onzz into those lamp beds from the doorway, seeing her dearest friend’s sunken face up close. This was drained. What she’d seen earlier was nothing compared to this, to this skull.

Supergirl’s skin had been cold under Lena’s fingers.

“Something changed,” Alex started, pacing the room, “when Dr. Jones drained them both at the same time. I don’t know if it was one too many alien DNAs, but he’s mutated.”

“Okay, well, that’s something the DEO can handle,” Winn asked hesitantly, “right?

Alex looked at him, then away - at the beds.

James stepped over the threshold with Mon-El and asked, “Any updates?”

Mon-El didn't answer. Didn't make his excuses. He took one look at Supergirl, frail and battered and small, and had to go.

“Are they going to be alright?” James persisted, moving closer.

“She will be,” Alex said, “eventually. The yellow sun lamps are bringing her back very slowly. Way too slowly if this thing attacks again.”

Lena cleared her throat. “I can help with that. Engineer. I’ll find a way to increase output.”

“Thank you.”

“And J’onn?”

Alex let out a shaky breath. “He’s lost a lot of blood.”

“Yeah, hard to get a transfusion when you’re the last son of Mars,” Winn joked, morose.

That joke gave Alex something, some vestige of power, and she said, “He’s the last son, but he’s not the last. Stay here,” she ordered, marching for the door. “Monitor them. Tell me if anything changes.”

Lena nodded sharply, then turned. “James? Can you get me some tools, please? Any - anything you can find, but the smaller, the better, and fuck rubber grips, I don’t need ‘em.”

James looked over at Winn, then at Lena, then sighed and left.

Now that they were alone, Lena climbed onto a chair, peeled one of the lamps open, and looked inside. Then, without looking, she said, “Winn, I know what the two of you are doing. I know James
wants to become a - a hero.”

“What? Um. What are you - ?”

“I have super hearing, and you two were being suspicious, and one of my best friends was hurt. I eavesdropped.” Lena squared her shoulders, set her jaw. “And Hank Henshaw - J’onn J’onzz - gave me the green light.”

“I am going to be so mad about that later,” Winn promised, padding over. “What do you want?”

“I want the intel. I don’t need a suit, I don’t need a name, I don’t need - ” Lena couldn’t breathe around the lump in her throat, and one hand floated down to touch Supergirl’s cold, withered cheek. “I don’t need anything tonight. I just want to protect them. Protect her.”

“Okay.” Winn nodded. “Okay, I can do that.”

Lena’s breath hitched, and she gave him the best smile she had. “Thank you, Winn.”

James came back with the tools, handed them over, dragged Winn out the door. Lena didn’t care, could not have cared less. She was going to save Supergirl, she was going to fix these stupid lamps, and she was going to stop a big horrible space monster from killing and eating people.

The lamps came first. Within minutes of Lena sealing the hub back up, the room was like a radiator, all dry heat, and the light was bright enough that you couldn’t quite look at it dead on.

With that done, it was back to waiting.

Lena climbed back down from the chair and shed her jacket, parking herself next to Supergirl’s bed and holding her hand.

“I listen to you,” she murmured. “All the time. Your heartbeat. You’ve helped so many people, Supergirl. You’ve helped me, time and again, when there was no one else I could trust to, and you made it okay to be - like me. You gave me the chance to start figuring out who I am. You and your heart, literally and metaphorically, have made my life and me incalculably better, and coming from me, that’s a lot.

“But I can barely hear it right now, Supergirl. I can barely hear it beating, and I am terrified, because I don’t know who I’m going to be if it stops.”

Lena was good at crying silently. She was good at being silent. It had taken practice to wear loud heels and bright lipstick and do anything to be noticed, but by nature, she was quiet, and she was quiet then, sobbing without a sound into her wrist, as close to Supergirl’s heart as she could get, just to listen.

I don’t even know her name, Lena realized. She changed my entire world and I don’t even know her name.

An alarm went off on her phone, and Lena put it all away - the crying, the need, the empty ache nesting in her now. None of it mattered.

She stood up, wiping her cheeks, and bowed to kiss Supergirl’s forehead, cupping her cheek, fooling herself to think there was any more warmth in it than before.

“When I come back,” she whispered, “you better be up. You’d better be up and you’d better make a joke about my leggings being too long because I stole them from Kara and you’d better be beating
away in there like nobody’s business, Supergirl, or I swear to god, I’ll…”

Nothing felt big enough. Nothing was adequate to trade for Supergirl alive and well. Nothing could articulate that need the way it deserved.

So Lena didn’t articulate it. She left.

After a moment of the clarity of running almost as fast as sound, Lena caught the rumble of O’Reilly’s gas guzzling engine and vaulted into the air, bounding from rooftop to rooftop until she was right alongside the car.

Within seconds, Parasite landed, punching a hole in the blacktop beneath him, making the sedan stop short. It snarled, wet and harsh.

“Hey, big fella,” Lena said from inside her hood, hands up and out and open - peaceful. “Wouldn’t you rather have a cozy little chat somewhere? I could get you some tea for that throat of yours.”

“We are Parasite,” it rumbled, stretching up to its full height. It opened its mouth and revealed a sort of Matryoshka doll of mouths - all hungry, all slimy, all disgusting.

“Um. Throats.” Lena leapt up and socked it square in the jaw - the main one, the outer one.

That uppercut, before whatever transformation had taken place, had broken the jaws of one mugger and two disgusting boys in high school, but now, even with super strength, it wasn’t enough to do much more than spray some spit.

And then Parasite’s hand was around her torso, too big to break out of, batting someone else away with the knuckles that bulged around her body. Her legs were still free, and she rammed her knee into the soft part of his wrist again and again until there was a sizzle, and Parasite fell.

She scrambled out of his grip and gave one of the smaller mouths a good stomp from about forty feet in the air.

“Huh,” she mused, grinding her heel. “Crunchy.” To the person behind her, in their heavy boots, she said, “Thanks for the assist.”

“Always here to lend a helping hand,” he growled.

“Nice voice modulator, but tell your man in the van to go in with more actual notes to modulate, James.”

“It’s Guardian.”

“I know what your heartbeat sound like, Guardian. And hi, Man in the Van.”

Buzzing through the headset in the Guardian mask, Winn said, “Hi, Legs. G-Man, he’s comin’ for you, you know what to do.”

James nodded, and a shield unfurled on his forearm.

“I pitch, you hit?” Lena offered, already digging in.

“Sounds fair.”

Lena pounced, fingers biting into Parasite’s skin as she gave him a good smashing against the already-broken blacktop before flinging him James’ way.
“Home run!” Winn yelped. “Take that, Grimace!”

Grimace did, of course, recover, and quicker than was fun for anyone but it. It swung on Lena once, twice. She snapped a finger the third pass. In response, Parasite picked up a clunky old sedan and whipped it down the street.

A little girl stood there at the end of the block, hand up like she thought she could catch the car sailing towards her.

Lena took off like a shot before she even knew what was happening, the hood folding in her fingers like copy paper.

“Could you have caught that?” she asked over her shoulder.

The girl ran.

“Stay safe!” Lena hollered after her. She adjusted her grip on the four-door and started swinging on Parasite. Just. Whailing on it. If something that wasn’t Guardian moved, she hit it. She didn’t care what part of it she hit, so long as it slowed it down.

As she swung the car at Parasite’s head, she heard something.

Tha-thump. Tha-thump.

“She’s awake,” Lena breathed, and she was promptly backhanded into an embankment so hard she felt plumbing crumple under her. She clawed her way out of the rubble, sprinting towards Parasite, shouting, “She’s awake!” like a battle cry as she kicked it right in the face.

Whoosh.

“Ohhh! There she is!” Winn hollered. “That’s my girl!”

And it was. There, restored, in all her glory, was Supergirl, plowing Parasite into the pavement. Then she floated, touching down, and said, “You want to change the world, and change is good when you finally become who you were meant to be.”

Lena’s heart fluttered.

Parasite snarled.

“But you were never meant to become this. Last chance.”

Bloodied, beaten, battered, bruised, Parasite roared.

“Let me help you.”

Parasite didn’t seem to want help. He lunged for her, and she raised her hands to meet them, something buzzing and blue split between them.

It took mere moments for Parasite to turn to dust. The last thing he heard was I’m sorry.

As the air cleared, Supergirl came striding forth, dismayed but not defeated, and Lena ran to meet her.

“You’re looking better,” she managed, because she couldn’t fit the rest into a sentence.
“You’re wearing Kara’s leggings,” was Supergirl’s retort.

“I can’t exactly wear a suit to fight crime, though he seems to be doing alright.” Lena hitched a thumb James’ way, shrugged a shoulder.

Supergirl gave a little smile, knocked her shoulder into Lena’s. “Thank you,” she said, casting her gaze towards Guardian on his motorcycle. “All of you.”

“Anytime.”

Supergirl squinted. “Lead?”

“Couldn’t make it too easy for you.”

Lena looked at him, looked him in the eye through that slit. If he needed this secret kept, she would keep it, but otherwise…

“Who are you?” Supergirl asked.

Behind his mask, James winked.

Lena’d keep her mouth shut.

“A friend,” he said, and roared off.

Lena gave Supergirl’s shoulder a squeeze. “A good one, too.”

“It seems I have a couple of those.” Supergirl wrinkled her nose and looped her arm around Lena’s waist. “C’mon. We gotta debrief.”

“Can you even wear briefs under that skirt?”

Supergirl laughed, longer than the quip deserved, but Lena supposed everything is funnier when you narrowly escape death and just listened to the gleeful peals and the happy, healthy rhythm of Supergirl’s heart.

Chapter End Notes

So, no, Lena hasn't figured it out just yet, and Kara hasn't told her, although being unconscious is a pretty good excuse. And, no, Mon-El doesn't feature in this chapter. Without Kara training him, there's even less of a reason for Alex to hunt him down than in canon. So, instead: why did that little girl think she could catch a car with her bare hands? Huh? Huh??

Thank you all so much for reading and reviewing. I'll update again on Sunday.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

2x07 and 2x08.
Friends and family; mothers and daughters; desperate truth and well-intentioned lies.

Chapter Notes

A moment, long heretofore awaited, arrives.

Lena woke to a text the next morning. Kara, in an old tank top and pajama bottoms, with an inhumanly huge stack of pancakes in front of her, giving a thumbs up. The text itself read All better! but i want my mon-hell ass woopin run

Lena did a little digging and sent the footage: fresh from the DEO servers pour vous

Eighteen emoji - including the prayer hands, the impact mark (about eight times), the white guy face, the little dizzy-implying spiral, sunglasses, the Supergirl insignia (which they’d both downloaded as soon as it came out), and one heart-eyes girl, and four hearts - later, Kara sent another text. can u believe tht new HERO???? i have those leggings!!!!

Lena snorted, casting her eye over them, where they sat on top of her hamper, caked in dirt and more than a little bit shredded.

I’ll replace them, she decided. I’ll place an order while I’m waiting for coffee. I’ll go over for girls night, we’ll watch The Wizard of Oz and eat potstickers, and I’ll sneak them back into her drawer before I tell her I’m an alien who played vigilante and stole her leggings.

She’ll be cool with it.

As she ordered the largest possible cup - forty ounces, insulated, brought from home; bless BYOC policy - full to the top with espresso, Lena found the exact pair of leggings and ordered a pair. And then two more.

She bought out the entire inventory.

With that handled, she collected her coffee, left a double digit tip, and practically skipped to work.

“Good morning, Jess.”

“Ms. Luthor!” Jess scrambled out of her seat, smoothed her polka dotted dress. “Good morning!”

Lena smiled and closed the doors behind her just so she could leap to her desk. Today was such a good day.
At ten a.m., when they both usually got up to stretch their legs, Kara texted: **Girls’ Nite 2 night!**

That just made it better.

The next text, from Winn, with James’ phone number, made things worse. One three-way call later, Lena was in her office apartment, door locked, hissing, “Really?”

“If we tell Kara… She’s gonna try and stop us,” James said, calm as ever.

Winn scoffed, “And she can stop us.”

“I was…” Lena sighed, sliding down the wall, knees to her chest. “I was going to tell Kara that I’m… I mean, I don’t know what I am, but I’m not…”

“Human?” James prompted.

“Yup. And telling her I’m… what are they calling me now? I never watch the news.”

“They’re not really settled on anything,” Winn said. “I think they’re all kind of fascinated by the Guardian - woo!”

“Telling her I was that superhero on the news wearing her pants is part of that.”

“Those were her pants?”

“She’s three inches taller than me, Winn, that’s like if I didn’t notice you were wearing James’ jeans.”

“You know what?” Winn said, clicking his teeth, “I’ve never seen you in jeans.”

The grin was audible in James’ voice. “Well, I don’t know how they’d fit over my suit.”

“You mean your awesome super suit that I made for my buddy?”

“So you want everyone in the world, but your best friend, to know about something that makes you this happy?” Lena asked.

Simultaneously, Winn and James said, “Yes.”

“Ugh. Boys are so weird.” With a groan, peeling herself off the tile, Lena nodded. “Fine, fine, alright. I will… I will not tell her anything about either of you two.”

“Lena! All for one, one for all, come on, man.”

James sighed. “Winn. Um, look, Lena.”

“If I was there, then she thinks I know who Guardian is? Because all vigilantes know each other? And I’ll just spill all my secrets?”

“It sounds ludicrous when you put it like that,” said Winn, “but I’ve been friends with Kara for, what, three years? She can crack me like an egg without even trying.”

“So you’re going to knowingly keep a secret from her, knowing that she will turn your secrets into a breakfast scramble salted with tears of betrayal?”
“That sounds like a really bad plan, actually.”

“Ganging up on me? God,” James sighed, “it’s like I’m babysitting for film money again.”

Lena laughed. “See, I feel like I’m babysitting, too. Is that what it’s like? Being friends? Everyone’s just babysitting everyone else the whole time?”

“Well,” Winn groaned, “I am not babysitting anyone.”

“Theory needs further work.”

James spoke, softer, more urgently. “Lena - if you gotta tell her, tell her, but please, keep us out of it.”

“I’d never tell her,” Lena promised them. “It’s not my secret to tell. I’m lucky to be trusted with this, and I won’t let you down.”

*I’ll tell her tonight*, Lena promised herself. *It’s girls’ night! I can tell her.*

And then Kara had to cancel girls’ night, because Alex was heartbroken, and Lena got that. Heartbreak needs help.

*Lunch! I’ll tell her at lunch!*

And Kara wasn’t in - she was hunting down some hot lead.

*Brunch! I’ll tell her I’m an alien over waffles and coffee.*

Brunch was a big mess. Kara was there for two seconds before her phone rang - her mom, Eliza! - and she had to dash because there was a thing in Midvale, in the old house, and then there was a big blue Jello mold-looking thing in Ginsberg Park. Rather than eat waffles alone, Lena quick-changed into her hoodie and blazed over, only to find that Supergirl had already melted the sentient amorphous blob of collagen and was busy scooping it into a big tank.

Lena took her hood down and leaned back against a tree, overcome with the desire to have stayed at the restaurant and eaten both of their plates of waffles and then gone home to bench press her King sized bed for a couple of hours.

She was bursting out of her skin. She wanted to move and run and jump and scream and tell Kara everything, and she couldn’t. The world, it seemed, was conspiring to ensure secrets were kept, and Lena hated it.

Especially when she saw the sixth Guardian headline in a row, walking back to her apartment. Without thinking, she was jumping onto the top of a building, leaping from one rooftop to the next until she reached her own building, scuffing the paint on the landing pad as she skidded to a stop. Her blood was pumping. She needed more adrenalin, more stimuli.

Rather than go out and seek it, Lena dropped down into the building proper, sliding through the vents so no one would see her coming in from the roof, and came out in her little en suite. There, she mussed the sheets, let the towels hang uneven, ran the shower just enough to put sweat on the walls - made it look lived in. Gave herself an excuse.

Whooosh.

“Oh! Sorry, were you in the shower, or…?”
Lena closed the door and walked over to Supergirl, wrapping her arms around her and squeezing. After a moment, Supergirl squeezed back.

“You okay?”

“I’m - I’m fine.” Lena nodded stoutly. “I just - I’m feeling kind of stagnant. Alone. Secrets and lies and… I still don’t know who or what I am. The lab still hasn’t told me what… species I am yet. I feel like I haven’t seen my best friend in weeks even though I saw her half an hour ago. Is it paranoid to think she’s avoiding me?”

“I don’t think you’re paranoid,” Supergirl said. “I think you’re concerned about your friend, and I think you’re stressed that you have this burden to bear that no one can know about, and I think that for someone as curious and stubborn and caring as you, not knowing who you are or where you belong is probably one of the worst things you could ever feel.

“But you’re not alone. And I know who you are.”

“Really?”

“You are Lena. You’re a genius who can run in six inch stilettos and loves to be around flowers because they’re soft and resilient, and you’re brave enough to beat up a mutated parasite with a four door sedan from 1987 and to fly with me even though two attempts on your life have been made in flight since you moved to this city alone and to assemble a Black Body Field Generator in the middle of a battlefield, and you… You are you, Lena, and that is all anyone can ask you to be.” Supergirl smiled, cupping Lena’s face in her hands. “Anyone who says otherwise can take it up with me.”

Lena laughed, a little thick, and nodded into Supergirl’s palms. “I’ve been meaning to ask you…”

“Anything.”

“What’s your name?”

Supergirl faltered.

“It’s not - I’m not intruding, am I?”

“No, no, you’re fine.”

“It’s just… when you were…” Lena’s breath hitched. “When you’d been drained. I realized I didn’t know your name. That I might never know it.”

Supergirl opened her mouth, about to speak, when they both froze.

Clack, clack, clack, clack.

The door opened, and in came Lillian. “Lena, I - oh? Who’s this?”

“Leaving. She’s leaving.” Lena whispered, so softly she could barely hear it, I’m sorry, as she shooed Supergirl out.

“Have you thought about my offer, Lena?”

“I won’t be a part of this - this ridiculous proposal!” Lena clenched her fists at her sides, stood straight up. “You can ask me again and again, and I’ll always say no.”

“What, because of your allegiance with the Kryptonian?” Lillian scoffed. “Need I remind you what a
Kryptonian did to your brother?”

“Need I remind you that the Kryptonian who just left this room has amidst thousands of others, saved my life over and over again?” Lena jutted out her chin. “Or would that be the first time you’ve heard anything about me, or my life, in months?”

"Since you cut off co -”

“Since you cut off contact. Since the one person remaining who made us anything like a family got locked up for killing people, and you couldn’t bear to be alone with me because he wasn’t there as a brilliant buffer to keep me at arms’ length? Since the one thing you poured your heart and soul into from day one turned out to be a broken little beast, lashing out and hurting people, just like you?

“Wait! No, that’s too cruel. Lex doesn’t deserve that - he used to be kind. Now kindly leave the way you came in.” Lena pointed a finger towards the door. “Get out of this building. Get out of my building.”

“Our building.”

“My building, Mother, I own the company, and I pay the security guards who will come and throw you out of it.” Lena tapped a finger to her lips, putting on a show of pondering. “Maybe of a window? If you’re lucky, a Kryptonian might hear you scream and stop you before gravity does.”

“Mothers and daughters,” Lillian drawled, “such a complicated relationship. But you’ll need me, Lena, just as all daughters need their mothers, and I will be there, and you will thank me.”

Lillian, just like that, was gone. Lena made her way to her desk and collapsed against it, shaking like a leaf. She could hear Jess, the security guards, the lightbulbs, the vents, the squeaky floorboards in the duplex fourteen blocks away, the clack-clack-clacking of her mother's shoes.

Lena fought. She squeezed her eyes shut so tight she saw spots and screamed at herself, Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop!, did everything she could. Ultimately, though, what brought her out was a familiar ringtone in her pocket: Bye bye bye bye!

Sorry I had 2 ditch u earlier. Ill be back in time 4 happy hr if you want to spend some time with me n the Game Night Gang!!!!

Lena let out a sigh of relief. She had not, in fact, been forgotten after all, so hell or high water, come Happy Hour, Lena would be where Kara was.

The bar is kinda rlly dive-y jsyk

Lena could not find it within herself to care. She was going out, with friends, to drink and have fun and be a happy person. She was so happy, in fact, that she ran halfway across the city via rooftop to get there, hopping off the last one banking the tiny building she’d been shooting for. She was careful when she landed not to crack the blacktop, but when she looked up, she felt almost as embarrassed as if she had.

“Game Night Gang?” she offered, dusting her knuckles off as she rose to her feet.

“Coolest entrance ever.” Winn bumped his knuckles into hers, very carefully, so as not to break his. “Is anyone else actually dying for chicken wings?”

“No. No, no one is.”
James rolled his eyes and threw an arm around both their shoulders. “No telling Kara?”

“No telling Kara.”

“About you.” Lena let out a determined huff. “I keep getting waylaid by the universe, but not tonight.”

“Hey, I hear this is the best place to do it?”

“Why? Oh.”

The bar was full of aliens. Real, live, honest to goodness aliens - a woman whose head looked like the most beautiful blue-and-white conch shell, a man who was just a stock cartoon dad only fuchsia, a woman with greenish skin and white dreads, a biker couple with sleek ridges on their foreheads.

“Yeah. Remember when Kara got really drunk?”

“Wait,” James laughed, “Kara got drunk?”

“Mon-El got her drunk.”

“Hate that guy.”

“Don’t we all.”

Lena patted James on the back. “Don’t worry. I have video. We can all bask in the glory of Kara’s drunken giggles.”

“I’m gonna hit the head,” he said, detaching. “Go get your wings, Winn. Maybe if you eat first, you won’t end up passed out on my couch.”

Winn groaned. “That was one time, man!”

“Two times - three if you count when you woke up at four in the morning, still drunk, and rode the bus home.”

“I will take two if we never speak of the bus again.”

“Deal.”

With that, James split, and Winn and Lena went up to the bar. She tapped her fingers on the counter, absently, so hard that she split the wood.

“Nervous?”

“She’s my best friend, and she’s an alien, and she’s fine with aliens, so it’s going to be fine.”

“I think you owe them new oak.”

Lena looked down at the sawdust in her hand and nodded. “I am very nervous. What do I owe you for the bar and drinks for that table?”

“What drinks?”

Stumped, Lena turned to Winn.

“Beer. Uh, one-two-three-four-five, five beers for the table, wings for me, and one very nice oaken
bar top for the lady without a single splinter.”

Lena paid, tipped hard, and looked over at the table. Kara and Alex - functional and happy and largely honest. A good family model. A good relationship model.

“Winn,” she hissed, “I think I’m dying.”

“No, you’re - ooh, wings, thank you very much - no, you’re not.” Winn clapped her on the shoulder. “It’s Kara. She loves you! You have usurped me as best friend, Legs, so she’s going to be fine with it. Trust me.”

Lena nodded and walked over to the table, praying that no one could tell how freaked out she was.

“Lena! You came! Oh, I’m so glad to see you,” Kara said, hopping off her stool and wrapping Lena up in a massive hug.

“The feeling is mutual,” sighed Lena, folding into the embrace. “I bought the next round, if anyone’s thirsty.”

“The way to any gal’s heart!” Alex tipped the neck of her near-empty beer bottle towards Lena in a little toast. “Thanks for buying.”

“Thank you for having me.”

Kara pulled Lena onto the stool next to hers and beamed. “Sorry I, um, I left earlier.”

“I get it, family emergency. They happen.” Lena picked at the label on the nearest bottle. “But there’s something I’ve been meaning to talk to you about, and, um…”

“If you don’t want witnesses, me and my beer can go win a game of pool against that guy who has a fifth arm,” Alex offered.

“Wait, fifth arm?”

“Yeah, why?”

“What happened to the third and the fourth?”

“Oh! Kids. Pfft. You know how they can get.”

Lena let out a nervous laugh, then swallowed hard. “I’m gonna go grab those beers.”

“No, it’s good, I’ll get them. You two stay and…” Alex looked at Lena, encouragement in her eyes. “Talk.”

And Lena was about to, when James and Winn walked up.

“This place is… exotic,” James said as he approached.

“You know, for a place that caters to aliens,” was probably what came out of Winn’s mouth around his chicken wings, “they have some pretty good chicken wings.”

Kara leaned over the basket, then looked up at him and asked, “How do you know that’s chicken?”

Winn gulped.
“You should be more specific,” Lena whispered, leaning across Kara to deliver her message. That proved to be a mistake, because she caught a snippet of the news, which was about…

“And now, the latest in a series of armed truck robberies was thwarted when National City’s newest crime fighter took a stand.”


“Guardian? I…” James cleared his throat. “I thought he helped, uh, Supergirl with that Parasite guy the other week.”

“He did.”

“But?”

“But… I don’t know, I just don’t think the city should be putting its trust in him so quickly.”

“I don’t know. That truck robbery that he stopped was no joke.”

Lena gave him the hardest, meanest glare she could muster and mouthed *Really!*

“Apparently it was, like, three versus one,” James said with a cool shrug.

Kara laughed, warm and bright and bubbly. “I didn’t say he wasn’t impressive, I just said… I didn’t know if he was trustworthy.”

"Kara's right,” Lena said, absently attempting to steal one of Winn’s potentially-not-chicken chicken wings. “Trust has to be earned.”

Something small inside her, stubborn in its fear and loneliness, hissed, *What will it take to earn all of yours?*, but she pushed it back. Kara was too good not to have a reason.

“Yeah, yeah, side with her,” Winn groused, scooting his basket away from her. “If I die of space food poisoning, I die with honor, not sharing my food.”

Snapping out of her distracted fugue, Lena made an exaggeratedly incredulous face. “You'll give me a Junior Mint, but not a maybe-wing?”

“Candy's not food.”

Kara and Alex both swiveled and stared at the exact same time, even as Alex walked up to the bar.

“Okay, yes, candy is a food. Moving on, what exactly is your problem with the Guardian? Is it an image thing, or..?”

“Yes! The mask! Why wear a mask if you're on the up and up? I - Supergirl doesn't wear a mask.”

“The voice changer is weird,” Lena said, eyebrows arched. “You can kind of hear his real voice, if you listen. He still hasn't fixed it.”

“He's been busy! You can say this about the guy, though,” Winn said. “He photographs well. I mean, his suit.”

Alex approached the table, beers in hand, and set one down directly in front of Lena as she said, “Well, I bet he’s working with a partner.”
James and Winn froze, and the latter began to babble. “Why? Why would you say that?”

“I’m just saying, in every situation, Guardian seems to be one step ahead. That screams sidekick.”

Lena snorted and took a sip, thankful not to have reversed the order.

“Sidekick?” Winn blustered. “I say - okay - if the Guardian does have a number two, I think they would be more like equals.”

“Didn’t Superman work with a vigilante once?” Lena asked.

“Oh, yeah, he did. Tons of gadgets, lots of demons. I mean, so many vigilantes are just - nuts.”

_Oh, shit. Oh, shit._

“Kara, you’ve been here before, right?” Lena asked.

“Yeah, why?”

“Well, if the ladies’ is as terrifying as the look on James’ face leads me to believe the mens’ is, I am going to need a tour.”

_Worst segue ever. Oh, holy shit, worst. Possible. Segue. Ever._

“I just. I need to tell you something,” Lena whispered, cheeks burning. “Really, really quick.”

“I - of course, Lena, I - be right back guys.”

_Escape! Hallelujah!_ 

“Danvers.”

Kara stopped, turned to look.

“It’s been a hot minute, how are you?”

Alex stood, fidgeting. “Yeah. Good. Good, yeah.” After a beat, she started moving again.

“Everyone, Maggie; Maggie, everybody - James, Winn, Lena, and _Kara._”

Maggie, whoever, lit up. “You’re the sister! Oh, I’ve heard so much about you from Alex.”

“And I have heard all about you.”

Maggie pulled Alex aside, and Lena took the chance to do the same while trying very hard not to listen.

The bathrooms were, indeed, weird, as if a Rube Goldberg and an M. C. Escher painting had decided to partner with a plumber who was perpetually dropping interstellar acid.

“See, they try to cater to all the different sizes, shapes, and abilities - see those up top?”

Lena looked up where Kara pointed. “Uh-huh.”

“They’re for people who can fly or climb walls, if there’s a line. And then - ” Kara laughed. “You didn’t need me to explain these, did you?”

”I mean, I probably will eventually, but for right now…” Lena turned to face Kara, hands on her
shoulders to keep them square. “I’ve got something I’ve been wanting to tell you for months. And it was never the right time, or when it was, I couldn’t get to you - especially this past week - and…”

Kara reached up and laced her fingers between Lena’s - a quiet comfort. “You can tell me, Lena. It’s okay. Whatever it is, it can’t be that bad.”

“I’ve been spending some time with Supergirl,” blurted Lena. “Since the gala. Since that migraine.”

“Are you okay?”

“I’m. I’m fine. I just.” Lena groaned. “I knew everything I wanted to say and how I wanted to say it until I had the opportunity to say it.”

“It’s okay, Lena, take your time. We’ve got all night.”

“Okay, this is something I hope you won’t be mad at me for not telling you. I was afraid you’d think I was - I was joking, or messing with you, after the way things started out, but I need you to know I’m being entirely honest and totally serious when I say this, and that I’ve wanted to tell you for a long time, and I was just scared of how you’d take it, but something happened recently that puts all of this into context, and I can’t - I won’t - put this off any longer.”

“Okay.” Kara squeezed her hand, thumb rubbing soothing circles over the back. “I’m listening.”

“Kara Danvers, I’m an - ”

Knock-knock, and then, “Kara, we gotta go. I just got called in.”

Lena deflated. Kara squeezed her hand and slipped out, with Alex peeping in, only slightly apologetic as she mouthed Sorry before departing.

After a moment, Lena came out of the bathroom and sat back down at the table. “And I can’t even get drunk,” she sighed.

“I mean, you probably can. But finding the right thing to get you drunk requires much more time to test, and right now…” Winn drummed on the tabletop, bounced his feet, eyes aglow. “We gots some Guardianing to do!”

“Go - have fun. I’m gonna. Probably take the rooftops again. That’s always nice.” Lena stood up, rolled her shoulders. “Maybe I’ll tell the moon I’m an alien. She’d probably get it.”

James gave her shoulder a reassuring squeeze. “If you want, you can go grab Kara’s leggings and come beat up bad guys with us?”

“Would that be okay?”

Winn nodded. “Do you want to come beat up bad guys? With or without us? Both are cool.”

Lena sighed. “You heard how Kara felt about vigilantes. I’m - I don’t think I’m going to punch anyone or anything until she knows… you know.”

"That is adorable." Winn clapped her on the back with a reassuring, if distracted, grin. “Good luck, Legs. Don’t forget to send us Drunk Kara!”

“Drive safe, Winn. James - ”

“Yeah?”
“Be careful. As careful as you can be.”

“Alright, Pileup,” James chuckled. “See you around.”

“Is that what they’re calling her?”

“See you around!”

“You’re no help!”

☆

The next twenty four hours were strange. No word from Kara. No word from Supergirl. The Guardian was suddenly a serial killer. Good stuff, fun for the whole family.

She’d only passed a newsstand. She wasn’t looking for anything - not a pack of gum, not a Naked juice, not a plastic-packaged cinnamon roll. She’d just walked past a newsstand and seen the headline: **VIGILANTE VILLAIN?**

In the back of her head, Lena started making a timeline of all the people in her life, of who she’d met most recently and who she’d known forever, that she cared about. *Lillian’s already a monster, and now James is a murderer. The next person is Supergirl, who is missing, and then Kara, who also appears to be missing. Shit.*

She went to the DEO, vaulting in past the balcony doors, landing almost completely silent, despite her heels. Then, it was just a matter of finding Winn and Alex, which was easy enough, because they were together, and chasing them down.

“Why is James killing people?”

Both Winn, who was pressed against a wall, and Alex, who seemed to be doing the pressing, turned and looked at her.

“Guardian. Whoever. What happened?”

“Someone is - is using the angles on surveillance tapes to make it look like Guardian is a jackbooted thug. In reality, he’s a softy who drinks honey vanilla chamomile tea on the reg, and definitely not a murderer, and definitely definitely going to be pissed you thought he was.”

Lena winced. “People go dark side, sometimes. It’s not them, but you can’t get them back. It’s just chronology. One day, you snap.” There was a weird moment - weird looks. She wished she hadn’t spoken. “Um. Do you know who’s taking out Guardian’s takedowns?”

“Not yet…”

“Can I help find him?”

More weird looks.

“James is a good man. He doesn’t deserve slander like that.”

So they look.

Winn was more practiced at this than Lena - he knew where to look, what to look for. Lena’s a little faster at reading, probably a virtue of biology rather than any real skill. They’re both equally desperate to exonerate James Olsen, though for different reasons.
At some point, they both wondered why they hadn’t heard from Kara, who dislikes vigilantes, and murder even more, but it fell away when they found a suspect.

A culprit.

Winn told James, James got ready, and Lena considered giving Pileup, or Galaxy Girl, or whoever (the E!News poll was still out on that one), an encore show. They had time enough for her to get ready; she could hold him down until the cops came to arrest him; she could carefully corral everything so security cameras plainly caught Guardian in the act of serving justice and clearing his name.

Kara would understand her helping a friend - if Kara knew it was a friend.

But Kara didn’t know.

And Lena didn't want to lie to her.

“How good are the computers in your little getaway car, Man in the Van?” she asked as night fell.

“Well, they’re mine, so fantastic. Why do you ask?”

“I’m not super suiting up - ”

“It’s never super suiting up, you don’t have a suit.”

“I don’t need a suit, I’m not a hero.”

“Of course not.” He scoffed. “You just do CrossFit with bad guys as punching bags and giant tires.”

Lena rolled her eyes. “I’m not fighting with Guardian tonight, but I do want justice. I want to give him proof.” She looked over at James, helmet in hand, and said, “I want to give Kara proof.”

“That not every vigilante is… batty?” said James.

“Exactly.”

Karnowsky appeared, as expected, where expected - a warehouse near the subway - with a hostage. James was there, shield up, valiant, noble - heroic. As Winn gave directions, Lena followed the fight with security cameras, capturing every just moment to a file on USB drive.

Except the police arrival. They didn’t need, she thought, to be associated with street justice, to be seen as soft.

After that, she went straight home.

Well, she intended to.

They all intended to. James loaded his bike into the van and Winn drove while Lena carefully stripped the sound to conceal that telling soliloquy before saving the footage. About two blocks from James’ place, they all got texts from Kara, calling them to hers for food.

They went. Lena hopped out of the van half a mile away and ran rooftops to get there, slipping through a window on the floor below Kara’s so they’d arrive separately, deceptively, and knocked.

“Lena, hey!”
Lena’s heart leapt. She wanted, so deeply, to tell her everything, but instead, she only said, “You’ll want to watch this,” and pressed the drive into Kara’s hand. Over Kara’s shoulder, she saw the back of Mon-El’s head and swallowed hard, head swimming. “I’d love to stay, but I - I have to get home.”

“Of - of course,” Kara said, briefly inspecting the drive before wrapping Lena in a hug. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah, I’m good, I’m fine, I just… I’ll call you in the morning.” Lena pulled back, looked at Kara. She looked good, rosy in her little red cardigan, and Lena decided that tonight was not the night to tell her.

Something hung in the air, and it was too cumbersome, whatever it was, to add another burden.

“Okay.” Kara’s forehead crinkled. “Um. Have a good night.”

“You, too.”

Lena gave her bicep a squeeze and went home.

☆

She didn’t tell Kara the next day, or the next. She kept not telling her, and every omission, every missed opportunity, was another scraped-away shred of her, dug out of an ever-deepening pit in her stomach.

When Kara invited her over for Thanksgiving, Lena was too deep in her wallowing and too deeply enamored to say no. So she said yes, an exuberant yes, and gave Kara the kind of hug Kara deserved - deep and warm and tight, chin hooked over her shoulder, like she was all that mattered. Because she really, really was.

Lena found herself acting like this was a Meeting The Parents. She found herself in what she’d worn to meet the Spheers - a structured violet dress (avec pockets; bless) with a delicate platinum pendant - under a red-lined black wool cape, hair in soft curls, bearing flowers.

Anthurium, for the hospitality she hoped for; pink carnations, for love of mothers, for love of women; gladioli, for faithfulness and honor; Queen Anne’s lace, for sanctuary.

At the door, she gave Kara a smaller bouquet in a pot she’d hand-pulled from marionite - peonies for shame, carnations for apology, violets for loving thoughts. She was going to tell her.

“Wow!” Kara’s big blue eyes widened, and she clasped her hand together against her sternum.

“Golly, Lena, these are beautiful.” She took the vase and said, “This is beautiful - what’s it made of?”

“I was toying around with an alloy. It’s totally unbreakable, in case it gets knocked over.” Lena fell into Kara and gave her a hug, sinking into her like she could fill up the longing in her chest that had built up and compacted under its own weight. “It’s so good to see you.”

“You, too, Lena,” murmured Kara into her hair. “You look fantastic, by the way.”

Lena blushed, eyes fluttering shut as she soaked up the sound of Kara’s pulse for a moment. “Thank you.”

“Come on in!”
Kara ushered her through the threshold with a hand on the small of her back. “Mom, this is Lena; Lena, this is…”

“Dr. Eliza Danvers! Oh, my god!” Lena’s jaw dropped. “I read your treatise on accelerating cell regeneration like the Bible when I was working on my biochemical engineering PhD. You were instrumental in my attempts at micro medical robots - unsuccessful, but, oh, my god, I’m gushing, it’s just… You’re a bit of an idol.”

Lena, flustered, presented the larger bouquet and snapped her hands back to her sides, where she fiddled with her pockets.

“Thank you!” Eliza touched her chest, beaming, and accepted them. “And thank you for the flowers, these are lovely. Now, tell me about these microbots while I go put these in water.”

“Oh - okay!”

Lena followed Eliza further into the kitchen and babbled bashfully about her ‘bots. She may or may not have basked in the affection and attention, gobbling up tips and appreciative expressions like she was starving for them.

And she sort of was.

“The only problem was, since they moved in an apioid manner, they needed a guiding sentience, but making a drone artificially intelligent proved impossible at that size.”

Eliza nodded. “And a bigger, passive droid would be inefficient and potentially damning.”

The door opened, Winn and James behind it. Kara hugged and greeted; Eliza hugged and greeted; Lena greeted and, uncertain about her hug status, succumbed to two surprising hugs before they all sat on Kara’s couches.

“We’re gonna tell her,” James whispered.

Lena’s eyes widened. “I was going to tell her!”

“You haven’t told her?”

“There hasn’t been an opportunity!”

“I don’t think both bombs can fit in the same airspace,” Winn said hesitantly.

“Well, I’ve actually wanted to tell her,” Lena hissed, jabbing herself in the sternum for emphasis, leaning forward at an acute angle. “So take a backseat, okay? I even brought the right flowers for telling her. I put my hands in molten metal for this.”

“What?”

“I’m indestructible, it’s not a problem, but the point is…” Lena took a breath. “The point is, I need to tell her. I feel like I’m dying from keeping it in.”

Winn looked between her and James, who looked between her and Winn while she looked at the two of them, and said, “Rock, paper, scissors,” sticking out his fist.

James groaned softly. Lena rolled her eyes.

They both stuck their fists out, and silently, cast.
All scissors.

Again - all paper.

A third time - all rock.

“Screw this,” James sighed. “We’ll both tell her.”

Win scoffed. “Both?”

“Both - me and Lena.”

“If anyone tells her, it should be me. I’ll just, like, casually mention the suit - ‘oh, it’s so awesome, it’s like someone at the DEO made it,’ and then - ”

“Okay,” James laughed. “It’s a badass suit, but I’m the one in the badass suit, so I’m telling her.”

Alex, beer in hand, swung down onto the sofa beside Lena, and asked, “Tell who what?”

“Alex, um, okay, so we thought about what you said…”

“Mm-hm.”

“About Kara.”

“Right,” Alex said, “about not keeping secrets from her.”

“We talked about it.” James hedged, “and, um, I’m gonna be the one that tells her I’m the Guardian.”

“No,” Alex barked. “No, no, no, you’re not.”

“Uh, yeah.”

“No. Because I have something to say, something very important, and I’m not going to have you two hijacking the night with your - vigilante hijinks.”

Lena whispered, “Can I tell her about - ?” The look on Alex’s face was answer enough. “Got it. I can wait.”

“Can you - I couldn’t sleep a wink last night!” Winn gestured emphatically at his face, like the lack of beauty rest had turned him into an old crone.

“Winn, again: I put my hands in molten metal. If I can’t tell, you can’t tell.”

“No.” Alex shook her head. “No, I can’t wait.”

Lena ceded, started fiddling with the hem of her cape, almost ripping it when Kara cleared her throat and said, “Can’t wait for what?”

After a split second of atmospheric oh, shit, Winn hesitantly mumbled, “Eliza’s glazed carrots? Oh… yeah.”

Kara leaned on the back of the couch and grinned. “Family tradition! Ooh! I’ll go get it.”

She went to address the knock at the door. Alex drank. James gave Winn a look. Lena looked Kara’s way and immediately regretted it as she laid eyes on Mon-El and suddenly heard the screaming baby in an apartment ten blocks south, the dog peeing on a fire hydrant down the street, cooking turkeys,
people’s thankfulnesses, and every goddamn thing else - too, too, too, too, too loud.

“Jolly Thanksgiving!”

“Thanks, thank you, and it’s ‘Happy Thanksgiving.’”

Lena looked away, closed her eyes tight and focused. Tha-thump. Tha-thump. It took only a few seconds, only a few beats, and then she was in the kitchen with Eliza, ferrying sides to the table - being useful. She could be useful. She was good at being useful. Being useful didn’t involve looking at or talking to anyone or anything but Eliza and her casual thanks and her glistening carrots.

Eventually, of course, food was ready to eat, and they all seated themselves around Kara’s dining room table, a mien of tension drifting above them all like smog. Determination was set in everyone’s jaws, locked tight until they could drop open and spill their secrets, make their confessions.

Kara stood, wineglass in hand, and spoke. “So, it is a Danvers family tradition that, before the meal, we go around and say what we’re thankful for.”

That was a first. Luthor Thanksgivings were solo affairs had at desks, or vastly separated by an overlong dining room table, with few words, if any, spoken. When Lionel had been alive, it was much the same, though Lena would sit at the foot of his desk with him, and think thanks to herself. She couldn’t even remember Thanksgivings with her mother.

Even with the tension, even with Alex and James standing at the same time and practically dueling for the right to speak with viciously cleared throats, it was nice.

Finally, James seemed either to win or to outpace Alex, and said, “Kara. I, for one, would like to say how thankful I am to have such an understanding friend.”

“Oh,” Winn enthused, “he’s right.”

Mon-El widened his eyes. “You are so understanding.”

Lena, staring at her plate, kicked someone in the shin - only human hard. She would tell Kara - after dinner, perhaps, or tomorrow, over leftover lunch. Alex could have today.

Spurred on by the support, James continued, “You are.”

“No,” Alex said sharply, “she’s not.”

“Yes. She is.”

Alex practically snarled, “No. She’s. Not.”

A silence as tense as they all felt was broken by Winn clicking his tongue and, then, Mon-El opening his mouth.

“Yeah. I just wanna…” He let out a breath. “I just wanna say something. I’m also thankful for you, Kara, because not only are you understanding, but you’re also gracious.” He chuckled, and then: “Out of everybody who could have found me in that pod, I’m the luckiest guy in the world that it was you.”

Lena shot him a cutting look and immediately regretted it, six heartbeats pounding in her skull, Alex’s chair scraping back like nails on a chalkboard painted on her eardrums.

“I’m just going to jump right in and say there are so many things that I’m thankful for,” she said, a
little breathless, like she was racing to get the words out. “And, honestly, I don’t think I’ve ever felt more like myself than right now, and, so, there’s a reason for that.”

The violets in the marionite vase suddenly leapt out at Lena.

*Oh.*

*OH.*

“And that reason… Well, the reason is - ”

Before Alex could finish her sentence and come out, a swirling blue rift tore open right above the turkey.

Mon-El asked if that was another Thanksgiving tradition, but Lena, transfixed, had only one question: what world was peeking into theirs? She bolted up out of her chair to lean in for a better look inside it and lifted a hand to touch it, listening intently for a sound other than an all-encompassing *whoosh.*

And then it was gone, and she was reaching into empty space.

“Were you trying to touch it?”

Lena’s gaze flitted around the table and she retracted her hand, swallowing hard. “I… Yes.”

She could feel the incredulity in their eyes.

“*Why the hell* were you trying to *touch it?*”

“Science.” Her cheeks burned. “I’ve never gotten to see an actual inter-dimensional rift, only theoretical diagrams. The possible applications are fantastic.”

Needless to say, Lena did not tell Kara that she was an alien on Thanksgiving. The meal itself ended sort of abruptly after the rift appeared, everyone dispersing to the four corners of the earth. Lena went to her lab and started drawing up the specs of it that she could remember - the shape, the size, the color, the placement, that supersonic *whoosh.* So absorbed in inter-dimensional travel was she that she almost missed Kara visiting the next day. If not for a prudent text from Jess, she would have.

Thankfully, she received that text, and ran upstairs to meet Kara so fast that she actually managed to hold the door for her.

“Lena!”

“Kara! I was just in the elevator. Yep.”

Kara looked her over and grinned. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you like this.”

Lena took inventory of herself and cringed. Hair sloppily pulled out of her face, in scrappy disposable clothes for welding and metalwork, having just run from a basement lab to a penthouse office in less than one second - she was a bit of a mess.

“It suits you,” Kara said warmly, entering her office.

Dumbly, Lena followed. “So - not that I mind the visit - but what are you doing here?”

“I just wanted to see how you were. You know, after trying to crawl into another dimension over
dinner.”

The joke was funny, but it just made Lena cringe. “That was foolish of me. I probably looked like an idiot. I’m - ”

“No, no, don’t apologize!” Kara insisted, waving her hands at Lena as she sank into the couch. “I was actually coming to apologize to you.”

Lena blinked. “Why?”

“Well… I know this was kind of a big deal for you,” Kara started, hesitantly perching beside her. “I mean, you’ve read my mom’s works religiously, apparently, and you - you’re family, Lena. You’re my family, and it was your first Thanksgiving with us, and your first Thanksgiving without your brother, and your family wasn’t excellent to spend time with in the first place because of your mom…” She winced.

“I - ” Lena crossed her arms, stared down at the overlap. “Yeah. It meant a lot to be invited. To be… important enough to come.”

“I’m really happy you were with us,” Kara murmured, reaching out and touching her arm. “Even though dinner got cut short, even though Mon-El was there and he makes you uncomfortable.”

“He always gives me a headache,” sighed Lena. Her eyes were glued to Kara’s hand. “But I was happy to be there. This year would have been me, at my desk - ”

“You really cool desk that you made from the molecules up,” Kara said, encouraging, giving her elbow a gentle squeeze.

“With maybe a call from my mother. Making me feel guilty.” Lena scoffed. “Asking me awful, impossible favors.”

After a beat, Kara asked, “What’s she asking you to do?”

Lena shook her head. “I - it’s stuff about the company. About the company’s resources. She doesn’t care about L Corp.”

“What about back when it was Luthor Corp? How did she feel when you changed the company’s direction?”

Lena leaned into the cushion and shook her head. “You mean when I changed it from its ‘murder and world domination’ direction?” A bitter laugh escaped her, and she brought her knees up onto the couch. “Sure, yes.”

Placing a tender hand on her knee, Kara said, “It’s just… you said to me once, you wanted L Corp to be ‘a force for good.’ She has to be proud of that.”

Lena looked up at Kara and said, “Yeah, I would hope so.” With a sigh, she looked back down at her hands. “But she and I have very different ideas about goodness.”

“Lena, I’m - ”

“I just realized, I left a generator running downstairs,” Lena blurted, bolting to her feet. “I have to go make sure I don’t burn the place down. It was really good to see you, Kara.”

“You, too, Lena.” As Kara stood, her eyes widened. “Oh! I almost forgot: my Mom packed you
leftovers.” She produced a neat stack of Tupperwares from her bag, presenting them with a smile.

Lena took them, clutching them in her fingers like Faberge egg. “Thank you, Kara. And thank your mother for me, will you?”

“Of course.” Kara smiled and pulled Lena in for a hug. “Have fun with your generator.”

“I will.”

And she would. But first, she had to call her own mother. If Eliza could take her in, if Kara could bring her in, she could tolerate that woman for long enough to disappoint her one last time and do some good, too.

Back in the lab, she turned the generator on and dialed a number she was ashamed to have kept, watching the faintest of colorless flickers appear and disappear.

Progress.

When the other end picked up, Lena couldn’t breathe, couldn’t believe she was going through with this.

“Hello, Mom,” she managed in a cold voice. “There’s something we need to discuss.”

Lillian chuckled. “Didn’t I tell you, Lena? Daughters always come to their mothers. You will always need me.”

“This isn’t what I want to talk about.” Lena took a silent, steadying breath. “Come to my office.”

It didn’t take long for Lillian to do just that.

“Well, isn’t this a depressing sight,” she sneered.

“I’m used to spending holiday weekends alone at my desk,” was Lena’s blunt retort, a territorial gleam in her eyes as she touched the rim of a plate of Eliza’s home cooking.

“Overworking does run in the family.” Lillian approached Lena’s desk, eyeing it.

“Now I know you’re in the holiday spirit. Usually that kind of thought is followed by a backstabbing jibe about how I’m not really a Luthor.” She allowed herself the indulgence of listening to everything inside Lillian - her lungs, her heart, her cerebrospinal fluid, the nitrogen in her joints waiting to form bubbles before saying, “You never let me forget that I’m adopted. When it comes to your children, Lex was always your favorite.”

“And you were always your father’s,” Lillian said with an air of affected nonchalance.

“You sound almost jealous.”

Lillian shook her head, a condescension all too familiar. “You shouldn’t take it all so personally. No parent truly loves their children equally. And though, maybe, I loved Lex more, I do love you, Lena.”

Would she say that, Lena wondered, if she knew what I was?

And then, It’s been almost three months and I still don’t know what I am.

“In my own way.”
“Well… Now that we’ve got the pleasantries out of the way, let me ask: what the hell are you up to?”

“We’ve hardly spoken since Lex’s trial. I thought maybe you called me here to make amends.” Lillian shot a look at the plate on Lena’s desk. “It’s Thanksgiving, after all.” Then, with an equally cutting look at Lena: “But I see I was mistaken.”

“I want to talk about your little project,” Lena said to Lillian’s back. “I want to know before someone sniffing about might. Someone smart. Someone who already knows something about you. What is it?”

“I couldn’t possibly imagine,” Lillian blustered, turning on her heel.

“See, I know you’re lying.”

“And how would you know that?”

Lena tried for cold. She really did.

“Because you told me you love me.” Then, finally, like ice breath, the frost came. “But we both know that’s not true.”

Lillian’s jaw tensed. She knew she’d been caught.

“So tell me what you’re doing. Be honest, for once.”

☆

To irradiate a proprietary molecule, one engineered by Lena Luthor herself to be particularly stable, to act as a stabilizing agent for an esoteric alien virus conglomerate when aerosolized into the atmosphere would not be physically difficult.

Still, she did not work on it.

She was put off, really, by a call from Kara.

“Hey,” she said, talking fast. “Supergirl told me to come to the office? Whatever that is. Something about… Camus? Cadmium?”

*Cadmus.*

“Thank you for calling, Kara,” Lena said. “I’ll be sure to find her.”

That was her first direct lie to Kara Danvers.

She supposed this lie balanced out, and she got to work on suspending marionite in an aerosolized gel matrix, perfectly formulated to house an inert bacteria. Lillian wouldn’t be able to tell that she’d switched metals, but she would know if the bacterial housing was inadequate.

Isotope 454 would never see the light of day.

She was content. She’d done good work.

And then Supergirl’s heart was pounding above her.

And then Supergirl was being thrown through the air by a cyborg doppelgänger of her boss, crashing
through steel-webbed concrete, crashing to the marble lobby floors, and Lena’s heart stopped. She froze like a deer in headlights.

Supergirl was in front of her, saving her even though she needed no saving, ordering, “Get out of here!”

Gunfire deafened her, filled her head. So Lena got out of sight, but she couldn’t bring herself to leave. She had to be strong and help her friend and fight, if she was needed. She had to at least be there. She had to at least try.

Hank Henshaw snarled, “All this time trying to save the world… Who’s gonna come and save you? No one’s coming to your rescue.”

And Lena was running before she knew she had even taken a step, ramming her elbow into his neck, too fast to be seen. If Supergirl didn’t see her step out, she hadn’t done a thing wrong.

And then another rift, another portal, blossomed into being above them, drawing Henshaw’s attention - drawing everyone’s attention.

Henshaw fired on a cop, things went to shit, and he was gone.

That was when Lena left, hid in her office, but she wasn’t alone for long. Supergirl flew in.

“I want to thank you,” Lena started, too fast. “You saved countless employee’s lives, and you - you put yourself in harm’s way protecting me when… Well.”

“Now I need your help,” Supergirl said, subdued.

“Anything.”

“I need help finding Lillian Luthor.”

Lena could hear her own heart pounding and willed it to slow, found it compliant. “What’s she done now?”

“Your mother is behind Cadmus.”

It wasn’t a shock, but it wasn’t exactly common knowledge either. Lena had suspected. She had feared. She hadn’t known, not for sure.

“She's their leader.”

“How did you know?”

“She… kidnapped me. And now she possesses a virus that she could wipe out the entire alien population of National City with. I need you to help me find her, so that she doesn’t hurt any more innocent people.” Supergirl let out a breath. “So that she can’t hurt you.”

Lena nodded on a sigh and wondered how no one died keeping secrets when it hurt so badly. The sting snapped her restraint, and she blurted, “I - I have a plan. I can handle this.” Placating, she stepped into Supergirl’s space and gripped her shoulders before quickly pulling her hands away.

“Okay. How can I help?”

“This is a one-woman show,” Lena murmured. “My plan only works without interference, without other operatives.” When Supergirl hesitated to respond, Lena grabbed her hand on impulse, thumbs
sliding over the ridges of her knuckles, and in an even softer voice asked, “Do you trust me?”

“Of course I trust you, Lena.” Supergirl squeezed her hand. “I’m a pretty good judge of character. You’re so good, and you’re so smart - I believe in you, and if you think this is the way, then I am behind you one hundred percent.”

“Supergirl…”

She wrapped her arms around Lena in a good, deep hug. “Be your own hero.”

“I will be,” Lena managed, eyes burning behind those tightly-clamped lids. Her fingers hovered over Supergirl’s waist and the nape of her neck, but she didn’t dare let them land. “You can leave the same way you came in. And please, no matter what, play along.”

Supergirl did exactly that, and Lena sank back onto her desk. She wondered if her mother knew about her biology, knew just how not-Luthor she was, if she was trying to coerce her into taking her own life.

So, naturally, she called her mother back.

“Twice in one day. It’s almost like we have a real mother-daughter relationship.”

“I’m ready for the Medusa virus. You didn’t need to send your goon here to steal Isotope 454 when I’d already agreed to assist.” Lena turned away from her view of the city to face her. “You could have told me you’re the head of Cadmus.”

“Is this the part where you lecture me,” asked the monolith, “like you’d lecture Lex?”

“No. You asked me for my help, and I’ve given it to you.” Lena laid a hand on a metal briefcase sitting on her desk. A clever, beautiful dupe.

“It’s that easy?”

“And you didn’t even have to believe in me to get it.”

“I didn’t think you believed in the cause,” Lillian breathed, coming up to the case as it opened, inspecting the glowing contents.

“Then maybe it’s time you got to know your daughter a little better.”

☆

They rode out to the port. Lena, remotely, changed the public and private records of Isotope 454 to reflect the radioactive signature of marionite. Winn would be watching; she had to fool even him.

They stopped about forty feet back so Lena, the more mechanical of the two, could install her contaminated yet impotent component. When they got out of the car and walked over to the inert virus, contained in a box within a box, she said, “Some mothers wear lockets with pictures of their children.”

Lillian had, once - Lex as a baby on one side; Lex graduating university on the other; no room for the charity child.

“You wear the keys to a bazooka.”

“It’s a rocket launcher. And…” Lillian made to bestow upon her the key. “It’s yours. Take it. Prove...
you’re with me. Unleash Medusa and end Earth’s alien menace once and for all.”

Even knowing she’d already stopped it, even knowing Lillian could never beat her, the prospect ached like an old scar. One of her dearest friends would have died. She would have died. So many people would have died.

Lena took the key. She hid the shaking of her hands well as she unlocked the box, but the farce became too heavy a weight when she heard that telltale whoosh.

“Don’t do it, Lena,” Supergirl warned.


Supergirl looked like her heart had broken.

Lena thanked whatever guiding force had brought them together that it was only a farce; she didn’t think she could live with herself if the hurt in her eyes was real.

“You two are finished,” said the Hank she knew - J’onn J’onzz.

“You’re wrong about that.” Lillian smirked, and, as if on cue, Henshaw leapt from the shadows and slammed into him.

Lena watched as they fought, watched as they beat each other, watched as she could have thrown herself into the ring and helped.

Instead, she ran when her mother directed her to. Instead, she stuck to the plan. Instead, she listened to J’onn tear into a new skin and call himself a monster. Instead, she watched her mother trigger the rocket.

Instead, she watched her plan come to fruition with an orange glow, glittering tangerine snowflakes floating down, and heard her mother’s disappointment and confusion bloom from the inside out.

“They should be dead,” she murmured. “All aliens should be dead.” She turned to Lena and spat, “You. You switched out the isotope. You made the virus inert.”

“I did,” she said, cocking her head towards oncoming sirens. “And I called the police.”

Lillian turned towards the sound a moment later, watched a faint flickering glow and heard an equally distant klaxon draw near.

“We won’t die, mother,” she said, to frightened to speak up, aching with the need to say it. Then, louder: “No aliens will die by a Luthor’s hand ever again.”

She watched her mother be carted away with a blossoming pride behind her sternum, in the hook of her collarbone. She’d done it.

She fled - first, behind a storage freight, then along rooftops. She ran and ran and ran. She hid in her office and touched her desk and hoped her real mother could hear her thanks.

“Your plan worked.”

Lena turned. “Supergirl.”

“You turned your mother in. You used your metal to save… everyone. Every alien.” Supergirl stepped off the balcony and into Lena’s space. “You told her who you were.”
“She didn’t hear me. It doesn’t count.” Lena let out a breath. “I still haven’t told Kara.”

“You castigate yourself for it,” Supergirl said, “but I get the feeling you needed to. Needed to do it that way.”

Reluctantly, Lena nodded. “I couldn’t let her… She was going to hurt you, both of you. I had to stop her. I had to stop her.”

“She was your mother.”

“And my Mom helped me stop her,” Lena said, running a finger along her desk’s curved edge.

“Marionite?”

“Marionite.”

Supergirl hugged her. “Family is the hardest foe to face, Lena, and you didn’t just face her, you defeated her.” Into her hair, she murmured, “I’m proud of you. Now, go. Go tell Kara. She’s waiting for you.”

Kara was waiting for her. Kara was damp-haired and flushed and in her pajamas and she invited Lena in. Lena didn’t say hello. She didn’t stop for a hug, or launch into her well-prepared coming out speech.

She blurted, “I’m an alien.”

Kara said, “Okay.”

That was it.

Lena borrowed pajamas and curled up on the couch next to her and told her the whole story - the headaches and the hearing and the strength and the one-off superheroism and her mother being Cadmus and stopping an atmospheric biological weapon that would have killed all the aliens in National City and lying to Supergirl and lying to her and how much she hated it and how many times she tried to tell her and failed.

Kara hugged her, so tight, and said, “I’m proud of you. Thank you for telling me.”

They watched the rest of Kara’s movie, but Lena didn’t absorb the soundtrack or the dialogue. She saw the flickering figures and heard only the most comforting sound in the universe: tha-thump, tha-thump.

About halfway through the third act, Lena realized where she’d heard that heartbeat before.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Lena stretches her legs and spends time with a friend. Set between 2x08 Medusa and 2x09 Supergirl Lives.

Chapter Notes

I know a couple of you wanted Lena to cross over with Kara, but here’s the thing: This was written up to chapter 10 before I started posting, so up to that is set in stone, and I haven’t watched The Flash. I know nothing. I didn’t want to make you guys wait for a rewrite, and to be honest, I didn’t want to have to rewrite the whole story. I’m in my first semester at college and my current writing/posting schedule is just based on my class-free days, but those days also have homework and extracurriculars, so I’m kind of busy. Please don’t be angry or disappointed, and know that I’m going to write that possibility as a sort of spin off. An AU of an AU, if you will. It should be coming soonish.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The next day, the 27th, Kara went to make pancakes and found her pantry stores pathetically depleted. Lena borrowed a big purple hoodie and a replacement of the pair of leggings and held the door for her while she shrugged into her trench coat, all the while convincing her to go to the farmers’ market instead of the grocery store.

“Will they have boxed mac’n’cheese?”

“They do not, because they don’t make money off of poisoning you.”

“You can handle some Kraft in your life, Lena,” Kara ribbed, slinging an arm around her shoulders. “It’s probably a good idea.”

Lena’s nose wrinkled. “I’ll just consume actual oceans of green juice, thanks.”

“I’ll sway you one of these days.” The threat carried weight, but no malice, and Kara’s eyes twinkled. “Someday soon, you will reach for a sticky bun first thing in the morning of your own accord, and I will throw a parade.”

“Oh, yeah? Who’s the grand marshal gonna be?”

“Alex, of course. She’s got very dextrous hands.”

“I’d have picked Supergirl,” Lena laughed, nudging Kara gently. It’s okay to tell me. It’s okay to tell me. “She’d make one hell of a figurehead, and she’d probably take as much glee in my dessert downfall as you.”
Eyes wide, Kara stammered. “Hey!” she finally managed, cheeks incandescent. “They’re totally a breakfast food!”

They ended up swinging by both farmers’ market and supermarket, as well as Noonan’s - it was criminal, Kara had declared, that Lena had never experienced the delight of a Noonan’s sticky bun.

Lena insisted on carrying the bags, despite Kara’s protestations; a single implicatorily arched brow served for the whole I can bench over fifty tons; three reusable grocery bags are absolutely nothing spiel, and it gave Kara one hand for pastry and the other for keys. On their way up the stairs, amidst their aimless chatter, Lena heard a thin supersonic whoosh she’d only heard twice before, and she nearly dropped her bags. Focusing, she grasped snatches - the right universe?... be very upset - and nearly dropped Kara’s food.

“Lena? Are you okay?”

“I’m - I think I heard someone,” she mumbled. “Upstairs.”

Kara barged up, caution so far in the wind it could be used in meteorological studies, and flung the door open. She gasped, then raced in, wrapping her arms around a tall, skinny guy in a black sweatshirt, crying, “Barry? Barry! I knew it, I knew that was you! I knew it was you in that weird, blue space-portal-thing!” She laughed as he squeezed back. “Hi!”

“Yeah,” Barry, apparently, said with as much affection. “Took us a couple of tries to get here.”

“You made that?” Lena asked, setting the bags down. “The transdimensional rift?”

“That would be me, actually,” the guy standing beside him said, sticking out a fingerless gloved-hand. “Cisco. Hi.”

Lena came over and shook it, wide-eyed. “Lena. That thing is incredible.”

Cisco grinned. “Thanks.”

“Uh, Lena, this is Barry Allen,” Kara introduced. “He’s from another universe.”

“So I gathered.” Lena grabbed Kara’s sleeve, tugging, gleeful. “Interplanetary life, interdimensional travel - everything is better with you.”

“This is a good universe you got here,” affirmed Cisco, slowly eyeing Kara’s apartment.

Laughing, she thanked him, but she was suddenly all business when Barry started talking.

“So, you remember last year when, um, I helped you out, and you promised you’d do the same for me?”

Jaw set in staunchly heroic lines, brow intently furrowed, Kara asked, “What are we up against?” and Lena’s heart fluttered.

“Oh, wow,” she thought, all red tulips and blooming honeysuckle and lens flares. Then, oh. Wow. How the fuck did I miss that?

Kara was Supergirl, no doubt about it, and Lena, blinded by her own life, hadn’t seen it for months. Barry glanced at Lena, more than a little too fast, and she had another moment of oh. Barry was some form of super, too, facing some interdimensional super-threat, and he didn’t know if she was a safe witness.
Lena disappeared into the hall and focused very hard on not eavesdropping, listening instead to Kara’s heartbeat - identical to Supergirl’s, and she really hadn’t noticed.

*Jesus.*

With that same thready whoosh, Kara’s heartbeat disappeared.

“Goodbye,” Lena murmured, and went inside to put the groceries away.

Sitting on the counter were those two sticky buns, all nutmeg and caramel and yeast, and before she knew it, Lena was parked before them, tearing off pieces with her fingers and chewing voraciously. She was totally allowed to stress eat sticky buns when her best friend was in an alternate reality and she had no way of contacting her or making sure she was safe and, oh, god, two sticky buns is not enough.

She refused, as a matter of pride, to go to Noonan’s again. Instead, she went to the farmers’ market, seeking out the stall that sells flower-flavored macarons, and bought two boxes - one Grandma’s Garden, full of the more common edible flowers like roses, honeysuckle, and lavender, and one that she hand-selected herself, an even split between lilac, chicory, violet, and jasmine. Goodies in hand, she wandered through the city at an absurd (but believable) pace, furiously munching, hood yanked up over her face. She only stopped when, crossing through the park, she heard what sounded like a gun cocking.

Lena was running before she realized she’d moved her feet, and made it just in time to get hit in the dip of her collarbone.

“Oh.” She peeled the crushed cupronickle slug off Kara’s hoodie - now punctured - and inspected it where it lay, bloodless, in her palm. “Oh.”

“Who the fuck are you?” the gunman asked.

Lena’s hands fluttered up to check that her hood where she’d put it; it was, thankfully. “I’m not a fan of people who abuse the second amendment,” she quipped, swinging a wide right hook and knocking him, out cold, to the ground.

Behind her, someone’s heart was beating - erratic, anxious.

Lena turned to face them and saw a girl in a National City University hoodie, white-knuckling her wallet and a three-year-old’s hand. “Are you okay?”

“H-he wanted my wallet,” she managed. “I - I was gonna give it to him, I swear, but he - he -”

“It’s okay,” Lena said. *Oh, god, how would Kara handle this?* “You did the smart thing; he wasn’t behaving like most muggers - he should have just taken it and ran.”

The girl - she was nineteen, tops - whimpered.

“No! No, I mean - you were really brave.” Lena knelt down and looked at the toddler, who was gnawing on her fist, brown eyes wide and dry. “And you, too.”

“Yike purple,” was her only reply. She reached out and tugged on Lena’s sleeve.

“Yeah? Me, too.”

The girl flung herself down, arms around both toddler and twenty-four-year-old. “Thank you so
much!” she sobbed. “Her mom would have killed me if Sophie got hurt!”

“Mama wouldn’t kill you,” Sophie drawled. “Jus’ yell an’ yell an’ cry a little.”

Lena was stunned still. People were hugging her. Thanking her. What the hell?

“Any time,” she murmured, heart pounding. Sophie’s tiny arms around her waist made something crinkle, and Lena remembered her bounty. “Are either of you allergic to almonds?”

Two heads shook, and she pulled out the last two macarons, folding one into Sophie’s palm and another into her sitter’s, before gently pulling back and bolting. Once she was out of the park, she started springing from building to building, rooftop to rooftop, until she was in her own apartment.

Lena flopped onto her couch and let out a sigh when it cracked under her. “To the lab!” she mumbled. She made to leave the apartment, but first, she stripped out of Kara’s clothes and slipped into a sleeveless crew neck and sturdy overalls - selections from her pile of clothes that probably wouldn’t get in the way and catch fire.

She walked - well, ran - to L Corp, hurried to the workshop, and went to work.

Up to her shoulder in molten marionite, she realized she didn’t actually have a reference for the structure of her couch.

Shit.

Lena stretched for her phone with her free hand, lamenting her lack of telekinesis - far more useful than leaping tall buildings in a single bound. After a solid two minutes’ fruitless strain, Lena reached out with her foot, thinking, I’ll scoot it half off the edge, then tap the part hanging off and flip it into my hand. Easy.

Not easy. She ended up shattering the screen - not by dropping it, but with her oh, so gentle tap.

Still, not too big of a loss; she was due for an upgrade and the broken glass couldn’t cut her, anyway. Phone finally in her clutches, she googled her old couch, found a diagram, and cursed herself for not sussing it out herself.

With the blueprint, though, building a new frame didn’t take long at all, and once all the pieces were assembled and cooled, she got the best grip she could and snuck out of the building, free running on rooftops and fire escapes and border walls until she’d reached her apartment.

And couldn’t get in; the couch was bigger than her windows.

Lena scaled the building, finally reaching the sidewalk, and angled inside, marching up to her penthouse. She got in, thankfully, and set the frame gingerly down next to the shattered remains of her IKEA Stockholm.

There, puddled beside it, was Kara’s mulberry sweatshirt. Lena’s fingers tangled in the collar, ring finger poking through the bullet hole; absently, she touched the patch of skin that should have been torn straight through, and heard Sophie’s tiny, calm voice.

“Purple upholstery,” she decided, and pulled the hoodie to her chest. It still carried the lingering scent of Kara, brown sugar and the vaguely petrichorial whiff of ozone, and Lena buried her face in it, eyes squeezed shut.

She’ll be fine. She’s always fine. She’s never not fine. Barry and Cisco looked human, like people
from Earth, and they were fine in our atmosphere, which means that their dimension is a pretty solid replica of ours, so their sun is probably yellow, so she’s probably got her powers, which means she’s effectively invincible. She’s super strong and super fast and she will be super fine, so stop thinking about her being anything else!

Lena forcefully veered away from visions of Kara being slowly overpowered, allowing her mind’s eye to linger on the hard lines of the Kryptonian’s muscles, the tendons in her neck when she strained, the determined phosphorescent blue of her eyes - everything there when she was about to win.

And then Lena realized that they matched each other, just about. That, even not knowing what she was - gotta ask Alex about my DNA testing - she was still above average, and they were both intensely resilient and physically powerful.

*I can still give her real hugs*, Lena thought, a smile bleeding across her face. *She can finally give me real hugs.*

Her brain, ever helpful, supplied her with a sense memory - warm arms coiled around her ribs, fingers on the back of her neck and the curve of her hip, soft cheek against her skin - and then took it a step further.

The step she never let herself take - even though, what self respecting lesbian hadn’t fantasized about Supergirl once or sixteen times? - because they were friends, just like she and Kara were friends, no matter how ardent and beautiful she was. But now they were one person, and Lena could see Kara ripping her shirt open to reveal that big ol’ butch S chest plate, shoulders deliciously square.

Worse, better, something, she could see Kara ripping her shirt open to reveal her smooth golden skin and her bra - which, as Lena knew from experience, could be either a severe sports bra, the kind of cottony nonsense you could get for $9.99 at Target, or lacy and impractical and indulgent. And the hug turning into Lena being slammed into a wall, hard, because they could both take it, and the cheek pressed against her temple or her jaw sliding back so those soft magnolia-pink lips could touch her skin instead, achingly tender - as if Kara’s kisses could be anything but, with her pouty bottom lip perfect to nip into.

Lena bolted upright. “No. Nuh-uh. Nope. We are not fantasizing about our best friend while she is in another universe. Or ever! Not allowed.”

She couldn’t bring herself to cast the sweatshirt away, but she did manage to turn on the TV. It was still hard, to watch the news, but since her best friend made it so often, it was worth the effort.

“…m with Katie Andrews, a National City University student and part-time nanny who says she was saved from a gunshot wound in a mugging gone wrong by an apparently bulletproof woman who moved faster than said speeding bullet. Katie, can you give us a little more information?”

Oh, my god.

Katie had Sophie in her arms, face buried in her shoulder, and she was rocking gently, but she nodded. “Of course, Amanda. This guy came up and demanded my wallet, and of course I was gonna give it to him, but my hand was shaking so bad, and I only had the one because she was holding the other, and I guess he got impatient, because he whipped out his gun and fired. Just - pow. And I thought I was gonna die.” She blinked, eyes watery. “Honest to god, I thought that was it, but then there was this girl in front of me in a purple hoodie who just took the shot. She didn’t even move, just picked the bullet off and slugged him. I was so freaked out, but she - she tried to talk me down.”
“What did she say?”

With a wet laugh, Katie said, “She called me brave. And smart. And she gave us cookies, which was probably exactly what Sophie needed. And me, too. I ended up throwing myself at her and hugging her, to say thanks, and she didn’t even get weird. Or when Sophie started tugging on her hoodie, commenting on the color.”

“And this hoodie concealed her face?”

“Yes. It was purple. She was wearing leggings, too.”

The reporter’s - Amanda - eyes widened, smelling a scoop. “Can you describe these leggings?”

“Totally! They were really cute. They had, um, galaxy print panels on the sides with, like, criss-crossing black bands. And pockets!”

“You heard it here, folks: Galaxy Girl is back!”

With a groan, Lena slumped into her naked couch skeleton. “It’s better than Pileup.”

☆

Around midnight, she got a text from Winn.

Well.

Multiple texts.

[12.03a.m.] !!!

[12.04a.m.] u said u weren’t gonna be a big damn hero! u don’t even have a suit!

[12.08a.m.] do u want me to make you a suit? bc i will make you A Suit

[12.10a.m.] the suit of ur dreams

[12.11a.m.] r you sticking w/the galaxy theme bc the public has kind of decided its ur thing but i’m sure u can work around that

[12.12a.m.] 12.12 make a wish

Lena texted back i wish u’d stop talking and rolled onto her back with a sigh.

[12.15a.m.] ok but like do u want a suit or na?

Eyes rolling, she punched out i’ll take a suit you animal what’s ur commission rate?

[12.32a.m.] r you serious u want to pay me

[12.33a.m.] nobody pays me its just what i do

oh my god Winn u do good work, she typed, bleary eyes wide. someone should be paying you for it jesus christ

[12.40a.m.] thats in the top 5 nicest things anyones ever said to me jsyk
“Goodnight, Winn.” She typed those words as she spoke them, then put her phone in her nightstand drawer and closed it only far enough that her charge cord still had space. With that, she rolled over and tried to sleep.

She could not. She was too wired - off her heroics, off the praise, off Kara’s absence, off Winn’s eagerness. She needed something to do.

So she stitched up the hole in Kara’s sweatshirt as best she could.

Not enough.

She cleaned up the shrapnel of her old couch, saving only the cushions.

Not. Enough.

She put the hoodie and the leggings back on and started for the door, stopping only to dig up her old fencing mask, because she was decidedly not risking her privacy because she couldn’t sleep.

With that firmly in place, she launched herself out a window, tucking and rolling across the street before popping up and breaking into a superhuman sprint, listening out for something to stop.

*Gunfire?*

poppoppoppoppoppoppoppopppop

*Gunfire.*

Lena turned a corner, ran thirteen miles, and flung herself through the cracked and punctured glass of a bank’s window, sneakers smoking from friction as she skidded to a stop on the marble floors.

“One, I liked these.”

“Who the fuck are you?”

Lena rolled her eyes. “That’s the second time I’ve heard that question from someone pointing a gun at me today,” she chided. “The criminal underworld needs some new material.”

There were three men, all holding hunting knives; two had full-on bowies strapped to their thighs; one had an actual sword slung over his shoulder. The knives were all pressed to the throats of some people by the counter - a blonde in a black pencil skirt and two security guards were pinned, and a woman in a pantsuit was wielding a stiletto like a weapon, standing in front of the janitor.

“Let me guess.” She meandered over, deliberately casual as she calculated the path she’d need to take to swipe and dispose of their knives. “This is a stick up.”

“Sure as shit is,” said the robber to her left, whipping a ballistic knife out of the back of his jeans. “So stick ‘em up.”

“I don’t think so.”

She took a blade to the gut and a step forward as stainless steel, crumpled like a tin can, clattered to the floor at her feet.

*Shnik!*

Another blade, this one to the thigh and from the man in the middle, freeing up a security guard; she
took a deeper step, almost a lunge, and then sprung out of it.

The third blade missed, and she grabbed the remaining hunting knife by the blade and crushed it like a cracker, tossing it over her shoulder like she was halfheartedly throwing something in the trash.

“Don’t you watch the news?” she asked, tutting. “I’m bulletproof, boys. Did you really think that little butterknife could do me harm?”

With that, she jumped up, laying parallel to the floor and kicking the bowie boys in the diaphragm. When they collapsed, she sprung forward, stole their knives, and snapped them like toothpicks.

The only one left standing was the apparent ringleader, who was reaching back to pull out his broadsword.

Except it was not a broadsword.

It was a pair of twin blades.

And he was aiming the sharp edges of them at the hostages’ stomachs, a long continuous line of potential blood.

Lena blazed forward, grabbed him by the collar, and rammed her knee into his solar plexus.

He went down. She grabbed the swords up when they clattered out of his hands and carefully crushed their sharp edges before twisting one around his wrists. As she did, she found a cutlass strapped to his back, under his shirt.

“Really?” she sighed. “What, are we playing pirates?”

She smoothed out the other twin and effectively cuffed another robber, twisting them together. She was about to do the same with the cutlass, but there was suddenly something poking her in the back.

She stood, reached back, and found the third blade flung her way jammed into the skin between her L1 and L2 vertebrae, caught on Kara’s hoodie.

“I was borrowing this,” she lamented, jerking back and headbutting the third criminal in the nose with a satisfying snap.

He didn’t go down, though. Instead, he snorted a wad of blood onto the floor and pulled a dirk out of the leg of his pants, raising it and running at her.

“In case you hadn’t noticed,” Lena said, voice light, “I’m wearing a fencing mask. You came prepared to the wrong sword fight.” Then she parried, swiping at him to drive him back, arm shortened just enough to not cause any harm - she refused to kill.

Right then and there, as if there had ever been another choice for her, she promised, I will never kill.

This guy, however, had made no such promise, and slashed at her throat. Lena bent back, then swept her leg, knocking his out from under him and sending him sprawling.

He did not let go of his knife.

“I’ve had enough,” he panted, “of you superpowered freaks in my goddamned city.”

“I’m wounded.” Lena raised her foot, preparing to stomp - just a little - on his crotch.
Her carefulness made her slow, and he managed to scramble out of the way and onto his feet. She pivoted, blocking over her shoulder with the blade of the cutlass running diagonally down her back, then twisted back around, pushing on his blade, pushing to break his grip.

“Not badly enough.” He spat again, landing on her shoe, and rammed the edge of his blade into her thigh.

It smooshed flat. Lena kicked her foot up, trapping the dirk between her calf and thigh, then threw herself backwards, crushing it to dust under her legs and bringing him down with her. With her superhuman speed, she got on top of him and tied him up, and to his cohorts, with his belt, then turned and asked, “Did anyone get hurt?”

Stiletto Woman said, “No,” but everyone else just nodded, too shocked to speak.

“Great! I take it someone called the cops?”

The janitor raised her hand.

“Fantastic.” Lena inspected the cutlass absently, feeling its balance, then shot them all her best everything is fine smile before remembering that they couldn’t see her face. “Are you going to be okay if I get out?”

“I think we’ll be just fine,” said the blonde, smoothing her skirt.

Lena sighed, “Good,” and started for the window.

“Thank you!” she called, voice fluty.

Lena’s cheeks burned as she launched herself up, up, and away. For fun, she spent a third of her trip home sprinting on telephone lines, and when she got back to the apartment, she fell face down into bed and conked right out.

Come morning, though, she was not to be so peaceful. Her phone was full of text messages from Winn, all to the same effect: watch the news.

But I did that yesterday, she whined to herself. She took a quick shower, scrubbing steel dust off her skin, and clad herself in a structured pine green dress that didn’t quite feel right after a weekend of stretchy, comfy clothes. She made herself a smoothie the size of the CatCo building, and then, and only then, did she search for news clips that lined up with his frantic texting.

The news clips were Amanda Singh narrating, as was standard, security footage of a hooded, masked vigilante in violet dueling with swords.

“Oh, bother.”

[Winn: 5:02a.m.] Did you see it yet

[Lena: 5:03a.m.] this is what happens when sleeping pills don’t work don’t blame me blame the people responsible for ambien

[Winn: 5:04a.m.] im putting that on hold rn because WHY DIDNT U TELL ME YOU COULD FIGHT WITH SWORDS
[Winn: 5:04a.m.] **FUCKING S W O R D S LENA**

[Lena: 5:05a.m.] **505 make a wish**

[Lena: 5:05a.m.] rebuttal: why didnt you tell me galaxy girl was the press monicker be that is way better than pileup like what the hell winn

[Winn 5:06a.m.] **come to the d.e.o.**

[Lena: 5:08a.m.] **winn i run an entire company**

[Winn: 5:09a.m.] **so you get to decide when u dont have to come in**

[Winn: 5:10a.m.] **come to the d.e.o.**

Lena came to the D.E.O.

Not right away. She went to the office, handled some nonsense - a chemical plant acquisition, approval of quarterly reviews for R&D department, scheduling a Skype meeting with a contract holder in Bangladesh - gave Jess the rest of the day off, mapped out a bed frame made of marionite, *definitely* didn’t think about Kara not breaking it when an ordinary headboard would have been dust, got four orange sticky buns from Noonan’s, and ate them on top of a solar panel.

*Then* she went to the D.E.O.

When Winn saw her, he immediately grabbed her arm and started dragging. It only took him about three seconds to realize that she was effectively an immovable object and start explaining.

“Alex is here and she’s weird about vigilante-ism sometimes and also she hasn’t heard from Kara in, like, forty hours, so she’s bugging out. We are going to go talk somewhere she won’t see us, and also where we have, um, *uniformity.*”

“Oh.” Lena permitted herself to be dragged. “Kara’s with Barry, by the way. In his universe.”

“Aw, *man,*” muttered Winn. “I *never* get to go to alternate dimensions.”

“Yeah, he was responsible for the rift on Thanksgiving - well, his friend-not-friend Cisco.”

“Goddamnit, I want to pick his brain.”

“You and me both, buddy.”

They made it down to the gym where Winn and James had had it out over *their* vigilante vocation, and Lena wondered if there was something about the place that made Winn want to do stupid stuff.

She parked herself on a weight bench and toed off her heels, looking expectantly up at him. “Come on, Winn, time to chatter.”

“Okay. Number one, *holy shit you can fight with swords.*”

“I fenced at boarding school. Partially because Lilian didn’t actively disapprove, partially because I wanted to be Obi-Wan Kenobi. I really got into the practical stuff because of Mademoiselle le Maupin.”
“I knew there was a reason we were friends,” Winn crowed, plopping down on the floor. “Okay. Number two, Kara now knows you’re an alien.”

“That is correct.”

“What did she have to say about that?”

Lena knew what he was hedging on, and hedged right back. “She was very supportive, sympathetic, even. Or - no, that’s inaccurate. She was empathetic.”

Winn’s eyes widened. “Oh?”

“But after I told her, we pretty much just watched movies and passed out on her couch. Next morning, grocery shopping, Barry shows up, I punch a stranger in the park - a standard Sunday.”

“Of course.” There was more than a glimmer of understanding in Winn’s eyes, and Lena could only hope he knew what she meant, one hundred percent. “Now, on to number three.”

“The costume?”

“The costume!” Winn started swiping through his tablet like a man possessed. “I have sketches.”

Lena hopped onto the floor beside him and peered over his shoulder. “What are you thinking so far?”

“Purple is an identifier for you - for her - now, so I figured, stick with that.”

“Makes sense.”

“I also thought that you should be more involved in the actual structure of the suit than James and… *Supergirl* were, considering your tech background.”

“Much appreciated.”

“Much obliged.”

“I made a metal that I can’t break,” Lena offered. “I already have a desk and a couch made out of it. Couch frame. I’m rebuilding my bed, next, but I’m thinking it could also have some more tactical practical applications.”

“Okay, that’s awesome, definitely being included. How do you feel about knuckle dusters?”

Lena clasped a hand to her grinning mouth, eyes sparkling, and nodded. “I love knuckle dusters. I was also thinking - that metal, the one they use for the weights assessment. It can be psychically controlled, or through magnetic frequencies, radio frequencies - I have to figure that out. If we could make an alloy of that - ”

“With your unbreakable metal - Lena Luthor, I think I love you.”

Lena laughed. “So, purple, marionite knuckles, shapeshifting weapons… what else?”

“Because you’re a public figure, you’re gonna want to hide your face.”

“Hence the hood and the fencing mask.”

“Right. Do you want full face, or..?”
“Three quarters,” Lena decided. “A cowl, maybe.”

“What, like Batboy?”

“God, no,” snorted Lena. “I just… people are more comfortable when they can see your face. I don’t want to save someone and scare them at the same time.”

Winn looked at her funny - not cruel, just strange - for a long moment before nodding. “Yeah, of course. Cowl that goes - what, to the bridge of your nose? Cheeks?”

“Bottom of my cheeks.”

“Bottom it is.” Winn’s mouth snapped shut and he cringed; double entendres are a bitch and a half.

“Oh, god, pants.” Lena wrinkled her nose and plucked at her hem. “Performative femininity gives you a slight increase in social currency, but holy shit, is it annoying.”

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“Pants, got it.”

“And pockets. Gotta have pockets.”

“Zippers?”

“I love you, too.”

Winn snort-laughed, then started swiping again. “Are you particularly attached to the whole two piece costume paradigm?”

“If you’re asking me to fight crime in feety pajamas, I’m in.”

“Awesome.”

“So!” Lena clapped once for emphasis, then stared Winn down. “How much am I paying you?”

He floundered, stammered - the verbal processing center of the brain put in a dryer set to tumble.

“I get custom clothes all the time, Winn,” she assured him, “so this is not weird. If you don’t know how to ballpark it, I’ll just… come up with the number on my own, based off field data, quality of work, material costs, work hours. A living wage in California right now is a little over thirteen dollars an hour, but a living wage is the bare minimum, so doubling that’s not unreasonable - ”

“Oh, my god, I’m gonna have to buy a house,” Winn wheezed. “I’m gonna move up a tax bracket.”

“That’s harder to do than you’d think.” Lena shrugged. “Believe me, I’ve tried to make it happen. I’ve given my assistant three raises in the past three months - substantial ones - and still! The R&D department, too!”

Again, Winn eyed her like an unidentified object, and she clammed up a little, shrank a little.

The look faded, and he said, “Kara says you forget to eat when you work sometimes.”

“That’s a lot harder to do now,” Lena admitted. “I’m always hungry.”

“Yeah. Increased metabolic activity, plus you’re parkour-ing all over the city instead of deepening your carbon footprint, plus you’re probably making up a caloric debt.” Winn stood, stretched. “Let’s
“Oh.” Lena sprang up, stepped into her shoes. “Okay. My tr - ”

“No.” Winn pointed his finger at her nose, attempting sternness. “We are both employed adults, we will pay for our own meals.”

Lena wrinkled her nose, caving nonetheless. “Fine.”

“No offense, it’s just - you’re going to drop a mountain of cash on me in, like, a week. I’m not going to be indebted.”

“No.” Now it was Lena’s turn to cut him off. “You’re not indebted to me because I’m going to give you money, because you’ll have earned it. Or because I buy lunch! I - we’re friends. Friends do nice things for each other, right?”

Winn nodded.

“If I overstep, let me know. I’m not - accustomed to actually having friends.” Lena swallowed hard, then squared her shoulders as subtly as she could.

“Hey! Maladjusted orphan club,” he joked, knocking his shoulder into hers. “It’s all okay.”

Lena smiled in spite of herself. “So, where are we going?”

“I’m craving Italian,” he decreed.

“Sounds perfect.” Together, they started up the stairs, towards the standard exit, but as soon as they hit the first subterranean floor, Lena said, “Wait. I have to tell Alex where Kara is.”

“There are a million rooms in here,” Winn warned. “You’ll never find her.”

Cocking an eyebrow, Lena tapped her ear and purred, “Really?”

Eyes wide, Winn mouthed ohhhh and sat back, waiting eagerly.

…fine, right? Like, she’s totally not dead?

Oh, baby, Kara’s fine. She’s a tough cookie, I’m sure she’s just… I don’t know. She probably spent the weekend with little Luthor and got too busy to text you - or had nothing to say that you’d want to hear.

Lena’s cheeks burned.

“What is she saying?”

“Shh.”

Maaaaggie!

Hey, she’s not my sister! Besides, you didn’t text her this weekend, and we were very occupied.

Lena’s eyes, squeezed shut in concentration, flew open, and she shook her head vigorously. “I… good for her. Good for her. Let’s go eat.”

“Wait, what was she saying?” Winn chased after her as she made her escape. “Lena! What was she
saying?”

“It’s classified.”

Gawping, Winn managed, “You’re the worst,” and Lena grinned because she was pretty sure he didn’t even mean it.

A half-hour wander later, they were parked in a creaky orange vinyl booth in a bare brick building that smelled like a wood oven.

Lena loved it.

Apparently, Winn came here often enough that they knew his order on sight, but Lena got a chance to peruse the menu and wanted to eat everything. Genuinely, everything. In the end, she settled on the risotto with artichokes, morels, and hen of the woods mushrooms, squid ink pasta with head on langoustine and scallops in gremolata, and kept her eye on cinnamon gelato and the quince crostata for dessert because goddamnit, Winn was right.

She loved the place all the more for how the waitress didn’t bat an eye at her double entrées. “You’ve brought Kara here, haven’t you?” she asked.

“Oh, yeah. When she actually used her lunch at CatCo, sometimes I’d drag her and James here. A man can only have so many milkshakes in a week.”

Lena laughed. “That’s absurd.”

“Tell that to my sporadic lactose intolerance.”

“Ooh. Gotcha.”

His meal came first, being only one plate - a heap of extra spicy chicken cacciatore over a heap of pappardelle - and he managed to wait about two minutes for politeness’ sake before digging in. “I’m sorry, I can’t help it. You’ll understand when you get your plate.”

She did, without a doubt. The food was better than any she’d had at the highfalutin bistros Lilian had deemed acceptable, and far cheaper, and the plates were the size of hub caps which meant she was actually approaching full by the end of the meal.

“Schott,” she proclaimed, gesturing with her fork, “you have excellent taste.”

“Our tastes are pretty similar, actually,” Winn said.

It was clear he was leading into something, teasing her a little, and Lena did her very best not to be nervous. “What do you mean?”

“You’re building a new bed.” Winn scraped up the last scrap of pasta, the last shred of chicken. “For a very particular reason.”

“Yeah, I don’t want to lay down too hard and break the damn thing.” Lena’s ears were burning, bright pink. “That’s how I broke my couch. Flop, crash.”

“I’m just saying,” he said, patting her on the hand, “I can empathize.”

Lena’s first thought was Oh, he knew what I meant before. Her second was Oh, he has a crush on Kara!
“Can, as in present tense?”

“Past tense, don’t you worry.” He grinned. “It’s a hazard of being near her,” he assured her. “Me, James, Ms. Grant’s son for, like, two minutes before he bailed. ‘Oh, your baggage’ - buddy, she just got kidnapped! Calm down!”

Lena’s eyes bugged out. “She’s been kidnapped?”

Winn winced. “Oops?”

Head crashing onto her folded arms, Lena groaned, “I’m going to die of an aneurism, worrying about that girl.”

Winn patted her hair, then somehow silently communicated to the waitstaff that it was time for dessert, and three minutes later, Lena moved herself so there was space for what was essentially pie and ice cream, but (don’t tell Kara) better.

Demolishing crostata, canella, and cannoli alike, their lunch ended in companionable silence, and they wandered back towards the D.E.O. As they strolled, Lena punched out a quick message - she’s with barry, she’ll be fine - to Alex. Then, two seconds later: also im working on replicating that dimension’s portal generator so if it becomes a problem i’m already on a solution

Another two seconds, and Alex replied: lena lifesaver!!!

Lena had to tamp down the bounce in her step lest she bounce right through the stratosphere, and she managed it all the way home.

When she got home, Kara was in her living room - well, Supergirl was.

“Supergirl!” Lena said, voice a little strangled.

“Lena.”

Her voice was so warm, so fond. Lena launched herself into Kara’s arms and gave her the biggest hug, hefting her off the ground.

“It’s been a while,” was her excuse when she set her back down.

“Sorry about that.” Sheepish, Kara rubbed the back of her neck.

“I’d say ‘sit down,’ but I haven’t finished fixing my couch.” Mutually rueful, Lena waved a hand towards the marionite frame, days old and still naked. “I’m working on managing my strength.”

“So I’ve heard.” Kara’s eyes glittered. “Galaxy Girl.”

Lena bit her lip, trying to play cool. “Is that what they’re calling me now?”

“So say the headlines.” Supergirl surged forth and gave Lena a hug, and it was her turn to be squeezed, and she loved it. “It’s really good to see you.”

“You, too.”

As she poured Kara a glass of water, Lena thought, I can make this work. I can see two of her if she needs me to.

So long as I can see her.
Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and putting up with this. I'll be putting up the next chapter on Thursday.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

2x09: Supergirl Lives.
Kara and Lena go on an adventure.

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Kara as Kara texted her two minutes after Kara as Supergirl left (hey!!! hi!!! i missed u!!! i’m ok everythings fine just wanted to let u know im back) and they caught each other up, but Lena didn’t see Kara face to face until the next day, when she groused into Lena’s office and gives her a sloppy, perfect hug.

“What’s wrong, Kara?” she asked, trying really hard not to stroke her hair or do anything other than wrap her arms a little tighter.

“Snapper’s a jerk,” she grumbled, relinquishing her grip on Lena to shuffle over to the couch - which Lena needs to reinforce, or rebuild, or something. Lena followed, sat down beside her, and listened as she said, “There’s a missing girl. Her mom came to me and said she needed my help, because the police weren’t looking. They think she’s just a runaway, but she didn’t say anything to her mom for her birthday, and Mrs. Williams is so sure something’s happened.”

Lena nodded. “Okay. What can I do to help?”

Rummaging through her bag, Kara blabbered, “There’s been a spike in missing people, but I can’t find a connection in the files Maggie gave me. I was gonna ask Winn, but you’re just as good at this as he is.”

“We’ll work faster if we split the load.”

Kara smiled, this big, beautiful beam of sunshine, and Lena loved her so, so much. “Thank you, Lena.”

“If there’s any other way I can help, just let me know.” Lena’s hand moved of its own accord, cradled Kara’s, thumb rubbing at the peaks and valleys of her knuckles until she realized what she was doing. Then, she pulled back, and definitely only imagined Kara’s hand coming after hers, and said, “And I mean that! Even if it’s using sheltered L Corp property as a pit stop for people getting home so it won’t be an overstimulating circus.”

Lena’s finger in her face, playfully insistent, Kara nodded back in the same tone, sober expression cracking into a soft smile. “Thank you. For helping, for offering, for… I feel better. Not so betwixt and between, when I’m with you, so thank you, Lena.”

Someone’s heart was beating so hard it drowned the other out, and Lena had to assume it was hers - had to. When Kara’s solid arms wrapped around her in a parting hug, there was another uptick, a stuttering pitter in her chest and in her ears, so it was an evidence-based theory and she could back it.
Would back it, until she had incontrovertible proof otherwise.

“I have to go ask questions,” Kara murmured over her shoulder, chin bobbing against the blade. “Can you get out of the office?”

“I can sure as hell try.”

With one last squeeze, Kara was gone, and the flash drive she’d tucked into Lena’s palm the most precious thing in the world. She plugged it into the naked hardware she kept for her offworld activities - anything that wasn’t work, wasn’t personal, and wasn’t worth risking the leak of - and, in turn, hooked that to pressure-sensitive hologlass. On her desktop, she had a few current projects up and open, but they held none of her interest.

Setup complete, she checked her phone - Winn knew she was involved, suggested he take the last half while she handled the first - and opened Skype. His face popped up on her screen, while his only saw the flat white of her ceiling.

“You need to get some sun,” he said flatly.

“You’re hilarious,” was her deadpan retort; 80% of her attention was now gone on the task at hand. Still, she turned to set her phone upright and her eyes widened. “What happened to you?”

Winn mouthed something so long and convoluted, Lena couldn’t keep up. He sighed, scribbled something, and held it up, both injured and healthy eyes shut, while saying aloud, “I got mugged, okay?”

The Golden Snitch PostIt said otherwise. According to his note, it was Guardian stuff.

Rather than rip into him for it, Lena just sighed, shook her head, and went back to work. These people were, as Kara had lamented, truly disparate - none of them had ever crossed paths, not even as children.

“Wait.”

“What?”

“There’s a medical file for… six people. Same file heading.”

“Okay, what’s it for?”

“I can’t look at it! I manufacture medical supplies! It’s a breach of privacy, a conflict of interest - ”

Kindly, Winn laughed. “You’re colluding with a black ops government agency to stalk missing people with confidential police files, and potential, what, small-scale insider trading is the line you can’t cross?”

Lena’s mouth snapped shut with a click, and she opened the files. “Blood work. They all had blood drawn.” She turned to look at Winn. “Who wants their blood? Who would want their blood?”

Her voice blurred, faded, and she started trying to suss it out in her head, brain abuzz, but before she could get too deep, Winn dragged her back.

“…na!”

“What?”
“What’s the address?”

Right. “209 Manila Road.”

“Searching my files now… I have two! And one of them is for Izzy Williams.”

Lena pounded the flat of her palm on her desk, vibrating with satisfaction. When it held, she did it again, letting out a little delighted noise. “Ooh!”

“Alright over there?”

“Fantastic! Who’s calling Kara?”

“Oh, uh, Kara’s actually… Kara’s right here - hey, Kara!”

“Hi, Winn!”

Lena ran her fingers through her hair, fixing her makeup in her phone - smudged lipstick, fuck - and adjusting the neck of her top, which was the same traffic-stopping red as her lipstick. She wasn’t actively lowering it, per se, but it sure wasn’t climbing any higher and it sure wasn’t staying put.

As Winn turned back, she dropped her hands to her lap, like she hadn’t been doing a damned thing, and clenched them into nervous fists.

“So, is she - ?”

“Talking to Alex, give it a minute.” Winn looked at her, brow faintly furrowed, then said, “You look nice.”

“Thank you.” Cheeks burning, Lena let out a breath and did just that, wiggling her feet under her desk and wondering if she should reinforce all her stilettos with marionite, or if that was unnecessary weaponization.

It took two brief bursts of giddy laughter for Winn to grumble, “I’m just gonna email it to her.”

“That sounds about right.”

Compiling their files only took a few seconds, and Winn fired off the message with a flourish before leaning back in his spinny chair. “So. How’s everything?”

Lena glared at him. “Did the mugger take your wallet?”

Something made a noise - a sort of sub-audible cheep - and then Kara said, “Oh, you’re finished!” After a moment’s super-speed reading, she and Alex conferred briefly at a murmur, and Alex bounced by with a telling Hi, Lena, bye, Lena, and Kara came over to Winn’s workstation.

Lena sat at attention and asked, “What’s the plan, National City’s Finest?”

Kara’s mouth twitched, like seventeen sentences were cage fighting for freedom on her hard palate. “I’m going to this National City Research Clinic, and I’m going to poke around. Alex offered to come with me, but she’s got a million personal days she needs to use up, so I’m gonna go stag.”

“Good for her!” And Maggie. “You don’t have to go alone, though. If this clinic and their metabolic supplement study is the link, then you’ll be a target for whoever or whatever is taking these people. I’ll gladly come with you,” Lena offered.
“You’re sort of high-profile.” Winn’s eyes widened when they both turned to look at him instead of at each other. “What? You run a Fortune 100 company and - I’m saying this from a place of understanding and affection - your family is a very public dumpster fire. This doctor is definitely going to recognize you.”

“You’d be surprised what a ponytail and a pair of glasses can obscure,” she quipped. She immediately regretted the joke, but Kara didn’t seem phased, so she turned to her and started again. “All I’m saying is I’m a blackbelt and I have your back. If you need me - if you want me - I’m with you. Whenever, wherever, so long as there’s not a board meeting. And even then, I can probably push things around.”

Kara let out a too-fast bubbly laugh, the back of Winn’s chair creaking in her grip. “I’m going to check clinic hours, and - and think about this, and I will let you know. Okay?”

“O-okay.” As Kara retreated just a little too fast, Lena stoically resisted the urge to call out after her. She had no idea what she’d say, but she knew herself well enough to know it would be embarrassing and kept her mouth shut. Once Kara was gone, she slumped onto her desk with a groan.

“Lena’s in love,” Winn lilted.

She groaned, “Shut up, please,” and buried her face in her forearms. “I’ve been looking at planets. Life-sustaining ones.”

“Uh-huh.”

“There’s one called Maaldoria.”

“They’re, like, weird purple lizard people.”

“Yeah. I don’t think I’m one of them. I mean.” Lena sat up and gestured at her very humanoid self. “But Maaldoria is an anagram for Manila Road, and Maaldoria’s got such a dense core that all the elemental carbon in the crust has long since been compressed into essentially perfect diamonds - the root word of which is diamas, which is the name of the doctor on the forms.” Lena crossed her arms, right hand squeezing left bicep just a mite too hard. “I think it’s aliens.”

“You think a Maaldorian is behind this?”

“I think more than one.” Lena leaned forward. “I mean, Maaldoria’s nickname is Slavers’ Moon, isn’t it?”

“And all the missing people were healthy, strong…” Winn’s eyes widened. “Did we just send the strongest woman in the world off to a planet were the strongest are worked to death?”

“Shit. Shit, shit, fuck, shit.” Lena started dismantling her extraterrestrial activities computer and, in her anxious haste, crushed the flash drive. “Fuck! Someone has to go after her. Someone has to go with her!”

“Okay. Okay. I’ll ask J’onn, if I can find him, he’s basically unstoppable.”

Lena bolted up out of her chair with such force that she snapped her stilettos. Fine, she thought, fuck them. “I’m going to get something from my lab,” she said, kicking them off with enough force to dent the opposite wall, “in case Kara’s already gone, and you call her and let her know. If you don’t hear back, I’m going to the clinic.”

With that, Lena hid everything away and strode forcefully out of her office.
“Ms. Luthor?”

“Everything’s fine, Jess. Put everything on hold until I get back to the office, and don’t stay late.”

“Of - of course, Ms. Luthor.”

Lena jumped down the service elevator shaft to the basement, pillaged the lost and found, and grabbed the prototype she’d been working on since Thanksgiving, when she’d gotten a closer look at Cisco’s portal.

True, the model she’d been emulating was transdimensional, but transmatter transport had more immediate practical applications, which meant that - if it worked - it could open a new portal.

*Only problem,* she thought, racing along rooftops, *is that it hasn’t worked yet.*

“Lena?”

In all the fuss, she hadn’t realized she’d kept her Bluetooth in.

“Winn! What’s going on?”

“Slavers’ Moon is rich in silicates toxic to Green Martians. J’onn is out.”

“Fuck.” Lena accidentally kicked in someone’s rooftop air vent. “*Fuck!* Have you gotten through to her?”

“No, no one can get her, not even Alex. It’s ringing out, so she’s still in range, she’s just not picking up.”

After a too-long stretch of silence, in which she turned and started towards Manila Road, Winn said her name with shocking urgency.

“I’m going after her.”

“Are you kidding me?” Winn groaned. “Someone will recognize you!”

“They won’t, but if they do, I don’t care. She’ll get hurt, or taken.” Lena’s chest ached at the thought. “I’m not letting that happen.”

“Lena!”

A sigh, and then Alex spoke: “Slavers’ Moon is under a red sun. You won’t have any superpowers.”

“Alex, I’m a blackbelt, a member of Mensa, and a highly skilled swordswoman. I’ve lived without superpowers my whole life and I’ve gotten out of situations only slightly less horrible. I can handle it.”

“*Can* you handle it, or are you just prioritizing reward over risk?”

“Can’t it be both?”

“We all care about her - ”

“I’m not saying that. I would never say that.” Lena let out a shaky breath. “I am, however, saying that I’m ready, willing, and able to go in there to bite any and all proverbial bullets, even if I’m not bulletproof when they come.”
Alex was quiet enough that she stopped running.

“You picked up something from your lab,” Winn piped, breaking the silence.

“It’s a prototype based off Cisco’s interdimensional rift projector - transmatter transport generators. It hasn’t worked yet, but it’s as close as I’ve gotten it, and it’s a safety precaution.”

Winn let out a laugh that was more breath than mirth. “Now you’re thinking with portals.”

“Shut up.” Lena gave a tight smile. “There’s a brick building across the street from 209 with an alley out back. I’m going to hide one half of the set in the wall; the other half stays with me. Fingers crossed the next time they see use is under laboratory supervision. If you call, and Kara’s phone or mine doesn’t ring out, come.”

“Oh, please,” Alex said, “I’m on my way to the garage now. 209 Manila Road.”

“Good.”

“Be safe, okay? No - stupid heroics. Get in, get out.”

Making no promises and speaking no words, Lena landed in the alley, carefully pried out a brick, and tucked one node behind it. Then she checked her deliberately flyaway braids, crammed her borrowed stripy knit toque further down her forehead, and adjusted the big fisherman’s sweater and mens’ jeans she’d grabbed from the lost and found. Nothing she wore fit quite right, and that was the point; the Lena Luthor commonly photographed was always sleek, chic, and put-together, clad in dark colors and tight skirts - vaguely intimidating. Today’s Lena Luthor, who would insist upon Nicole Kemp as her name when given the slightest prompting, was comfy and cozy and more nonthreatening than a hypoallergenic throw pillow.

She wore a shoulder bag, for Christ’s sake, and practiced hitching the strap like an absent tic and gripping it casually a few times before walking straight into the surprisingly anonymous beige waiting room.

Kara wasn’t there.

Fighting her panic, Lena sat down by the door. After about two seconds, she stood up, got a clipboard of forms to fill out, and sat back down. She was thankful to be wearing flat sneakers instead of heels; the clacking of anything sharp or hard would have been unbearable at the rate her feet were tapping, and she was too nervous to stop.

_Either they already took her, Lena listed, or she’s on her way. Whatever happened, being here is my best bet at keeping her safe._

Then Kara walked in.

Lena shifted, just a little, to indicate the empty seat beside her and stopped jiggling. Kara sat after the subtlest of double takes and hissed, “What are you doing here?”

“You weren’t picking up your phone, Winn and I were worried.”

“Why? I’ll be fine.”

“He - we - I think this might be a milk run for some Maaldorians.”

Kara’s jaw squared in that beautifully determined way. “Can’t wait. But you, you should go. You’re
Lena wrinkled her nose, thinking, and so are you. “If I could pick the lock on the trunk of a ’98 Taurus in the dark with the binding of a spiral notebook, I can handle being kidnapped on another planet.”

Kara sighed, all stubborn angles - like proper posture could make her stay angry, or be angry in the first place. When Lena handed a clipboard to her, she softened, knocking their knees together. “I worry about you.”

“Then you understand what drove me here.” Lena shifted into her warmth and didn’t bother fighting her smile. “No matter how strong you are, no matter how brave or how clever, I will always want to protect you. I know you’re capable, and I trust you to the edge of the universe, but I’ll still do everything in my power to keep you safe.” Lena opened her bag, showing Kara the edge of her prototype in a sort of promise.

Kara took a pen out of Lena’s bag and clicked it open, started filling things out. She paused, then looked over at Lena and said, “I like the glasses, Nicole.”

“Thanks… Kiera.”

“Well, well, well, well.” The doctor had arrived. “Hello.”

Both of them popped to their feet at the same time, with the same languid grace, and said, “Hi!”

“They told me two striking young millennials had dropped by, and here you are!”

“Yes! Dr. Diamans, hi!” Lena stuck out a hand for him to shake, trying for perky instead of professional.

He shook her hand and didn’t seemed bothered by her grip; she was safe. He did, however, inspect her hand before asking, “All those rings, is one of them special?”

Lena flushed, looking down at the silvery stacks on almost every finger. Including her left ring finger, where a ring her birth mother had worn sat comfortably all alone, currently caressed by his dry thumb. “Um.”

“Yes!” Kara beamed, knocking her head gently into Lena’s. “It’s such a shame they don’t do two for one on wedding dresses; the market is booming.”

Lena could have caught fire just then and not noticed.

“We just wanted to get a better idea of what you do here before jumping in,” Kara continued, apparently oblivious to the meltdown happening against her side. “We looked at your website, it just said we could make some quick cash.”

“Well, don’t worry; we’re only drawing blood today to see if you qualify for our metabolic supplement trial. You’ll be saying yes to the dress in no time!”

“We can’t!” Kara blurted. “It’s against our religion.”

“Really? I didn’t know there were religions that… Huh.” Under his breath, Dr. Diamans muttered, “This planet.”

Lena squeezed Kara’s bicep in earnest - holy shit he’s an alien - but kept silent.
“Well, you look young and healthy enough. Let’s just give it the old college try, shall we?”

Dr. Diamans started towards the back, and Kara looked at Lena, wordlessly offering her an out. When she got a nod and a smile, she started walking, and they went in together.

In, through the hall of exam rooms.

In, through an office with some tools that strongly resembled dental equipment.

In, finally, to an empty garage with water-stained concrete floors.

“How did you hear about our study?” he asked, stepping up behind a control module. “We have a recruiter, but she didn’t tell me to expect anyone today.”

“Well, actually, a friend of ours told us about it.” Kara’s hand in Lena’s tightened, her thumb painting reassuring sigils on the back of her hand. “It’s weird, I haven’t heard from her since she came here.”

“You,” Dr. Diamans said with a gesture, “stand here.”

“Okay.”

They let go of each other’s hands, and Lena took a step to her left.

“And you stand here.”

“Well, maybe you remember her,” Kara tried. “Izzy Williams?”

“Yeah, she did come through here.”

He grabbed the black drop cloth covering some smooth elliptical arch and yanked it away, revealing slick grey metal and swirling purple light.

Wide eyed, Lena whispered, “That’s a transmatter portal.”

Diamans’ face pixellated away into a proper Maaldorian visage as he sneered, “I hope you were looking into destination weddings,” and a hand came down on both girls’ shoulders.

To the soundtrack of Kara pounding she shit out of someone, Lena headbutted her goon in the nose, then hooked her knee around his and pulled, stepping aside as she did so, to watch him fall hard. When she looked up, she met Kara’s gaze and blew a strand of hair out of her eyes.

Diamans started running.

“After him?”

“After you.”

They sprinted through the portal together and came out the other side on a planet bathed in a gentle red glow.

Lena had about one eighty-eighth of a second to think it was sort of soothing before someone launched themselves at her, lifting her off the ground. She rammed her elbow into their solar plexus and pain radiated through the joint - armor.

It had been months since she’d felt pain, and god, was it obnoxious.
Okay. Red sun. Smart, not hard.

That flew out the window when she heard Kara get tackled - heard her gasp in pain, too - and realized she couldn’t hear Kara’s heartbeat.

She headbutted the Maaldorian holding her, gashing her temple open on their scales, then kicked them in the kneecap so hard she heard a crack.

They fell, and she rolled away, one hand covering her forehead so she didn’t get sand in her wound - the other holding her would-be assailant’s gun. “You okay?” she grunted, shoving to her feet.

“Bloody knuckles. You?”

“Better than I look.”

Kara smiled mirthlessly and cupped her cheek, tilting her face towards the sun. “You got anything in your bag for this, Mary Poppins?”

“Not my bag, I’m afraid, but there’s more than a spoonful’s worth of sugar in all the cough drops in here.” Lena rooted around and found a packet of Kleenex, and immediately pressed one to Kara’s knuckles. As Kara fussed, cleaning her face as best she could and holding a tissue to the scrape on her temple, Lena asked, “What’s the plan?”

“We get out, back through the portal, and return with the D.E.O. Storm the place.”

“The D.E.O.’s already on its way.” Lena patted her bag over the bulge of the device and offered a smile. “But that clinic did seem legitimate enough to have some actual bandaids, and you use your hands to too good an effect to risk infection. I mean, who knows what’s growing out here? Oh, I should have packed petri dishes.”

Kara’s smile turned into an actual laugh, and she looped an arm over Lena’s shoulders, turning back towards the portal just in time to see it close. “Damnit.”

“They’re coming. And I have a prototype of a transmatter portal generator based off Cisco’s interdimensional rifts and tiny tools. If push comes to shove, I’ll try and jerry-rig us a Yellow Brick Road.”

“If I had to be trapped on an alien planet with anyone,” Kara hummed, “I’m glad it was you.”

Overhead, something began to whir, and Lena looked up. Her eyes widened. “Drone?”

“Troop transport. Looks like it’s headed up… there.” Kara’s long arm lined up just right with the front door of what looked like a space opera interpretation of a Vincent Price movie poster.

“And we’re going?”

“Do you want to?” Kara looked down at Lena, who keenly felt their four inch height difference now that she was without her five inch heels, with utmost understanding. “I mean, red sun. You’re de-powered now.” Her eyes flickered up to the growing red stain on the wad of Kleenex plastered to her forehead. “You can get hurt.”

“Then we’ll just have to have a really good plan to avoid both of us getting any new sore spots.”

☆

“I used to dream about this,” Lena said, picking over the rocks. “About seeing places no human had
ever seen. Going somewhere and being a first impression. ‘Oh, you’re an Earthling? You must speak the language of flowers like Lena does!’ For once, being my own person.” She wobbled, caught herself, looked up at Kara through her lashes. “That must sound incredibly selfish. Petty.”

“No, Lena, it doesn’t. Not at all.” Kara steadied her with a hand on her shoulder and closed her fingers gently, tugging at the collar of her borrowed sweater. “I get it. Wanting to be you, instead of like him.”

Lena did not say that bearing the weight of Superman had to be exhausting, even on shoulders of steel. She did not say that Kara Danvers was incredible and Supergirl was unique and that no one could ever eclipse her. She wanted to, but did not.

Instead, she squeezed Kara’s hand and toed away a precarious rock, giving her a clearer foothold.

“Thanks.”

“That’s what friends are for.”

They came upon a flat chunk of path and marched onward with renewed focus. Lena’s right hand was plastered to her still-bleeding temple, but her left was clutching and being clutched by Kara’s, and together, they kept moving.

“Do you know what planet you’re from yet?”

“No. I doubt it’s a priority project, though, it being anonymous and the lab being so busy.”

“…huh.” Kara frowned. “But you’re from a red sun planet.”

“Probably.” Lena peered up at the crimson star in the sky above them and felt that familiar calm wash over her. “Do they all look like this? The red sun planets.”

“I don’t think they do.” Kara squeezed her hand and stopped still. “I think that planets are as variable as people, and some are harsh and rough and unpleasant like this planet, and some are vibrant and beautiful and full of life and change and growth. And I think your planet had to be like you.”

“So I’m a craggy wasteland?”

“No.” Kara murmured, voice warm and sweet. “You’re really not.”

Lena flushed, somehow, through the insurmountable heat, but still noticed the original trilogy-esque bear trap on the path. She pushed Kara away from it, leapt away herself, and ended up sort of toppling them onto a boulder, sprawling into Kara’s lap.

_Sweetness and deep space_, she thought, as a bullet made of light zipped by her ear.

Both of them looked up and saw a gun-toting, red-robed figure on the ridge above. They looked back to each other, so close their eyes were blurry, and grinned.

“Get captured.”

“Get close.”

“Get everyone out.”

Lena got out of Kara’s lap, Kara stood, and they put their hands above their heads in surrender.
The figure in red guided them up to a hodge-podge tent, offered them food, took off his hood. He was Maaldorian, too, and very kind.

When Kara brought out her picture of Izzy Williams, he said, “They brought her through portal. They took her to the Red Fortress where they sell carbon forms like you. Sell them like animals.”

Lena refrained from asking what his chemical makeup was based on, because A) they didn’t have time and B) that would be rude. Probably.

“The royal family on Daxam used to buy their slaves there.”

“That’s awful. How can anyone even think to own a person?” Lena shook her head - which, bad idea; it was actively throbbing. “What excuse could they have? Humans and Daxamites are almost identical! Put two in a room on a red sun planet, and without an actual exam, you couldn’t tell the two apart.”

“Two carbon forms. Should go, go now. Before they come and take.”

“No. We need to find the people we came for. We’re not leaving without them.”


Lena smiled grimly. “Not under our own power, at least.”

So they stepped outside, walking straight towards the Red Fortress, hands high as soon as they set foot inside, surrender on their lips. They were frog-marched into a holding cell with the eight missing people, Dr. Diamans watching with his superiors, but Kara had already sprung into action.

“Izzy? Izzy Williams?”

The girl she was talking to - a doll-faced blonde in a too-big coat - lit up. “Who are you?”

“Your mom came and asked me to find you,” Kara said, walking over to her, calm but urgent. Quietly, she continued: “I’m going to get you out.”

“How? It’s not like you can just punch the walls down. You’re not Supergirl.”

Kara bristled.

“She’s here in her stead,” Lena interjected. “Supergirl wouldn’t have any of her powers on this planet because of the solar radiation, so she sent someone who wouldn’t let that stop her.”

“And it won’t stop us.” Kara gave her best Hero Face, her best Hero Voice. “I promise, we will all get back to Earth, and any and all complaints can be lodged with Supergirl.”

“I didn’t know Supergirl had an HR department.”

Kara turned on her heel, putting herself between Roulette and everyone else.

“I didn’t know she’d be so mousy, either.”

Lena clenched her fists and carefully kept her mouth shut and her back to Roulette.

“I’m here because of her,” she drawled. “After she shut down my club, I had nowhere to go, so imagine my excitement when one of my fighters told me about Slavers’ Moon? I jumped at the opportunity to expand its market.”
“You are treating this like - like they’re coffee!” Kara spluttered; her eyes would be igniting the atmosphere, if not for the sun. “You are selling people!”

“I’ve taken human trafficking to the next level!” purred Roulette. “You’re prime specimens that will survive a lifetime of labor. You’ll sell for top dollar.”

“It’s blood money,” Kara spat.

“Blood diamonds, actually.” Inspecting the ropes of them around her wrist like a mildly interesting anaconda, Roulette cracked, “The planet’s lousy with them. They’re like dirt to the Maaldorians.”

“Of course, you’d do it for the diamonds.”

“What was that, Extra #3?”

Shit.

Kara sidestepped to block Lena from view, but she wasn’t quick enough.

“I’d know that snide, self-righteous sniping anywhere.” Roulette clasped her hands to her chest and smirked. “Lena Luthor, slumming it. I may have to lower the price, by virtue of you being part of the package. One bad apple, or so the saying goes.”

“I’d say how far you’ve fallen, Veronica, but I’d hate to give you credit that should go to the bleak vacuum of space.”

Roulette looked Lena over with a hard eye just a hair too long, then shrugged. “I really don’t care.”

A gigantic creature, like a stretched-out frog with an exposed brain, entered the room, and it conversed with Roulette in a dialect Lena couldn’t understand, at a volume too low to comprehend.

“Oh, man,” Kara muttered, “I hate these guys.”

“Dominators?”

“Uh-huh.”

Lena started fiddling with the projector in her pocket, blindly, and to no avail. Her hands were shaking, just a little.

“Good news!” Roulette’s eyes glimmered dangerously, an oil slick or the edge of an obsidian arrowhead or the deepest, hungriest seas at night. “You’ve all been sold.”

Lena fiddled faster. Behind her, Kara was making promises Lena had every faith she’d keep, soothing every ache, assuring every confidence. Her voice slowed the tremors in Lena’s hands until they were gone, but the projector still wasn’t working.

She gave a particularly vicious twist of a knob and it began to hum, rattling out of her hands until - poof! - it disappeared into itself.

“Kara,” she said softly, voice too still.

She practically ran over. “What’s happening? Is it done?”

“It’s gone. The portal wasn’t stable enough, so it - it engulfed itself. I built an ouroboros door. Useless.”
“Hey, it’s okay. Winn and Alex are coming, and the door Diamans used is still there. If anyone can figure it out, it’s them. They’re two of the three smartest people I know.” Kara knocked their shoulders together and gave a brave smile. “This is going to be okay.”

“I love you - er, optimism. I love your optimism. You’re always so enthusiastic about the value of others, about hopefulness, about people’s intrinsic capability to be better.” Lena leaned into her, eyes squeezed shut. “You put so much good into the world with every tiny thing you do, and you never stop fighting - you’re a hero, Kara Danvers. You’re my hero. And if you believe we’ll be okay, I believe it, too.”

Kara wove their fingers together and held her hand tight, jerking tighter when Diamas said, “Time to go, Earthlings.”

She stepped in front of them all again, planted herself, and said, “No.”

The guard to his right hefted his weapon and rammed it into her side, sending arcs of blue electricity around and through her.

Lena dug in her bag for something, anything, and found a familiar item’s unfamiliar grip - the gun she’d taken from a guard at the portal.

She whipped it out and fired at him, point-blank. He went down, hard, and she moved in front of Kara, absolutely bloodthirsty. “I will empty this in the next person who lays a hand on anyone in this cell,” she growled, voice stronger and steadier than she felt. “Is that understood?”

A guard lunged for her, cattle prod out, but another stopped him. “We’re not allowed to hurt that one,” he hissed, and Lena’s eyes went wide.

“Why?”

“Lena,” Kara whispered in her ear, “if you move, they’ll open the cell. Once we’re all out, start firing.”

Lena barely nodded, but she knew Kara understood. With great pomp, she stepped back, tucking the gun into her waistband and faking its deposit into her bag before throwing it to the other side of the cell.

The shield came up; the prisoners came out.

So did Lena’s gun. Her hands shook, though not from anxiety, and her limbs felt leaden. The world spun a little, but she could counter that when she aimed, even though the trigger seemed to be sticking.

How, exactly, she corralled Dr. Diamas, the two guards, and her old classmate into the cell was beyond her, but she did it, and she did it with pride.

“You’re an interesting specimen,” Veronica called after her. “And some very interesting people are looking for you.”

“Tell them I’m not interested.”

“I’ll be sure to let your mother know.”

Lena swayed a moment, but shook it off and started running after everyone else, bringing up the rear with her weapon raised. When she wiped her wrist against her forehead, it came away soaking
sanguine. Guess I can’t return this stuff, after all.

As she stood in an archway, holding up one enforcer, another shot her gun out of her hand. She kicked it back, towards the escapees, and swung a left hook clean at their cheekbone, ready to crack a few knuckles.

They stopped her. They grabbed her wrist, stared at her hand, then backed up. Lena didn’t give herself the time to worry about that; she grabbed her gun off the floor and ran. Stumbled. A Dominator bowed deeply and watched her flee.

She made it through the arch Kara had been holding open, gave a crisp thumbs up, and promptly passed out.

☆

“Hey, Legs.”

Lena groaned, covered her eyes with her hand to protect them from an all-too-bright yellow light. Yellow...

“We’re back!” She bolted upright and immediately regretted it, cringing against a spinning world. “Ugh. Alex, what happened?”

“Well. You lost a couple pints of blood from what I assume was the mother of all head wounds.”

“I headbutted a Maaldorian.”

Alex closed her eyes. “Oh, my god.”

“I had no other options.”

“I don’t know if I’m proud or pissed off. You and Kara got everyone out okay. Izzy’s home with her mom. Winn’s not a red shirt.”

“Good for him.”

“And I got a cool gun.”

“Really? Me, too.” Lena wriggled a little so she could reach the gun without dislodging anything medical, then extended it to Alex, butt first. “Happy birthday.”

“It’s not my birthday.”

“Yeah, but I missed the last one.”

“You didn’t know me on my last birthday.”

Lena shook her head and gently shushed Alex. “Just take it. You came in, guns blazing, to rescue your sister because my dumb doohickey didn’t work. If I could name a town after you, I would.” She squinted. “Siri: remind me to buy a ghost town and name it Alexandra - Alexburg? Alexville? Big-sister-to-most-beautiful-Kryptonian City? No, that one’s confusing, Kara’s not a city.”

Alex made a face. “She told you?”

“Her heartbeat sounds the same. And she smells the same. And she makes the same hero face when
she wants to help people.” Lena sighed. “Took me *too long* to figure that out.”

“Does she know you know?”

Giggling, Lena shook her head. “No. I’m waiting until she tells me because she likes being close to someone who doesn’t know she’s ‘special,’ but she’s special as Kara, too, and I love her so much.”

Alex looked at her, something soft in her eyes, and Lena’s widened as she remembered something important.

“Oh! Congratulations about Maggie!”

Then Alex made a *Face*.

“Did something bad happen?”

“You’re kind of stoned, Legs.”

“I mean, I’m on a sun bed, so I assume I’m a little fucked up, but so is you avoiding the question. I just backtalked my boarding school bully in deep space! My blood is oxidizing in another atmosphere - silicacizing? Is that a thing? I should know if that’s a thing.” Lena twisted to look at Alex and tried for firm; she came off as mush, because she’d never been anything but. “Are you okay?”

“I sort of broke up with Maggie.”

“Boo.”

“*Boo*?”

“Just because Kara doesn’t take her own safety into consideration doesn’t mean you don’t get to have a full and happy life.”

Alex blinked owlishly at her.

“That’s it, right? Kara was in trouble and you felt bad, and you’d been happy, so obviously it was causation, not correlation, and you were bad so you had to give away your toys.” Lena closed her eyes and tilted back towards the artificial sun. “I mean, I only met her the once, but even when you were kind of mad at her, she made you glow. And she makes you shine when you’re not mad at her, like this morning. I could hear it in your voice, in your pulse: happy.”

“…Lena.”

“Mm-hm?”

Alex hesitated. When she finally spoke, her words were so carefully chosen they had to have been a second choice, off the cuff. “Your projector worked.”

“No, it didn’t. Ouroboros. It ate itself.”

“And came out the other side. We have both pieces.”

“Huh.”

Alex stood and ran a hand through her hair, careful of where she was healing. “You did good today, Legs. We’re all proud of you.”
“That’s very nice of you, but you should go talk to Maggie. I think I’m going to sleep for eighteen hours, then apologize to my secretary with green tea cupcakes because those are her favorite and try to get my blood out of this sweater so I can put it back in the lost and found.”

And they did exactly that.

Chapter End Notes

I skipped classes today because my roommate got me sick, so I've now written up to chapter 13. Chapter 14 will be set during Duet, but it won't have a rewrite of the Music Meister's universe, because Lena can't see that. I will, however, rewrite that part in a one shot. Fun stuff.

Anyways, I'm still feeling abhorrent, so please comment, because hearing what you guys think about this story honestly makes my day. Thank you all for reading!
Chapter Summary

Set in 2x10: We Can Be Heroes. Things get better and things get worse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After seeing that red sun, Lena’s curiosity was almost sated. She still wanted to know what she was, but it didn’t matter as much. She knew who she was; she knew her worth. She knew what it would feel like to be on her species’ planet. She knew what it felt like to be without powers and be something other than human, and that was almost enough.

She could wait.

But she *couldn’t* wait on other things. It seemed her allotment of patience was limited; now, she wanted to train and hone her skills, and she wanted to successfully create gates between worlds and over vast distances.

The latter meant more time in the lab, which was what she’d always loved about her company.

The former meant more time with Kara, under the guise of Supergirl.

Things felt good.

“Ow!”

“Sorry!”

Supergirl’s punch had knocked her back and actually hurt, but the worry on her face was worse. Lena righted herself, insisted, “I’m fine,” and swung her shin at the side of Kara’s knees in a move that would have sent her sprawling if she couldn’t fly.

Instead she hovered, looped back, and flew straight at Lena, pinning her to the wall with glorious brute force. Lena hit with a grunt, then wrapped her legs around Kara’s waist and twisted her hips, switching their positions, slamming her onto reinforced steel. Her knees were braced on the wall on either side of Kara’s hips; her hands framed her face.

She was so close, she could see the starburst of aegean blue around Kara’s pupils, and the sight distracted her enough that Kara had the chance to push off the wall and launch them both to the floor, gripping Lena’s wrists, holding her down.

Lena’s heart pounded so loud she could barely hear Kara’s accelerated pulse. Her blonde curls had fallen in a curtain around them both, and everything Lena could see was painted faintly golden by the light filtering through them.

She swallowed hard, and Kara’s eyes flitted between hers and something further down her face. *She’s not looking at my lips,* Lena thought, dazed. Her tongue flicked over them, and someone’s
heart stuttered. She’s definitely not looking at my lips.

“O-okay. Simulation time!”

Supergirl floated up, then pulled Lena to her feet just a hair too hard, crashing into each other’s space. Ears pink, Lena cleared her throat and reluctantly stepped away, assuming the ready position.

The robot that fired lasers hovered into view, and Lena popped up onto the balls of her feet, arms loose, ready for action.

Lasers active, Lena dodged, vaulting over a cement road block. As she passed over it, she stuck out a hand on impulse, pivoting on her palm so she could spring back up and crush the ‘bot. It ended up trapped just above her knees, and she snapped them together so hard they made a clacking noise audible under the exploding hardware.

She landed on her ass on the floor, and Kara was immediately there, eyes wide.

“Protect the people,” Lena groaned, brushing broken chassis off her inner thighs.

“You just crushed that thing. With your thighs. Like a watermelon.”

“Was - was that wrong?”

“No, that was…” Kara gulped. “Efficient.”

A siren wailed, off in the distance, and they both turned their heads to look.

“Do you want to take - ?”

“You can - ”

“It’s practically gift-wrapped,” Kara murmured.

“Too late for Christmas.”

“And Hanukkah.”

“I don’t have a suit.”

“Kara doesn’t mind you wearing her clothes.”

Lena’s teeth dug into the swell of her bottom lip and her fingers into the concrete floor, raking short furrows into it and kicking up rubble.

“No, no, I - I promised Winn I’d wait until he was finished with fabrication, I still owe him plating.” She offered a smile and hoped it wasn’t too dopey. “You go, have fun. Punch a criminal for me.”

“Always.”

Kara zoomed off, a stiff breeze forming in her wake and blowing Lena’s hair off her face. She flopped back onto the concrete, which crunched faintly beneath her, and let out a groan. After a minute’s self-indulgent loafing, she got to her feet and wandered off to find Winn, grabbing her duffel bag of marionite plates and slinging it over her shoulder like a boule of brioche.

When she found him, he was conked out over his tablet, an empty can of RedBull knocked over by his forearm in a puddle of vaguely green fizz. Lena set the bag down as quietly as she could and
zipped off to grab a paper towel from the break room and another can. Mess absorbed before it could short out his tech, she cracked the can to wake him up.

“Huh?”

“New caffeine.” As he eagerly grabbed the can from her, Lena asked, “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. Tired. Lots of work to do!” Winn drummed the table, all verve, then took a long string of sips, emptying the can and sighing. “You have fun training with the Girl of Steel?”

Lena nodded mutely, mouth tight against a stupid smile. “I almost beat her.”

“And you crushed the laser drone. Sounded like she was impressed.” At her incredulous expression, Winn grinned blearily. “I was listening. Should have been watching, but I ended up resting my eyes for a minute.”

“Uh-huh, sure.” Lena scrutinized Winn for a moment - the bags under his eyes, the clumsy hands - and intimately recognized the signs. “You’re overworked. And stressed.”

“Isn’t that typical for government employees?”

Lena gave him a look, and he slumped.

“Kara doesn’t know about - ” Looking left and right, Winn whispered, “Guardian. Yet. I’m working on James, but…”

“He’s stubborn, but he cares about you. You’ll sway him.”

“Sure.” Winn groaned, scrubbing his hand over his face. He stilled, catching sight of the duffel, and took a sharp breath. “Is that it? The - the - the - ?”

Lena leaned down, opened it up, and pulled out one set of knuckle dusters. She then slipped her fingers into it, retrieved the breast plate, and demonstrated a devastating jab. All parties - her hands, her armor, her weapon - came out unscathed, even with the ear-splitting clash. “I’d say so.”

“That is so cool. It looks like a NASA deep space photograph.”

“I know. That’s probably the best part.” Lena stood and put her hand on his shoulder, giving a gentle squeeze. “Try and get some sleep today. RedBull is deeply unworthy of your consumption.”

“Coffee takes effort.”

“Oh, Winn.”

He groaned. “Don’t you have a chief executive office to oversee?”

She patted him on the shoulder and said, “Call me if you need anything,” before ducking out. She changed into street-slash-work clothes - including the tight pencil skirt, though lately they included a deep vent for ease of movement (just in case), and reinforced heels that wouldn’t be crushed if she stepped down too hard - and stopped off to grab the world’s most gigantic green smoothie before heading into her office.

There wasn’t much to do, if she was being fair. Surprisingly, things had been going well of late. No one had said she was a heinous bitch in a few days, and running around, saving people and punching criminals, made her feel less bogged down - especially when they thanked her. So rarely was she thanked that it felt strange, but she was slowly acclimating.
Today, there wasn’t anything on her docket, so she started working on the specs for her transmatter transporter, trying to get it to stop eating itself, trying to figure out just what made it so fucking greedy. She turned the news on for background noise, and the chance of catching Kara fighting crime, and got to work.

Kara was fantastic, as usual, a primary colored champion, but about an hour into the day, something came on the news.

…Leslie Willis, the supervillain known as Livewire and Supergirl’s arch nemesis, has escaped prison. With her are fellow prisoner Lisa Gold and a prison guard who may have been in cahoots with her. Whether or not they are her captives is as of yet unknown.

“Well, shit.”

☆

The D.E.O. building was calm, for the most part, with one buzzing node of activity framed by tense shoulders wrapped in a red cape. Kara turned as soon as she heard Lena’s heels clicking on the floor, and she smiled, though the tension didn’t leave her eyes.

“I came to help,” Lena blurted as an introduction. “Anything I can do, I’ll do it.”

“Do you think you want to team up?”

Lena cast a glance at Winn, who jumped. “Oh! Me? Um, yeah, I attached the plating, like, an hour ago, so you should be set.”

“Great!” Supergirl smiled, and this time, her eyes were genuinely joyous, stress gone. “Suit up, buttercup.”

She did, even going so far as to braid her hair up around her head so it fit under her cowl better. The suit looked good, the pattern recognizable, the plating secure. She wouldn’t have been able to pick herself out of a crowd as Lena Luthor.

Her favorite parts, probably, were the reinforced soles she couldn’t friction-burn out - good, since she’d wrecked ten pairs of sneakers so far with her superpowered shenanigans - and the batons that on command turned into sabres, among other things, thanks to the malleable metal used in the training room.

Kara met her on the balcony, ready to ride, but paused a moment when Lena sped out to meet her.

“How - how is it?” Lena asked, suddenly nervous. Beneath the cowl, her cheeks had to be fire engine red.

“It’s great. It’s perfect.” Kara looked her over, head to toe and back again, with wide glossy eyes, before shaking her head. “Come on.”

Lena made to jump, but Kara grabbed her hand and stopped her.

“What?”

“It’s faster if we fly.”

Lena wrapped her arms around Kara’s neck and hopped up into the cradle of her arms, allowing herself to be carried.
“She should never have been in a human prison,” Kara said after a moment. “She’s too dangerous. All the humanity in her was burned out. She should have been locked up at the D.E.O.”

“You’ve stopped her twice before, and since then, you’ve only gotten better at this. I believe you can do this, and I believe there will be minimal casualties, minimal destruction.” Lena smiled under Kara’s chin. “And I’ll be here to have your back. Whatever you need.”

“Thanks, Lena.” Supergirl shook her head. “Galaxy Girl.”

Lena’s fingers tightened across the back of Kara’s neck, warmth blooming in her chest.

“Listen out for her, okay? Two sets of ears, we’ll find her.”

“Listening for your nemesis.”

Kara huffed a mirthless laugh. “I hate having a nemesis. Kal always makes it look so fun, like you have a deadly pen pal you see once a year, but having a nemesis is stressful.”

“To be fair, Superman’s nemeses are either locked up or licking their wounds right now. He’s practically on vacation.” Lena didn’t say that Lex seemed to find their relationship just as fun. She did say, “You’re not alone in this fight. There are plenty of heroes in National City.”

“Yeah. I’ve got you.”

*Yikes.* Lena hoped Winn convinced James to tell Kara soon.

“But, I mean, you have allies who don’t have powers, too. Just as brave, just as noble, just as eager to help.”

Kara didn’t say a word.

It took a while, but there was a crackling - lightning in a bottle spilling out. Kara zoomed down to the NCPD garage that held it, peering through the roof to see a woman with white hair in blue scrubs conducting that electricity, and landed with a crash. Lena leapt out of her arms as soon as they were in the room, cratering the floor just as hard, and rose to her feet, ready to fight.

“Give it up, Leslie,” Kara said, voice hard. “We’ve done this before; the same thing always happens. I win. You lose.”

The woman smirked, her face too round, too dimpled. “I’m not Leslie.”

Realization dawned on Kara’s face as electricity crackled behind them, and she whipped around to see the impostor guard appear, skin bleached out and eyes wreathed in shadow. As he approached, Lena murmured, “What do you need?”

“I can handle them. You protect the cops.”

Lena nodded and extended the batons. With a flick of her wrists, they extended into shields the size of drywall sheets, and she stood between the fray and the police. A stray bolt collided with one baton, blistering her palm through her gloves, but she stood firm.

“When I start moving,” she gritted out, “stay behind the shields. I’ve got you.”

With that, she started advancing on the exit, looking between the fight and the people she had to protect, but the guard wasn’t looking at her anymore. He dissolved into electricity, crackling along the ceiling towards Supergirl.
“Behind you!”

Just in time, Kara caught him, bobbing and weaving, ducking every blow until he stopped a too-wide right hook and held her arm.

Lena shifted her right baton into a knife and threw it at the lock on a gate, slicing it off. “Go, go, go!” she ordered, shuffling in front of the cops as they fled. “Get out, now!”

They did as told, but Lena’s hand dropped: Kara’s wrists were caged in blue lightning, bringing her to her knees. The woman whipped her through the air, slammed her onto the ground, and Lena fought her rising panic. She shifted the last shield into a whip of its own and cracked it at the guard.

He turned, the crackling electricity between his palms now targeted towards her.

No, over her shoulder at one of the cops.

There was no time to make her baton change when he fired, so she raced into its path and took the bolt square in the chest.

As the electricity fizzed through her and she hit the ground, Lena thought, *Tungsten and steel are superconductors in alloys.*

*Fuck.*

The cop pulled out his gun, but before he could fire, something crashed into the gates - a motorcycle, one she knew.

Guardian leapt in front of the cop as the guard fired on him, blasting him and the officer into a van so hard the side was dented. Still, James got up, got the guard out, came back to fight. He gave Lena a hand up, concern evident through the slit in his mask, and rather than say a thing, she gave him a silent nod, an affirmation - *I’m fine.*

At the crash, Kara looked and saw Lena on the floor, sparking, twitching, and James struggling to his feet, and she snapped free of the charge around her wrists, eyes glowing. She cut through the sprinkler pipe above the Livewire knockoffs, but it was too late - they arced away.

Kara flew over to Lena, cupped her cheek, looked into her dazed eyes. “Are you hurt?”

“I need a less conductive metal in here,” she said, rapping her knuckles on her breastplate. “I’m okay.”

Kara draped Lena’s arm around her shoulders and gave Guardian a withering glare, like Lena’s lack of foresight was his fault.

They stopped to collect Lena’s batons before Supergirl launched herself into the sky, cradling Lena closer, tighter.

☆

“I’m fine!”

“You were electrocuted.”

“And I’m fine.”
Kara crossed her arms, staunchly stubborn, and turned to look at Alex for confirmation.

“She is fine.”

Kara sighed and wrapped Lena in a tight hug, leaning over the edge of the sun bed. “This is the second time you’ve gotten hurt on some mission. You lost so much blood on Maaldoria, and now you get electrocuted with Guardian in the room - ”

“Guardian helped me. And that officer.” Lena pulled back and looked Kara in the face, placating, appealing. “When I was down, Guardian shielded him, got him out, and then came right back to protect me. He was ready to throw himself into the fight to help us.”

Kara shook her head. “With all that armor, there’s no way he’s invulnerable. He’s going to get hurt, and I don’t want be responsible when it happens.”

“He’s better prepared than I was. His shield’s clearly a titanium alloy, because he didn’t get zapped at all. I’m stealing that.”

With a huff of laughter, Alex rolled her eyes. “You better get on it, then.”

Lena nodded, mouth tight. Alex left after that, but Kara stayed, jaw clenched just as hard.

“Why are you defending him? Them? Guardian?”

“Because I know what it feels like to see great evil and feel helpless and still want to fight.” Lena wanted to reach for Kara, take her hand, but something in her body language, on her face, made it clear that that was a bad idea, so she kept her hands to herself, poking at nearly-faded blisters. “I was - I thought I was human for a long time, and every time Lex fought Superman, I thought, ‘I know how to fight. I’m strong. I’m capable. I could stop him.’ When talking failed, I imagined picking up a gun, a knife, anything, forcing him to stand down, but I couldn’t bring myself to point a weapon at the only living person who was kind to me. Every day, I wish I’d done it. I wish I’d tried harder, been braver, because maybe he could have changed for the better and I would still have him.

“But Guardian isn’t afraid. He’s standing out there, fragile and willing to be broken if it means he can help just one person, and I understand that. If I lost my powers today, I would still want to fight.”

Lena’s eyes burned, bubbled, but the distorted Supergirl she saw through all that wasn’t swayed.

“I couldn’t stand it if you did that. I couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t stop you, if I let you walk out, weak enough to be hurt. To die.”

Bristling, voice sharp, Lena said, “I’m not weak.”

“No, you’re not. But you were.” Supergirl backtracked, eyes wide. “Physically! You could have been damaged, I mean. I know Guardian is James, and I care about him. He’s my friend. And when people I care about put themselves at risk like that… It breaks my heart.”

“I can be damaged now! You can be damaged! Superman, Barry - they can be damaged!”

“We heal! We survive! We bounce back!”

“Humans are so resilient, Ka - ” Lena swallowed her words, tried again. “Can’t you see that?”

Kara looked like she was about to say something, but she just snapped her mouth shut and walked away.
Lena wiped furiously at her eyes, taking a moment to calm herself down before starting towards the exit. She didn’t mean to, but she heard them arguing. She heard the heartbreak, the comparisons, the promise, the protection as threat.

She waited, for James.

“Move.”

“No.”

He gave her a hard look, and she saw in his eyes the same thing she heard in Kara’s voice.

“I’m sorry.”

James blinked like he’d been startled. Shocked.

“I’m not apologizing for her, because I can’t do that, but - I’m sorry I was part of her argument against you doing what you need to do.” Lena crossed her arms, fingers wrapping around her bicep and squeezing away anxious energy. “And for what it’s worth, I’m grateful you were there. I’m grateful you’re the Guardian, because everyone needs protecting and you want to do that. And you do it well. So thank you, for covering my ass, for protecting that police officer, for being there with us.”

James nodded, slow. “Always. You’re my friend, Lena.”

Without thinking, Lena launched into a hug, so, so careful, eyes tightly shut. Almost immediately, she went to pull back, but then his arms were around her, too.

Oh, wow. Hugs from someone behind Kara exist. And are nice.

“If you go after Livewire’s ripoffs,” he said, pushing off to look her in the face, “you can go after her with us. We can take her down together.”

Lena nodded sharply. “Can’t wait.”

“Hey,” Winn called, “uh, you got a second?”

“Yeah.” James headed over, Lena on his heels, and asked, “How’s the mood down there?”

“Pretty bleak. They’re all worried, because I haven’t found Livewire yet. Funny thing about that?” Winn spun his chair around to face them, little boy grin on his face. “I totally know where Livewire is.”

“How?”

“Short answer? Science.”

“I’m getting the long answer later,” Lena said, poking him on the shoulder.

“You wanna go catch her, show Supergirl exactly what we can do?”

“My man!”

“In the van.”

On their way to Leslie, Lena peeled off her plating - it would do more harm than good - and hoped
Kara could forgive her.

About half a block away, she leapt into action, climbing out of the back of the van and onto the roof so she could jump onto the building. Guardian came in from the ground floor; Galaxy Girl came in from the roof.

While he slid in, dramatic, Lena punched through the concrete ceiling like nothing and landed by Leslie’s side, batons turning into knives and slicing through her restraints.

“Who are you?” she asked, voice flat. More life bled into it when she asked her next question: “Where’s Supergirl?”

“She’s busy,” Guardian said. Lena tossed him one of the knives, and he got to work on Leslie’s other side. “I’m Guardian.”

“Galaxy Girl.” The left cuff fell away, but it was taking too damn long.

“Great. I’m screwed.”

Lena ripped through the belt around her waist and cocked an eyebrow. “Are you, Leslie?”

“Less screwed.” Her eyes were hard. “And it’s Livewire.”

“Livewire. Got it.”

Lisa and the guard had gotten to their feet, and Guardian tossed Lena her baton before going for them. He bowled the guard down, blocking a bolt of electricity with his shield, while Lena got to work on Livewire’s feet, tearing both belts away like wet tissue paper.

“So, are you an interstellar costumed nutbag, or are you a freak of nature like me?” Livewire asked, stretching down to rub the circulation back into her calves.

“Interstellar.”

Dryly, Livewire said, “Neat-o,” and Lena tried not to laugh.

She looked up, intending to say something to the captive, but she caught sight of the vaguely murine doctor behind Livewire and stood up, calling, “Guardian!”

He turned, eyes wide through their slit.

“Did you know, most scientists test on themselves first?” he asked.

“Speaking from experience, we don’t.” Lena wrinkled her nose. “Sounds like you don’t know what you’re doing.”

His hands, which had both been aimed at Guardian, now parted so one was facing her. With a shout, he fired yellow lightning at them both, blasting them into opposite corners of the room.

Without her plating, the charge was weak enough that it didn’t even stun her, but both knockoffs were on her, pinning her down, cuffing her with something she couldn’t quite free herself from. They dragged her over to a generator and parked her beside James like they were toddlers in time out, in perfect position to watch Leslie struggle against her one remaining strap.

“Can you break out of these?” James asked, voice low.
“I can try.” As soon as they turned their backs, Lena planted a foot between her wrists, on the connective bar, and pushed, feeling it give a little - also feeling an angry zap as the cuffs electrocuted her wrists. “Shit.”

“Oh, the cuffs? Fun, huh? Patent pending. It’s funny, because Shark Tank turned them down - said my valuation was too high.”

“Rarely do I respect Shark Tank,” Lena muttered. “What’s the bottom line? What are you doing with us?”

“It’s become clear that my current prototypes aren’t strong enough.” The doctor gestured towards his minions who were, admittedly, not the hardest to defeat. “And I need upgraded models. That’s where you come in: the perfect specimens.”

_Ew._

“Not sure how much power I’m going to need,” he said grandly, striding up to Livewire’s side. “I might have to drain our little battery completely to pull it off, but you’ll be worth it.”

“We will _never_ fight for you,” James spat.

Lena shook her head. “You really don’t know what you’re doing,” she laughed.

The good doctor ignored them, turned his back, and Lena went back to her cuffs, bearing out the shocks because she _almost_ had them.

The machine started up, and James shouted, “Leave her alone!”

“Oh, what do you care? She’s the bad guy!”

“Right now,” Lena gritted out, “you’re the bad guy. Which means we _will_ stop you.”

Something crashed through the window as the groaning metal gave way - two somethings: Kara and Mon-El.

“Him?” James hissed. “Really?”

“I know.”

“Mon-El, after the copies!” Kara threw the doctor away from Livewire and came over to break James’ cuffs. Lena smashed them off her wrists, head down so she didn’t have to look at Kara.

“I’ll get Livewire,” she said, skirting the elephant in the room. “You two… help Mon-El.”

With a sharp nod, Lena obeyed, and James was right behind her. When they came up on the two knockoffs, Mon-El wasn’t there. He was off, not listening, trying to go for the doctor and being blasted into the wall for his ill-advised troubles.

“I’ll be right back,” Lena promised, and bolted off to help him. She drew out one baton, absorbing the blast with it so Mon-El could get down. He joined James in the fight, and after she threw herself backwards to throw the doctor off, so did Lena.

Side by side, they fought - some in each other’s way, some working together - and they were winning against the knockoffs. Still, they managed to escape the fray for a moment, and all that stopped them was Leslie - Livewire. The _real_ Livewire.
Kara zoomed over, started punching with them. The copies were going down, hard, until finally, back to back, the four of them stood in a triumphant ring over their unconscious bodies.

“No, Leslie, Leslie, don’t kill him!” Kara cried out, racing over to her.

Lena started to advance on the scene, cautious, slow.

“You can’t!”

“You said we’d punish him!” Livewire’s voice was rough, plaintive.

“Not like this. He - he will go to jail, I swear.”

Kara’s heart was so loud, her lungs so empty; Lena could hear each shallow breath echoing.

“I’ll make you a deal, All-American Barbie,” Livewire spat. “He goes to prison, but I never see the inside of a cell again.”

“I can’t make that deal.”

“Then he fries.” She was so glib, raising her hand, her whole body crackling with desperate, vengeful fury.

“Livewire, don’t!”

Livewire chanced a look, and Lena met her gaze, stared her dead in the eyes and, god, somehow, they looked human. Kara turned and looked at Lena, too, eyes wide. She floundered before turning back. “Leslie, please…”

“My name is Livewire!”

“Livewire, listen to me!”

“Why?” She didn’t turn, but Lena could feel the resolution weighing on her shoulders. “You know you can’t stop me from killing him.”

Kara approached her, coming too close for comfort, and as much as Lena trusted her, was awed by her strength and compassion, she was ready to stand between them and take everything Livewire had, including her life, if it meant Kara went unharmed.

“You know you can’t stop me from chasing you. And you know how fast I am.” Her voice was so soft, coaxing. “If you spare him - if you do that much - maybe I’ll wait to chase you until he’s in jail.”

Livewire sniffled, almost too quiet for human ears.

“Maybe.”

That was enough.

She flicked her wrist, and the electric noose around the doctor’s neck vanished, leaving him gasping but unharmed. “Just us girls next time,” she snipped. “We can braid each other’s hair.”

Kara outright smiled - just with her eyes.

“And that includes you, Purple Nurple, or whatever your name is.”
Lena nodded, watching her arc away into the fluorescent lights, and wondered if it was a bad thing that she could see herself being friends with a supervillain.

James and Mon-El made it over, finally, and James said, “You can still catch her.”

“I know.” Kara’s lips matched her eyes, curving upwards slowly but surely. “But not today.”

“Should’ve waited.”

Kara looked expectantly at Lena, arms crossed.

“I should have waited, and I’m sorry. I - I know you have more experience with this than anyone, and I trust you - totally, implicitly, explicitly. But sometimes…” Lena sighed, hugging herself, fingers digging into her arm hard enough to bruise. “Do you trust me?”

“I do! With everything I am.”

Except your true identity, Lena thought with a bitterness that surprised her.

Except with the join between the two parts of you.

“Just not - I can’t ” Kara sighed, brow furrowed deep. “You always listen to me. And I always listen to you. That’s why we work so well together. Why - why not today?”

“Because - ” Lena shook her head, raked her fingers through her hair and shoved the cowl off. “I needed to. I needed to help them, to trust them, to have them trust me. You are the most important person in my life, you and Kara, and I don’t want to do anything that would cause either of you harm, but knowing you has brought other people into my life. For the first time, I’m not alone! I’m not isolated! And they are my friends, and I want to be there for them, too.” She gulped, harsh, and looked up to meet Supergirl’s eyes. “I believe in them, and I know you do, too. I went with them because I’m not human. I’m harder to break than they are. I went to stop them from getting hurt.”

Kara nodded, took a breath. “Thank you, for trying to protect them. I’m - I’m happy you have friends, Lena. I just - I can’t replace you. You are a singular person, and there’s only one of you, and I can’t - I don’t want to lose you. I care about you too much, in a way - ”

Something sick caught in Lena’s throat. “Then why did you bring Mon-El with you? That last fight, you needed to save our asses. I get that. But you could have come alone. You could have handled that alone, or with me and James, but you didn’t, you brought him. Why? He doesn’t listen to you! He went and tried to fight that quack of a doctor, and I had to go save his ass. Why aren’t you mad at him?” She clenched her jaw, vision blurring. “If I’m so singular, why did you bring him in to replace me?”

“I don’t know.” Supergirl clenched her fists on the railing of the D.E.O. balcony and shook her head, staring down at the street below. “I don’t know why I brought him. I shouldn’t have brought him. He was useless in that fight. I just thought… I don’t know.”

“What? What did you think?” Lena leaned against the railing, deliberately looking beyond the rooftops in the opposite direction. “That he’d make me jealous? That seeing someone else fight with you would make me sorry for disagreeing, and I’d run right back and be all yours again?”

Was it anger, throbbing in their chests so loud it was all Lena could hear?

“I wanted to show you that no one else is as good at working with me as you are.” Supergirl pinched
the bridge of her nose, thumb grinding into her eye socket. “I need a partner who will listen to me, and he won’t. He’s not there to save people, he’s there - He’s reckless, he’s untrustworthy. Not like you. You’re careful, you listen, I trust you. I wanted you to see that we should be a team.”

“We are a team. We were a team. I - are we still a team?” Finally, Lena broke, and looked at Kara, her pensive moonlit profile. “Can we still fight side by side after this? After I betray your trust, after you replace me with that - that awful excuse for a partner?”

“Do we.” Supergirl turned her head, blue eyes unwaveringly fixed on Lena’s green. “Do we take a break?”

“Do you want to?”

“I don’t know what I want!” Hands flung up, Kara let out a pained groan, eyes squeezed shut. “I don’t know what I want. I want the people I love safe, but safe doesn’t make them happy, and I want them happy. I want you with me, but I want you to want to be with me, too. I - ” She hid her face in her hands, dragging them down her cheeks. “Maybe we need a break. Just a little one.”

“Okay.”

“To think. About whether or not we’re okay. About - about how we feel.”

“Of course.”

“You can still - I mean, I don’t have the right to give you permission, but if you want to keep working with the Guardian team, I - I won’t stop you.”

“And if - if Mon-El is serious about being a hero, you should be the one to train him. If you want to do that.”

Kara laughed, rough. “He isn’t serious about that. It was - a passing fancy.”

“Okay.”

Lena hadn’t ended a conversation with Kara without some sort of hug in months. She wanted to hug her, so badly, give her a wordless confirmation that she cared, too, so fucking much, and that she was never going away.

She didn’t. She couldn’t. Kara’s eyes were sadness blue, and she was curled in on herself, so Lena touched her shoulder, feather-light, before climbing onto the railing and jumping off, flinging herself out into empty space.

She could take a break. If Kara needed one, if Kara wanted one, she could endure it.

Chapter End Notes

I know. I’m sorry. Don’t worry, though, because this is Only Temporary. My gay ass couldn’t break these two up for longer than it takes to write, say, 3572 words if I tried.

Thank you all for reading and being so kind and supportive and active; it really means the world to me.
Next chapter goes up Tuesday!!
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Set during Season 2x11: The Martian Chronicles. With the DEO on lockdown, Lena has to face facts and feelings with a new friend. (Sort of.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Titanium, when added to marionite mark 2, helped with the conducting problem, but Lena wanted a little extra protection. She threw in a little bismuth, to prevent rusting and lower the conductivity even further, then applied the armor to her suit and called it a day.

In truth, though Kara had said she’d be okay with Lena and Guardian working together while they were split, Lena couldn’t bring herself to do it. It hurt too much.

She buried herself in transmatter and transdimensional transport, calculations and formulae, any and everything that could make them work, because then, she’d be contributing something positive to the world.

Sometimes, when blue light crackled and swirled before collapsing away, Lena thought about Livewire, crackling away somewhere. She thought about how she’d liked Leslie - her cutting dry humor, her ferocity, her ability to fight for herself - and how she’d liked Lex.

She wondered if she was even qualified to fight for good, when so often, she liked evil.

She was a mess.

She probably would have caught herself on fire and died, at least eight times, if she was human, but instead, when there was a crackling that wasn’t from her equipment and her welding torch touched her palm at 9.30p.m., she just accidentally crushed the nozzle in her fist.

“So, you’re the nurple behind the purple.”

Livewire was sitting in her lab, legs crossed like a pinup poster, in actual people clothes - black leather people clothes, but people clothes nonetheless.

“There are other purple things in the world, you know,” said Lena once she’d collected herself and turned off the torch. “You could call me an eggplant.”

Blasé, Livewire inspected her black lacquered nails and drawled, “I get the feeling you’re not an eggplant kind of gal.”

Lena’s jaw tightened.

“Relax. I’m not here to hurt you.” Looking around, Livewire smiled. “I could like it down here. Lots to eat.”

“My lab isn’t a brunch buffet.” Lena turned back to her prototype, only to remember she lacked a
torch with a heavy sigh.

“Magic fingers, only twenty five cents.” Leslie pointed a finger, blue lightning arcing around the tip, and said, “Weld away, Violet.”

“Beauregard or Baudelaire?” Lena murmured, taking her hand and guiding it, working quickly and carefully. “Thank you.”

“Thank you. You almost got my ass out of that chair.”

Lena straightened up and crossed her arms, leaning against the table. “I didn’t, though. That’s on K-Supergirl.”

“Kara?” At Lena’s widened eyes, Livewire cackled. “Oh, please, like glasses are a disguise? Besides, she’s my nemesis. What kind of nemesis am I if I don’t know everything about her?”

“Um.”

“And I do mean everything.”

“Why are you here?”

“Because you used my name.” Livewire shot a cluster of bolts at the floor, floating off the table and across the lab. “Because you tried to help me. Because Kara Danvers loves you.”

“She’s my best friend.”

“No.”

“I’d know whether or not my best friend was in love with me.”

“Both of you, running around with big bad butch armor, fighting crime while holding hands, practically reciting wedding vows at every opportunity?” Livewire snorted. “Oh, honey, you are blind as a bat.”

“Actually, I have contacts.”

“So it’s just boring, old, garden-variety low self esteem.” Livewire twisted, lying on her stomach, and looked down at Lena with a smirk on her blacked-out lips.

“You came back to poke fun at my relationship with my best friend, cool, cool.”

“I have her, you know.” Livewire knocked her knuckles against her sternum. “In me.”

Lena’s brain short-circuited, just a little.

“I got my powers when lightning passed through her body and into mine. We were connected. We still are.” Floating closer, crackling, she smiled unnervingly wide. “I have her DNA now, so I don’t know if I’m still all the way human, but... I like it this way. I like being a freak of nature.”

Jaw tight, Lena said, “Good for you.”

“Do you know what you are?”

“No, I don’t.” Lena shrugged away from that sore spot and started fussing with the portal, which sputtered, staying open just a little longer.
“You should find out.”

“I’m trying.”

“Y’know, back when I was just a shock jock, Lena Luthor: the Alien! is a story I would’ve killed for.”

The portal collapsed, and Lena whipped around, eyes hard. “You’ve lost your credibility now, Livewire. No one will believe you.”

“Hey, look, baby got fire!” Livewire executed a lazy loop-de-loop, her face passing Lena’s upside down. “Why would I want to sink back to that? I’m actually special now. Also, why would I want to fuck with the only other person as obsessed with Supergirl as me?”

“I’m not - ”

“Obsessed, yadda yadda, denial, bullshit, whatever. You’d do anything for her.”

“She gave me a family. An understanding of myself. Even though I don’t know what I am, I know who I am, and that’s because of her.”

“See, Baudelaire brat? You and I are the same.”

“I’ve never killed anyone.”

“But for her, you would.”

“You’d just kill her.”

“What’s the fun in a dead nemesis?”

“So, what?” Lena scoffed. “You want her attention?”

“The most powerful woman in the world? Hell, yes, I want her attention, and I will always have it.”

Lena turned away, pushing the button again, opening a tiny, weak portal.

“Because I’m a part of her, and she’s a part of me.” Livewire waved a hand over Lena’s head, static making her hair stand on end. “Connected. Bound. Linked.”

On impulse, Lena grabbed Livewire’s wrist and flipped her down onto the table. Looming over her, what she did registered, and she scuttled backwards, hand clapped over her mouth.

“Find out what you are.” Livewire stretched, luxuriating on the table, and touched both portal generating prototypes, draining their power. “Just for funsies.”

Lena sagged. “Fine. If I ask about my stupid DNA, will you stop?”

“Pinkie promise: when you get your answer, I’ll leave you alone.”

☆

No one was picking up. Not Alex, not Winn, not Pam from HR. Lena couldn’t bring herself to call Kara - if she needed space, space she would have.

“This is boring.”
“Boo-hoo,” Lena drawled. “Go zap in, if you’re so needy.”

Livewire zapped, and was back seconds later, thrown on her ass. Lena scrambled to her side and was about to check her pupils for a concussion when she remembered Livewire’s eyes were all pupil.

“I didn’t know you cared, Baudelaire.”

Lena dropped her head and recoiled, scooting away. “What happened?”

“They’re on lockdown.”

“What?” Lena jumped to her feet and started for the door. “I have to go. Don’t eat my lab or - !”

Livewire had wrapped a bolt of lightning around her waist, staying her progress.

“Let me go!”

“Sorry, dumpling, but if I can’t get in, neither can you.” Livewire shrugged and sat down, jerking the lasso so Lena had to sit, too. “Even if you can punch through walls.”

“I wouldn’t punch their walls. My friends work there, I can’t damage the infrastructure.”

Livewire cocked a bleached-out eyebrow and leaned back on her elbows. “That’s your concern? Reconstruction?”

With a sigh, Lena crossed her legs and tugged on the electric lasso. “Can you..?”

Livewire flicked her wrist and the charge dissipated, and Lena flopped back on the floor, cool concrete crumbling a little under her head.

“So, what are your powers?” Livewire asked. “Besides the super strength.”

“I can jump. Really high - upper atmosphere high. And I have super hearing. She - Kara - helped me get control over that. It was painful at first, but she taught me - if I focus on one sound, I can mete everything out.”

“What did you focus on?”

“Her heart.” Lena frowned, concentrating for a moment. “But I can’t hear her right now. Shit, she could be in trouble.”

“When is blondie not in trouble?”

“When I’m there to help! When someone’s there to help - her sister, her boss, her friends! But if they’re all trapped in there with something - !” Shoving upright hard enough to dig her fingers into the floor, Lena moved towards the door again.

This time, Livewire caught her by the ankle and dragged her back, shaking her head. “You’re so dumb.”

“I am not.” Lena clawed into the floor, holding herself in place too hard for Livewire to beat her strength, and jerked her knee up so Livewire went flying her way. “Can you stop doing that?”

“If you stop being an idiot.” Livewire sat up, blew her hair out of her face. “Look, the building’s in lockdown. No one is getting anywhere until the situation is resolved. You’re just gonna have to wait
it out.”

Lena groaned and pulled her hands out of the floor. She brushed concrete dust off onto her pants and stood, wiggling her ankle meaningfully.

“Are you going to run?”

“I’m going to get some quick-drying concrete so no one else who comes into this lab sees my…” Lena sighed. “Mess.”

The charge disappeared, and Lena walked off. She opened the steel closet that held all her chemical supplies and ingredients and just stared for a minute, fingers too tight on the doors.

_I don’t want to be away from her. I don’t care about the danger, I don’t care about Guardian or Mon-El. I just want to be there so I can know she’s safe and help her if she isn’t._

“I can smell your pining from over here.”

Lena grabbed her cement, her various silicates and sulfates, her quick lime and limestone dust. She did her very best not to stomp into the floor, and ignored Livewire completely as she started measuring everything out. Lena only acknowledged her to warn her: “Water’s the next ingredient. You may want to move back.”

Livewire scooted away and watched her pour it in, then stir the mixture with her bare hand. “Isn’t that shit _extremely_ caustic?”

“I’m nigh unto indestructible. If molten metal can’t burn me, I doubt this can.”

“Huh.”

Livewire rested her chin in her hands, black eyes wide and observing as Lena doled the concrete out, carefully smoothing it over with her fingers, and went to wash her hands.

“You’re not from her planet, are you?”

“No. I can’t fly.”

“Y’know, when you stormed in all Flying Purple People Eater, I thought for a second you were like me. A second attempt at a Kryptonian rubbing off on a human, of power filtering through her and passing on to someone weaker.”

“You thought she was replacing you?”

“Only a little bit.”

Lena dried her hands and sat back down, maybe ten feet from Livewire. “She’s not like that.”

“She’s too good.”

“I know.” Her head thudded back against a pillar, controlled in its descent - Lena didn’t want to mix up another batch of concrete - and her stomach snarled impudently. “Do you still eat? Or are you all battery power?”

“I haven’t had food in a while.” Livewire eyed her growling stomach and Lena drew her knees up to block the view. “I could eat.”
“Any opinions?”

“I haven’t had a burrito in a year.”

“Mexican it is,” Lena started to stand, then sat back down. Right. “You’re a wanted woman and I’m a camera draw.”

“I’m cool with delivery.”

And that was how, forty five minutes later, Jess dropped off a hot brown paper bag, barely double-taking at the literal criminal whose ass was parked not fifteen feet from a laser that could actually cut through bone - a surgical tool Lena was working on that could easily be turned into a weapon.

Granted, with her hair pulled up into a sloppy bun, and making grabby hands at her barbacoa and Manchego burrito oozing red pico de gallo, Livewire looked more like a grad student taking a study break than an actual supervillain.

“Thank you, Jess.” Lena watched Livewire rifle through the bag with a rush of affection, but shook it off and turned towards her secretary. “Did you get something for yourself? It’s late enough you should have had dinner, and I know you didn’t.”

“Yes, Ms. Luthor - deshebrada and salsa verde. I’ll be eating at my desk if you need me.”

“You can go home before I do, you know.”

“I like staying until you go. That way, I know I’ve done my job.”

With that, she was gone, and Lena pulled out her own meal - turkey mole on brown rice with about a pint of the hottest salsa the restaurant could manufacture - and popped the lid off, sighing into the fragrant steam.

“She’s cute.”

Lena looked up, eyes wide. “Jess?”

“Oh, yeah. She’s adorable.” Livewire took a big bite, chewed slowly. “And so devoted.”

“She works for me.”

“I’m not accusing you of anything. Just looking, is all.”

“Oh. Oh!” Lena pointed her plastic fork at Livewire, eyes hard. “You’re not allowed to flirt with my secretary.”

“Why not?”

“Because - ”

Because you’re evil, and trying to kill Supergirl most of the time, and I’m not letting the next Lex Luthor come into my goddamn company and run the risk of hurting someone.

“I’m Barbie’s arch nemesis, and you don’t trust me with that tiny innocent.” Livewire grinned, licking sauce off her thumb without taking her perceptive, eerie eyes off Lena. “And yet, here you are, feeding me, letting me sit by your big, scary weapons.”
“They’re not weapons.”

“Tools, fine, whatever.” She leaned forward, elbows on her knees, and said, “Double standards aren’t sexy.”

“I’m not – ” Lena huffed a sigh. “Just because I’m an idiot with no self-preservation instincts doesn’t mean I’m enough of an ignoramus to endanger my employees.”

“You’re such a bleeding heart.” Livewire laughed, fingertips sparking gleefully. “Man, this is great! Better than dessert.”

“No alfajores for you, then.” Lena grinned and dragged the bag away, parking it in her lap and hunching around it.

“I take it back, you’re an asshole ice queen with a heart of stone, now gimme.”

Eyes rolling like tumbleweed, Lena rummaged around in the bag for a moment before throwing one Livewire’s way. She tucked into it with as much vigor as she had her long-overdue burrito, and Lena wondered if she’d been okay, just feeding on electricity. Then she cursed herself for wondering, for caring at all about an actual, literal supervillain.

“Mm.” Sucking her fingertips clean, Livewire leaned back, blacked-out eyes peaceful. “Food is fantastic. I’d almost forgotten.”

“They fed you watts in prison?”

“No.” Livewire shrugged, like it didn’t matter. “I’d sneak-eat phone batteries sometimes, but after a while, they stopped carrying them around, and I went hungry again.”

“Didn’t they try to give you food?”

“I only really need the charge, but that makes me ‘too dangerous.’”

Lena bristled. “They starved you in prison. Jesus Christ.”

“Careful, now,” Livewire teased, “or I might start to think you care about me.”

Lena stared down at her food like she intended to catch it on fire with the power of her mind.

“Oh, my god, you care about me.” Livewire grabbed another alfajor out of the bag and chomped down. “Lame.”

“The first time I saw you, you were held captive by a lunatic who was sucking you dry. You were a victim. How am I supposed to not feel for you?” Blood roared in Lena’s ears, and she shoved her container aside, suddenly not hungry.

“So you used my name.”

“I know what names mean.”

Livewire nodded slowly. “Luthor.”

“It’s the only family I have left. Even if they’re horrible people, they’re my horrible people, and I can’t - I can’t cut myself off from the only people who loved me when I was little.”

Livewire stared as Lena pulled out two of the chocolate-coated cookies and bit down on them in a
Lena nodded, swallowed hard. “Yeah, I have been, but I can’t exactly run around calling myself Lena Danvers.”

Livewire’s eyes widened and she grinned.

“You’ve got her, though. And her friends, her family. You’ve been adopted, but now by... decent people.”

“Or Schott! Or Olsen, or - or - or Lane, J’onzz, Henshaw, Sawyer, Vasquez! Grant! I can’t call myself by her name just because she loves Kara and Kara cares about me. I can’t use my friends’ names, even if they’re better family than mine ever was.”

Livewire looked away, and Lena ran through the list of names, catching on the last.

“She was your mentor.”

“And then she was Kara’s, and I was a nuisance.” Livewire’s jaw tightened. “Until I went rogue, she only noticed me to ream me out for what I did at work.”

“I know what that’s like,” Lena murmured, but Livewire didn’t look back up.

Instead, she asked, “You gonna finish that?” and pointed at her unfinished food.

“Take it.” Lena watched her drag it over with a lightning bolt and took another bite of her cookie stack. “I’ll eat again later.”

“Bet you eat all the time.”

“Thank god I have money. I don’t know how Kara feeds herself on her salary.”

They finished their food in easy silence; Lena was too busy keeping an ear out for Kara’s heartbeat to say a word.

When they did speak again, Livewire was the one who broke the silence.

“Why not turn me in right now?” she asked. “I walked into my enemy’s house. That’s dumb enough to deserve it.”

Lena shook her head. “I made a promise. I swore I wouldn’t hunt you until that incompetent quack was in jail, and he hasn’t even been to trial yet. I promised you, and I promised - ”

“Her.”

“I keep my word, Livewire.” Lena looked her dead in the eyes, her own reflection - in all its tension and urgent earnestness - staring back. “You’re a free woman.”

Livewire exercised that freedom by stretching over and kissing her. It was shockingly gentle, save for the mild, if literal, electric shocks, and also shockingly brief. Within three seconds, she was sitting back on her heels like nothing had happened. Lena wasn’t so lucky, red-faced, brain totally stalled.

“What,” she asked, voice hoarse, when she finally had her wits about her, “the hell was that?”

“She’s part of me.” Livewire shrugged. “Now you know what it’s like to kiss her.”

Lena swallowed hard, fingers to her lips. “I don’t think it works that way.”
“It does if you want it to.” She grinned, black lips still perfect. “It wasn’t a come on, by the way. You’re not my type.”

“Jess is. And Kara.” Lena found a taunting smile of her own. “You just like girls in pencil skirts and ponytails.”

Livewire laughed, a belly-deep cackle, and slapped the floor. “See? We’ve got a type.”

Lena found herself swept up in the levity, laughing so hard she almost couldn’t breathe. When the laughter finally died off, she wiped her eyes and looked at Livewire - really looked at her. “Are we friends?”

“We’re friend-adjacent. Like weird gay buddies. Bound irrevocably by our weakness for Supergirl’s stupid perfect everything.”

“I’ll take it.” Lena laughed again, softer, and shook her head. “Fun, deadly pen pal.”

“Now that’s something I’d put on a business card.”

“Do you really need one? I mean, your work speaks for itself.” Lena grinned. “And you’re self-employed.”

Livewire snorted, kicking Lena’s knee. “I’d probably burn ‘em up, anyway.”

Suddenly, cutting off what would have, no doubt, been a delightfully witty retort, was that familiar sound - tha-thump, tha-thump, tha-thump, tha-thump.

“Is lockdown over?”

Lena nodded, her own heart pounding. “I need to - ”

“Go for it.”

“Are you going to be okay if I leave?”

Livewire snorted. “Are you asking about my feelings, or about whether or not I’ll put your building into a blackout?”

“Both. In that order.”

“I’ll be cool. And I won’t eat your generator.” She grinned, throwing the leftovers back into their bag and stretching. “Weird gay buddies, right? Go profess your love to Prom Queen.”

Lena nodded, and resisted the urge to hug her. “I wouldn’t recommend coming back. Just in case.”

Livewire gave a tight smile as her affirmative. “Yeah. I’m not that dumb.”

“Don’t peek into Jess’ bathroom light fixture.”

“I’m not a creep. Just a supervillain. I have standards.”

Lena couldn’t help herself. Livewire would just have to bear a crushing pseudo-Kryptonian hug.

“Ew, you’re so mushy.”

“You need some mush in your life.” Lena started towards the door, passing the point where Livewire
always stopped her, and looked over her shoulder at her. “Go eat the stop light on 56th and Prince. Maybe they’ll finally replace the cracked bulb if it goes out.”

☆

“Supergirl?”

Even with the wind in her ears as she bounded from rooftop to rooftop, Kara’s voice was still crystal clear.

“Lena!”

She sounded breathless, but not afraid.

“Are you alright? The building went into lockdown, I was - ”

“No, no, we’re okay. There was some drama with a White Martian, but it’s over now. Everyone’s safe.” Kara took a deep breath. “Listen, Lena…”

“Before you say anything, I just need you to know.” Lena’s voice caught. “I don’t want to be on a break. I don’t want to be away from you. I was so scared when the D.E.O. was locked down because I couldn’t hear your heartbeat, and I’m always listening to it, because knowing you’re alive and okay is number one on my list, all the time. The only kind of fighting I want to do with you is against bad guys, and I’ll wait until you want to work together again, as long as it takes, but just know that I will always treasure you, no matter what.”

“I’m Kara!”

Lena tripped, skidding down a building until she could dig her fingers into the brick and stop her fall.

“Kara Danvers is Supergirl, and Supergirl is Kara Danvers.”

“Okay.”

“I’ve wanted to tell you, because you’re my best friend and I care about you so much, and when Mon-El tried to be my backup, he said it was because he - he liked me. He was in it for me. And the only person I want to protect me like that, fight with me like that, is you. And Alex. Who told me I should ‘just fucking tell you already,’ which is weird because she was the one who always pushed to keep this a secret because she wanted me to be safe, but - ” Kara stopped rambling. “Did you say okay?”

“Yes.”

“Just… okay?”

“I’m just - I’m really happy you trusted me enough to tell me.” Lena sniffled, clawing her way back up onto the roof and starting to run again. “The two most important people in my life are one person? My best friend is my partner in crimefighting? You trust me enough to feel safe telling me your biggest secret? That’s probably the best news I’ve heard in - in ever.”

“But - I didn’t tell you for so long.”

“You weren’t ready, and that’s okay.” Lena skidded to the edge of the last building before the D.E.O. and looked down to see Kara, red cape and all, standing in the midst of the puddle of glow from inside. “But now you are. And Alex trusts me with your secret, too, and I know she’s the most
important person in your life, and that means so much to me.”

Wetly, Kara laughed, running her fingers through her hair. “Where are you?”

Lena landed, with practiced grace, behind her, and stood up to tap her shoulder with a cheeky grin. She didn’t get the chance; Kara just wheeled around and wrapped her in a crushing hug, face buried in her hair. Lena flung her arms around Kara’s waist, fingers clutching the folds of her cape, and let her eyes fall shut.

“I meant it,” she murmured. “Thank you for trusting me with everything.”

“I’m never keeping secrets from you again.” Kara sniffled. “It hurts too much.”

Lena kissed the curve of her shoulder, burrowing into her warmth, and thought, *This is enough.* More than enough.

*I’m so stupidly happy.*

Chapter End Notes

So! Was it worth the wait? Did you count the words? Did I do a good job? Was this chapter everything Soft and Gay you could have ever asked for?

(Please tell me; I need positive reinforcement.)
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Set during 2x12: Luthors. The truth comes out, the truth comes out, the truth tries its best.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When her mother died, Lena had been at school, suppressing a migraine that flared at 2.06p.m. precisely. They took her to the nurse, who couldn’t find anything wrong, and had only just decided to call home when it suddenly stopped. Another fruitless inspection, and Lena asked to go back to class.

Her mother didn’t come to pick her up, so Lena snuck away from the teachers staying late to watch her and walked home, clutching the straps of her backpack with white knuckles. She unlocked the front door with the key hidden under the welcome mat and saw her mother slumped over on the floor. Not moving. Not breathing.

She called the police, too calm, and waited by her side, holding her hand, pretending it wasn’t growing cold. They called Marion’s emergency contact - a man called Lionel who came and picked her up, looked into her green eyes so like his own, and smiled at her.

“Do you know who I am?”

“Mommy’s emergency contact. 215-555-8216.”

He laughed, warm and deep, and stroked her hair. “That’s right. Your mommy wanted me to take care of you, if anything happened to her, so we’re going home together.”

Lena hugged her stuffed bear and took his hand. He led her out to his shiny black car - ’93 Lincoln Continental - and sat in the back with her.

He was so nice, and when she asked about his family, it sounded like he loved them so much. Lena was excited to be surrounded by all that love.

When she walked in, she didn’t feel it. For all the warm wood and warm lighting, she felt cold.

“Now,” said the woman, long neck bared by an elegant French twist, “let’s see how you defend against the Alekhine Variation.” She stopped ignoring them, turned to look. “Lionel?”

Her voice was so cold, it had to be her freezing everything.

“Keep setting up,” she said to the boy sitting opposite her, and stormed over, seeming for all the world calm, but the sharp click of her heels belied that quite clearly. “I thought we had discussed this.”
“We did.” His voice was cool, steady. “And this is what we’re doing.” Then he turned to Lena, stroked her hair. “Lena, this is your new mother.”

Lena gave her biggest, best smile - the one that made her Mommy cup her face in her warm, dry hands and kiss her forehead.

Her new mother was not impressed.

The boy, all long limbs, smiled at her. “I’m Lex. I’m going to be your new brother. Wanna play?”

He gestured over at the chess set, ready for a new game, and led Lena over like she’d been there for years, like this was normal and okay.

Lillian said, “I think having a sister will be good for Lex,” and Lena could only hope that was true.

Maybe it would make her new mother love her.

☆

“You don’t have to watch this,” Kara murmured. Her hand on Lena’s back moved in steady arcs up and down her spine, sometimes skirting the nape of her neck. “We can go somewhere else.”

“No,” Lena shook her head and leaned into the touch. “I’m okay.”

“Okay.”

On the bar’s TV screen, Amanda Singh, newscaster, said, “The trial of Lillian Luthor continued today. Luthor, the the suspected head of the anti-alien terrorist organization, Cadmus, has been charged with a host of crimes, including the use of a bio-weapon in an attempted extermination of all aliens in National City.”

Looking around at all the alien faces - the obvious and the subtle, the passing and the blatant - and whispered, “Maybe I should go.”

“That woman is bad news,” Mon-El interjected, brash and brassy, wiping down the bartop. Over Amanda’s prattle, he continued. “I hope once she’s convicted, they - they, uh, put her in the town square for public shaming. On Daxam, it really seemed to cut back on recidivism.”

Kara shot him the nastiest look she could muster, while Lena just tipped the rest of her drink down her throat. “They got rid of that punishment a long time ago,” she hissed, “because it was unnecessarily cruel. Inhumane.”

“That’s too bad.” He tossed his rag over his shoulder. “Haven’t seen you in a while, Kara.”

“It’s deliberate.” She sipped her club soda, jaw tight. “We’ve been busy.”

Mon-El’s eyes flicked over to Lena, then away just as quickly. “Yeah?”

“Just chasing bad guys.”

That was true; when the news wasn’t spouting coverage of Lillian’s trial, it was showing clips of Supergirl and Galaxy Girl flushing National City’s crime rate down the toilet. Side by side. It was a good distraction.

“How are you?”
“How’s Eve?”

“How’s Eve?” Lena’s eyebrows practically disappeared into her hairline. “Huh.”

“Great! Eve is great. We are - ” He gulped. “We’re great. Things are great.”

“I’m happy for you,” was Kara’s crisp reply. “Can we have another round?”

“Coming right up.”

Kara pulled Lena back to their table, parking her between herself and Winn at the end of the table - more on the corner, really, so close their elbows bumped into each other. “Another round’s on it’s way.” She paused, frowned. “Are you okay, J’onn?”

“Yeah, it’s just.” His shoulders curled in. “This is the first time I’ve been in this bar since, uh, M’gann left.”

Kara looked so soft, like all she wanted was to comfort him and the words wouldn’t come, so Winn jumped in and cut the tension. “So, I am very excited to meet Alex’s mystery man.”

Lena coughed to cover the laugh in her throat. “Um, me - me, too.”

“What does he do?” James asked. “Alex’s guy.”

Kara blurted Cop like she couldn’t risk a longer sentence.

“Yeah. No way Alex Danvers dates someone who doesn’t own a firearm.”

Speak of the devil, Alex walked up, holding Maggie’s hand behind her back. Her heart was so fast, a jackrabbit in a drum. “Um, you guys all remember Maggie, right?”

James’ eyes widened; Winn did his best to be deeply casual. Lena just beamed, flashing her the most covert thumbs up possible.

“AleX!”

“I - I didn’t know. Did you know?”

J’onn warmed, smiling for the first time that night. “Yes, I knew, I’m psychic.”

“How come you never said anything?”

“It wasn’t mine to say,” he said with soft eyes. “Good for you.”

Giddy, goofy, Alex swayed into Maggie’s side. “Yeah.”

“Drinks up!” Mon-El swooped in, setting beers down with a clank. “Bubbly club soda for the lady,” he oozed, placing Kara’s highball glass in her hands.

She thanked him, more attention paid to her drink than his overt flirtations.

“And a human Scotch that takes all the fun out of drinking.”

Lena gave a pressed-lipped smile and took a long sip.

“Hey!” Alex chirped, buzzing. “Hi!”
“Oh, what’s up?”

“Well, I just wanted to let you know Maggie and I are dating now.”

“Oh. That was the - the thing. Oh, okay.” He floundered. “Is - is that, like, a problem, here on Earth?”

“Well, you know, on Earth, not everyone supports ladies lovin’ ladies.”

“Well, on Daxam, it’s the more the merrier, so…” He grinned, the same grin you see on OKCupid profiles for straight couples with unicorn emoji in their bio, and both women leaned away. “Drinks for you two?”

“Yes, please.”

Kara watched that interaction with keen eyes; Lena wondered what she was thinking.

“Hey, do you play pool?” Maggie asked Winn, tapping his shoulder.

“Um, yeah!”

“Wait,” James laughed, “hold on.”

Kara stared at him like he’d started chewing on his chair. “What?”

“Winn, you can’t even throw a candy wrapper in the trash from two feet,” Lena teased, knocking the toe of her shoe into his shin.

“It’s geometry with sticks, folks!” he protested. “Pool is easy.”

“I’ll play you, Maggie,” Lena offered.

“Oh, you’re on, little Luthor.”

James stood and wrapped his arms around Alex, murmuring, “Congratulations.”

“My money’s on your girl,” J’onn said to Alex, and Lena could hear her heart flutter with glee.

“Yes, thanks, me, too.”

“Are you breaking, or am I?” Lena asked.

“Tell you what.” Maggie leaned on her pool cue and grinned crookedly, one cheek dimpling deeper than the other. “I’ll let you go. This time.”

Lena couldn’t help but grin. Next time! New friend! Alex’s girlfriend doesn’t hate me!

She lined up the shot, calculating just how she could sink three striped balls without knocking any solids into a pocket.

As she struck, Amanda Singh said, “Testifying today against Luthor is her adopted daughter, Lena Luthor, acting CEO of L Corp.”

Lena’s cue punctured the whole table, screeching horribly on the floor., while the pale pixels pretending to be her blinked wetly onscreen.

The bar went silent for less than a second, enough to rubberneck and get bored, but it felt like
decades.

Lena muttered, “Sorry,” and hurried to the bar to try and pay for her stupid, *stupid* mistake.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Maggie called. “Happens to the best of us.”

Kara and James were under the TV, and they both turned to watch her come up. “Hey, are you okay?”

“Fine, James. I should get going.” Lena opened her wallet, trying to calculate, and gave up. Her brain was buzzing useless noise too loudly. “How much does a damn pool table cost?”

“Ask Google?”

Lena shook her head and tore out a blank check. She signed it, dropped it over the bartop, and started for the door.

“Hey.” Kara’s voice was so fucking gentle. “You’re doing the right thing, and you’re being so, *so* brave.”

With a watery smile, Lena pulled away and ran.

Even though the trial was for the day, Lena couldn’t escape it. She’d actually used her driver, for the first time in months - it had been so long that Georgie looked shocked - just to avoid looking at anyone, but she turned the TV on in her office and stayed there all night, watching, playing with her portals.

Kara had given her the night to stew, but the next day, she walked in, white cardboard in hand, cheerfully greeting Jess on her way. As soon as the doors were closed, however, she turned towards the TV, eyes powering up.

“Lillian Luthor’s defense attorney tried to downplay Lena Luthor’s testimony, characterizing her statements as the angry rant of an estranged - ”

Her heat vision fried the circuitry, and she thundered over to Lena’s desk, wrapping her in a hug.

Lena’s throat ached around a little sob that finally managed to sneak out. “Everyone’s got an opinion about me,” she said hoarsely. “Ungrateful daughter, heroine. Bitch.”

Kara shook her head, planted a kiss on Lena’s hair. “Oh, Lena…”

“And they’ve all called for a quote.” Lena squeezed her eyes shut. “But not you? Snapper Carr hasn’t sent you down here for a quote?”

“No! No. I’m here as a friend.”

Another pathetic hiccuping sob.

“I know you didn’t leave your office last night, and I know you didn’t have any food brought up, so I brought you these.”

Doughnuts. Easily two dozen - chocolate frosted, yeast raised. Her favorite.

“Thank you, Kara.”

They pulled only a few inches apart, Kara’s arms still around Lena, and flopped down on her couch
with the box balanced between their laps. Lena selected one, revealing a raspberry-pink frosted
doughnut layer beneath, and smiled at Kara taking care of herself, too.

“So.” She fidgeted, picking at pink glaze. “Was it awful?”

“It actually felt good to testify,” Lena said, tucking her feet up under herself. “I got to say my piece
and finally distance myself from the Luthor name… and then I come back to twelve calls from her
lawyers.”

Kara’s eyes widened over cheeks stuffed with doughnut.

“Yeah. She wants to see me.”

“What do you think she wants?”

“Probably to tell me that my outfit in court was horrible and that I need a makeover.” Lena curled
into Kara’s shoulder. “I don’t know, and I don’t care. I thought I was done with her. I thought I
could finally be with my real family, that I’d finally shut the door on the Luthor legacy, and then
there she was, back on my phone sheet.” She closed her eyes, drawing her knees to her chest.
“Twelve times.”

“Oh, Lena.” Kara rubbed her arm, soothing, and kissed her hair again. “I’m so sorry.”

“You don’t think I should feel guilty for not wanting to see that monster, right? I mean, if she knew
about me, she’d want me dead. More than she does now.”

“No. But, would seeing her and having the chance to tell her how you feel bring you peace?”

“Even if I did, it wouldn’t make a difference. It wouldn’t change her, and it wouldn’t change me. It
wouldn’t make her love me, and it wouldn’t make me not want her to.” She sniffled, “She’s been
like this since the day I met her. She’s hated me since day one.”

“I’ve spent my whole life wishing I could talk to people who are no longer here,” Kara started. “My
planet is dead and gone. There is no one who remembers my life before age thirteen but me, and
even the AI of my mother isn’t enough. But Lillian… she’s still here, and you still want her to
understand you, even if she can’t love you.” With a huff, Kara grabbed a second doughnut and
started waving it around. “Which I don’t get, because you are so lovable, Lena!”

Thickly, Lena laughed. “If I go to see her, could you come with me?”

“Of course. Whatever you need.”

☆

This jail wasn’t like Lex’s. It wasn’t as high security, and Lena itched to demand an upgrade because
she knew, deep in her bones, that Lillian would escape.

“No one but you and her lawyers are allowed in there, ma’am,” said one of the guards.

Kara pressed Lena’s shaking hand between her own and said lowly, “You’re going to be okay.
You’re stronger than she is. You’ll make it through and come out the other side and I’ll be waiting
right here.” She offered a smile, but it was too heavy. “I promise.”

Lena gave her that same smile back, wrapping her free arm around Kara’s neck in a hug she made
too short before pulling away and striding towards the interrogation chamber.
“You did a number on me in court,” Lillian drawled. “Measured, succinct, believable. The jury ate it up.”

Hands clenched to hide them shaking, Lena said, “I can just call the guard back and go.”

“No! I’m sorry.” Lillian almost managed to look it, too. “I said I would be better. Please sit.”

Lena did.

“Old habits die hard; I don’t want to fight.” She smiled coolly. “I asked you here because I wanted to tell you that I forgive you. That I still love you.”

Something cold and bilious filled her chest. “You only tell me you love me is when you need something from me.”

“I know I wasn’t the best mother, but I did the best I could.”

“By making me feel unwanted.” Lena pushed forward, pushed her anger out. “Like an outsider.”

“You don’t want to believe it, but I always tried to protect you.”

“If Dad could hear you now,” Lena scoffed. “All the things you’ve done, and justified.”

“You hold Lionel up like some kind of saint,” Lillian hissed, “but he’s not.”

“Don’t disparage him. He was a good man.”

“If he was a good man, he would have told you the truth.” Lillian slumped. “But he hated me too much.”

Lena’s heart throbbed a violent tattoo: Lionel knew. Lionel knew. She asked, “The truth about what?” and prayed for a safe answer.

“When your father and I first got together, it was the happiest time of my life.” There was a light in her eyes, soft, dreamy, but it faded just as fast as it had appeared. “But after Lex was born, Lionel started having an affair. I was clueless,” she spat bitterly, “until I went to surprise him on a business trip, only to find him with your mother.”

“Where’s your drink?” Lena asked, but Lillian didn’t answer.

“My mother?”

“She already had you by then. We paid her off. Your father came back to try and rebuild our marriage.” Lillian shook her head. “Then, when you were four, we heard your mother had died. The state was going to put you in foster care, but your father brought you home, and we adopted you, but he didn’t like me spending time with you. I think it made him remember what he’d done.”

Lena shook her head, tuning in to Lillian’s heartbeat - she didn’t think she was lying.

“He felt guilty. He’d lash out. So I stayed away, gravitated to Lex to protect myself and you. But seeing you with him…” Her voice was so small. “You look so much like her. It was like ripping off a BandAid every day of my life.”

“That’s not possible.” Lena’s head moved faster, jerking. “It isn’t.”

“Denial doesn’t suit you.”

Her head whipped up, and she stared directly into Lillian’s eyes. “You don’t understand. He can’t be
my father because I’m not human.”

“That’s absurd.”

With no thoughts in her head, Lena pushed away from the table. Her chair flew back so hard it cracked the wall behind her, and her fingertips pressed their patterns into the steel table.

Lillian’s eyes widened, and Lena could hear the cogs and gears ticking in her head. “We had the paternity test done. You’re his.”

“I’m a Luthor.”

“One of the only two left,” Lillian cooed, reaching for her, beseeching. “Even if you aren’t all the way human, you’re still a Luthor. You’re still my daughter. We have to look out for each other. I want another chance with you.”

Lena sank down to the floor, face hidden in her hands. “You want me dead.”

“Not you. Never you.” Her chains rattled, sliding across the table too loud. Lena looked up and saw her hands extended, palms up, asking for and offering peace. She sighed, a lonesome sound. “Please, honey.”

Lena had no answer for her.

Lena ran.

In the hall, she stopped, sagged into a wall, let out a ragged, sickly sob. She felt like a child, like she was throwing a tantrum. She had never been that kind of kid, all pleases and thank yous and waiting her turn, but now every opportunity to fruitlessly rage when things were too much was bubbling to the surface. She was boiling over, and she stayed there until everything had spilled out or evaporated and the fire inside her had died out.

Then she stood, straightened her suit out, checked her makeup, and marched calmly towards the gate.

“She, are you okay?” Kara reached over and touched her arm, and Lena jerked away. Her skin felt raw, that revelation sandpaper lining her clothes, and wanted to cry again at the look on Kara’s face.

“I sign out here?” she asked the guard. When she received an affirmative, she scrawled her name and the time and left, heels digging into the floor a little too hard.

Kara chased after her, followed her, calling, “Lena, wait!”

“Why?” She whipped around, vision blurred. “I’m - god, I’m one of them. I’m actually one of them. He was my father. He - he hurt her. He was just as awful as the rest of them, and I’m from him! My one saving grace has always been that it was only ever my name, but now? It’s in my blood. They’re in my blood. All that hate and rage and bigotry and lying – that’s what I am. My mother was so good and so kind and she ruined a marriage. She ruined lives.

“I’m not special, I’m not strong, I’m just damage playing at reconstruction.”

“Don’t say that.” Kara’s eyes were bubbling over, too, behind her glasses. “Don’t ever say that.”

“It explains everything.” Lena’s voice was hoarse from all the crying, a broken bottle rasp, and she flung her arms out wide. “It explains why I still love Lex, for all the evil he’s done. Why I
understood Livewire. Why I broke your trust, why I lied to you - Kara, I’m bad.”

“No.” Kara reached out and took her hands, pulled them in between the two of them and stood close enough that her body heat radiated into Lena’s palms. “I refuse to believe that. I will never believe you are capable of evil, I will never believe you are a bad person, because you have never given me any reason to.” Her thumbs, pressing into Lena’s palms, started moving in steady sweeps. “My mother let my planet die because my aunt wasn’t in good enough standing to be believed when she warned everyone, to associate with when she tried to fight back. She used me to trap my aunt, to trick her into turning herself in. My father created a virus that nearly killed every alien in National City, that could have killed you. My aunt and uncle tried to brainwash the entire planet. They did bad things, Lena, but they’re on them, not me.

“I am not my mother’s mistakes, or my father’s, or my aunt and uncle’s, and you are not your father’s. Or your mother’s. Or your brother’s. We are not our families. You are one person, with one person’s actions reflecting on you, and they are yours. You decide every day not to be like them. You decide every day to save people in every way you can. Lena Luthor, you are one of the best people I know, and I am going to remind you of that fact until the day we die, which, under a yellow sun, may be never.” Kara squeezed her hands, kissed her knuckles. “Okay?”

Lena crushed herself into Kara’s chest, face buried in her collar bone. “If I ever go bad, I need you to stop me.”

“You won’t.”

“But if I do - ”

“You won’t.”

“Promise me, anyway.” When Kara didn’t respond, Lena begged her, tears slipping out and soaking her shirt: “You’re the only one I trust. You’re the only one who can.”

☆

“You know I was at the jail to see my mother last night. You convinced me to go - you came with me.”

“I know.” Kara’s voice was gentle, as gentle as her hands when they came up to cup Lena’s shoulders. “I know. It’s just - people are losing it because of your mother’s escape. I wanted to let you know so that you could be prepared.”

“Okay.” Lena took a breath. “What are people saying?”

“That you may have also visited Metallo.”

“You know I didn’t do that.”

Kara squeezed, pressure comforting. “I do.”

The door opened, and a familiar face walked through, badge out.

“Maggie!” Kara turned to her, eyes hopeful. “Did you find Lillian?”

“No. We didn’t.” She smiled, but it was a crisp, professional smile - a push off. “We’re actually here on official police business, Kara, so it might be better if you waited outside while I talk to Miss Luthor.”
Kara gaped, but Lena just took it. Two days ago, she’d had a nickname, she’d been a friend; now, she was a suspect. This was how things went.

Leaning into Kara’s hand, she said, “I want her to stay. Please.”

Kara dropped her bag, jaw set. She would not be moved.

“The police were sent some surveillance footage I wanted to talk to you about.” Maggie turned on a tablet, played footage - Lena in blue retrieving a lump of Kryptonite the size of an ostrich egg.

“That’s not me,” Lena blurted, voice shaking. “I don’t know where you got that, but it - but it’s not me!”

“You’re under arrest for aiding and abetting a felon, accessory after the fact, conspiracy - ”

“Hold on, Maggie.” Kara put up her hand, like she had any control over the situation, and Lena had to look away. “Just slow down, let her explain.”

Maggie bit out, “Stay out of this, Kara,” and she crumbled a little. “You told me yourself, she was in there for a long time.”

“Not like that!”

“It’s okay,” Lena promised, meeting her gaze if only for a moment. “Maggie’s doing the right thing. The evidence says it’s me, so until they find someone else, I should be locked up.”

“Anything you say can, and will, be used against you in a court of law,” Maggie said, frog marching her out. “You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford one, one will be provided to you by the state.”

In the backseat of the police car, Lena was totally quiet. Not because she was afraid to incriminate herself, but because she couldn’t think of a single word to say.

“You’re not going to break out of those cuffs, are you?”

Mutely, she shook her head, and Maggie sighed.

“For the record… I wouldn’t put it past Lillian to find some way to pin this on you, but you were right. There’s a panic right now, and if locking you up will stop it… I’m protecting more people this way, and that’s my job.”

Another mute nod.

They drove in silence, arrived at the jail in silence. Lena was processed, photographed, allocated in silence. She laid down in her bunk in silence, and bore out the gawking without a word’s complaint or self-defense.

“The prodigal daughter,” one guard scoffed. “Think she’ll lose her hair like her brother?”

His companion laughed until a hard stare and her starting towards the bars shut them both up, sent them scrambling.

They made it forty feet before the scuffle started - three sets of feet, but only two heartbeats.

Corben.
A fourth pair, a third pulse - James.

“If Lena was bad,” he said, “I knew it was only a matter of time before you showed up to free her.”

“I do work for the Luthors after all,” Corben drawled.

There was a blast, grunting, clanging metal. Lena looked down the hall and saw nothing; there was a mirror in the corner to help with rounds, and in its reflection, she could see only green flashing lights and warped shadows.

*James isn’t going to win this.*

Lena tore off a bar, pried two more apart, and climbed out. As Corben approached, she ran at him, swung the bar at his knees.

He jumped, landing on it and slamming her to the floor.

“She sent you to kill me,” Lena gasped.

“She sent me to save you, Miss Luthor.” Corben grabbed her hands and yanked her to her feet. “Sorry for the delay.”

“Let go of me.” Even as he ignored her, dragging her out with his preternaturally strong hand trapping her wrists, she fought and bargained and commanded. “Let me go. Put me back in my cell.”

“I have my orders, Miss Luthor.”

“They’ll think I did it! They’ll think I’m guilty, and I’m not - is that what Mother wants? She wants them to lose faith in me. She wants *her* to lose faith in me.”

Corben laughed, a tiny dry breath of a thing like an artifact unentombed.

“She won’t.”

He laughed louder.

“She won’t! She promised me! Supergirl will find me, and Supergirl will stop you.”

“If you don’t stop talking…”

“What? You’re no stronger than I am!”

Corben swung her by her wrists into the wall, cracking her so hard into the brick that she hit rebar, and everything fuzzed to black.

When she came to, she was in the back of a van, wearing a coat to defend against the chill in the air, and Lillian was sitting across from her, looking - for the first time in her life - like she was interested in Lena.

“Are you okay?”

“Your goon just battered me to unconsciousness, and you had me taken out of my cell. It only makes me look more guilty when I’m not.”

“I did ask him to be gentle.”
“She fought back. If I hadn’t, she would have escaped.”

Lillian smiled, pale eyes cold and alive. “Even if they found out the truth about you, it wouldn’t change their minds. The public wants to believe the narrative they expect from us - that Luthors are evil. We don’t get second chances.” She shook her head, fading into vacancy. “Look what they did to me - stripped me of my medical license without even a hearing. Look what they did to Lex. He could have fixed this planet for generations, but Superman twisted what he was doing and they all turned on him.”

“Lex went insane,” Lena managed.

“Exactly. And if they could take the brightest mind on Earth and drive him crazy defending himself, imagine what they could do to you.” A cold patrician smile settled on her lips. “What they’ve already done. Supergirl came to town and… *awoke* something in your genes. In you. And now you’ve betrayed your family by running around with her, when her cousin ruined your brother. Have you no shame? No loyalty?”

“I’m loyal to her. I was lost, and she gave me hope. Love. Family.”

“We are your family.”

“Stop the van. I’m going back.”

Corben barely glanced her way, but she stood firm, determined to throw herself through the walls if she had to.

“To what? You have no life anymore, Lena. You have no one on your side.”

“She is on my side!”

“Not after this.” Her voice was so silky as it stole the fight from inside her. “You’re guilty. Just like me.”

Lena sat, feeling billions of tons on her shoulders, crushing her.

“You’re on the run, just like me.” She tilted her head, dropped her voice. “Join Cadmus.”

“Why would you take an alien into your ranks? Why would an alien want to join you?”

“You were human once, Lena. We can make you human again, and together, we can do all the great things you ever dreamed of.” Her eyes misted over. “And with no Luthor men to divide us, I can finally be the mother you’ve always wanted.

“Because I do love you, even like this. Let me prove it to you now.”

It was hours before they came to a stop at a warehouse in the middle of nowhere. As Lena stepped out of the van, she took in as much of the place as she could, wishing for x-ray vision so she could get a complete map in her head. Steering clear of Metallo’s leer, she asked, “What is this place?”

“One of Lex’s facilities. A giant satellite receiver embedded in the top of this mountain monitors outer space for signs of intelligent life.”

“To warn of alien invasion.”

“Bingo. We’ll know when more are coming.”
“Makes me glad I joined the cause,” Corben oozed.

“We’ve got enough supplies here to sustain us, if we need it, but I reckon we won’t.” She looked at Lena with that same inquisitive sparkle as she looked at Lex’s projects.

“Why not?” Lena looked away, jaw tight. “We’re fugitives, we can’t go back.”

“Not yet.” Lillian smiled, too wide. “But your brother didn’t only keep rations for times of emergency. He also kept an arsenal all around the world of things he’d collected to level the playing field and defeat Superman once and for all, and one of them is right… here.”

With the tap of her screen, Lillian summoned a console with its own red and black screen.

“It’s a biometric lock.”

“It’s for Luthor DNA.”

“Tell me you don’t have a bit of Lex frozen somewhere.”

“You still don’t believe me about Lionel?” Lillian clicked to her side, stroked the curve of Lena’s skull. “I didn’t say Lex’s DNA, I said Luthor DNA. Any Luthor can open it, and you, my daughter, are part of that family tree.”

Lena pulled away, wrapping one arm around herself. “You didn’t have your green goon liberate me from prison because you love me,” she laughed humorlessly, “because you wanted to help me. You did because I’m the only one who can open this vault for you.”

“While it’s true I need your DNA, one doesn’t negate the other.” Lillian smiled - smiled and smiled and was a villain - and took Lena’s hand. “I still love you, and I still want to help you. You can be a real girl again, a real human girl.” She dragged it towards the console and said, “I promise it won’t hurt.”

“The only person you want to help is yourself.” Lena jerked away so hard Lillian was sent sprawling, and her heart stopped for a moment. “Mom - ?”

She started towards her, but two strong hands grabbed hold of her and stopped her.

“I think you should apologize, and listen to your mother.”

Lena looked back, eyes widening. “J’onn?”

He snarled, grip tightening, and dragged her over to the console.

“Stop! You’re hurting me!”

“I don’t want to, Lena,” an exasperated Lillian sighed. “Just put your hand on the console and we can all start getting along again.” She looked down at Lena, eyes softly calculating, and cooed, “I promise.”

“It won’t work!” Lena blurted. “My skin can’t be pierced!”

“We don’t need your blood,” Lillian drawled. “I know your little detector used skin cells - surely you didn’t think you were clever enough to come up with that first?”

Hank Henshaw slammed her hand down on the pad, and after three seconds, it flashed green. A plate in the floor opened, he let her hand go, and Lena pulled away, rubbing her wrist, watching in
horror as a great armory rose from underground.

“See?” Lillian smiled at her, actually warm. “That wasn’t so bad, was it?”

Lena took a step back, and another, and another, until she ran straight into Corben.

Inside him, something was wrong. The Kryptonite inside him was crumbling, weakening, and she flung herself back from him, leaping across the room.

“His core isn’t stable.”

Lillian wasn’t listening. She was watching Lena land, more graceful every time, with hungry eyes.

“Mother, are you listening to me? His core is broken, he’s going to be the heart of a thermonuclear explosion. Lex’s stockpile will be destroyed in the blast!”

She shook herself free. “Oh, please. I made that Kryptonite myself.”

“You’re not a chemist! You don’t know what you’re doing!”

Lillian rolled her eyes, then beckoned towards the armory. Henshaw and Corben grabbed her by the arms and dragged her over, though she fought them every step.

Inside, the first thing she saw was the armor Lex had painstakingly built. He’d told her he wanted to fight alongside Superman, be a hero, and she’d believed him like a fool - like she’d believed her mother.

“Lex’s War Suit, an atomic axe, a Black Mercy…” Lillian turned, looking for all the world like she was in love. “Everything we need to rid the world of every Kryptonian and every alien once and for all - except you, dear. You’ll be cured, your biology studied. We could give your gifts to an army - our greatest achievement.”

“You’re worse than Lex,” Lena spat. “I’ve opened your toy chest, now let me go.”

“What, and let you go warn your little girlfriend?” Lillian scoffed. “I promise, I will be on the right side of history. Maybe then, when she’s gone and you’re human, you’ll believe that I was looking out for your best interests after all.” She leaned in, voice low. “Whether you like it or not, I will always be your mother.”

She looked away, eyes catching something glimmering in the corner, and caught sight of a ventilated silver box. Without setting down the canister she’d been playing with, she walked over and opened it. “Oh, my beautiful boy. I had no idea. You finished it.”

“Finished what? What was he - ?”

Lena’s sentence was cut off by something crashing through concrete, and she wheeled around, pulling free of her mother’s henchmen’s grips. “Supergirl! You came.”

“I never doubted you. Not for a second.”

Lena started towards her, but Henshaw grabbed her by the neck, dragging her back.


Lena watched, dragged along behind her like a sack of potatoes, as she started to fiddle with the canister.
“I’ve been wondering if these worked.”

With that, she threw it, an easy underhanded lob, and Supergirl caught it like it was nothing because it was nothing - at least, until it started to scream.

Kara cried out, fell to her knees, and Lena fought to cover her ears against the screeching, but it wasn’t enough.

“Well, that was easy.” Lillian strode, casual as can be, up to Kara’s prone, pain-wracked body.

Through the audio fog of that sound grenade, Lena tried to scream, “Don’t hurt her!”

“Sorry. She has to pay for what her cousin did to your brother.”

Henshaw threw her to the ground, cratering the concrete, and she curled into a ball against the onslaught of sound - the slowly quietening grenade, the yelling, the fearful heartbeats, and Corben’s dying heart.

“Throw Supergirl in the vault,” Lillian ordered.

Kara fought the whole way, suddenly blurt out, “Metallo’s heart is going to explode! Please, you have to get the Kryptonite out of him!”

“You’re lying.”

“She isn’t, Mother, please!”

“I’m not.” Kara rasped, desperate, “He’s going to die.”

“The only one about to die is you,” he spat back, even as the radioactivity fizzed in his veins like carbonation, ignoring Lillian’s scrutiny.

Kara blasted the canister, scream cutting out, but Corben fired a bolt of Kryptonite at her. Twice, he blasted her with that toxic beam, and twice, the Kryptonite broke down faster, snowballing to certain doom.

“Come on,” Lillian hissed. “It’s time to go.”

She and Henshaw booked it, leaving only Corben, Supergirl, and Lena barely conscious on the floor.

With a grunt, Kara threw Lex’s motorcycle at Corben; he shattered it with a bolt of energy; Lena struggled to sit up. In a series of swift, cruel moves, Corben had Kara pinned against him.


Lena found herself flying through the air, nailing him in the side with her reinforced stiletto, sending him straight into J’onn’s arms.

“Martian,” Corben gasped before being thrown clean across the room.

Meanwhile, Lena pulled Kara to her feet, looking her over - no glowing green. “Are you okay?”

“We have to go. Now.”
Next thing Lena knew, they were soaring through the sky, cold wind biting their cheeks, and a green mushroom cloud was forty miles behind them.

She readjusted her grip, holding herself in a position that wouldn’t strain Kara as much, and said, “She has armories, all over, full of things to kill Kryptonians.”

“We’ll get them all,” Kara promised. “But not tonight.”

☆

The next morning, they didn’t start the hunt, either. Instead, Kara came to Lena’s office with sticky buns and found her nose buried in the newest edition of CatCo magazine.

Lena looked up and smiled. “It’s a good article. You flatter me.”

“I only wrote the truth.” Kara waved a hand, batting away every word she wouldn’t use. “I’m learning how to defend my opinions, even when all the evidence is pointing the other way. There’s always another side.”

“Especially when it’s hard to find.”

“Especially when it’s hard to find.” Kara put a hand on Lena’s knee, pressing into the muscle in a familiar rhythm - tha-thump, tha-thump, tha-thump, tha-thump. Then she looked at Lena, eyes twinkling. “So,” she said, giving the patch of thigh between hem and kneecap a pat, “my office is overflowing with flowers.”

“Really?” Lena asked, tilting her head, ponytail swishing over her bare shoulders.

“Yeah.” Kara wrinkled her nose, grinning, and it was sunshine. Then she shook her head, looked down. “You didn’t have to do that.”

“Yeah, I did.” Lena laid her hand over Kara’s wove their fingers together. “You came to save me. She said you wouldn’t, that you wouldn’t believe in me anymore. James didn’t believe in me.”

“James was wrong.”

“He just doesn’t know me like you do. So thank you - for knowing me, for trusting me, for saving me every time. For believing in me.”

Kara floundered. “That’s what friends are for.”

“I’ve never had friends like you before,” Lena murmured. “Come to think of it, I’ve never had family like you.” She laughed, more like a gasp in reverse than humor or gaiety. “No one’s ever stood up for me like that before.”

“Now you have someone that will stand up for you. Always.”

“Kara Danvers,” Lena said, weight leaving her shoulders, “you are my hero.”

Kara laughed, like she didn’t believe it, but Lena squeezed her hand hard in hopes she’d believe that. She was standing to leave, and Lena didn’t stop her, even though she wanted to make her stay just long enough to hear three words.

Instead, she wrapped herself around Kara, heart fluttering when she did the same, and said three different ones: “Thank you, Kara.”
She whispered back, “Anytime,” before they said their goodbyes, promising to come over and watch some dumb movie, and Lena was alone with the Luthor chess set.

Still pristine after generations.

She picked up a smooth white marble piece - the knight she’d won her first game against Lex with.

Lillian, with that same calculating curve to her lips, had told her the truth just that once, but it wasn’t the whole truth.

*Maybe you are a Luthor after all.*

“But that’s not all I am,” she said aloud to no one, and carefully put it back in its place.

☆

That night, she came - as she promised - with flowers and about four pounds of potstickers. Kara lit up at the sight of her bearing food and gave her a careful hug, sighing, “You’re the best,” into her hair.

“I try.” Lena set the takeout down while Kara set her mossy rosebuds in the marionite vase, fussing over them with infinite care.

“So, um, what do these ones mean?” Kara asked.

“What?”

“Well, sometimes, you mention that flowers have meanings, a whole language. In that language…” Kara turned on her heel, very deliberate. “What do they mean?”

“Kara, I - ”

“I’m really good at standing my ground when I’m protecting someone,” Kara blurted. “But I’m not so good at it when that someone is me, because I don’t like being vulnerable. But you, Lena… You make me feel safe. I don’t hate being vulnerable when I’m with you.”

“Kara, I - ”

“Last year, I thought I could have it all. And then I thought I couldn’t, that I had to pick.” Kara knitted her fingers together, fidgeting but finally standing still. “Between being Supergirl and having a relationship.

“And then you came along, and you asked me to understand you, and I didn’t even have to try. You wanted Kara Danvers in your life as much as you wanted Supergirl, and no one else has done that. No one else has known all of me from the start and not had a preference.” She stepped in closer, close enough Lena had to look up to see her, close enough to feel the heat of her skin and smell her shampoo. “And you understood me, too. You let me wait. You listened to me, trusted me, worked with me. You let me be who I needed to be.”

“How could I not?” Lena swallowed around the three words lodged in her throat and put her hand on the kitchen island, palm up and fingers open. “How could I have a favorite part of you, when every piece of you is so… so good?”

Kara’s hand came to rest right beside hers, her thumb brushing Lena’s pinkie. “You’ve got me thinking…” She reached up, pulled her glasses away. “Maybe I can have it all.”
“Kara, I lov - ”

Something chimed into the air, a dancing streak of bluish white energy, and they twisted back to back, fingers finally locking together, turning with it so they could always defend.

It came to a stop at the far window, swelling up into the silhouette of a man, finally solidifying into one, slick hair parted like curtains over the stage of his forehead.

“Who the hell are you?” Kara asked.

“I,” he said grandly, “am Mr. Mxysptlk, and, Kara Zor-El, I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

For those who were curious, the mossy rosebuds mean 'confession of love.' Also, posting this, I'm stressing for these poor babies, and I actually know what's going to happen.

Feel free to yell at me about this chapter in the comments; the next one goes up on Sunday.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Set during 2x13: Mr. & Mrs. Mxyzptlk. Things™ happen. Many of them. Oh, my.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Looking at this interdimensional asswipe, all slick hair and smug smirk, all Lena could think was, Does he really get to tell Kara he loves her before I do?

“First, let’s set the mood.” Mr. Mxysptlk rubbed his hands together, contemplating his options, energy swelling from his palms - dimensional energy.

Lena would recognize that swirl of light anywhere.

Snapping his fingers, he said, “Candles,” and that energy flowed out, leaving dozens of tea lights and tapers and pillar candles in its wake, all lit and smelling faintly of vanilla.

“Who are you?” Kara asked, taking a step forward.

The dimensional traveler didn’t pay her any mind, and Lena bristled as he bombasted about, calling out, “Music!” and making a string quartet appear. The true offense, however, was him summoning a roomful of flowers.

Peonies, to be precise, for a happy marriage.

Oh, shit.

Lena squeezed Kara’s hand, and Kara squeezed back, even as she froze before the creature power sliding across her living room and conjuring up a wedding ring - warm gold cathedral setting, pale blue diamonds framing a larger white one.

“Kara, sweetie, it’s like I said. I’m your soulmate, your one true love - your one true pairing, as the kids say. My name is Mr. Mxysptlk and I love you, Kara Zor-El.”

Kara, spluttering, looked over at Lena, help me sky-written in her blue eyes.

“Tell me: will you marry me?”

As soon as he started singing, Lena stepped in front of Kara and snatched the ring out of his hands, crushing it between her thumb and forefinger like a gumdrop. “Look, Mr. Mxyzptlk, I understand the appeal of Kara Zor-El more than anyone, but before you go on bended knee and ask to spend the rest of your ostensibly unlimited life with her, perhaps you should consider whether or not she’s interested.” Arms crossed, she glared defiantly up at him, ready to go to war. Her resolve only deepened when Kara put her hands on her waist, steadying them both.

“The other suitor.” He sneered. “Second in everyone’s eyes, hearts, and minds - barely there, hardly my romantic rival.”
Kara’s eyes started sizzling behind Lena - not glowing yet; the pilot light had only just been turned on - but Lena laid her hand over Kara’s, staying her attack before sending a swift kick right into his crotch, the bone of her shin squishing some clearly quite sensitive bits.

He evaporated, rematerializing behind them both and tapping her on the shoulder. “You seek the naked truth through hard science; I’m a nice guy - I’ll give you both.”

He waved his hand, and the world whooshed away.

When it came back, Lena fell onto a steel lab table, naked but for a matching white and buttercream-colored lingerie set that she definitely hadn’t worn on the off, off, off chance Kara might see it.

Someone, of course, had to be working at it; thankfully, it was only Alex.

Blinking, she looked up from her work at Lena and removed her safety goggles. “I’m going to need to know where you got those and to never know why you were wearing them.”

“Sounds like a great deal to me.”

One borrowed D.E.O. uniform later, Lena got Alex and J’onn caught up on the total nonsense happening back at Kara’s apartment.

“He proposed?”

“And sang from Aladdin, which was a dumb move, because Kara’s favorite classic Disney princess movie has always been Sleeping Beauty - ”

“Because she loves the dragon, yeah.” Alex crossed her arms, thinking. “You said he’s from another dimension?”

“I think he lives between them, or beyond them. He showed up in dimensional energy, but then he used it, like it was magic.”

“Sounds like a 5th dimensional being,” J’onn said, frowning. “They’re practically impossible to stop, and their powers are almost beyond limitation.”

“But they’re not limitless?”

“And they’re not magic.” Turning to Lena for just a moment, he asked, “Is Kara on her way here?”

Lena listened for a moment, homing in on her heartbeat and then zooming back to hear what she was saying, doing, where she was.

…naked, you know.

I’m gonna need you to never talk about my - about Lena like that. Ever again, Mon-El. Ever.

“She’s on her way in right now, North stairs, and Mon-El is with her.” Lena opened her eyes. “Though I don’t know why.”

“Lena! Are you okay?”

Kara bolted across the room and cupped Lena’s face in her hands, looking her over for any sign of injury, even going so far as to remove her glasses and use her x-ray vision.

“I’m fine. Are you? I left you alone with that… cretin.”
“J’onn, what was he?” Kara asked. Her hands slid away from Lena’s face, one coming to rest on the back of her neck.

“You’ve been visited by a 5th dimensional being.”

“Wait, you’ve seen one of these before?” Kara’s eyes widened.

“Not here on Earth - on Mars. One of them moved the Xan’xie Mountains halfway across the planet during the Zook uprising. 5th dimensional lifeforms possess the ability to warp our reality to their whims, an ability which appears, for all intents and purposes, like magic.”

“On Daxam,” Mon-El piped up, “we had a zero tolerance policy for those creatures. They know how to party, but they’re dangerous. Very dangerous.”

“Agent Schott,” J’onn called, “search the archives for anything that resembles 5th dimensional incursions here on Earth.”

“Close encounters of the 5th kind, got it.” Winn turned back towards his screen, typing furiously, then just as quickly paused. “Oh, hey, J’onn? We’re ready to send that message to Mars whenever you are.”

“What message?” Kara asked.

“On Earth, it’s customary to send messages on Valentine’s Day.” A dreamy sort of look melted over J’onn’s face. “We had a similar custom on Mars.”

“It’s too bad you can’t call her.”

“We Martians are a psychic people, all our communication was through thought, but when we had something really important to say, we would write it down.” He smiled softly. “On some planets, to write something is to truly say it.”

“I’m sure M’gann will be happy to hear from you,” Kara said, thumb stroking the nape of Lena’s neck in little sweeping arcs, melting her like sugar.

She managed, “It sounds like a lovely custom,” before she and Kara slipped away.

“So.” Kara’s hand was still on Lena’s neck as she spoke, like it belonged there, and Lena really hoped it did. “You were about to say something.”

“Yes, I - I was.”

“There was something happening, between you and me, before Mxysptlk showed up.” Kara’s little finger dipped below the line of the black polo shirt Lena had co-opted, brushing the top of her spine as she sent shivers down it. “And I really want to get back to it.”

“You and me both,” Lena murmured, leaning into her hand, fingers twisting into the hem of her blouse.

“But we have to get rid of him first.”

“I think I have a way to do it, too.” Lena grabbed Kara’s hand and grinned. “Come on. We need to get to my lab.”

Kara flew them there, holding Lena close enough that she could feel, instead of hear, the pounding of her heart. When they landed on her office balcony, Lena wobbled a little.
“Are you okay? I know you don’t like flying.”

“I’m - I’m great.” Lena smiled up at her, lower lip caught between her teeth. “I don’t mind it when I’m with you.”

There was a moment’s hesitation, two seconds preserved like the contents of a snow globe, before they swallowed the want and headed downstairs.

“I’ve been working on interdimensional travel ever since I met Cisco,” Lena began, picking up her prototype and handing one half to Kara. “I haven’t gotten it properly working yet, but the malfunction might just play in our favor. Watch.”

She pressed the button, and one projector rattled to life, spitting out a flickering portal that, as usual, collapsed on itself. A few anticipation-tense moments later, it spat itself out of the other one.

“If I can put it on a timer, an automatic reset, that starts with a code only you know, and he touches it when it goes off, we can trap him in an infinite loop of dimensional travel. An ouroboros gate swallowing him up for good.”

Kara looked at her with glimmering eyes, set the prototypes down, and tucked her fingers under Lena’s chin, tilting her head up and up and up.

She was so close, Lena could almost taste her. Her fingers looped through the belt loops on Kara’s jeans, pulling them closer together - intoxicatingly proximitous.

Then Kara’s phone buzzed. She closed her eyes, licked her lips, and turned away to answer it. “Alex? Yeah, no, Lena has a plan… Uh-huh… Okay… Okay, we’ll be there in three minutes, no dawdling, I heard you the first time, oh my god!”

She ended the call, then let out a breath with her cheeks puffed up round. “We have to…”

“Go?”

“Yeah.” Kara slipped her fingers into Lena’s, plucking her hand from where it curled against her hipbone, and gave it a squeeze. “I swear to Rao, before Valentine’s day is up.”

“I work well with a deadline,” Lena rasped.

She tucked the prototypes into her borrowed cargo pants pockets and left, again wrapped in Kara’s perfect embrace, nose tucked into her clavicle. They landed on the balcony and she scrambled down, the both of them hurrying in like their asses were on fire.

“Okay,” Alex asked, hands on hips, “what’s the plan?”

“Ouroboros gate.”

“Elaborate.”

“My portals always end up eating each other, right? I’m going to set one on a loop, so it keeps eating itself and spitting itself back out over and over again, and Kara will get Mxysptlk to touch it, thereby trapping him in the loop.”

“Huh. Solid.”

Lena beamed, back straightening.

“Kara, how are you convincing him to touch it?”
“He wants to marry me. I can just tell him it’s part of Kryptonian culture, like the Jewel of Truth and Honor, and say I won’t marry him unless it’s in a Kryptonian ceremony.” As she said it, Kara squeezed Lena’s hand. “He’ll get swallowed up before he has the chance to say I do.”

“Who’s setting the gate off?”

“I am.”

Lena and Kara both looked at each other, their stereo words hanging in the air.

“The last time you two were in a room together, you kicked him in the nuts for me and he sent you halfway across town. What’s he going to do the second time you piss him off?”

“If I start it up remotely, there’s less risk for you.”

“If I set it up right in front of him as part of the ceremony, he’ll be none the wiser until it’s too late for him to do anything.”

After a moment’s hesitation, Lena sighed, “Okay.”

“Okay?”

“I know you have this, and I know it’ll work.”

Kara leaned down and hugged Lena, whispered, “Once he’s gone, you and me, okay?” in her ear. Lena’s fingers clutched at her shirt, and she nodded.

When she finally pulled back, she said, “I’m going to go work on these. Go home, get some sleep.”

“Okay.” Kara gave her one last hug before flying off, and Lena slumped against the war room table with a stupid smile on her face.

Alex leaned in, hypercasual, and said in the calmest of voices, “So, I love my sister more than anything on this Earth or beyond its stars, and if you hurt her, I will use your species’ biological weakness against you. Clear?”

“Clear.”

“Good.” She straightened back up and stretched her shoulders. “Let me know if there’s anything I can do to help with that machine.”

“I will.”

☆

It took until three in the morning, but Lena managed to cobble together a repeat starter and fix it onto one of the projectors. She handed them off to Alex, who would deliver them to Kara, and promptly went home and passed out.

When she woke, it was still Tuesday, and she had three meetings - one investor, one board, one acquisition - to address on three hours of sleep.

Jess, the angel, delivered her gargantuan coffee and obscene amount of cinnamon rolls, because Noonan’s apparently made them, too, and Lena was a self-described freak for cinnamon.

“You look cheerful,” Lena remarked.
Jess just hummed and floated out of the office, rosy-cheeked and staticky, and Lena took a note to ask about what was making her so happy later, because if Livewire was dating one of her employees, she was going to have to give Jess her own private generator.

Six hours and three meetings later, her schedule was empty save for a few pounds of paperwork. Two hours after that, she was done and dusted, so when Winn texted her, asking to meet at the bar, she readily accepted.

“Valentine’s Day,” he sighed as she sat beside him.

Lena slumped a little, grumbling, “Tell me about it.”

“I thought - ” He looked at her, eyes wide under an incredulously furrowed brow. “You and Kara - ?”

“If not for Mxy-fucking-zptlk, yeah.”

“Oh, yikes.” Winn clapped her on the shoulder and sipped his lager, and Lena noticed the sparkle in his eyes, the ease in his posture.

“So, you’re in a good mood, considering that it’s V Day and you’re perpetually single and perpetually bemoaning the fact.”

He sighed. “Yeah.”

“What’s her name? Also, does she have anything to do with all the destruction that I, for once, had no hand in?”

“Her name’s Lyra. She’s a total badass, she’s from Starhaven, and I’m taking her out for dinner tonight.”

“Oooh.” Lena nudged him in the ribs, grinning with him. “Good for you.”

“Hey, and you! Kara! I mean.” He let out a breath. “Congratulations.”

“You’re not - ”

“No. I’m good. I mean.” Winn stopped, laughing. “When she told me, about being Supergirl, I thought she was coming out to me.”

“Oh, wow.”

“And she said, ‘I’m not gay!’ but here we are.”

Lena snorted. “Bisexuality’s a thing, Winn.”

“I know, I know. I mean, like, umbrella gay.” With another swig, he set his stein down and kicked her in the shin hard enough so she could feel the pressure. “But, really, I’m happy for you two crazy kids. Maybe you’ll stop pining after each other.”

“What? We do not pine, I do not pine!”

“You pine harder than a coniferous forest.”

Lena kicked him back, careful to be gentle, and leaned on her elbows, playing with the condensation on her glass. “I’m not jealous,” she said.
“Um, okay. Out of nowhere, but okay.”

“I mean about Mxyzptlk.” Lena propped her chin up in her hand and took a sip. “I’m not jealous that he’s proposing marriage, singing to her, filling her home with flowers.”

“Aren’t flowers your thing?”

“Yes, of course they are, but he was doing it wrong. Wrong music, wrong ring, wrong flowers. He doesn’t know Kara, he’s just - infatuated. And as powerful as he is, he’s still just as fragile as the average man child, and Kara wasn’t interested. I don’t have to worry.” She giggled, raking her fingers through her hair. “God, that’s nice.”

“Feeling better?”

“Yeah.” Lena thumped Winn on the shoulder and grinned. “Thanks for bringing me out here.”

“Drinking buddies for life, Legs!”

“For life.”

☆

They parted ways, Winn heading back to the DEO while Lena returned to her office.

Well, her lab.

Her bed was finally finished - just in time, too, if she and Kara ever got to finish the conversation Mxyzptlk had so rudely interrupted - and Winn seemed to think it was, well:

[Winn: 3.17p.m.] fkin sweet!! Unbreakable Bed

[Lena: 3.18p.m.] now i just have to figure out how to get it into my apartment

[Winn: 3.20p.m.] did u do springs for the mattress?

[Lena, 3.20p.m.] fuck now i have to make springs

[Lena, 3.20p.m.] i’m gonna make a goddamn indestructible tempurpedic

[Winn, 3.22p.m.] i’m on the hunt for 5th dimensional artifacts

[Lena, 3.45p.m.] where’s waldo, interdimensional macguffin edition?

Lena laughed at Winn’s response, a Where’s Waldo Snapchat selfie, and went to work on her mattress. In truth, she would have preferred to be working on her trap for Mxy, but her part in that project was finished. All that was left for her was to wait, watching the news for any sign of superheroicism and keeping herself busy.

And there was Kara, protecting criminals from Mxyzptlk - at least, that’s how it looked from the angle the news chopper had on it.
[Lena, 5.04p.m.] how’s the hunt? a.k.a. how soon is that interdimensional asshat gone?

[Lena, 5.05p.m.] make a wish

[Winn, 5.06p.m.] i wish i knew how to act around gorgeous intimidating women

[Lena, 5.07p.m.] is this about your date?

[Winn, 5.09p.m.] she’s beautiful and she broke people for being bullies I Am Weak

[Lena, 5.10p.m.] then she’s got a good heart and you shouldn’t be worried

Mattresses, Lena found, were spectacularly difficult to make, but she would have rather spent seventy years working on a marionite memory foam suspension than see Parasite on the news again, especially outside Kara’s apartment. The whole secret identity thing was, while frustrating, necessary, and if Parasite was somehow immortal and aware, then that was a whole new set of problems.

She was in costume and on site within seconds, catching a flying black four-door before it could hit the blacktop and explode.

“Hey!” Supergirl whooshed into the street and stood between him and the swathe of civilians, a barrier in blue. “I thought you were dead.”

“You’re the one who’s dead,” Parasite rasped.

Kara fired laser beams at him, but something was off.

He didn’t sizzle right. Even as he stumbled backwards, falling back onto a bank of haphazardly abandoned sedans, something was too clean about it.

Something exploded, and Kara turned, x-ray vision scanning for victims, but Parasite had no such moment of consideration before advancing on her. Lena leapt, swinging the car at him and batting him away.

“Remember when I ripped your tongue out?” she asked, pinning him under the vehicle as best she could. “Wanna see if it grows back a second time?”

Parasite snarled and bucked, throwing her off, the car landing on top of her.

“Is vigilante insurance a thing?”

Kara grinned. “Should be.”

And then someone went flying through a bus terminal - by the ringing in Lena’s head, Mon-El.

Kara zoomed to Lena’s side and moved the car off her, helping her to her feet.

“You okay?”

“Yeah. I don’t think that’s Parasite.”

“What?”
“He doesn’t sound right - listen.”

Kara spent so much time focusing on not using her powers that it took her a second to tune in, but realization dawned on her face much as it had on Lena’s only moments ago. “Mxy. He’s wreaking havoc to get my attention.”

“Want me out of the way?”

“Look,” some bystander yelled, “up in the sky!”

“It’s a bird -”

“It’s a plane -”

“It’s -”

Kara shook her head, watching as a familiar caped figure soared down. “Think you two can play nice?”

“I’m a big girl,” Lena said, smile genuine. “Have fun.”

Together, Superman and Kara froze up a potential explosion, but Kara was a little hesitant to approach him. “Superman?”

He turned, cape flamboyantly flourished - not Superman.

“Not quite,” the impostor oozed.

“Mxy?” Kara’s fingers clenched at her sides, knuckles bleached with frustration. “Are you serious?”

“Well, I thought you could use a little extra help, Supey-Baby.”

“She doesn’t even need my help,” Lena retorted. She jerked her thumb at Mon-El behind her and said, “and there’s already a dead weight hanging around.”

“You?” Mxsptlk arched a condescending eyebrow. “That’s a laugh. You’re lucky I flew in when I did, Supergirl. Do you think this fraud could have helped you save the day?”

“She was helping.” Kara stepped in closer, jaw tight. “More than you did by causing this whole mess. What are we, kindergarteners? Being a jerk won’t make me like you any better.”

“What powers do they even have? What, could they have leapt over Parasite like a pair of gazelles?”

“Inefficient,” Lena scoffed. “I’d just rip off his face-tongue-thing again.”

“You - ” Mon-El scrabbled over, broken glass too sharp in Lena’s ears. “You wanna see my superpower? ‘Cause I can just rip you apart with my bare hands right here if you’re interested in that.”

“Are Daxamites really the best company the last daughter of Krypton has to keep?” Mxy asked. “I mean, brute force is all they have to offer. You, goddess, you deserve a man who is your equal in your powers and wits.”

“My equal in wits would know better than to endanger civilians.” Kara jabbed him in the chest with her pointer finger, sending him swaying back. “And if you were that equal, you’d understand I’m not looking at any man right now.”
Lena’s cheeks went pink under her mask.

“You will not impress me with - with childish misbehavior!” Kara flung her arms out wide, gesturing at the mess Mxy’d made, then crossed them tight over her chest, muscles coiled and ready to strike. “All you’ve done is lower my tolerance for you to subterranean levels.”

“I’ll make you see, blossom, you deserve better than slumming with these two.”

“Hey, why don’t you just say your name backwards and zap back to wherever you came from?” Mon-El sneered.

“Wait,” Kara said, wheeling on him. “Wait, that’s how you send him away?”

Even Mxysptlk looked disappointed in Mon-El just then.

Kil… Kilt… Kiltspzyxm! Kiltspzyxm!

“What is wrong - Stop! Stop, enough.” Kara pushed a scrabbling Mon-El away, eyes hard. “Mon-El, get out of here. Go.”

“What, me? What about her? What about him?”

“You are not wanted here! I’m handling this, so go.”

Mxy gave a petty little fingerwave bye-bye. Lena just crossed her arms at Kara’s side, trying not to go into meltdown mode at the level of stern command in Kara’s voice because a civil battlefield really wasn’t the time or place.

“Galaxy Girl,” she said, voice softer. Her hand came up to touch Lena’s fingers where they dug into her bicep, if only briefly. “You, too. Mxy and I have something to discuss.”

“Of course.” Lena gave Kara’s fingers a fleeting squeeze, then jumped up onto her rooftop to eavesdrop.

Kara hadn’t expressly forbade it, after all.

“Finally, darling, we’re alone. I thought they’d never leave.”

“What is it going to take to get you off this planet?”

“It’s like I said.” Mxy’s voice had lost all its easy charm, slipping into a frosty register void of all bon vivance - every syllable sounded like a threat. “It’s going to take two little words: ‘I do.’ Or things will get very bad for your world.”

Lena took off running towards the DEO. There had to be something she could do to help stop him.

☆

It’s cute, Lena thought as Kara stormed in, a hounding Mon-El on her heels, that she took the time to redo her hair again. Dedicated.

“Oh, I’m sorry that I was busy, um, defending your honor.”

“Do you see a hoop skirt?” Lena muttered from Winn’s desk, shifting a baton into a tiny Southern Belle that simpered in the palm of her hand. “She doesn’t need you, buddy.”
And Kara seemed to agree, wheeling on him, voice hard. “I am not some damsel in distress,” Kara spat, “I am Supergirl! I can defend myself, and, more importantly, I was handling it.”

“Well, sometimes, Kara, you’re not the best judge of what you can handle.”

“And you aren’t arbiter of her decisions, Mike,” Lena called. “She asked you not to play, and you came anyway. If you can’t be helpful, you shouldn’t intercede!”

“Stay out of this,” he spat, before turning back to Kara. “I was trying to help.”

“If you wanted to help so badly, why didn’t you tell me that the secret to getting Mxy off Earth was to get him to say his name backwards? Huh?” Kara’s jaw ticked. “Because you didn’t think I could handle it?”

“No, I didn’t tell you that because it never works! First of all, it’s hard enough to say it forwards, and second of all, that guy is a motormouth, but he’s not stupid.”

“Kiltspzyxm.”

Mon-El gave her a hard look over Kara’s shoulder, and Kara twisted around to look at Lena as she stood and walked over.

“It’s not actually that hard. And neither is listening when Kara speaks.”

“Why is everyone so hard on me?” he whined at their retreating backs. “Huh? But not on Lena.”

“Because she listens to me!”

“Okay, why not on Mxy? I mean, that guy, he conjured - Kara, hey! Hey!”

Kara wheeled, the tendons in her neck tight enough to put a dulcimer to shame. “What? God!”

“He conjured up a supervillain and set him loose on National City. Did you give him an earful? No, no, no, no. Because Mxy snaps his fingers, and there’s flowers in your loft. Mxy snaps his fingers, and you’re in Vera Wang.”

“You’re jealous,” Kara laughed, “and you’re not even jealous in the right direction!”

“What? That’s ridiculous!”

“Mon-El! I am not interested in you. I am not interested in Mxy. My love life is none of your business - none of my life is any of your business!”

“You know what? I knew you were a little full of yourself, like, a little bit - ”

Lena’s blood boiled, and she risked looking at him and all the cranial weirdness just to give him the most withering glare she could muster.

“What, are you kidding me?”

“ - but this is, like, off the charts. I’m not jealous, okay? I’m angry, because you have an unfair double standard.”

“Yes, you’re right. I don’t hold you and Mxy to the same standard, because I expect bad behavior from him, but from you, I expect better! Because you’re not supposed to be a villain, Mon-El!” Kara jabbed her finger in her face, and started trying to escape again.
Mon-El wouldn’t let her, darting into her path to block her off, and Lena saw red. She grabbed him and tried to pull him away, and it was like her head was filled with fire. “You don’t get to do that,” she gritted out. “Let her go.”

Mon-El tried to shake her off. Tried. When he failed, he ignored her, turning back to Kara. “You do not get to turn this around on me. Because I am the one in this situation, at this moment - good to see you, Dana.”

Dana, a field ops agent with a spectacular blonde French braid, ignored him, a scowl deepening around her mouth. Lena wondered if it was in good taste to send fuckboy survival fruit baskets.

“ - that is acting like the bad guy!” Kara hissed. “You are acting so volatile and so petty right now. How you feel isn’t the priority right now, or how I feel, or how anyone feels! What is the priority is getting Mxy subdued and keeping the civilians safe, and you are acting in direct opposition to that aim.”

“I am not!” he exploded, flinging his arms out. Well, one arm; the one in Lena’s grip was going nowhere. “That’s not fair!”

“You know, I thought you’d changed. I really did.” Kara cocked her head, up-to-here done. “But you are still the same macho - ”

“Oh, here it is. Say it!”

“ - egotistical - ”

“Daxamite!”

“Yes!”

“He’s a Daxamite!”

“As you’ve always been!”

“Mm-hm.”

“This was a mistake. Trying to - to foster you, like some lost space puppy, was a mistake.”

“I guess so!”

“Good.” Kara crossed her arms, eye twitching, then murmured, “Lena, let him go.”

Lena let him go, fire in her skull immediately dimming. Kara touched her shoulder, and they started off towards the command center.

“Are you gonna kill the imp?”

“No!”

Once clear, Kara stopped, taking a look at Lena. “You okay?”

“Yeah. I’m gonna go help Winn with the search for artifacts. You go strategize with the grownups.”

Kara smiled, fingers brushing back an errant curl and tucking it behind Lena’s ear. “Okay. We need a new plan. We’re going to finish this, and then…”
“And then.” Lena gave Kara’s hand a squeeze. “You’ve got this.”

“Have fun.”

She went off into Winn’s room and found Mon-El lurking by the wall, looming over the tiny techie. “Things were a lot easier on Daxam when I objectified women - ”

“Terrible advice. Not just for girls - for everyone.” She brushed past him, careful not to look, kneading the knot of tension at the nape of her neck.

“Yeah.” Winn frowned, then looked up at her, snapping. “Hey, hey, you’re a girl! Right?”

“Spectacular observational skills. Yes, I am a girl.”

“How do I not fuck up with a girl?”

“Be conscientious, don’t script the conversation in your head, don’t be an asshole, and try to have fun. She seems like a good person, which means you two should at least have that in common.” Lena gave Winn’s phone hand a gentle squeeze. “Oh, and don’t be late.”

“Definitely not gonna do that.” Winn’s eyes went wide. “Oh, my god, I’m late. I’m already late.”

“Are these the artifacts?”

“Yeah. Um, can you - ?”

“I will look through them for you.”

“That pendant is the most promising one - no idea what it’ll do to him, but it tested off the charts for 5th dimensional energy - but we won’t know anything until the spectrometer updates, which is in, like, six hours.”

“I’ll babysit. Go, go.”

“I’m gonna go be brave and go to Valentine’s Day dinner with that girl.”

“Use my name at Il Palazzo. That should get you in the door - Italian’s totally Valentine’s appropriate.”

Grinning gratefully, Winn said, “Look with your eyes, not with your hands.”

“First rule of potentially dangerous bric-a-brac.” Lena walked with him towards the door, giving him a brief hug before pushing him out. “Run.”

He ran.

Lena turned back to see Mon-El reaching for the very pendant Winn had oh, so helpfully pointed out and launched herself at him, knocking him to the ground.

“What the hell?”

Lena gritted her teeth. “Kara said to let her handle it. Do they not have active listening on Daxam?”

Mon-El flipped them, pinning her to the floor. The impact jarred the necklace out of her grip, and she jerked a knee up, patella hitting him square in the balls. He let her go, grabbing for it, but she nailed him again - this time, in whatever he had where humans have kidneys - and held him down
“See what happens when you listen to Kara?” she asked, voice thin and sharp. “You win.”

She went to grab the pendant from his tightly curled fingers and found only dust.

“Goddamnit.”

With more force than strictly necessary, Lena pushed up off the floor and off of him. She grabbed a napkin off Winn’s desk and refolded it into a rudimentary bindle, brushing the dust out of Mon-El’s hand and into it. Then, bounty in hand, she carried it over to Kara, where she stood with J’onzz, and presented it, fingers digging into the meat of her arm.

“Mon-El tried to make off with it. I stopped him, but in the struggle, it broke.”

“Damnit.” J’onzz pinched the bridge of his nose, scowling. “Kara, this is why we’re not supposed to bring in civilians.”

“Her didn’t break it!” Kara protested. “Did you?”

“No.”

“See? And she’s not a civilian.”

“Unless she’s a DEO contractor, she’s not supposed to be in this building.”

“Then contract me. I want to help.” Lena closed her fingers around the dust. “Let me make this right. I can try to recycle this into something more immediately useful. If this could have shut down his powers as a pendant, maybe… Maybe it can work in some kind of short-range atmospheric dispersal.”

J’onzz gave a short nod. “Fine. Handle this.”

“Yes, sir.”

Kara took Lena’s arm and all but dragged her away. “This is out of control,” she hissed, plucking the packet out of Lena’s palm. “What was he thinking?”

“I don’t know.” Lena’s arms wrapped around her, fingers digging into her triceps hard enough to bruise. “I’m sorry, about all of this. I saw him with it and I just panicked.”

“No, it’s.” Kara sighed through her nose, jaw tight. “It’s fine.”

“Winn said it’d be six hours until the spectrometer updated and we could find out just what the amulet can do. Could do.” Lena swallowed hard. “I’ll stay and babysit. You should go get some rest.”

“Until two a.m.?”

“I wouldn’t have slept anyway. I’m still technically bedless.”

“What happened to your bed?”

“It’s under prophylactic reconstruction.” Lena flushed. “I don’t want to break any more of my furniture.”
Kara looked at her, cheeks pink, eyes softly focused. “We wouldn’t want that, now would we,” she murmured.

“Definitely not.”

Kara took a breath, then folded the dust back into Lena’s palm. “You work on that. I’m gonna patrol. I need something to punch.”

She took off, and Lena pressed the powder to her chest in a clenched fist. “You got it.”

☆

Around two, the base all but cleared out and Mon-El detained in the basement, the results came back. It looked like the pendant used to let off an inverse of the wavelength Mxysptlk ran on, nullifying his powers completely, with a radius of about twenty feet once activated.

Of course, as a powder, the energy was weaker, but the radius was much improved - so long as one particle was within ten feet of another, the circuit worked and it stayed radiating negative 5th dimensional energy.

Lena emptied out two flash grenades and packed them full of dust. She set one down next to the abandoned ouroboros gate and zipped the other into her pocket.

[Lena, 2.17a.m.] if you’re not too busy patrolling i have a way to use the dust

[Kara, 2.18a.m.] you’re the best ( ˘ ³˘)♥

J’onzz didn’t look any more or any less pleased to see Lena, so she kept her head down, setting the grenade on the console in front of him and taking a few big steps back.

“The explosion should activate the particles, and they’ll release their energy field, shutting his powers down. If ground zero is surrounded by DEO agents, cut off from civilians, that will minimize potential casualties and maximize efficacy. Depowered, he’d be defenseless.”

“And we can coerce him into saying his name backwards.”

“Kiltspyzixm, yes, sir.”

J’onzz nodded. “Good work.”

Kara whooshed up. “How do we draw him out?”

“He’s looking for romance and he’s looking for a fight.” J’onzz turned his eyes towards Lena. “You want to help?”

“More than anything, sir.”

“Here’s your chance.”

“We can’t endanger Lena like that!”

“Like you said, Supergirl, she’s not a civilian. She can handle this.”
Lena set her jaw. “I won’t let you down.”

☆

The plan was this: drive out to the desert, a few miles from the Mojave DEO base, with cloaked vehicles. Lena makes a scene, uses his extradimensional eye against him and draws him out. Drop the bomb, detain him, make him banish himself.

Things did not go down that way.

“Mxy-boy!” Lena hollered into the desert sky. “Wanna talk about your feelings of sexual inadequacy and how they’ve ruined your relationships with women for good?”

Snap - and there he was.

“Inadequacy? My dear, I am a god.”

“And yet you still can’t get a girlfriend.” Lena grinned, striding off across the sand towards him at an easy pace. “Do you want some advice? Apparently, I’m a girl, so I must know how to talk to them.”

Mxysptlk vaporized, rematerializing in front of her with his hand around her throat. “Why not just do away with you now? You might be her current fascination, but I can give her anything in the world.”

“Yeah? So can I.” Lena’s hand found its way into her pocket. “It’s called money, asshole, and I have more than any person has the right to. I could get her actual designer dresses, not some hyperrealistic facsimile from the fifth dimension of fuck off.”

“You think you could compete with me?” He laughed, head thrown back, and dropped her in the sand. “Is that a challenge?”

“It’s whatever you want it to be, monsieur.” Lena swept her leg through where his would have been, had he not dematerialized, but when he rematerialized, it was in a lavish theatre.

“I’ve gone backstage in better,” Lena shrugged, rolling to her feet. “What are the rules?”

Mxysptlk just snapped his fingers; Lena curled hers around the grenade and watched her costume morph into a loose white shift. Her arms snapped behind her back, and she found herself tied to a pyre in the middle of a field.

“Always did love Joan of Arc,” she said. “Too bad you didn’t give me the sword. That would’ve been more cinematic than my bare hands.”

“Yap, yap, yap.” Clad as a 15th century French executioner, blue tunic and red tights, Mxysptlk looked like a well executed but poorly conceived Halloween costume. “Time to burn.”

“I’m fireproof, Mxy.”

As if to prove her point, an inferno roared to life around her and not a single hair on her head so much as sizzled.

“All your kind are.”

“And what kind might that be?” Lena asked, shifting her wrist into the fire, waiting for the flames to lick away the rough hemp binding her in place. “Not from Earth, not from Starhaven, not from Maaldoria, not from Daxam, not from Krypton - why are you laughing?”
“You really don’t know? Oh, that’s adorable. So unobservant. You didn’t even know who Kara Zor-El was when she was lying next to you.” Mxy strode up through the flames, and they parted for him until they were nose to nose, eye to eye. “That is why you don’t deserve her, Lena Lutessa Luthor. Because you’re too small and too stupid to appreciate the magnitudes within that woman.”

Lena didn’t launch the grenade like she’d intended to. She cracked it over his head like an egg.

The charge went *boom* when exposed to the flames, and Mxy had to leap away - he’d started scorching.

Lena shook off the ropes and grabbed her pyre, uprooting it from the soil and swinging on him. “I might be small, and I might be stupid, but even that can’t stop me from seeing Kara Zor-El for all the glory she is.” She pinned him under the burning beam and gave a tight smile. “That sounds like a you problem.”

“You may have cut me off from the fifth dimension, you bitch, but I still know a thing or two. I’m a god, and you’re a c - ”

“Doesn’t matter.” Lena reared back and headbutted him so hard the hillside under his head went concave. “I know at least three.”

The illusion faded, and she hefted him over her shoulder, carrying him towards the DEO vehicles.

“Good work,” J’onnz said, stepping out of the nearest Jeep.

“Glad to do it. Any guess at how long he’ll be out?”

“Not long enough to get back to the city.”

☆

“J’onn! It’s been too long.” A tiny woman with slick dark hair and brilliant green eyes grinned from behind a console, walking around its base towards him. “How’s the city? Does she miss me?”

“It’s agony. We have a prisoner.”

“I can see that.” She turned her head and inspected Mxysptlk where he laid over Lena’s shoulders, lips pursed. “And new muscle. Is the DEO just vigilante daycare now, Director J’onnz?”

“That’s for us to decide at the next quarterly review, Director Lane.”

“That, and better coffee makers. Ours keeps shorting out whenever someone downstairs has a temper tantrum.”

Lucy Lane walked Lena, plus a phalanx of proper agents including Dana, down to holding. J’onn threw in the other grenade, filling the cell with nullifying dust, and once it had settled, Lena hefted Mxyzptlk in, too, slamming the door behind him.

“So, who’s he?”

“5th dimensional imp.”

“And she is?”

“Lena Luthor.”
Lena bristled. “That’s not meant to be common knowledge.”

“Let’s play pretend, then, and I’ll call you Galaxy Girl.” Lucy looked Lena up and down, then nodded. “Always loved you telling the military to go fuck itself after you took over.”

“Loved doing it, Director.”

Kara found them about three minutes later, screeching to a stop midair so she didn’t crack the floors when she landed. She touched Lena’s shoulder and murmured, “Are you okay?”

“Fine.” Lena gave a fleeting smile.

“Don’t I get a hello?”

Kara grinned, wrapping the other director up in a hug. “Lucy!”

“It’s been too long.” Lucy squeezed back, thumping Kara’s shoulder fondly. “How’s everything been?”

“Well, you know, imps asking for my hand in marriage.”

“Stop going to Noonan’s! All those milkshakes.” Lucy shook her head. “How can a boy resist?”

Kara laughed. “It’s good to see you.”

“You, too, but let’s play catch-up when neither of us are on the clock. Right now, we have an imp to dispose of.”

☆

Lena sat outside the conference room, very, very still. Around seven, she got a text, and it took her ten minutes to convince herself that she’d be allowed to check it.

[Winn, 7.02a.m.] happy v day to me!!!!

[Lena, 7.13a.m.] i take it dinner went well

[Winn, 7.14a.m.] we did not make it to dinner

[Winn, 7.14a.m.] if u Know What I Am Saying

[Lena, 7.15a.m.] good for you. Please tell me u used protection.

[Winn, 7.17a.m.] i’m an idiot but i’m not That idiot

[Winn, 7.17a.m.] 7.17 make a wish that i didn’t get or give an intergalactic std

[Lena, 7.18a.m.] wish made hope you don’t die

That was palliative, in a minor, meagre way, though Lena could Spider Sense him saying, somewhere in the near future, that last night was a win for Winn. Still, her friend having a good night wasn’t enough to kill her anxiety over her own.
She still didn’t know what was happening in that glass-walled room, and the everything-proof panes of glass had gone opaque, which meant she was stuck sitting out there with her blistering headache and deep sense of festering failure.

She’d been instrumental in derailing the original plan. What if allowing Mon-El to abscond with the amulet would have been the right call? What if he could’ve defeated Mxy?

*Not likely*, said Lena’s common sense, but who listens to their common sense when rife with self-doubt?

Kara’s boss-slash-father-figure didn’t seem to like her much. He hadn’t payed her much mind thus far, largely because she’d stayed as far out of his way as possible, showing her face only when she was helping. He’d seen her when she’d been helping with the solar lamps after Parasite had attacked, but otherwise, they’d stayed separate. That their first proper introduction had been her presenting him with the remains of a solid plan and an irreplaceable artifact was a mistake.

She probably could have made it back to the city by then. She should have. Without a dismissal, though, she may as well have been glued to the spot.

The meeting broke up around eight thirty, and Kara sat down beside Lena, legs splaying out across the floor once everyone had passed. “You okay? The glass is x-ray vision-proof, but I could hear how nervous you were.”

“I’m fine.” Lena smiled, fleeting. “I should head back into the city. Jess will worry if I’m not in by nine.”

“I’ll fly you.”

“No, you should stay out here. Whatever the DEO’s going to do to him, I’m sure they’ll need you.”

“I can fly faster than sound,” Kara said softly, looping an arm over Lena’s shoulders. “If they need me, I’ll be here.”

Lena nodded and stood, stretching, back releasing a series of grotesque pops. Kara laughed softly at the sound, standing with her, and wrapped her arm around Lena’s waist. They walked out together in total quietude, and once they were out under the colorless early-morning sky, Kara scooped Lena into her arms and flew off.

“I can’t tell you anything,” Kara said about a mile outside city limits. “Just in case.”

Lena nodded into Kara’s collarbone and closed her eyes. “Can we stop off at my apartment? Food.”

“Food.”

They landed on Lena’s roof and dropped through the skylight. Lena padded into her kitchen, emptying out her fridge and cabinets, and started in on a kitchen sink smoothie.

Kara perched on her countertop, pulling out two spoons and grabbing the Häagen Dazs banana split ice cream. She popped the top off and took a bite, offering another spoon Lena’s way. Lena gave an appreciative grimace and dug out a river of fudge before turning back to the blender.

“What do you want in yours?”

“Um. I’ll take whatever.”
Okay.

Lena dumped in enough frozen spinach to terrify Popeye alongside some steamed pumpkin, dried apricots, dates - basically any and everything in sight, moving on autopilot. Kara had to stop her from putting a teabag into the blender, too.

The finished product tasted like weird pumpkin pie, but they drank it willfully and gratefully, only superspeed stopping them from spilling on their uniforms.

After Lena finished her half of the carafe, she grabbed a five pound bag of oranges and started juicing. The hum of the motor and the repetitive motion was peaceful, in a way, and soon she had about two pints. That, she actually poured into cups, the ravenous hunger gnawing at them both having dulled to bearable levels, and she handed one over to Kara, sitting beside her on the countertop.

Kara looked at the juice and grinned. “Huh.”

“What?”

“I’m gonna drink this.”

Lena huffed a laugh. “Okay, sunshine, you do that.”

Kara drank it, in one long chain of gulps, then wiped her mouth on the back of her hand and kissed Lena.

It was over so fast Lena could have imagined it, and she was tired enough that that was a genuine possibility, but she tasted oranges and her lips tingled from tenderness long after Kara flew off.

“Huh,” she said, and changed for work.

Just to be a shit, she wore Vera Wang.

☆

“Ms. Luthor!”

“Good morning, Jess.” Lena smiled, swallowing the last of her coffee and tossing the cup out. “How was your night?”

Jess touched her neck in that self-conscious way one does when they have hidden hiccups, and only then did Lena notice the faint discoloration of concealer against naked skin.

“Good! It was. It was good!”

“Happy Valentine’s Day, Jess.”

“And yours? Ms. Luthor?”

*How was my Valentine’s Day?*

She settled on, “Better than it could have been,” and wandered into her office. She sat, toed off her heels, and started in on her paperwork.

Her last Valentine’s had been spent in a garage in New Jersey, treating a welding burn on her ankle by wandering, half-conscious and barefoot, into the snowcapped backyard. She’d woken Jack up by
whipping a snowball at him, and they’d wasted easily an hour just playing in the snow, laughing like idiots. They’d drunk chai hot chocolate and eaten stale bagels and managed to finish the circuit diagram for their eighteenth iteration of the ‘bots.

Fighting a self-absorbed asshole from another dimension, meeting two figureheads of a shadowy government organization, and eating breakfast in a super suit with Kara Danvers - pretty solid, and good or bad, Lena wouldn’t trade it for another one.

Of course, the day after V Day, she’d have traded in a heartbeat, because the day after V Day, she went from being behind her desk, looking at the brief for a deal with a GMO startup that wanted to eliminate the allergen in peanuts, to being assaulted by her own damn desk.

When she woke up, it was to the hiss of a sealed door opening.

“Goddamnit.”

“What happened?”

“The ventilation kicked in,” said a woman, “and the circular filter sucked up all the dust. The imp’s loose.”

Lena groaned, head lolling back.

“Can you break yourself out of this?”

“It’s designed to be unbreakable. You have to weld me loose.”

The woman sighed. “Shit. And I put away my micro torch ten minutes ago.”

“Who’re you?”

“Agent Vasquez. Call me Vasquez.”

“Oh. Okay.”

It took half an hour to rip open Lena’s desk and get her out, and she allotted the same amount of time to mourn it once this bullshit was over.

“Woulda been faster,” was Vasquez’ apology, “but Supergirl’s MIA.”

“Mxy broke out, and she’s missing? What if he took her?”

“According to the brief, ma’am, he can’t break her free will, if that’s any consolation. And she seems to have some idea of what to do. Once she heard the news, she said something about burrows and flew off.”


“Oh, what?”

“Plan A. Bait and snatch.”

“You need to talk to the director.”

They marched deeper into the building, dodging more than one bat along the way, until they found a remarkably airy office buried at the heart. Perched behind a sleek holo-glass desk, munching on a
bowl of cherries, sat Lucy Lane in her tactical blacks, wavy bob scraped back into a painful-looking ponytail that didn’t quite catch the short strands around the nape of her neck.

“Lena Luthor. Quelle suprise.”

“I know what Kara’s doing.”

“Sit.”

Lena sat.

“Spill.”

Lena spilled.

It only took about ten minutes to hash through all their collective details, which was about enough time for the Kryptonian Sunstones on their radar to spike to near meltdown levels and a radiation signature identical to that of the ouroboros gate to spike up on their display.

“According to plan, right?” Lena asked, hugging herself.

“He can’t make her kill herself, and he wants her alive.” Lucy grabbed Vasquez’ hand, and they white-knuckled each other like nobody’s business. “This will work.”

“This will work.”

It worked. It took only eighty eight seconds to shut the cauldron down, for the radiation to fizzle out, for the gate’s signature to disappear. Vasquez leaned down to kiss Lucy’s temple as the director slumped, relieved, into her side.

“Good work, dumbass,” Lucy mumbled, side-hugging Vasquez and waving away the display. “As for you, dumbass’ damsel, I recommend you hightail it back to the big NC for when she inevitably returns.”

“Thank you. I’m going to…” Lena stood, swallowed hard. “Thank you.”

☆

Lena worked from her couch, not her suspiciously repaired and replaced desk, after reassuring Jess that she was fine and convincing her not to call the police. Her paperwork was a blur, with or without her reading glasses (which she found she still needed, annoyingly enough), and went by too fast to properly occupy her. She had Jess renew Winn’s seats at Il Palazzo, considering he hadn’t used the table the night before, texting him on and off all day. Come nightfall, he went dark - occupied with better and brighter things - and she stayed at work.

The conversation she’d intended to have with Kara barely forty hours before felt so far-off, so distant. Kara’d spent those forty-odd hours being forcibly romanced. Lena’d been kidnapped, threatened, attacked by her own furniture.

Continuing that conversation was scarier than any of that.

So she stayed. She stayed, and she worked on her prototypes, and only around midnight did she finally leave - if only because she’d realized Jess was still behind her desk, and knew she wouldn’t leave until Lena had. She walked Jess out to her car, and waited until it had pulled off to go back inside.
The mattress was done. Bed, too.

She schlepped them across town and managed to cram them into her apartment somehow. On went soft satin sheets, cool enough for California’s stupid ceaseless summer heat, and Lena was about to peel out of her clothes and fall into them when someone knocked.

On her window.

If she ran, well, no one saw, and she had every right to be riding high on adrenaline.

“Can I come in?” Kara asked.

Lena’s heart stuttered, and she opened the bay window. “Always.”

Kara floated in, shoes quietly meeting bare hardwood, and she touched her glasses in that endearing nervous way, and all Lena could think was *orange juice*.

“Turns out plan A was the way to go,” Kara said softly, pushing the window shut. “I linked the locks on your gate and the Fortress’ atomic cauldron. The shut-down code was KLTPZYXM. He punched it in between cycles and then just: poof!” She took off her glasses. “Gone.”

“Good. Good, I’m glad.”

“He wanted to be loved, is the sad thing,” Kara continued. “I guess the 5th dimension is probably pretty lonely.”

“Must be. He just watched until now. His first foray into real-boyhood wasn’t very well-done.”


Her fingertips reached out, brushing Lena’s, and Lena’s palm unspooled like a flower’s petals, opening only to close around them.

“Being respected, trusted. Someone working with you and trying to understand you and listening when you speak. Someone taking care of you and letting you take care of them.”

“And that’s what you thought of today?” Lena asked, voice hoarse and barely audible over two pounding hearts.

“I thought of asking this question.” Kara lifted Lena’s hand until their hands hovered at chest height, cupped it in both palms. “I thought of asking if I could kiss you, properly, all day.”

“You are a yellow sun,” Lena whispered, reaching up and cradling her jaw. “You’re so warm and so giving and you make me better, Kara. I’m not all of myself without you.”

Kara beamed, all sunbeams and soft pink lips.

“You can,” Lena blurted. “Kiss me. Properly. If you want.”

So Kara did. She kissed her, gossamer soft, arms encircling Lena just the right amount of tight, enough to make her heart skip a beat. Lena’s fingers wove into her hair, lying along the curvature of her spine, of her skull, clinging.

“I made an unbreakable bed,” she whispered when the kissing stopped. “For, um. Practical reasons.”
“Practical,” parroted Kara, lifting off the floor. Her eyes narrowed, infinitely fond, and she smiled. “That works.”

The bed, indeed, proved unbreakable.

Chapter End Notes

I went through so many different versions of the duel, and of the plot. I wanted Lena to be involved, but not overshadow J'onn's importance in the plot and in Kara's life; I wanted the musicals, but also wanted something more personal to Lena. The duels in Hamilton are very much a masculine thing, a toxic masculinity thing, and Lena is not masculine, nor does she exhibit masculine toxicity. I was going to have her be Angelica, or Maria Reynolds, because Red Dress Foreshadowing; I was going to have her make a Heathers joke. In the end, I went with a Joan of Arc thing because, according to Katie McGrath, she used to be Lena's hero—until a certain Maid of Might swept her off her feet. So, yeah.

I hope everyone liked this chapter. I'm pretty okay with it. The next chapter goes up on Tuesday, so keep an eye out! Thank you all for reading and leaving kudos and comments!!
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Set during 2x14: Homecoming. Family is hard.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was screaming.

Far away.

Lena sat up, bracing her hand in the space Kara’s back had only just occupied, and looked over at her pillow-creased cheek.

“I hear… two shotguns half a mile away,” she said, leaning in and kissing Lena softly. “Good morning.”

“Good morning to you, too.” Lena bit her lip, looking up into the soft, dark blue of her eyes. “Do you want to take it?”

“I thought we could take it together.”

“That sounds nice.”

Four armed robberies later, they were waylaid by a scarred pit bull in an alley’s pitiful whimpering. It took about two hours, but come eight thirty, four beautiful baby bulldogs were blinking sightlessly up at the shadows they carved out of the morning sunshine. Lena called a shelter she trusted and took more than a few pictures of Kara cuddling puppies, because what kind of woman wouldn’t take that opportunity, and waited with her until a shelter worker named Shelby showed up to collect them all.

“Oh, wow, you’re - and you’re - ”

“Yep.” Kara smiled, draping one arm around Lena’s shoulders, the other fist perched heroically on her hip. “It’s been a good day so far.”

“I - shit, I bet.”

Gunshots popped about ten blocks east, and Lena clicked her tongue, tipping her head towards the sunrise. “Gotta go.”

“Hey, um, can we mention you on our website?”

“Put pictures up,” Kara called, scooping Lena into her arms. “She’s adorable with puppies.”

“Thanks!”

As they swooped in over the fifth armed robbery of the morning, Lena shifted her batons into aerodynamic panels and said, “Permission to go Falcon, ma’am?”
“Permission granted,” Kara replied, launching her down.

Lena glided over the scene, bouncing harmlessly off the side of the building and landing as a bulletproof shield in front of the bystanders while Kara took both guns and broke them like mechanical pencil cartridges. Tossing the pieces aside, she pivoted on the ball of her foot and knocked one gunman out cold, giving Lena just enough time to slide on her kneepads towards the other, swiping his legs out from under him and pinning him for the police.

With arrests made and statements given, they ended up wandering down the pier, barely open but still willing to hand out funnel cake to friendly neighborhood feminist crimefighting figureheads - “free of charge!” the vendor insisted.

Lena took note of the cart’s identifying information and left herself a message to pay its licensing fees for the next year.

“Softie,” Kara teased, bumping into her side and beaming.

“You stopped to birth rescue puppies and you have powdered sugar on your nose. Who’s the softie here?”

“I have powdered sugar on my nose?”

Lena reached up, booping her nose with cake. “Now you do.”

They sat by the docks for a while, munching on fried goodness and sinking into each other, until a tugboat honked at them.

“Hey!”

“Yeah?” Kara shadowed her eyes with her hand. “What’s up?”

“Motor done died on me. Think you could give an old gal a lift?”

“Sure.”

“Want a hand with the motor, too?”

“Why not?”

Kara hauled the tug and their tanker to shore, where Lena set about fixing their motor - slipped teeth on the rotor; all she had to do was carve them back into place with her thumbnail. The woman running the boat gave them each a hug and a mug of lemon zinger, and that was their morning.

“Good morning,” Lena decreed, landing on Kara’s window ledge in her arms.

“Pretty good, I’d say, yeah.” Kara hopped in and set Lena down. “Good night, too.”

Lena beamed, biting her lip. “Yeah?”

Kara’s eyes flicked down, then back up. She peeled off Lena’s cowl and murmured, “Yeah,” ducking down to kiss her.

“Oh, um.” Lena reached back to close the window and heard it crack a little in its frame. “I’ll fix that.”

“Laser vision.”
“I’ll pay to fix that, in a responsible and endearingly chivalrous display.”

“My knight in shining armor,” Kara beamed.

Lena stretched up and kissed her again, nipping at her bottom lip. “I do know my way around a sword and a code of etiquette.”

“Does that, um, code of etiquette include confidentiality?”

“I’m not a fan of private life being public knowledge anyway,” Lena assured her, giving her waist a gentle squeeze.

“It’s not that I’m not proud to be with you. It’s just, the last person I really liked, everyone in my life watched and commented, and I don’t want that to happen to us.” Kara swallowed, offering a half-smile. “Plus, Alex is dating a girl, and I don’t want her to feel like I’m…”

“Infringing on her new frontier?”

“Yeah. Is that. Is that weird?”

“I wouldn’t know, but I don’t think so.” Lena pulled Kara into a tight hug, hooking her chin over her shoulder. “I’m happy just to be here, Kara, so whatever we need to do for you to feel comfortable, I’m ready.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I mean, I’m pretty sure people suspect already - I know they do. But no confirmations? I can absolutely handle.”

“Let them suspect. I just… just for now?”

“As long as you need.”

Kara kissed the top of Lena’s head, sighing into her hair. “Mmm, good. Because we need to be at the DEO in twenty minutes.”

“Okay - wait. We?”

“You told J’onn you wanted to sign on,” Kara said, shrugging haplessly. “He’s a very literal man.”

“Good. I meant it literally.”

Kara grinned, floating up in a little drifting twirl before landing back on the floor, hands clasped over her smiling mouth. “Okay. Gotta get dressed.”

Lena reached out and touched her elbow. “Meet you back here in five?”


Lena was very careful not to break her window completely as she launched herself out of it, whispering, “One.”

It was a good day.

☆
“So, you made it official?”

“Jesus Christ!”

If not for her desk being unbreakable, it would have been in shards; at the sound of a voice coming from nowhere, Lena had slammed her laptop shut on her desk so hard the floor under it cracked.

Her laptop zapped her, almost chiding, and Lena opened it to see Leslie’s grinning face over an ugly 3D owl mug full of pink marshmallows.

“What the hell? Someone could be tapping this computer!”

“I mean, probably, but I’m not your average digital missive. I’m not even your average digital miss.”

“You’re Swiss Miss, is what it looks like.” Lena sank back into her chair. “Nice marshmallow mustache.”

Livewire made a great show of licking her lips clean before saying, “Thanks, Baudelaire.”

“And made what official? I haven’t made anything official.”

“You little partnership with the shadow puppets who know what you are.” Livewire gave her a look. “If they didn’t want it common knowledge, they should’ve put it on paper.”

“Are you keeping tabs on me?”

“Well, your girlfriend doesn’t share hers with me, so…”

Lena tried to fight the grin. She really, really, truly did.

Livewire saw it anyway. She let out a cackle, and Lena’s keyboard crackled. “Girlfriend, huh?”

“Shut up, like you don’t have one.”

“It is a casual sexual relationship with cuddling.”

“You’re wearing her team hoodie, Leslie, and you’re drinking out of her favorite cup.”

Leslie sneered and took another sip. “Whatever. Congratulations on joining Big Brother.”

“Congratulations on being the little spoon.”

Livewire waggled her eyebrows, then disappeared.

Swallowing a laugh, Lena called, “Jess?”

Like magic, she appeared, travel mug in hand, the barest trace of pink foam in her cupid’s bow.

“Yes, Ms. Luthor?”

“I’m sending a few R&D goodies home with some employees. Do you want a self-sustaining generator?”

“I pay my own utilities bill, of course I want a self-sustaining generator.”

“I’ll have it delivered.”

“Thank you, Ms. Luthor.”
“It’s nothing.”

*A good day, indeed.*

Not for long, because then Lena got four of, essentially, the exact same message.

*Winn, 9.02 a.m.* Cadmus crème egg umbridge is on the move

*Kara, 9.02 a.m.* A Cadmus convoy is coming out of a weapons facility in the desert be on the look out and be safe

*Alex, 9.03 a.m.* Assembling a backup team to move on a Cadmus convoy in or out

*Unlisted number, call time 9.03 a.m. - 9.03 a.m.* A Cadmus weapons conveyance convoy is leaving a base in the desert and moving towards the city. Your presence and participation is required in a strike to stop it and take any active members into custody. Be ready to move out in no more than ten minutes.

“Well, gee. You sure know how to make a girl feel wanted.” Lena stood, cracked her neck, and walked out past Jess. “Something’s come up. Clear my schedule for the rest of the day, leave a pat message on the phone, and take off for yourself, too.”

“Is something wrong?”

“My, um, my mother’s making a move. Don’t know what it is, but I’ve been advised to keep a low profile, and I think it best you do the same.”

“Yes, Ms. Luthor.” Jess already had the phone in hand. “How much detail do I give?”

“Bare minimum. Misinformative.”

“Of course. Have a safe day.”

“And you.”

Lena took the rooftops and changed in the base, racing up to Alex and her scant assemblage.

“Alright, now we just need MacArthur and Hoang, and we’re ready to rumble.”

“Where are we rumbling?”

Alex offered her a glimpse of her tablet.

“That’s near an old Lord test facility. Lex bought it out two years ago.”

“Any idea what it held?”


Alex almost smiled. “Keep an eye out for any hazardous Lord tech along the way. Or Lord. No one knows where the hell that slimy bastard’s been the past ten months, or what he’s been up to, so keep sharp.”
The throng of agents nodded sharply, all primed and ready to move in tac blacks. Lena felt a little absurd in her visible violet uniform, more so when Kara’s call came in.

Alex? You’re not going to believe this. It’s Jeremiah. We have him.

“No.” Alex pressed a hand to her mouth, shaking her head. “No, no way.”

Transport is dispatched. Send a cleanup crew to take custody; he’s not in great shape, so we’re flying him straight back. Get a bed ready.

Alex nodded, wordless, jaw tight.

We’re bringing him home, Alex.

“Yeah. Okay, yeah.” She inhaled, a mighty get-yourself-together sniff, and turned to her assembled agents. “Ellis, Didier, Adichie, Pearson, Little, Schmidt, Andrews, and Van Der Beek, you head out to coordinates and handle cleanup. Make it quick and make it fast; Cadmus is gonna be pissed they lost cargo. Everyone else, back to business. If I see one game of Galaga, I don’t give a shit how meta the reference, we are not SHIELD and I will have you relocated to Ne-goddamned-vada, clear?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The agents dispersed. Lena hesitated, for just a moment. “Are you okay?”

“I don’t believe it’s him.” Alex’s eyes were shiny-bright, and she sat on the edge of the console, staring at the floor. “It’s not going to be him.”

“Got it. What do you need me to do?”

“You begged off L Corp for the day.”

“Yes.”

“Stick around. We’ll send you on Supergirl’s calls.”

Lena nodded crisply and made to step away, but she was stopped when Alex reached out and grabbed her wrist.

“What would you do?” she asked, head low. “If your dad came back.”

“Make him answer a lot of questions.”

Alex snorted. “Sounds about right.”

“I’m sorry. About all this. About him, about… her.”

Alex looked up at her, searching for something. “You’re nothing like them. Like your family.”

“I try not to be.”

“Good.” Alex looked away again. “Good.”

Lena stayed, serfs’ distance away, until Kara arrived with J’onn and a badly bloodied man draped between them. Alex raced across the room, and Lena sank back to give their reunion some space.

She couldn’t help but think on Alex’s question.
If Lionel were here, she thought, I’d ask him about my mother. I’d ask him about me. I’d ask him about Lillian, about Lex. I’d ask him every question under the goddamned sun. Why did you hit her? Why did you have me? What was my mother? What am I? Are you proud of what we became without you?

Are you the sort of man I’d want to be proud of me?

Jeremiah Danvers, it seemed, was exactly the sort of man you’d want to be proud of you. Even broken and bleeding, he reached out to touch the daughter he hadn’t seen in over a decade and spoke her name like a prayer with the last vestiges of strength in him. He hugged his girls like they were the whole universe, made fragile in its condensation, perfectly fitted to his arms.

Arm.

Lena gripped her own arm too tight, feeling like the worst sort of voyeur for watching, for joining the applause, for wondering if it would be worse to hide in the herd and not participate.

When the Danvers girls carried him off to the med bay, she hid out in the control area with Winn, picking at her armor.

“Dads are weird,” he hissed, reviewing the satellite footage. “Right?”

Lena nodded. “It’s not just me, then.”

“He seems so… nice. So functional.”

“Are some people just like that? Built to keep going?”

“And be good.”

“That’s where they get it from. Benevolent, born and bred. Born and raised.” Lena took a breath. “Why would Mother trigger an alert? What’s she trying to accomplish?”

“I don’t know.” Winn shrugged, raking his hand through his hair. “Is there any chance it was a mistake, a genuine, bona fide fuck up?”

“Lillian Luthor doesn’t make mistakes, to hear her tell it. Other than - ” Lena shut up, fingers digging in harder in an undulating pattern. “Well.”

“Unreliable narrator.”

Lena huffed a laugh. “The trial transcripts agree.”

The tension in the air had lifted, but not broken. Lena didn’t know how to do this - how to be suspicious, how to be trusting, how to be cautious without fucking up. She just wanted Kara happy.

She wanted her whole family happy.

Oh, god, they feel like family. Like family should feel.

Goddamnit.

“Should I..?”

“Bring your suspicions to them?” After a moment, Winn nodded. “If Jeremiah’s being used, they need to know.”

“Um, sure. Yeah, any time.”

With that, Lena padded over to the med bay. She couldn’t bring herself to go inside, hovering in the open door, eyes down, hands held stiff at her sides.

“I guess I did too good a job enhancing Henshaw, because they wanted me to stick around, help ‘em with other projects.” Something crossed Jeremiah’s face, something he pushed back almost as fast as it had appeared, and Lena’s heart broke a little in her chest at the sight, fracturing again when he looked up at his daughters with Alex’s saddest, most earnest eyes. “In the beginning, I tried to escape again and again. But, well… Let’s just say they didn’t appreciate that very much.”

“Oh, Dad.” Alex’s sad, earnest eyes couldn’t stand the sight of his, judging by how she looked away, the helpless set to her shrugging shoulders. “I - ”

“It’s okay. By working with them, I was helping to keep you and your sister safe.” Jeremiah’s injured hand gave an aborted sort of twitch, like he’d forgotten for a moment how badly it hurt to move, and Lena’s vision blurred.

Wiping her eyes, she hoarsely said, “Dr. Danvers, I am… I’m so sorry. For everything she did.”

“Do I know you?” he asked, brow furrowed.

“No. She wouldn’t have - it doesn’t matter.” Lena grabbed her shoulder, a nervous clutch, and shook her head. “I’m - ”

“Lena Luthor.” His eyes widened. “I do know you.”

Swallowing hard, Lena squeezed tighter. “I just - your daughters have been very good to me, and if there’s anything I can do to help. Anything. I want to. I’ll do it in a heartbeat. You’re a good man, you didn’t deserve what she’s done to you.”

“The torture and imprisonment? Yeah, you’re right.”

Kara looked at Lena, really looked at her, for the first time since they’d left her apartment that morning, and Lena couldn’t bear to see if something in her eyes had changed. Nothing makes you hate someone like finding out their family’s been torturing yours, especially for the second time.

“You can help with a prosthesis,” Alex said. “The damage to your hand, Dad, it’s extensive.”

“It was a punishment. For helping Kara and Mon-El escape.” He smiled. “I would do it again in a heartbeat. I’m so lucky you found me.”

Lena’s voice died in her throat right then and there. She wanted to question. She wanted to warn them.

The words wouldn’t make it past the hinge of her jaw.

J’onn J’onzz looked at her, eyes focused strangely. He gave Jeremiah’s non-wounded shoulder a squeeze before excusing himself, and Lena melted out after him.

“You think Cadmus has done something to Jeremiah?”

“I think Lillian let him go into DEO custody for a reason. I think it’s too easy. Nothing good has ever come from her; every gift comes - poisoned, and covered in spikes, and you never see it until it’s too
“late.” Lena crossed her arms tight, really more just hugging herself, and asked, “Does Cadmus know where the DEO is?”

“Project Cadmus started out as a government program. It was cut, last year.”

“Lillian bought it up?”

“She might know, but more likely than not, she doesn’t.”

“It would be easy enough to hide a tracker in his hand, easier still to insert it while bludgeoning it to bits. In all the fray, in all the blood and pain, there’s no way he could’ve seen her insert a tracker.” Lena took a breath. “If this has compromised the base, in any way, I’m - ”

“Don’t apologize for things you had no hand in.” J’onn’s crossed arms were far more impressive than Lena’s, and she was duly intimidated. “Now, go back in there. With your girlfriend.”

“She didn’t want to tell anyone about it.”

“I can read minds, Lena, especially loud thoughts, and Kara’s been screaming about you in her head for months. I won’t say anything, not until she’s ready, but for what it’s worth, I’m happy for her.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“And she wants you with her right now, so if I were you, I’d head back in.”

Lena nodded and went, ducking back in as quietly as she’d left.

Kara looked at her again as she walked in, was already looking. She didn’t say a word, just grabbed Lena’s hand and clung, locking their fingers together. Lena ran her thumb along the back of Kara’s hand as soothingly as she could, giving a few pulses of pressure - I’m here. I’m sorry.

Kara flashed a weak smile her way before turning towards her adoptive father. “Jeremiah, would it be okay if Lena came to that family dinner?”

Jeremiah’s smile was much stronger when he said, “Of course.”

“Thank you, Dr. Danvers.”

“Call me Jeremiah, okay? Family doesn’t need titles.”

“Okay.” Lena took a breath. “Jeremiah.”

“There we go.” His smile didn’t wane, even waxing, growing wider, brighter. “Family does, however, help family get over to the control bay, because there is something you need to know.” His voice hardened. “Something Cadmus has been planning.”

Alex was already under one arm, helping him up off the bed, and Kara was under the other in a heartbeat.

“What’s going in, Dad?”

“They built a fusion bomb with the radiation they mined from Kara’s heat vision, and they’re going to use it on National City. Blame the attack on hostile aliens.” Jeremiah’s jaw tightened. “It’ll be the ultimate triumph for Dr. Luthor - eradicating almost everyone who could stop her in one fell swoop, and getting rid of one of the largest alien population hubs in America.”
“Two birds, one bombshell.”

“Oh, my god.”

Winn, in his chair, wheeled around with fright-wide eyes. “So, what you're saying is that Jeremiah Danvers, former DEO agent and Alex and Kara’s long lost father has returned from Cadmus custody with news that our enemy has developed a nuclear fusion explosive using Kara's other-worldly heat vision radiation, and that they're going to drop that on National City and just kill us all?” If at all possible, his eyes widened further, and he let out a nervous laugh. “Is - Is this - Is this place bomb-proof?”

J’onn gave him a Look - of course it is, what are we, children? - but Jeremiah didn’t stop for a moment.

“You could run a trace on Kara’s heat vision radiation signature.”

“Right, well, yes, if the bomb is armed, I might be able to pinpoint it’s location before it goes off.” Winn wheeled back around and got to work, fingers flying over his keys with speed, precision, and desperation usually kept on lock until he’d downed three Redlines.

“Jeremiah?”

More than a few hearts skipped a beat just then, and all eyes were on the blonde woman who’d just walked in - Eliza Danvers.

Jeremiah said her name like a prayer, leaned into her hug even with his injured hand trapped between them. “My god, did I miss you,” he sighed into her hair, eyes squeezed shut.

Kara and Alex shared a look, Kara gently batting at Alex’s elbow like oh my god! Oh! My! God!, and Lena’s own heart filled with warmth. She sat down next to Winn with the tiniest of smiles on her face.

“I told Director J’onzz,” she murmured. “I couldn’t - I couldn’t say it to them. They're so - look at them, they’re so happy.”

Winn spared a glance, and when he looked back, he was still for a long moment. “Yeah, they really are.”

“He doesn’t - ” Lena shook her head.

“What?”

“He doesn’t hate me.”

“For?”

Lena barely had to shoot him a Look - he’d been on the receiving end of a lot of those so far that day - before he got it.

“I mean, he’s their dad. Of course he wouldn’t.”


She peeked over her shoulder, at the four of them huddled close and glowing with happiness, and couldn’t help but feel a little jealous. A little nostalgic.
Marion had looked like that, in the few pictures of them Lena could recall. Lionel had looked like that in early family photos, looked like that when he’d looked at her, sometimes.

She missed being the subject of that look.

☆

“He’s going to hate me.”

“No, he’s not.”

Somehow, Lena and Maggie had arrived at exactly the same time, the exact same nervous look on their faces, the exact same sort of gift in hand - Maggie toting tequila, Lena bringing Scotch.

“If he doesn’t hate me, for all my mother’s done, then he’s not going to hate you for being his baby girl’s girlfriend.” Lena bit her lip. “He’s a good man. He just wants his family safe and happy, and you make Alex happy, and you keep her safe. He’s probably going to roll out an aisle to walk her down as soon as you flash him your perfect dimpled grin.”

Maggie snorted, and the elevator let out a ding.

Lena tried not to feel like it was a death knell, and let Maggie get out first, just listening to the Danvers for a moment.

Is that the party line?

I seem to remember a lot of grumbling.

Maggie knocked; Lena ducked aside and kept listening, the fond patter somehow soothing.

Well, times have changed, Dad.

We have embraced being helpful!

On scales both large and small.

Kara opened the door, and she and Maggie’s cheerful, familiar greeting was drowned out by the nervous/happy/besotted thudding of Alex’s heart.

“I heard there was a party,” Maggie said, offering the bottle, and her nervous heartbeat was just as bad outside of the enclosed elevator.

“Hey, um.” Alex crossed to her, almost hugged her, settled on just gripping her shoulders like a life preserver. “Come on in.”

“Hey, sweetie,” Eliza said, hugging Maggie, kissing her cheek.

Kara, at the door, jerked her head inwards and whispered, “You, too.”

Lena shook her head, feeling like a recalcitrant toddler being forced to wear a hair bow for a press release photo - lonely and terrified and petrified by anxious adrenaline.

“He’s going to love you.”

Lena set the Scotch down so her nervous grip didn’t break the bottle, and Kara took that as a cue to step out into the hall and close the door behind her.
“It’s going to be weird,” Lena finally wheezed. “Alex is bringing her girlfriend! Her serious girlfriend! Of, like, four months, and I’m just your friend whose mom kidnapped you, tortured and blackmailed him, and is trying to kill everyone.”

“I’m sorry.” Kara bit her lip, fingers fidgeting.

“No, don’t be sorry.”

“Alex - Alex has worked so hard to be happy, I can’t - I can’t take that from her.”

“This isn’t me saying I want to tell people, or that I’m going to. I wouldn’t do that to you. I just - this is for family. I don’t have an excuse.”

“Oh, Lena.”

“Why are you hugging me?”

“Because you’re shaking and I want to make you feel better because I care about you.” Kara squeezed a little tighter and kissed her hair. “You’ve lived with Lillian. You know how horrible she can be better than anyone.”

“Better than most.” Lena closed her eyes so tight she saw spots. “She crushed his hand.”

“And you are going to fix it. You, and your beautiful brain, alongside my sister and hers, are going to fix that. I have faith in you.”

Lena sniffled. “I’m a Luthor. A Luthor did this to him. I just - I can’t imagine him not hating me on sight. I don’t know how he’s been so accepting of me.”

“Because he’s a good person,” Kara said softly, pulling back to look at Lena. “Just like you. And he sees how good you are, just like me. Okay?”

“Okay.”

Kara tilted Lena’s chin up and kissed her, the most fleeting of pecks, but that and the enduring embrace helped, somehow.

“And Eliza likes you, too, and Alex, and Maggie. You’re in good company. Tonight is going to go well, I promise.”

Lena nodded. “And you never break a promise.”

Grinning, Kara said, “That’s right,” and dragged Lena inside.

“Lena!” Eliza hugged her, too, like she had Maggie, like she did her daughters, and Lena had to swallow the lump in her throat three times just to make it go down. “I’m glad you could make it.”

“There’s nowhere else I’d rather be,” she said softly, and meant it with all her heart. “Also, there’s nowhere else this ’56 Macallan would rather be, either.” The blender whirred; her cheeks turned pink. “I should’ve brought something else.”

“No, this is perfect,” Kara insisted, squeezing her hand. “Special occasions.”

“I hope you don’t think this is staying in your apartment,” Eliza teased, eyes sparkling. “I’m taking this bad boy home with me.”
Drawn in, Lena mock-whispered, “It’s good with a bubble bath.”

“Then I’ve just made weekend plans.” Eliza gave Lena’s cheek a pat. “Thank you, Lena.”

“Of course, Eliza.”

Jeremiah, struggling to cut a lime one-handed, let out a curse as he lost his grip of the fruit and it rocketed across the room. Lena snagged it out of the air, too fast for human hands, and brought it back over. She couldn’t bring herself to look up at him.

“Nice catch.” She watched him set the knife down, watched his hand lay over hers and give a gentle squeeze. “Thanks. This is harder one-handed.”

Lena smiled and ducked away, practically running over to where Maggie and Alex were sitting practically piled on top of each other. She eyed the couch opposite theirs for about a second, because she was in a nice dress that she couldn’t properly walk, let alone sit down on the floor, in. Kara, sitting under the TV, grabbed her hand and pulled her onto the carpet. “Don’t worry. I’ll pull you up, too.”

“What’s with the duds, little Luthor?” Maggie asked. “I mean, that’s Meeting the Folks level fancy, and I didn’t even go that hard.”

It was, in fact, a meeting the parents dress. Not the one she’d worn for Thanksgiving, because the possibility of Eliza thinking she had exactly one dress was mortifying (even though there was literal press evidence to the contrary out there, there was a Lillian-esque voice in her head). It was royal blue, and she’d been a little fluttery over it because it matches Kara’s eyes!, but it wasn’t absurdly formal, and she said as much.

“I just want to make a good impression.”

“If you’d introduced yourself to me with a Scotch from sixty years ago, I’d probably have fallen in love with you,” Alex said, grinning. “You’re safe.”

Maggie draped an arm around Alex’s shoulders and said, “Lucky me you held out, huh?”

A tiny, smitten giggle escaped Alex, and she hid her smiling mouth behind her hand, leaning into Maggie’s shoulder. Maggie’s arm wrapped a little tighter, pulling Alex a little closer, and Kara squeezed her hand.

Lena, listening to all the lovestruck pulses in the room, squeezed back.

“Kids,” Jeremiah called, “drinks are ready!”

“I’m ready.” Alex scrambled over, grinning girlfriend in tow, and they all huddled around the table as he poured, casually passing the pitcher Kara’s way when his grip faltered.

The door opened, softly, and J’onn said, “Sorry I’m late.”

“Oh, don’t be silly, J’onn.” Eliza beamed warmly at him and beckoned him over to the table.

He approached, looking at Jeremiah with total fondness.

“Oh, hey.” Jeremiah turned to face him, an equally familiar look on his face. “I forgot to do something earlier.” He swung his good arm around J’onn in a tight hug, gripping the back of his neck, and sighed. “Thank you. Thank you for saving my life again. Thank you for keeping your
promise to watch over my girls.”

“It was an honor,” J’onn said.

Lena let go of one of the glasses to covertly wipe her eyes, but she picked it up just as fast when Kara nudged it back into her hands.

“A toast,” she said, “to coming home.”

They clinked, and not a single pair of eyes was without warmth or burgeoning tears.

“Now, obviously this is going to be a time of adjustment, but I hope you’ll all be patient. With me.” Jeremiah, who had been looking across the table at Kara, suddenly found his margarita impossibly interesting. “I’ve seen and done things that I wish I hadn’t.”

“Dad,” Alex said gently, “don’t.”

“If I’m going to move forward, I need to face my past. Cadmus - ”

And he was looking at Lena.

*Oh, god, no.*

“Cadmus changed me. Tried to break me. But in the process, they made me dangerous. I know everything they know. I know their weaknesses, and I’m here to work with all of you to make our planet safer, and if you’ll have me, Director, I’d like to return to the DEO. Formally.”

J’onn looked a little gobsmacked as he turned towards Alex and Kara, who asked, “Can he?” in this soap bubble voice, all fragile, floating hope.

“Pending a full psych evaluation and a field readiness exam…” He grinned at his old friend. “I don’t see why not.”

Kara bounced on her toes, ponytail swinging, and Lena swallowed a too-big mouthful of margarita.

“Thank you, friend.”

Salt stung in the corners of her mouth. Lena licked her lips, trying not to think on everything Cadmus knew - everything Jeremiah knew. She hoped he could pass his field exam. She hoped he passed his evaluation. She hoped, with everything inside her, that he was okay, but she wished she had Kara’s x-ray vision so she could look at his hand and see what Lillian had done to use him and protect this tiny golden moment, these blissful people, from her own family.

The night went well, without a hitch. They had *fun.* Lena heard about tiny Alex’s month of nightmares about some ad for Bionicle and Kara’s new-to-earth fascination with birds and how Eliza and Jeremiah met (a conference, held in a community center, about the frozen bacteria on Mars’ use in creating new antibiotics; the science was shoddy, but they complained about it to each other over margaritas at the bar across the street and became nigh unto inseparable). Maggie told a story about her first case with the Science Division that had everyone in physical pain from laughing too hard.

Lena couldn’t help but get sucked into it.

The end of the night was heralded by Alex reminding Maggie of her early shift. Maggie wrinkled her nose distastefully and combed her fingers through Alex’s hair. “Gonna walk me home, Danvers?”

Alex spared a fleeting glance towards her parents, her newly rediscovered father, and blushed when
all three of them waved her and her girlfriend off. J’onn started cleanup with Eliza and Kara, and once there was enough trash collected to merit a trip to the cans outside, Lena volunteered both hands readily.

“Let me take one,” Jeremiah said, scooping up the recycling just before she could grab it. “You can get the door.”

“Oh.” Lena got the door, held it wide open for him and his bloated blue plastic bag, then showed him down the back steps. Outside, they ditched the garbage, and for a moment, they just stood there. She found herself avoiding eye contact by staring up at the stars.

She’d been staring at the stars a lot, lately.

“What are you,” Jeremiah began to ask.

“I don’t know.”

“- to my daughter?”

Lena’s cheeks went pink. “Oh. We’re. She’s my friend. The first real friend I’ve had in… a long time.”

Jeremiah looked at her, almost scrutinizing. “What does that mean, you don’t know what you are?”

Lena put the lid on the trash can a little too hard. “Alex ran the genetic testing, but I haven’t gotten the results back yet. I suppose it must be harder to tell, since I’m only half human.”

“It shouldn’t be taking that long, even with mixed strains. Huh.” After a moment’s pensive silence, he asked, “Does Kara know?”

“She was the first person I told. Right away, she believed in me, even when no one else did. Even when all signs said I didn’t deserve it, she read them different. She wanted to help me.”

“She’s always been like that.” Jeremiah smiled softly. “She’s a good kid. They both are.”

“Your family is good people.”

“I’m surprised you’re telling me all this. Since, well.” He lifted his injured hand, and it said enough.

“I trust you,” Lena blurted. “I don’t trust my mother. I - she kidnapped Kara. She held you hostage. She wants to cause so much death and destruction - she wants to study my genes and take my powers and give them to alien-killing soldiers. Living with her for fourteen years was bad enough, but being her captive that long… I can’t imagine.”

Jeremiah inspected the handle on the trashcan lid, the way it had warped to fit the contours of her fingers. “That’s quite a grip you’ve got.”

“I’ll match it,” she promised, “when I build you a new hand.”

“Sounds good to me.”

“Deal,” said Lena as she stuck out her left hand.

Jeremiah ignored it and pulled her into a hug. “Deal.”

Lena was still warm with it when they got back into Kara’s apartment, and collapsed into a new one
with her as soon as she could.

“Hey, hey, are you okay?” Kara pulled Lena a little tighter. “What happened out there?”

“Nothing. We talked shop a little, about his hand.” Lena tucked her face into Kara’s shoulder. “I like him. I’m glad you have him back.”

“Me, too.” Kara released, just a little, stepping far enough back to look at Lena properly. “Am I walking you home, Ms. Luthor?”

“I was thinking of, y’know, going all hop-skip-jump.”

“Can you do that in that dress?”

Lena grinned. “I have a costume stashed in your room, Kara. I was going to change clothes first.”

Kara hummed, then pulled Lena into another hug. “I’ll fly with you.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah. Eliza and Jeremiah need some time to talk to each other, and I need some time with you.”

Lena nodded, ducking into Kara’s room to swap out her clothes while Kara made their excuses. Moments later, they were zipping along the skyline under stars that had never seemed brighter.

“I’m really happy right now,” Kara yelled over the wind.

Lena, vaulting from one side of the street to the other, called back, “Me, too!”

In the air over the lane demarcation, Kara swooped down and snatched Lena out of the air. Reacting without thinking, Lena wrapped her legs around Kara’s waist, her arms around her neck. Kara’s eyes, paler in moonlight, were satiny and sweet before they closed, long lashes casting shadows on her cheeks before she leaned in and kissed Lena.

“Are you flying me home like this?” Lena asked breathlessly, noses brushing.

Kara giggled and took off again.

Wind whipping around them, all Lena could think was, I really am happy.

“Drop me off at L Corp?”

“Why?”

Lena smiled into Kara’s collarbone. “Homecoming present.”

☆

“Do you actually need to wrap this?” Jess asked.

Lena froze, arm chassis’ box heavy in her hands. “Yes.”

“I mean, it’s - what is it?”

Thankful that Jess, like almost everyone else on the planet, lacked x-ray vision, Lena said, “It’s a… toolkit. For Kara’s father.”
“Isn’t he..?”

“Apparently not.”

“Well, most toolkits just come in a, y’know, kit. Stick a ribbon on it and you’re done.”

“These are more specialized.”

“Are you giving him *previews*?” Jess asked, aghast. “Ms. Luthor!”

“I - no.” Lena frowned. “Do you think I should?”

“No! The investors, the board - they’d go insane if they found out.”

“Good thing it isn’t, then.” Lena clutched the box a little closer. “Should I just - ?” With a desperate look to her secretary, she mimed slapping a bow on it.

“I’d say yes. I’d also say we *have* gift wrapping bows in house, and that you have back-t0-back meetings for the next six hours, so you should probably tuck it away for the time being.”

Lena nodded crisply, posture shifting into Business Mode. “Of course,” she said, gently putting the box away and smoothing herself down. “Is the board set to meet today?”

“Twelve thirty.”

“Fantastic. That’s going to go for a while; take a long lunch.”

Jess blinked, momentarily stunned, but managed to pack that away even as her hand floated towards her pocket, ready to make a date with some electric personality. “Your first appointment is in seven minutes; your coffee will be here in five.”

“Thank you, Jess.”

Jess nodded and disappeared, leaving Lena alone in her office to send a message of her own.

*[9.13 a.m.]* can i come by the deo at 3.30 i have something to give Jeremiah

*[Kara, 9.13 a.m.]* of course but be on alert

*[Kara, 9.14 a.m.]* winn’s looking for the thing and if we find it it’s gonna be all hands on deck

Lena sent back an affirmative and sank into her chair with a groan. If they found the bomb during her board meeting, as her fantastic luck promised, she would make Lillian eat part of it.

*I wouldn’t put it past her to have Henshaw hack in and find my schedule just to do something like that. Tanking L Corp, killing aliens, and destroying the DEO in one go would be celebration-worthy for her. She’d throw some atrocious gala with tiny crab cakes and show a presentation on all the people she’s murdered.*

With a morbid laugh, Lena resettled into the right frame of mind for her stagnant corporate day. First would be Bardem with Red Road Securities, then Bardot with that Canadian mining firm, Abdul from Pine and Oak International, the stupid board…
Lena wondered if she was a bad person for wishing she had some disaster to avert. A criminal disaster. Her rather outsized office had started to feel rather small.

Coffee came, and a thank you note from the tugboat operator, which was nice, but then Lena drowned in meetings. During a five minute break, Lena received another scrambled anonymous voicemail that informed her that there was no tracking device.

A weight lifted. She felt better.

Cadmus didn’t even interfere with her (horrendous) board meeting. She spent three hours arguing about public opinion and political stances, getting Lex and Lillian thrown in her face like darts, resisting the urge to break something.

Three o’clock came, and she passed a staticky-haired Jess on the way out, box tucked under her arm.

“I’m done for the day. Feel free to head out, too.”

“That’s… remarkable.”

“You can remark off the clock.”

Jess gave a polite smile, the very tip of the grinning iceberg lurking under the surface, and rode the elevator down with Lena. She sent a text around the 30th floor, and when they hit the lobby, a woman in black motorcycle leathers and a reflective helmet was waiting, a maroon helmet resting on one hip.

“Hello, sailor,” she purred.

Jess walked across the lobby like she was deliberately not running, but the last ten feet between her and her ride were crossed in less than a second, and she pressed a kiss to the helmet’s opaque visor. “I have the night off,” she said, snatching her helmet up and slipping it on.

“You’re welcome,” Lena said, patting the biker on the shoulder. A faint shock confirmed her suspicions, and she grinned. “Have fun, you crazy kids.”

“Oh, please, Baudelaire,” Livewire hollered after her, “I’m three years older than you and you have juice boxes for lunch.”

“Green juices and Grover Grape are two entirely separate phenomena!”

“I’m not seeing the difference from here.”

“Drive safe!” called Lena over her shoulder as she swung into her car. “Hey, Georgie.”

“They’re cute, huh?”

“The cutest. You see them around often?”

“Not so much. Liz works odd hours, to hear Jessica tell it, but whenever she does show up, it makes her day.”

Lena swallowed a laugh at Liz and Jessica; the pseudonym was absurdly transparent and only Georgie could get away with using Jess’ full name. “Good for her.”

She made a note to check security footage for Livewire showing up; that quack’s trial was coming up, which meant she needed to make a call.
Lena really hoped neither of them got hurt.

She hugged the box in her lap, hugged it to her chest as she got out five blocks away and took a ten block detour just to maintain covertness, hugged it to her chest as she walked past Pam from HR and made it to the command floor where her people usually hovered.

*Her* people.

*I, she thought with a manic sort of glee, have people.*

Her people, however, did not look happy.

Kara was sitting by the console, at Winn’s desk, but Jeremiah was in the med bay with Alex, so Lena stopped there first.

“I brought you something,” she said, setting the box down far from any surgical equipment.

“What is it?”

Alex leaned sharply over to grab it, retreating with the same frenetic grace and handing it to her father.

“It’s just the chassis right now. I skinned it, for cover reasons, but I can chrome plate it - plate it with anything, really, and we’ve made decent strides in neural integration. I would have put in the mechanisms, but I’m sure there are DEO mods that I don’t have clearance for, and you and Alex are better acquainted with the human nervous system than I am, so I thought I’d leave that up to you.”

Jeremiah beamed. “Thank you, Lena.”

Flustered, she blurted, “Focus groups report between forty five and seventy percent of regained sensation.”

“That’s pretty decent.” Alex inspected the skin-like polymer with surgical eyes. “Nice work.”

“Is everything okay around here?”

“Why don’t you go ask Winn?”

“He’s not here.”

Alex made a tight face and shrugged.

“Oh.” As she started towards the door, Lena heard Livewire in her head, heard Jeremiah in her head, and asked, “Hey, um. Are my results finished processing?”

Alex’s face got tighter. “I’ll find out. With Cadmus and everything, it’s been busy around here.”

Cheeks burning, Lena nodded before ducking out and crossing to Kara, who was dejectedly spinning in Winn’s chair, forehead crinkle pronounced and profoundly endearing. She knelt down and gave it a tiny tap - “Boop.”

Kara snorted a soft laugh.

“What’s going on here?”

“Winn’s program is taking forever and it is very stressful. He’s on his lunch break with Lyra because
there’s nothing left to do for him, and we’ll all get an alert on our phones when we find something, but Jeremiah wants to be here when it goes off, which means Alex won’t leave, and I won’t leave the two of them here, and J’onn has a headache from all the loud stress thinking, so it’s - fraught.”

“Fourteen points,” Lena murmured. “We should play Scrabble.”

“I suck at Scrabble.”

“English isn’t your first language. It’s not even linked to your first language. Give yourself a break.”

Kara half-smiled. “What was in the box?”

“I gave your dad a hand.”

Kara’s half-smile bloomed into an all-out grin.

If smiles could be weaponized, hers would be easily twice as dangerous as the bomb they were all hoping to catch before it dropped.

She leaned forwards, her forehead thudding into Lena’s, and let her hands come to rest draped over Lena’s shoulders. “How was the board meeting?”

“Obnoxious. I spent the whole time hoping there was a fire in the hedge fund next door so we could evacuate and I could do something productive, rather than explain to Lex’s holdouts why aliens aren’t here to steal jobs and spread disease.” Lena sighed. “I should fire the board and bring on aliens instead.”

“That’s not actually a bad idea.”

Lena’s jaw went tight. “Why the hell didn’t I think of that before? Kara,” she hissed, pulling back to look at Kara, cupping her jaw in her hands, “you are a genius.”

Kara’s cheeks turned a delicious pink, and there was a crackle of heat between them that made it very hard not to kiss her.

Lena resisted, somehow, rising to lean against Winn’s desk. “Him and Lyra, huh?”

“I still have yet to meet the mysterious woman from Starhaven.” Kara pouted. “Aren’t best friends supposed to be the first to meet girlfriends?” After a beat, her mouth twisted; Lena knew that face. It’s the whoopsie face, the I have yet to tell him about my girlfriend face.

“Well, if there’s another woman out there willing to pummel giants to protect him, I can’t find fault.”

Kara spun back around to face the console, leaning back and looking up at Lena. “You are an excellent judge of character.”

“Yeah, I am.”

“But I am an excellent judge of hunger. Five bucks says you haven’t eaten today.”

Lena opened her mouth to protest and was drowned out by her stomach. Her mouth closed with a click.

“Wanna make a pizza run for the building?”

“For the building?”
“Yeah! What’s the point of super strength if you don’t use it to carry seventy six boxes of Hawaiian to feed your coworkers?”

Lena wrinkled her nose. “This is why I don’t eat pizza with you.”

“You do, too, eat pizza with me. Game night.”

“That was different; you’d been out-voted. It was good pizza.”

Kara laughed. “Oh, Lena. Sweet, naïve Lena. All pizza is good pizza.”

Lena watched as, with alarming skill, Kara collected a building’s worth of lunch orders. More people ended up asking for deli food instead - it’s all Dana’s fault; there was, apparently, a kosher Korean deli on 17th street that had duck floss and pickled sour cherry bánh mi sandwiches that were worth dislocating a shoulder for, and she promised to tell the story if she was delivered said sandwich - but Kara didn’t seem to mind the two stops.

“You’re such an odd duck,” Lena marveled as they exited onto the sidewalk from an underground garage that carried them eight blocks away. “I’d almost think you miss being Cat Grant’s assistant.”

Kara shrugged. “She was a good boss, and it was simple work. There weren’t layers of instruction - if she wanted a bulletproof coffee, I got her one. If she wanted the layouts, I got them. I didn’t have to take eighty three detours and go on a side quest just to get her a whole wheat croissant, and, yeah, it was pretty thankless, but I knew she cared about me, and I knew I was doing my job right.” She let out a sigh. “Journalism is not like that.”

Lena took her hand. “You’re doing your job right now, too. You’re telling stories that need to be told.”

Kara just shrugged.

“I mean it! You don’t just cave to the narrative. You go looking for answers, even if they seem to be right in front of you, because you know the truth keeps people safe.” Lena knocked her shoulder into Kara’s. “You’re good at this job, Kara, and if Snapper won’t admit it, then I’ll take over that supervisory duty.”

“You can’t file my quarterly reviews,” Kara said, eyes lighter.

“Says you.”

“Lena, if you hack into CatCo servers to edit my paperwork, I will be very impressed and very disappointed.”

Nose in the air, Lena gave a dramatic sigh. “Fine, then, I won’t.”

“Good.”

They found the deli with relative ease, but found carrying forty five sandwiches to be a bit of a stretch, just based off the size of their available gripping limbs. Still, they managed it, and then it was off for pizza.

Kara insisted on carrying the first round of food, but when the time came to pay, she made Lena switch.

“How do I know you won’t buy the building lunch on your own dime? Huh?”
“Oh, no, you’ve foiled my dastardly plot,” Lena drawled, accepting an armful of bánh mì. Kara scribbled down the DEO’s account number - its fake corporation cover was some sort of dental hygiene supply conglomerate, which was absolutely hilarious to Lena - and toted the pizzas out with balletic grace.

(Nothing the employees seemed surprised. Or to care.)

“I’m just that good,” Kara said, ducking to get through the door.

“You really, really are.” They made it another three blocks before Lena said, “If not for the metric ton of cardboard in the way, I would definitely kiss you right now.”

Kara almost dropped her metric ton of cardboard, right there on the corner of Granger Avenue and 18th Street.

☆

The DEO’s atmosphere lightened a little with lunch, but with two slices of Margherita left, the program had run its course, and everyone sprang into action.

“I’m going to go collect Winn,” Lena said, kicking off her heels. “Will you still be here in two minutes?”

“You have one hundred and four seconds.”

With a sharp nod, Lena threw herself out the window. She arrived outside the alien bar without breaking the pavement only by ping-ponging off a few barbed wire fences to eat up some momentum, then dashed inside.

Lyra had Winn in quite a deep dip, a few darts scattered on the floor below them, and was kissing him like it was the end of the world. “Go get ’em, handsome,” she purred, bringing him back upright.

“You bet,” he said, dazed.

She swatted him on the ass as she walked off, eyeing Lena speculatively. “Hi, Winn’s friend.”

“Hi, Winn’s girlfriend.” Lena grabbed Winn’s arm and dragged him, quite gently considering the time crunch, outside. “She’s amazing. Keep her.”

“Dude, I’m trying.”

There was a split second of decision making, and then Lena said, “Piggy-back.”

“What?”

“That’s how I’m getting you back to the DEO. Get on.”

“I’m going to die.”

“No, you won’t. If anything goes wrong, I’ll break the fall. Just hold on, okay?”

“Okay.”

“And don’t scream.”
“No promises.”

He was pretty good about the whole not screaming thing, but Lena was sure that, if she wasn’t nigh unto indestructible, she’d have bruises from how hard he’d been holding on. As Winn disembarked, he gripped her shoulder to keep upright.

“I promise not to tell Lyra another woman made you weak in the knees.”

“Good, because I do not want to see that girl fight.”

They raced up to the command bay and found everyone already gone.

“One hundred and five seconds,” J’onn said by way of explanation.

“Goddamnit.” Lena started pacing. She’d missed the departure. She’d missed the mission. What if they needed her? What if Lillian was there?

“Ms. Luthor, please take a seat.”

Lena sat.

“And try… just try. To think more quietly.”

Winn sat beside her and handed her a comms unit. “About time you got one,” he said with a shrug.

Lena put it on and tuned in, listening to the wind whoosh past Kara’s set, focusing on that until it was the only thing in her head.

Kara landed, and DEO boots were on the ground only seconds after. She blasted through the warehouse door with deft precision, but there was nothing.

“J’onn, please advise. There’s no sign of target.”

Jeremiah’s heart was so loud, it dragged Lena away from the display. She turned just in time to see him slip away.

“Director,” she said, very softly, “I don’t think a tracking device could have ever been the issue.”


The elevator closed.

“*Why can’t I read your mind?*”

J’onn ran off for a short cut. Lena stayed, watching the screen, fists clenched so tight she could feel her suit ripping thread by thread.

“Winn, can you track life signs in this building?”

“We have a system.” He tipped his head towards the center console, and Lena took that as the permission it was.

She selected Jeremiah’s, bringing up security footage in the elevator.

He got out on the mainframe level. Cameras tracked him down the short hall, into the access chamber.
“Director, he’s after files.”

“Well, he’s not going to get them.”

The cameras didn’t carry into the mainframe room. The servers were harder to commandeer than the CCTV, so if someone was lazy-ish, they could just hack the cameras and zoom on the screens. It was a smart security move.

It was a dumb sanity move.

J’onn came in mere moments after Jeremiah disappeared past the leaky valve’s gush of steam, and then there was silence, fraught and peppered with bodies thrown willy nilly.

“I’m going after them,” Winn said, shoving himself up out of his chair. “I can protect the system, sneak around them.”

“You can get beat up.” Lena shoved him back into his seat with one hand. The other brought up the ventilation system, and she committed it to memory, mapping out a path in her head. “Stay here. No one comes down without full body armor.”

With that, she stormed the med bay and ripped open a vent hatch big enough for her to crawl through. As she climbed up, she saw the hand she’d made sitting by a sun bed and something twisted in her gut.

Yet another father figure she’d read wrong.

She dropped into the hallway just as Jeremiah knocked two armored agents with assault rifles to the ground, flinging them aside like they were paper. She threw a solid punch, and he caught it with a hand that it didn’t immediately demolish, a metallic thud ringing out.

“Guess I pulled an all-nighter for nothing,” she said, kneeling him in the solar plexus.

He folded like a bad hand with a grunt, but straightened up way too fast. “I’m sorry. I really didn’t want to do this this way.”

Then his metal hand was around her throat.

“If it makes you feel any better,” he said, “I can only feel at about 15% capacity.”

“Is that why your grip sucks?” Lena swung up, her neck as a fulcrum, and kicked him in the head.

They both dropped; they both got to their feet.

“I don’t want to hurt anyone,” he panted. “But I have to do this.”

“What is Lillian making you do?”

He opened his mouth as if to explain, but then he tightened his human hand around something and tried to push past her.

“What does she want from this?”

“I’m doing this for Alex,” he gritted out. “For Kara. For my family.”

“So am I.”
Lena jammed the point of her elbow into the bend of his and broke his grip. She dove for the device, but he managed to backhand her away with his metal arm. She crashed into the wall, vision a black blur, and watched him scoop up two flash drives - one red, one blue.

“She wants you,” he said finally, straightening up. “She wants to know what you are.”

“Then she should join the goddamn club,” Lena slurred before slipping into unconsciousness.

☆

Lena woke in a sun bed ten minutes later. Next to her, J’onn’s face was glowing around its open wounds, and she could see them creeping closed.

Cool, she thought, and sat up. Her spinning head protested - hell, Winn beside her protested - but she did it anyway.

Between their beds was the vent she’d shinnied through and the hand she’d made. The unnecessary, unbreakable, undeserved hand.

Lena reached over and grabbed it, squeezing like a stress ball.

“You should really lie down.”

“I missed it.”

Winn pushed on her shoulder; though practically ineffective, the point came a cross, and she leaned back.

“I got sucked in,” she whispered. “I thought he was safe.”

“Yeah, we all did.”

“I should have known better. I should have known Lillian would still be blackmailing him, still be using him. I should have seen it.”

“You couldn’t have seen it.”

“Of everyone, I’m the only one who could.”

“Alex, Eliza, Kara, J’onn - none of them saw it, and they all know Jeremiah.” Winn winced, slumping in his chair. “Knew him.”

“But I know her.”

A few minutes later, Kara and Alex blazed in. Kara, standing at the foot of Lena’s bed, laid a hand on her foot, warm even through the fabric of her suit.

“Is he okay?” Alex asked, rounding J’onn’s bedside.

“Yeah. Yeah, he will be.” Winn nodded, slowly looking up at her. “Look, um. Jeremiah got the jump on him.”

“He couldn’t have.”

Lena closed her eyes, knuckles white.
“Hey, look, even if he has turned, there’s no way that he could’ve overpowered J’onn.”

“Yeah,” J’onn rasped, “that’s what I would’ve thought.”

“Thank Rao you’re okay.”

“Jeremiah’s arm… The one we thought had nerve damage. It’s been enhanced. Cybernetically.”

“Like Hank Henshaw?” Kara asked, fingers curling inwards, knuckles brushing over Lena’s ankle.

“Like the Winter Soldier,” Winn mumbled.

“Jeremiah isn’t who he said he was,” continued J’onn. “I’m sorry.”

Alex gritted out, “Not as sorry as Cadmus is gonna be,” but the heartbreak was stronger than the sandpaper in her voice.

The prosthetic in Lena’s hands cracked.

“We will find him.”

“How?”

“Well, uh. Don’t be mad.” Winn raised his hands, a preemptive olive branch. “I may have hid a tracker on Jeremiah.”

Everyone just looked at him.

“What? Lena’s not the only one with scientific know-how and a history of parents going darkside.” He put his hands down, started fidgeting with them in his lap. “When we didn’t find a tracker on him, I figured I’d fix that.”

“Good job, Agent Schott.”

Winn probably would have looked a lot happier to hear that under other circumstances. As was, he pulled up the tracker feed and sent it to Alex, who collected a team.

Lena’s scalp ached as she braided her hair so it would fit under her cowl.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Kara asked.

“To help.”


“Lena is not grounded,” Alex said, strapping on a thigh holster. “Lena is bulletproof, Supergirl-tested, and has as much staked in this as me and Kara do.”

Lena flipped up her cowl, jaw tight.

“We’re bringing Lillian Luthor in.” Alex shouldered her blaster. “Tonight.”

☆

Deep in the woods, Hank Henshaw leaned up against the grille of an army green Jeep, playing with a knife, with Lillian perched delicately in the backseat. Jeremiah approached, breathless, erratic heart
audible even with the rapidly shrinking space between him and the wayward daughters tracking him from above.

“You’re late, Danvers,” Henshaw growled.

“Jeremiah,” Lillian cooed, “it’s been too long.”

As she bounded over a set of train tracks, Lena felt her face twist, falling, going hard.

“The DEO put up a little more resistance than I anticipated. Nothing I couldn’t handle.”

Lena, bounding from the forest floor to the airspace over the tree cover, saw Kara and Alex’s faces make the same expression.

“Did you get the files?”

“Yes.”

“And hers?”

“I keep my word.”

“Right here,” Lena said, and she dropped, hard, on purpose.

Kara swooped in beside her, setting down Alex, who fired on the Jeep just to get everyone’s attention.

“It’s over,” Kara said. Her hero voice was shaky.

“Not yet. But it will be.” Lillian’s mouth curled into a smug moue. “Soon.”

“Dad,” Alex said, breath heavy, “you’re coming with us.”

“That’s unlikely, dear.”

As Lillian, in her unsensible heels, stalked in front of Jeremiah, Lena felt something cold and sickly coil in her throat. She hated that sentence, that dismissal, that voice.

She hated what came next even more.

“Ka-boom,” Henshaw snarled.

It didn’t take super senses to hear the train coming closer, but the explosion was for alien ears only. Kara’s heart stuttered as she peered through the foliage and watched the section over the river crumble away.

“No!”

“Train,” Alex hissed, “go.”

Kara flew away. Hank elbowed a tree, sending decades of redwood crashing towards Alex with a harsh crack. Jeremiah cried out, but Lena caught it, throwing it their way and crushing the Jeep in the process. Then she grabbed Alex around the waist and leapt over the trunk.

“I want Jeremiah.”

“I want Lillian.”
They landed and took off after their parents.

“Freeze!”

Jeremiah froze. Hell, Lena went stock still for a split second, paralyzed by the raw pain in Alex’s voice, but Lillian didn’t stop for anyone, so she made herself keep running. She launched herself over a fallen trunk, soaring up over the treetops.

The train was coming.

*Oh, god, Kara.*

Lena turned midair, landing with her back to the tracks, and whipped out her batons. They shifted into the two halves of a pair of fire tongs, perfectly suited to clasp around Lillian.

“I know it’s you, Lena,” she said.

Lena squared her stance and made the tongs shrink, dragging Lillian closer.

“You’re under arrest.”

“Under whose authority?” she laughed. “Honey. Do you really want to fight for the people who’ve been keeping secrets from you?”

“You’ve kept secrets from me. My whole life, Mother, you kept secrets from me. You pushed me away, you lied to me, you made me feel like I was nothing. Like I was a burden. I didn’t even know who my own father was!” Lena’s heart was throbbing in her throat, but she spoke around it, voice thick. “The DEO - I’m not nothing when I help people.”

“Come with me, Lena. Join Cadmus.” Lillian was only about three feet away, close enough that Lena could smell her Chanel No. 18 perfume. “We’ll find out everything about you together.”

“You’ll use me up. Take everything good in me and push it and warp it until I’m insane and awful.” Lena’s eyes burned. “Just like Lex. You made him so obsessed with power that being outshone by someone was too much. You took a little boy who was happy to lose a chess game to a girl ten years younger than him because it meant she was learning and turned him into something so craven and greedy that he tried to kill his best friend!”

“I made Lex strong.”

“You made him weak! You made him weak by making him fear his own weakness, Mother, by making him fear being helped.” Lena sniffled. “Superman loved him, Mother, and Lex was so scared of that that he tried to kill him.”

“For all we know, those people don’t even have the concept of love.”

She was only inches away. Her pale eyes were hard and sharp and cold.

“Those people have lost everything. Everything. And they came here, and faced people like you spitting in their faces at every turn, and all they’ve done is try to be help. All they’ve done is be kind.”

Lillian scoffed. “Their kindness is a ploy. They’re not like us.”

“I’m not like you! And if being like you is being human, then I’m glad I’m not.”
There was a sharp noise, loud and shrill and piercing and so immediate that Lena had dropped her batons to clasp her hands over her ears, just for a shot at drowning it out, before she even knew it.

Standing over her, Lillian didn’t even wince.

“This frequency is something Lex discovered,” she said. “He used it to build a communicator for himself and Superman, because only a Kryptonian could hear it. Do you know what Superman did?”

Lena curled in closer, fighting a whimper.

“He took Lex’s gift, Lex’s pioneering, and gave it away to someone else.” Lillian loomed over Lena, smiling like she could see the end, like she was dragging it over her like a blanket. “That’s what love means to a Super.”

With that, she dropped the device in the dirt and walked away. Tears streaming down Lena’s cheeks, she tried to bat out and crush it; the sound was so massive she almost blacked out with one hand away from one ear for a second. She rolled away, shifting so her head wasn’t facing it anymore, then lashed out with her foot and pummeled it to dust.

It took a long, long moment for her to be able to stand. She collected her batons with shaky hands. Even through the ringing in her ears, she could hear Lillian running - no. Not running. Walking.

Taking a single step proved too much; that frequency had fucked up her inner ear, and her balance was shot. She toppled over, face in the dirt, half-rotted scraps of redwood clinging to her wet cheeks.

She let out a cry like a wounded animal, punched the soil so hard she rolled over, up to her shoulder in mulch.

*Weak,* she repeated to herself. *Weak. You weak fucking waste.*

*She hurt everyone you’ve ever loved, and you couldn’t see her coming. You couldn’t take her down.*

*You betrayed them. Not by choice, not through action. You betrayed them by being too damn weak to stand up and fight back.*

Kara landed, a few minutes later, on excruciatingly deliberate silent feet. “I need you to get up,” she whispered. “I need you to get up,” she whispered. “I know it’s hard. I almost dropped a train when I heard that blast, and you were right up close with it. But we need to get Alex and Jeremiah and get back to the DEO.”

Lena pushed upright, clawing out of the dirt, because Kara needed her.

“I couldn’t stop her.”

“You’ll stop her next time.”

“I can’t stop her.”

“We’ll stop her together.”

Kara pulled her off the forest floor and into a hug, half-dragging her towards Alex. The trek was slow enough that Lena’s hearing was noticeably better - better enough that, two hundred meters away, she could hear Alex’s awful sobs.
Lena wobbled off Kara’s arm and over to her, sitting on a fallen tree beside her and offering her hand.

Alex took it.

Kara sat on her other side, and those three lost girls cried together in the woods until they could find the strength to carry each other home.

Chapter End Notes

There was a glitch with the previous chapter, so I took it down and fixed it.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Set during 2x15: Exodus. We take the good with the bad; one outweighs the other.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Starting with the phrase "She woke in a cell," Lena is in Cadmus captivity. She's not physically injured beyond your typical superhero smash-arounds, but she is with Lillian, who has abused her in the past and continues to be awful. This lasts until the end of the chapter and through the next; there's a summary in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Cadmus has a list of every alien in the country, as well as the files on one Patient 12-3X. That last one has been totally erased from the mainframe; all we have left is the name.”

Lena and Kara, curled up under a blue throw blanket, looked at each other.

“Winn,” Lena said, “I’m 12-3X, aren’t I?”

“…Yeah.” He let out a breath. “I’m sorr - ”

“Ohkay.” Kara hung up, threw off the blanket, turned off Breakfast at Tiffany’s without even looking.

“What do we do?”

“We’re going in.”

Kara pulled Lena up off the couch. For a moment, they looked each other over, and Lena knew the hollow weight around Kara’s eyes was reflected in her own. She was just thankful there was no blood streaking the line of her jaw or clotting in her hair.

“We’re going to get them.”

☆

They didn’t get them.

Cadmus was playing quick and dirty - pan-stacking UNO. They snatched whole families in broad daylight, and half the disappearances came with the victims beingouted, the communities they’d hidden in turning against them in their absence.

On top of that, the trial for Livewire’s kidnapper was on. Watching him in court was just nausea on top of preexisting nausea, pain on top of preexisting pain. Him, and everything he’d done, plus twenty kidnappings, plus Lillian knowing everything and planning worse - it was too much.
Jeremiah Danvers was marked an enemy combatant. Every alien in the country was at risk. The DEO couldn’t speak up, or every agent would be at risk. Snapper Carr wouldn’t publish without more than just Supergirl as a source.

“Cite me,” Lena said.

“What?”

“Cite me. Lillian is my mother. I’ve been digging through her things - her computers at the house, her files. I have backlog on information that might be useful, I have a history with her - use me as your source.”

“You’d be putting yourself directly in the line of fire,” Kara cautioned.

“Cite Galaxy Girl, too. She’s an alien, she works alongside Supergirl, but no one has ever interviewed her before. This being her first on record statement ads weight.” Lena downed the rest of her drink; somehow, alien liquor burned cold. That never ceased to fascinate. “Is three sources enough, do you think, to get him to publish? A CEO with a link to the story, an exclusive, and goddamn Supergirl has to be enough.”

Kara set her jaw. “Snapper said, ‘at least two.’ That’s more than enough.”

“Set up an appointment with Jess - I’ll have her clear her whole schedule.” Lena blinked, rubbing her eyes. “Never mind. She’s in Curaçao right now. Vacation days.”

“You let your assistant take off now?”

“She’s more than earned the time, and she needs a break as badly as the rest of us.” Lena sighed. “My temp’s name is Alana. Talk to her, have her set up an appointment first thing in the morning. I’ll go out for my lunch break, get into costume, you can have James photograph me.”

Nodding, Kara took Lena’s hand. “Thank you.”

“This is, dictionary definition, the least I can do, considering.”

“Considering nothing. This isn’t on you.”

“Let’s not…” Lena closed her eyes, sinking into Kara’s shoulder. “I don’t have the energy to be validated and supported right now.”

Kara let out a breath and nodded, slumping back onto her couch. Lena came with her, curling into the column of her neck. She went to take another sip of her drink and found her glass empty.

“Wish there was an alien liquor store,” she mumbled. “Could do more than just fill a flask, transplant into a bottle, like I’m thirteen and want the girls at boarding school to like my useless gay ass.”

“Number one,” Kara said, taking the glass, “you are not useless. Number two, neither is your ass. Your ass’s ‘mazing.”

Lena gave a breathless laugh and squeezed her eyes shut tighter. “My ass? Dear sweet Kara Zor-El Danvers, how shall I compare your ass to a summer’s day?”

She trailed off, just for a moment, until Kara gave her a shake and reminded her what she was supposed to be doing. “How, though?”

“Both’re hot.”
“Pfft.”

Lena pressed a lazy kiss to Kara’s throat, eyes still closed, and mumbled, “Should go to bed.”

“No drunk sex.”

“For sleeping. Interviews suck most always, but especially on bad sleep.”

Kara nodded, but did not move. After a moment, Lena got up and pulled Kara with her, hefting her over her shoulder.

“Strong,” Kara murmured. Hanging down Lena’s back, she pressed a kiss to the notch of her L4.


“Better.”

They reached Kara’s bed. Lena fell face-first onto it, and Kara unspooled off her, the back of her head actually hitting a pillow. From there, she hooked her fingers under Lena’s armpits and hauled her up so she could have a pillow, too, dislodging her heels in the process. Kara toed off her own shoes while Lena dragged the blankets up over them, and they fell asleep like that.

It wasn’t restful, and it was over too soon, them waking to hear even more terrible news.

“Cadmus raided the alien bar. Stonewall style. They took - they took Lyra.”

“Do you need us?”

“I - ” Distress pitched higher in Winn’s voice, and he passed the phone to someone else. Lena could hear him, faintly, pacing.

“We need you to get that information out there,” J’onn said. “If people go into hiding - a public place like the bar is a bad idea right about now. Everyone needs to know.”

“Got it.”

Kara and Lena went their separate ways for all of an hour, getting presentable, before reconvening at L Corp, in Lena’s office.

“It’s weird, someone other than Jess being behind that desk,” Kara said in lieu of a greeting.

Lena nodded, smoothing an anxious hand over her hair. “Let’s do this.”

Kara sat opposite Lena, across her desk, and set her phone on the tabletop to record. “This is an on-the-record interview with Lena Luthor, CEO of L Corp, on the subject of Cadmus and the alien registry. Ms. Luthor, to your knowledge, what is Cadmus?”

“Cadmus is my mother’s pet project. A xenophobic science fair for homegrown terrorists.”

“That’s a pretty strong stance.”

“This isn’t a topic you can be soft on.”

“In an interview with Supergirl, she revealed that Cadmus has stolen a copy of the alien registry. Police records reveal that twenty - twenty-one kidnappings have occurred since its theft involving
alien victims, all with links to Cadmus. What…” Kara swallowed hard and took off her glasses to rub her shiny-wet eyes. “I’m sorry. What do you know about the alien registry?”

“I suppose as much as any other citizen. It’s a document created by our president, Olivia Marsdin, to allow people of extraterrestrial origin to become American citizens, granting them the rights and protections of anyone else.”

“What was your opinion of it when it was first introduced?”

“I thought it was an incredibly brave thing to do. I thought it was the natural next step. I also thought it would need to come with many changes in our society to make it the smart thing. Healthcare reforms, legal proceedings - everything would need to be updated. Aliens would need protection during the transition.”

“And now?”

“Now, I think I was right. People are being taken in broad daylight by my mother and her lackeys because they weren’t safe, because that list fell into the wrong hands.” Lena buried her face in her hands, drawing a shaky breath. “Lillian Luthor believes that aliens, because they are not human, are not humane beings and do not deserve humane treatment. She once said she didn’t know if they could even feel love.”

“What did you say in response?”

“I said that these people come to Earth when they have lost everything. They come here with nothing, with worlds burned behind them, and they try to make a new start, a new home. They come here and contribute to our lives, our economy, our existence. They come here and take up the mantle of protector, because after losing so much, they cannot bear to stand by and watch everything be taken from someone else.

“I said that if to be human is to be like her, to kidnap and torture and abuse with reckless abandon, then I would rather stand on the side of aliens than earthlings.”

Kara reached over and took Lena’s hand, lacing their fingers together and squeezing. “Ms. Luthor, you know the head of Cadmus better than almost anyone. How does one survive her?”

“Run.” Lena looked up, pulling her face from her hands, overflowing eyes boring into Kara’s. “Run as far and as fast as you can. She is cruel and she is relentless. Find people you can trust and let them help you. Keep yourself safe. Do everything you can to stay as many steps ahead as possible, and never stop trying. Not just to survive, but to thrive. Being visible is so brave, but right now, it’s not smart. It doesn’t matter how brave you are if you don’t get to be brave again tomorrow.”

“Thank you, Ms. Luthor.”

“Of course, Ms. Danvers.”

“Any parting words for the readers of CatCo magazine?”

“To any alien fugitives whose livelihoods are now at risk because of this, I will personally sponsor you, your businesses, and your families. Like I said before, now is not the time to take a soft stance, and I stand, firm, with you.”

Kara stopped recording, rounded the table, and wrapped Lena up in her arms. It bordered on too tight, for both of them, but it felt like the only thing holding them together.
Alana knocked. “Ms. Luthor.”

They pulled apart, just barely, and clasped hands like they were shaking goodbye.

“Someone is here to see you? A Dr. Alexander?”

“My morning was cleared for this interview, and I don’t see walk-ins. If this Dr. Alexander wants to see me, tell them to schedule an appointment through you for some other day.”

Alana nodded, said, “Of course, Ms. Luthor,” and disappeared.

“What are you doing until lunch?” Lena asked, voice urgent.

“Structuring this article. Planning what I’ll say to Snapper.”

“Why are you whispering?”

“I don’t trust her,” Kara admitted. “Something about her… She doesn’t feel right.”

“I wish Jess were here right now, too, but she can't.” With a sigh, Lena let go of Kara’s hand. “I’ll see you in an hour.”

“In an hour.” Kara let go, too, and started for the door. “Can you lock this?”

“Not yet. I’ll figure something out.”

“Good. Stay safe.”

“And you.”

Over the next hour, Lena jerry-rigged a makeshift external lock and started portioning out her money. There were a few aliens she’d spoken to at the bar whose lives she knew enough about to make an estimate of how much they’d need to keep their business running while they went into hiding, month to month, as well as how much they’d need to maintain their standard of living, so she set about doing that. When the time came to leave for her second interview with Kara, she locked those notes away in her fingerprint-sealed box, openable only by herself, Jess, and Kara, then hid it in her desk, leaving a decoy in its place.

Georgie drove her to Noonan’s, where she met James. They piled into Winn’s van, à la 'Man in the', and drove out into the desert in silence.

“I’m sorry about Lyra,” Lena said after almost an hour’s awkward mutism. “About all of this.”

“Don’t. This is on her, and on him, not on you and Alex, but if I - ” Winn drew in a shaky breath through his nose. “If I have to talk about it, or think about it, I will put James’ shield on the gas and throw myself through the windshield.”

Lena shut up.

James clutched his shield tight.

☆

Kara was waiting for them in the desert, sitting under a tarp on a folding chair. An empty one sat opposite her.
They pulled up, James and Lena piling out while Winn stayed inside. Lena cast one last look at her friend before pulling up her cowl and taking a seat.

“This is an on the record interview for CatCo Magazine with the hero known as Galaxy Girl,” Kara said. “For her own safety, we have met in the middle of the Mojave. Galaxy Girl, can you tell me a little bit about that?”

“I don’t know if you know this, but I’m not human.” Lena took a breath and said it: “I’m an alien.”

“Oh.”

“And that’s something I only recently have come to - to understand the full extent of. Because only recently has that become something to be used against me.”

When Lena went silent, Kara reached over and put a hand on her knee, gently asking, “Can you elaborate on that?”

“Sorry. Yes, I can. Cadmus knows about me. Cadmus is probably hunting me. I am one among many they are after, but I’m higher profile than almost any alien on this planet, and if I can’t use that visibility to do some good, then I’m not a hero, and I don’t deserve any of it.”

“Is being…”

“Did you know, since November, when I first fought Parasite alongside Supergirl and Guardian, the sale of galaxy printed anything, really, but especially leggings, has skyrocketed? There are people out there with my picture on their shirt, people out there who talk about me like I’m… special.”

“Aren’t you?”

“I’m about as meaningful as what I accomplish, and this interview… this is what will make me special.” Lena set her jaw, straightened up in her chair. “This is the most important thing I’ll ever do.”

“You mentioned Supergirl and Guardian.” Fidgeting, Kara clicked her pen. “She doesn’t wear a mask; he wears a full helmet. You fall somewhere in between.”

“Supergirl is the most famous alien on the planet, no doubt.”

“Not Superman?”

“If you asked me about Kryptonians, she’s the first one I think of.” Lena laid her hand over Kara’s, stopping the frenzied clicking. “But she came to this planet and made Earth her home. Guardian, however, is human, but even without any powers, he does what’s right. He fights for good, for justice. He helps.”

“And where do you stand?”

“I was born on this planet, but I am not a human. I don’t bare my whole face, when I fight crime, but I want people to see the expressions I make, the words I speak. I need people to understand me, even if they don’t know me, because that’s hard to do.”

“Why?”

“I look like a human woman. Human women are judged, all the time, on their appearance, and so are human men, and so are aliens. So is everyone. But these first impressions aren’t always accurate, and
they almost always last. People get stuck with a label or an opinion that might not be accurate anymore, might never have been accurate. I show part of my face because I want people to see that I’m enough like them to identify with, to try and understand. Some aliens look like humans, and we have it a little easier than others who don’t. If I can use that so this planet is safer for people like me, then I’m going to do it.”

“Talk to me about Cadmus.”

“Cadmus is what happens when the government fails to protect its citizens. Cadmus is what happens when the Unabomber is a charming, wealthy woman with social standing and access to better resources. Cadmus is a blight.”

“You’re passionate about this.”

“I’m passionate about not becoming an experiment.” Lena laughed wetly. “I’m passionate about not dying. I’m passionate about the people I care about not suffering loss after horrible loss.”

“You conceal your identity for your own safety. Do you recommend alien citizens doing the same thing?”

“Yes, I do. If you can shapeshift, pick a humanoid face and stick with it. If you have image altering technology, use it. If you can run, run. If you can hide, hide. I’m paraphrasing Joan of Arc here, but ‘one life is all we have, and we live it as we believe in living it. But to sacrifice what you are, that is a fate worse than dying.’ What you are is alive. What you are is a person. What you are is a citizen of Earth. Live, and believe in your own worth and your own rights. You deserve to be safe. You deserve to be healthy. You deserve to be happy. You deserve to outlive those who would see you destroyed.”

“You and Supergirl are often seen fighting side by side. How do you think she’d react to all this?”

“I think it’s breaking her heart,” Lena said softly. “I think it’s gnawing at her, and I think she’s pushing around that anyways, because I know she believes in you, and in me, and in herself, and in all our rights to be here. She’s fighting for us, and I am fighting for us, and you can fight for us, too, by protecting yourself.”

“Any closing statements?”

“To everyone who has lost someone to Cadmus, I will - we will bring it down. We will bring them home.”

“Thank you for your time, Galaxy Girl.”

“Thank you for listening, Kara Danvers.”

Kara stopped recording.

James put his camera down.

“Did you get any pictures?”

“Yeah. We should be good. You need to come by CatCo, out of uniform, for a different shot, but this is enough.” James pushed up off the sand, dusting himself off, and tucked his camera away.

“This is gonna work.”

“This has to work.”
Lena came by CatCo that evening. She stood in their studio against a stark white wall in a sharp suit, because trying to put on a dress just then was too damn much.

“Get angry,” James said. “Fuck being polite, okay? We don’t need that.”

It hurt, stripping away her Luthor mask, her press mask, her girl-in-the-world mask. It hurt, being angry, the one kind of hurt she didn’t lean into.

“This is tough, okay? This hurts. I know this hurts. Watching the news and knowing it’s not just news, it’s your life, that hurts. That hurt is credibility.

“People don’t trust the Luthors? Fine. They’ll trust someone whose family has fucked them over, again and again, who is speaking out. They’ll trust someone who is hurt.

“People don’t trust someone who testified against their family in court? They’ll trust someone who does it anyway, even with the flak they get, because they believe it’s right.

“People get angry. People trust angry. Be angry, Lena.”

Kara stormed in. “Snapper won’t run it without Supergirl’s source.”

“What?”

“Nope! He wants me to turn in the… DEO. To name J’onn, Alex - someone. Anyone. I can’t do that. I’m trying to stop someone from getting hurt.”

Something snapped in Lena, just for a moment. “I’m your source. I leaked it. Mother was on the Board when Lex was in charge - maybe she left something there, too. Whatever it takes.”

“Yeah?”

Grimly, Lena smiled. “Ride or die.”

James’ face bore the same morbid smirk. “Go, get out of here. Get digging.”

They dug, and dug, and dug until Kara got a call from Alex - Alex in tears - and had to go. Then it was just Lena, but Lena didn’t stop. Alana wasn’t particularly helpful, dragging up files one at a time, dropping them, losing paperwork - where the hell, Lena wondered, did Jess find her? - but Lena managed it.

“Found it. The annual budget report from last year.”

Lena took it from her hands and sighed. It would’ve been useful an hour ago. “Alana, take a look at this.”

She cued up a shot from L Corp’s website, a picture of an old Luthor Corp property.

“Did you know Luthor Corp shuttered my brother’s naval research facility back in 2007?”

“I was in the 8th grade,” Alana simpered.

Lena had been applying to colleges, then, earning scholarships she shouldn’t have financially needed, considering Lillian’s money. Practically, of course, she did need them; Lillian wouldn’t have paid for a bastard. She’d been thirteen, turning fourteen, when the project was shut down. Lex, at
twenty six, had moped harder than she could ever manage.

*Good for you.*

“Well, if it’s been shut down for ten years, then why did L Corp get billed for a metals shipment last month? It doesn’t make any sense.”

“Accounting just switched operating systems,” Alana offered. “Could be a glitch.”

Her heart had stuttered.

*Liar.*

“Can you go to the archives and get me the tax returns and annual budgets of the last ten years?”

“Right away, Ms. Luthor.”

As soon as Alana closed the door, Lena called Kara, eavesdropping as the phone rang.

“What’s going on?”

“The Luthor Corp naval research facility. Cadmus is receiving supply shipments there and billing L Corp.”

*Consider it done.*

“Also, Alana is a Cadmus mole.”

“Do you need me?”

“I’ll handle it. And this phone call is on the record. Lillian Luthor is embezzling from L Corp and using it to fund Cadmus. I’m sending the bank statements for you, the real estate holdings - anything you need. It should be in your inbox.”

“We’re gonna get her.”

“We’re gonna fucking get her.”

After a moment, Kara said, “I’m putting you on speaker. Mute me, so she can’t hear. If things get heavy, I’ll be there. Moment’s notice.”

Someone opened the door.

*Forgot to use the bullshit lock.*

Calmly, Lena muted the call and retrieved her Taser, slowly, watching three heavies walk in on suspiciously silent feet.

She turned, hitting the one closest to her in the neck. He sizzled and went down. She shoved his unconscious body aside, then threw her desk at the two remaining.

They threw it back, knocking her through the glass and out onto the balcony. She’d dropped her Taser.

“What is it about me that brings out the worst in people?” she asked aloud, stepping closer to the ledge as they climbed over the desk.
They lunged. It took both of them to pin her, and even then only with the element of surprise, concrete lip digging into the small of her back.

“I don’t want to hurt either of you,” she said, straining not to push too hard, “but, god, would it be easy.”

They let up, for just a moment, briefly enough that Lena stumbled forwards, and took advantage of her split, off-kilter, second to shove her off the ledge.

As she fell, Lena tried to ignore the voice in her head.

When you jump in the pool, princess, make yourself as tiny as possible, okay? Minimizes resistance, so there’s no splash, no sting. Just - bloop! Underwater.

Marion Smith had given her that speech when she was almost four, finally big enough to stand in the shallow end with her eyes above water. Smiling, she’d mimed diving from her seat on the bus, explaining the physics over speed bumps and through stop signs.

Lena loved swimming, loved diving, loved her mother.

Her mother told her never to land in water on a flat surface - never belly flop, never flex your feet.

Sorry, Mommy.

Lena righted herself in the air and landed hard enough to crack concrete. Her heels stabbed so far into the sidewalk that, when she jumped back up onto the balcony, she left them behind.

Hell, the balcony even cracked a little as she landed.

“I can do this all day,” she said, shaking concrete dust off her French twist.

“So can we,” retorted one of them. He drew her eye, and the other, out of nowhere, tackled her, jabbing the prongs of her Taser into her spine.

There was a long stretch of burning, then black. In the interim, Lena wondered if Livewire would mind getting punched, just once, as a representative of electricity.

☆

She woke in a cell.

That’s new.

She could smell the ocean, and hear the tide, and with it came wave after wave of obnoxious nostalgia:

Lionel, holding her on his shoulders, walking along the shoreline with her, pointing out stars the same way her Mommy did.

Lex skipping stones, up to his waist in seawater, holding her hand and joking that if he didn’t the ocean would gobble her up.

Swimming. Diving deep, deep, deeper until she touched the bottom, coming up to a world that hadn’t quite caught up to her yet, sound coming back as water dripped out of her ears. Taking a deep breath like she’d never used her lungs before.
Sitting by the docks with Kara, in costume, eating the first funnel cake of the day and holding hands.

“Fuck off,” she said to no one in particular. It felt quite nice; her voice rumbled pleasantly in her throat, and the reverb off the glass walls wasn’t too loud or jarring.

Sound didn’t usually sound like that anymore.

Lena sat up. Lena stood up. Lena paced through her glass cell and tried look for a weakness. There were air holes, a slot about the size of a lunch tray, but they’d been melted in, not cut, so there were no microfractures to make use of. If she’d had her high heels, reinforced and serendipitously useful, she could have cracked the glass with them, but they were probably still stuck in the sidewalk outside L Corp.

Experimentally, Lena swung a roundhouse kick at one wall, driving her heel into the glass.

“Ow.” She blinked, inspecting her foot. “Ow.”

It was turning red, just a little, and fading just as fast - powers not gone, just depleted.

She turned her attention to the glass - no actual breaks, no visible fault lines.

“Fuck.”

The elbow is the strongest point on the body, she recalled, and began whaling hers against the glass in rapid, rhythmic succession. The beat started out in 32nd notes, but the longer she went, the slower she got. 16th notes. 8th notes. Quarter notes. Half notes.

When she’d reached 16/2 time, cracks started to form. Lena inspected them - jagged, spiderwebby things that would break into jagged, painful pieces. If her powers were depleted enough, they’d cut her.

She didn’t want to know what Lillian might do with her blood.

Lena ripped the hem of her skirt, wrapped her fist in the fabric, and gave one solid punch.

The glass shattered and, exhausted, Lena stumbled out past it, mincing around the shards until she was on clean enough ground.

She could barely hear the ocean, but she thought there might have been gulls, which meant it was early morning.

*I’ve been out for a few hours,* she thought. *Okay. That means it’ll be sunrise soon. If I can get to the roof, get to a window, I can recharge and escape.*

Lena looked around, searching for a window of some sort. In one corner was an old boiler, and she remembered the floor plans of this place.

*Basement. Okay. Get out of the basement.*

She made it as far as the stairs before someone knocked her out again.

☆

She tried to move her hands and found she couldn’t.

She tried to move her feet and found she couldn’t.
She couldn’t even move her head.

“Well, shit.”

After some well-placed wriggling, Lena ascertained that she was strapped to the lovechild of a hospital bed and a hand truck made of something she couldn’t break.

“Language, honey.”

“Lillian?”

“Are you really surprised to see me?” Lillian laughed.

“Surprised you’d deign to visit Dr. Lecter, Clarice.”

“Don’t be crass, Lena.” Lillian flipped a page - magazine, by the sound of it. “CatCo Magazine - can you believe that’s the most credible news outlet in town?”

“It’s run by an incredible woman.”

“Yes, yes - the Queen of All Media, Cat Grant. I met her once, through that mousy reporter who interviewed Lex. Interesting woman.”

“I hear her mom’s an asshole, too.”

Lillian swatted her with the magazine. Hard. “Language.”

What hurt more than the blow was the fact that it still hurt. “What time is it?”

“Seven.”

“A.M. or P.M.?”

“Mm.”

Lena gave breaking her ties another shot.

“It’s useless, you know,” Lillian drawled. “I know your little weaknesses now, honey. Not just the ones up here…”

Her tastefully manicured fingertips trailed along Lena’s brow, dallying over her temple. Goosebumps erupted across Lena’s whole body.

“But the ones burned into you by that beautiful yellow sun.” Lillian’s smirk was audible. “Someday I might let you see it again.”

“You’re so compelling. I’ll do it. I’ll join you. Cadmus is the way.”

“There’s no need to be so snide, Lena.”

“You have me strapped to a dolly in a bunker.”

“Is that any call for bad manners?”

“Yes.”

Lillian laid the magazine down and picked up something solid. It scraped on the floor. There was a
moment of nothing, and then the restraints tightened further.

The worst was the band on her forehead. It was worse than every migraine she’d ever had combined.

She wouldn’t let herself scream, but when the pressure released, she sucked in air like she’d never drawn breath before.

“Will you behave yourself now?”

Jaw tight, Lena gave no answer.

“Speak up, honey,” Lillian said, and the pressure was back.

Gasping, Lena gave an affirmative.

“What was that? Enunciate, Lena, no one can understand you when you speak like that.”

“Yes. I’ll behave.”

“Good girl.” Lillian picked up her magazine with one hand; the other stroked Lena’s hair in a way that would have felt nice if it was anyone else, anywhere else. “Keep that up, and I’ll tell you what these - ” she knocked on the band over Lena’s brow “ - are made of.”

“Why do I want to know that?” Lena asked, voice neutral - cordial, even, if demonstratively disinterested.

“Because, honey, it’s a piece of the puzzle. You learn about your weaknesses - you learn who you are.”

*I know who I am.*

“We are who we love,” Lena said, after a long stretch of silence broken only by flipping pages, “and who I love will come for me.”

“What, Kara Danvers? Supergirl? They won’t come for you. They’re... *both* very busy people.”

*Doe Lillian know?*

*Shit, shit, goddamn shit.*

“Kara’s writing an article. About you. About your theft. About your sinister plot.”

“Sinister - ? My god, Lena, you always were the dramatic one.” Lillian scoffed. “Endlessly crying, ‘You’re not my real mom!’ Like anyone gave a damn.”

“To be fair, you’re not.”

“I taught you more than that woman ever did, Lena. I taught you to survive.”

Lena’s jaw ticked.

“I know you think I was cruel. I know you think I outcasted you, pushed you aside, ignored you. But it made you stronger, Lena. It made you resilient. It made you tough.”

Lena strained against the restraints.

Lillian sighed and pushed a button.
Everything went black.

☆

“What time is it?”

“Five.”

“A.M. or P.M.?”

“Mm.”

☆

“CatCo, CatCo, CatCo.”

“Does it still sound like a word to you, or are you also hearing nonsense?”

The bands tightened; caught off-guard, Lena let out a short cry.

They tightened again; Lena’s vision went white for a moment. “Really, Lena? Cruel and relentless? The Unabomber? Honey, he killed people.”

“You killed people.”

“I killed aliens. There’s a difference.”

Lillian closed another band across her mouth; a click came from right behind her head as the restraint released.

“You really shouldn’t have done that, Lena. Now that it’s out there, and in a respected forum, we have to cut our losses. We’re launching early.”

Launching?

“I’m sure you have your suspicions. That overactive imagination of yours ticking away in there. Well! Let me put you out of your misery.”

The dolly-bed started to move.

“We - Cadmus - are removing these aliens from our planet. They will be shipped off to a local interstellar trading hub, where they can easily find transport back home.” Lillian sighed. “I would have rather just killed them, but Dr. Danvers can be quite convincing. I can almost see why you fell for Kara’s charms.”

Lena’s eyes went wide, and she began to fight, struggling fruitlessly like a fish on dry land.

“Interesting, isn’t it, how everything is energy. There are sensors in those bands, Lena, absorbing force.

“The harder you fight, the faster the ship leaves. We might even break lightspeed, with all the force you put out, although the main fuel source is your little girlfriend’s heat vision.”

Oh, no.

“Tuckered out? Don’t close your eyes just yet.” Lillian’s breath gusted past Lena’s ear, making her
flinch. “I want you to watch.”

The ship was huge, the sort of bloated black mass that made you think immediately of the Death Star, but it wasn’t what caught Lena’s eye.

What caught her eye was a familiar shock of red curly hair.

Alex! Alex!

An engine whined.

Lena swallowed, and did not move.

“Do keep trying, honey. I hate the electrical bill we stick you with every month.”

Okay.

Okay.

*It absorbs and transmits force. Pushing into it means the ship goes faster. People will be put in danger. Lyra might get hurt.*

*Lyra might already be hurt.*

Don’t think about that, for fuck’s sake.

*Meeting the bands is bad.*

“I’m going to lock you in, now,” Lillian said. “So you can’t move. I need to supervise the launch from the ground level.”

There was a fatalistic sort of click, and Lillian was gone.

*Fall away from the bands.*

Lena waited until she could see Lillian on the floor below and gave one quick, sharp jerk forwards before flinging herself back with all her might.

The engine flared, then faded. She went nowhere.

Again.

Again.

Again.

Again.

Again.

“Turn it off.” Alex’s voice carried like a leaf on the wind. “Now.”

“You don’t threaten me.”

“Lillian, do you really think that I’d walk into the lion’s den without a whip? I planted ten Haldorr particle mines all over this facility. *Stop the launch.*”

After a beat, Lillian said, “You’re lying.”
Lillian thinks she’s telling the truth.

“You wanna bet?”

Click. Boom.

Lena’s cart tipped and swayed with the force of it.

Again.

“The rest of these bombs are on a dead man’s switch.

The engine whirred to life, properly, and Lena toppled back. The clang of the cart falling was drowned out by the engine, but that didn’t matter. She was still trapped.

“The rest of these are on a dead man’s switch. I let this go, and the whole place goes up.”

“I won’t stop this.”

“I don’t need you to. Dad. It’s time for you to do what you taught your daughters to do. Are you with me?”

“Tamper with my launch, Jeremiah, and I declare war on your whole family.”

“If you let her… We’re gonna protect each other. Always.”

“Jeremiah. Jeremiah.”

“Dad. Make this right.”

Stuck, staring at the ceiling, Lena listened to the fight below. Futilely, she tried to throw the switches that would release her. She needed to go. She needed to fight.

“Now,” said Alex, breathless and exhilarated and triumphant, “stop the launch.”

“I can’t.”

“Give my daughter the override code.”

“There isn’t one. The only way to stop that ship is to drop that stick.”

Nine explosions rattled the base, one after the next.

Lucky number eight jostled Lena enough to spring the mechanism and free her. There were marks around her wrists, swollen ugly bruises, and she wobbled when she walked.

Fuck it, she thought, and started to run.

“You’re as naïve as your daughter,” Lillian spat just as she arrived on their level.

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” was Jeremiah’s biting retort from the control hub.

“As well you should.” Lena clung to a guard rail and felt it give, just a little, beneath her fingers.

“What,” snarled Henshaw, “are you doing out of bed?”

He wrapped his arms around her and dragged her back. No matter where she kicked, bit, scratched,
hit, his grip didn’t falter.

Jeremiah looked at her over his shoulder, just for a second, but he never stopped working, never stopped trying to break through the program.


The screen beeped pleasantly.

“You’re as sentimental as the rest of us, Mother,” she spat, just before Henshaw slammed her on the ground and knocked her out again.

☆

“I’m getting really tired of being knocked unconscious,” Lena groaned.

“It’s all down to them, honey. The Danvers, your silly little found family, it’s down to them. If they weren’t running around, causing such trouble, being so unreliable, it wouldn’t be like this.”

“Did - ” Lena swallowed a mouthful of dried blood. “Did Jeremiah get the ship down?”

“Mm.” Lillian turned a page. “You come from a planet with a red sun, Lena, did you know that?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Do you know that sun’s name?”

The lumps and bumps on her head hurt almost as bad as admitting she didn’t.

“See? You can’t trust them. They’re not looking out for you, honey, but I am.” After a moment, she started petting Lena’s hair. “It’s called Valor. Your sun’s name, according to your people, is Valor.”

Lillian flipped a switch; the light in the room went red.

“It wasn’t easy to decipher Lex’s notes. He always had the most atrocious penmanship.” Lillian stood, heels clicking on Lena’s cell floor as she paced out the space. “But I figured it out. This is just another thing I had Jeremiah build for me.”

Lena flexed her fingers. She was in standard restraints, leather straps. Any other day, she could have snapped them like old rubber bands.

Today was not any other day.

They groaned, but did not give.

“Now, you are essentially powerless, honey. Human again.” Lillian leaned over her, eyes almost red in that strange sunlight. “Isn’t that exciting?”

Chapter End Notes

Summary: While in captivity, Lena manages to nearly escape multiple times. Lillian implies knowledge of Kara’s double identity and also outright states that Lena is alone and unloved. She’s also using a similar setup to the solar flare helmet, absorbing the
kinetic energy of Lena's escape attempts as a sort of nitro boost for the ship. Alex shows up, like a badass, to stop the launch; this goes basically identical to canon, although Lena does reveal the secret failsafe code, which is Lex's birthday. Henshaw knocks Lena out, and when she comes to, Lillian talks crap about the Danvers and tells her the name of the sun Lena's planet orbited: Valor. She also reveals that, however temporarily, Lena is utterly powerless.

So! Did you enjoy the suffering? I know I didn't! that's a lie, this was really interesting to write, but it was also very intense because guess who also has mommy issues? me! Feel free to scream at me about this chapter in the comments section.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Set during 2x16: Star-Crossed.

Being held captive by your mad scientist mother isn't exactly a picnic.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is almost entirely Lena in Cadmus captivity. This includes medical procedures performed without consent, use of surveillance equipment without consent, and torture of the physical and psychological varietals. If the captive violence is an issue, it's over at "Go," Lena barked, snapping the gurney over her knee." There will be a full summary below, and a question that I'd really like you guys to answer. Also, in a much earlier chapter, in a comment I cannot find, someone mentioned that the Dominator arc in this story took much less time than it did in the show, and that there was some missing time. This chapter is where it goes; it's short, but encompasses a few weeks.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After about a week, Lena was given access to a few things.

It was always a trade. Lillian would come in and blindfold her before someone else did the dirty work.

In exchange for a cheek swab, she was given (limited) drinking privileges. Two drinks a night, from paper cups. Glass meant weaponry, and weaponry was not allowed.

In exchange for a hair sample, she got to shower. No one was in the room, though she knew there had to be cameras. It was quick, bad water pressure and bad temperature control, but even so, her skin felt cleaner. She did not.

In exchange for blood, she got a tablet, full of books and movies and music - but no connective capabilities.

“I remember all your favorites,” Lillian said, beaming beatifically as she presented it to her.

It was all queued up to the first chapter of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*.

She never asked. It was just assumed. They took, they compensated.

Next, Lillian wanted cerebrospinal fluid. Lena waited until they were over her, prepping the needle, then struck out behind her. She caught the needle and jabbed it into someone’s something - she wasn’t sure what, exactly, but she knew it had to hurt.

*Mama said there’d be days like this, there’d be days like this, mama said! Mama said, mama said…*
Lena could appreciate the irony, but she appreciated the access even more.

She was watching *Funny Face*, remembering the first time she’d watched it more than actually focusing on the plot.

It had been on Kara’s couch, sharing a pint of ice cream, toes poking into each other’s shins. Kara’d enthused about how perfectly romantic a movie it was; Lena’d seen only the delight in her eyes. She couldn’t remember a thing about it after that first viewing, had to go back and watch it on her own accord later (Kara was right, of course), but she loved it anyways because it made Kara so happy.

Lena wondered how long and how thoroughly Lillian had been following her.

Mid-sycophantic *Oh, no, Miss Prescott, you mustn’t say that!*, the footage crackled away to pixelated snow.

“To his captors,” the voice began, “we demand you turn over Mon-El of Daxam. We know where he is harbored. If you do not relinquish him, we will take him by force.”

When Lillian came, Lena took a page from the voice’s book and demanded to know what she knew about the missive.

“Nothing, Lena. I had Mon-El for a few days, and then your dear friend *Supergirl* came to his rescue. Very noble, considering how filthy she thinks his kind.”

“You met him, Mother. You know her expectations were met quite soundly.”

Lillian laughed. “And you think me a bigot.”

“Yeah, and I think him a sexist and an asshole. I don’t know anything about Daxam or Daxamites, but I do know Mon-El willingly endangered people to further his little schoolboy crush on Kara.”

“And you’re so saintly, you’ve never put someone in danger to see, say, *Supergirl*?” Lillian arched a brow. “Perhaps, at a gala?”

Lena clenched her jaw. “No one was in danger.”

“She was.”

Something sour filled Lena’s throat. “I - No, I would have protected her. I *did* protect her, me and Winn.”

“If that’s how you want to frame it,” Lillian drawled. “When Cadmus reigns, you can rewrite history all you like.”

Lena closed her eyes and pretended she could hear Kara’s heartbeat.

Once Lillian left, Lena smashed the tablet and half-pulled out the lens. She used the new angle to mimic the security feed and, when satisfied, wired it into the actual security camera. One hasty algorithm later, footage of her reading, sleeping, eating, listening to music, or watching something was all scrambled together into a reasonable facsimile of footage, while the tablet screen itself was segmented off into all the other security camera’s feeds.

That done, Lena got to work on the bulb.

It was hidden behind a huge panel of heavy glass. Lena couldn’t break through it with her bare hands, not anymore, but she could eventually break one of the slats under her bed and give herself a
tool to work with.

That took two days. She didn’t think she could ever enjoy bouncing on a bed again.

With the metal slat in hand, she set about pressing the ends under the legs of the bed, shaping it into a rudimentary crowbar.

It worked well enough to pry the glass panel off. She had to be careful not to break it, but it hid well enough against the wall that Lillian probably wouldn’t notice.

Between visits, Lena set about slowly shifting the terahertz output of the light fixture. It hovered around 430 Th, if she had to hazard a guess, and she needed it somewhere around 525 Th - square in the middle of visible yellow light.

She never stopped hoping Kara would come rescue her.

She just never relied on that hope too heavily.

It was what put her to sleep at night, the thought of waking up to laser vision melting the glass, Supergirl pulling her through the gaping makeshift exit, flying off into the sunrise together.

What woke her up in the morning, though, was gaging just how much stronger she felt four or five terahertz higher.

At around 480, she had to fix some of the fiber optics from the screen to the glass cover panel so the change in light wasn’t so obvious. The red wasn’t quite right, but it was enough.

It would have to be.

She was at half capacity when she got caught.

Jeremiah Danvers limped towards her cell.

“You’re still her helper monkey, then,” Lena said, precariously balanced in the air holes, hands on the glass panel. “It’s you I stabbed. Right hip. I nicked bone.”

“She knows.”

Lena rolled her eyes. “Yes, and she’ll never let me forget it, or stop holding it over my head.”

Jeremiah pounded his mechanical fist against the glass; she jumped. “Lena, she knows you tampered with the camera. She’s coming.”

Lena bit her lip. “Does she know about the light?”

“No. So cover your tracks.”

“Thank you.” Lena turned her attention back towards the lamp, cranking the output up to 525 terahertz. She fiddled with the fiber optics, too, and the light managed to be a decent red - close enough for an ex-government unethical experimentation program, anyway. When she was finished, Jeremiah was still there.

Watching.

“What does she have planned?” Lena asked, climbing down. “Why didn’t you run with Alex?”
“No matter where I go,” Jeremiah said, rolling up his sleeve to reveal the metal plate of his forearm, “she’ll be able to follow. I can’t help the DEO, I can’t help my daughters, if I run. But from in here, I can throw sawdust in the engines.”

Lena nodded slowly, shoving the chair back into its place. “You love them.”

“Yeah, I do.”

“Then that’s another thing we have in common.”

Jeremiah looked at her, just looked. “Among quite a few, I’d imagine.”

“The foremost being we are going to get out of here, and she is going down.” Lena glanced at her camera rig and frowned - Lillian was coming. “Get in here. Rough me up.”

He opened the door with an eight digit combo and stepped inside. Before grabbing her, he ripped the camera off the wall and crushed it in his fist.

“Make it convincing,” was the last thing Lena said before he punched her in the face.

Lena would have liked to say that she leaned into the punch, threw herself onto the floor, faked the grunt of pain, but she wasn’t at 100% and he was.

Blood spattered.

Jeremiah knelt and pinned her arms behind her back, pushed her face into the floor. “You said make it convincing.”

Lena heard footsteps - faint, kitten-heeled. “Get off of me!” she yelled, putting more effort into struggling than into actually getting away.

“Dr. Danvers, ease up.” Lillian stepped into the room. “We don’t want to hurt her, now, do we?”

Jeremiah let up on her head, and hauled her up onto her knees. “Of course not, Lillian.”

“I’m glad we have an understanding.” Lillian sat on the edge of Lena’s bed, elbows on her knees, and leaned towards her. She stroked Lena’s cheek, thumb dragging through the line of blood on her chin. “But, Lena, I thought you knew better.”

“So did I, Mother.” Lena spat pink at her, staining the lapel of her jacket. “You know I hate being watched.”

“You wouldn’t need to be surveilled if you weren’t so insolent.” Lillian stood and began to pace the room. “I could almost forgive it, if you weren’t so lax in your disobedience. No remote switch for the dummy footage? Foolish girl.”

_Goddamnit. I could have built one, too._

“I suppose I’ve expected too much from you,” she sighed. “You never could manage to behave yourself. Mr. Henshaw.”

He rattled a coil of chains, leering. He was so much more blatantly expressive than J’onn, and it was unnerving, viscerally disturbing. “This is going to hurt,” he growled.

With a flick of his wrists, he looped the chain around her, tight enough to dig into the muscle of her arms. Immobilized, she gave the chains a test - they groaned, just a little, around her. She couldn’t
tear out of them just yet, but soon? She’d be free.

Until then, however, it felt like she was on fire.

She clenched her jaw, jutting her chin out as she looked Henshaw in the face while he crushed the chains together, pressure fusing the disparate links of metal into one solid clump. “The cybernetics have aged you,” she sniffed. “Director J’onzz wears it better.”

A flash of vain fury filled his one human eye, and he twisted the tail of the chain around her neck. She could hear it sizzling, louder than all the rest of her exposed skin, and had to swallow some taut, animal sound. Her throat bobbing into the chains burned worse.

Lena closed her eyes and silently thanked whatever the hell was out there that she had so much skin bared. Even though it was exposed to the chains, it was also exposed to the sun lamp. She was healing exponentially, faster than she was being burned, and she was getting stronger by the second.

“Leave her in the chair,” Lillian said.

Henshaw plopped her in the chair, dragged it into the middle of the room. Lillian rose and padded over to her, banishing her lackeys with a wave of her hand. Around Lillian, Lena looked Jeremiah dead in the eye.

He nodded, a tiny gesture, almost invisible, but it was enough, even as he closed the door behind them.

“How do you want to know what we’re going to do with you, Lena?” Lillian asked, arms crossed, leaning - looming - into her space.

Lena closed her eyes, calculating.

Surface area of an eyelid about 1.18 square inches. Two lids, 3.36.

Not much of an increase in viable tissue for radiation absorption, but it’s something.

“Your skin, your blood, your saliva - they’ve been interesting, but ultimately useless so far. But once we get your cerebrospinal fluid, full of neural stem cells, we can use those to encode more stem cells, create a serum to impart your gifts in human soldiers. That’s something the old Cadmus never quite managed.” Lillian smiled, eyes cold even under the red-filtered light. “And once we’ve studied your stem cells, we’ll know just how to suppress those same abilities in you. We’re going to make you human again.

“And once we’ve done that, we’ll do the same to your beloved Supergirl.”

Lena’s heart pounded frantically in her chest. “That won’t work,” she managed. “I’m half human. She’s pure Kryptonian. Suppressing her genetic function could kill her.”

Lillian’s smile stretched.

“And you don’t want that, Mother. Killing the Supers is one thing, but you - you want to control one. It would be the ultimate trophy in your sick little Deadliest Game reenactment. And she’s not the one you want to kill, not really. If you could only pick one, you know who you’d pick.” Lena pushed forward, gritting her teeth through the rising smell of burnt skin. “Kal-El. Superman. The man who took away your little boy.”

A shadow passed behind Lillian’s eyes. It lingered there, and she straightened up, stepping
backwards out of the box and slamming the door, sealing it shut with a hiss.

“You’ll be the last thing she sees, Lena. She’ll know you as a traitor.”

“She’ll never lose faith in me,” Lena managed, voice thready. “She’s funny like that.”

Lillian finally tore her gaze away from Lena, turning to Jeremiah. “We’re going to make the extraction today. Ready the supplies.”

☆

One hour passed.

Lena kept track listening to the nearest analog clock, in an office building ten blocks away. Tick-tock, tick-tock. She focused on that, drowning out the sound of her skin being dissolved.

She didn’t dare listen for Kara, now that she could. She had to get out before Lillian got a sample of her stem cells, before her awful plan could actually get rolling.

She wasn’t strong enough to break the chains yet. It seemed the healing process was eating up enough solar energy that she wasn’t filling her reserves anymore, or at least not at the same speed - like using your phone while it was on the charger, she mused.

Then she pictured a micro USB cord jammed into the base of her skull, and it wasn’t so entertaining a thought.

*If I go still, if I stop fighting, I won’t incur as much damage. Less damage means less healing, less healing means less energy used and more energy stored.*

She stopped trying to rip free fifteen minutes in.

Tick-tock.

Tick-tock.

After those forty five minutes, she tried again. The links creaked, stretched, did not snap.

She could hear Lillian’s heels.

She stopped struggling.

She stayed silent as she was manhandled onto a surgical gurney, face down.

*Good,* she thought, ignoring the way the restraints dug into her anterior face. Lillian had her in a top without sleeves and with a generous enough neckline so she’d absorb more red sun radiation, but the back was lower - more surface area.

Someone peeled away the chain around her neck - literally, peeled; her skin was fused to it, and she screamed when it ripped away, carrying a decent amount of epidermis with it - with a nitrile gloved hand.

Flesh, neatly manicured.

Lillian was performing her procedure - an intraethical cervical draw - for the first time.

The antiseptic stung; the topical anesthetic numbed. Through it, there was a pinch, a drag - down,
across, across - on the tissue over her her C1 through C3 vertebrae.

Lena had a vague thought: *Lillian knows what my spine looks like now.*

There was another pinch, a shallow, dull ache, and then: “Oh. That’s interesting.”

For a moment, there was silence, and then Lillian hit the opposite wall hard enough to crack it, syringe yanked out with her.

There was a struggle, cyborg on cyborg, and Lena took that chance to stand up and rip through her restraints, tearing stray links off her arms and legs. Her head was pounding with the bastard child of a migraine and what she imagined a post-dural-puncture headache had to feel like, but she didn’t cave to it. Rocked by vertigo, she picked up the gurney and swung it at Hank Henshaw, who took the hit with a clang and a grunt, rolling off Jeremiah.

“Go,” Lena barked, snapping the gurney over her knee. “Now.”

She pushed one half into his hand as a makeshift shield, keeping the other for herself.

“Bandage the back of your neck,” he insisted, tossing a sealed BandAid her way. “Spinal infections are terrible.”

“Personal experience?”

Jeremiah gave a grim smile as she slapped the bandage on, slamming his half of the gurney into Hank Henshaw when he tried to get up.

Lena smashed through the door and started running. After a few steps, she saw Jeremiah wasn’t behind her. “What are you doing?”

“I need to get rid of the arm. Tracking device. She implanted one after I returned.”

“It’s fused into your skeleton. You need actual surgical intervention, with a team, with sterile equipment.”

“We don’t have the time.” He shook his head. “If I go to the DEO…”

“They’ll take you as a hostile? Alex will fight them. I’ll fight them.”

Lillian began to stir.

“Shit.” Lena raced back to the cell. She snapped a few slats off the underside of her bed and twisted them around Lillian’s wrists and ankles, then did the same to Henshaw. On him, it wouldn’t be nearly as effective, but it would buy them a minute or two. “Cadmus tampers with the city’s electricity all the time. They have to have some sort of electromagnetic scrambler. Find it. Use it.”

She wished Livewire were there. It would be so much easier to disable the arm if she could just drain it, or fry it.

“Okay! Okay, now run.”

Lena didn’t.

“Go!”

“I can’t leave you behind,” she finally said. “They’ll never forgive me.”
“Then don’t tell them.” Jeremiah grabbed her and started dragging her away from the broken cell; she had to run to keep up. “What they don’t know can’t hurt him.”

“They didn’t know where you were. That hurt them.” Lena dug in her heels, the floor rippling and tearing until she’d anchored herself in the steel platform.

Jeremiah stopped short, yanked back by her grip.

“I won’t lie to them. I won’t hurt them like that.”

For a moment, he just looked at her. “What are you to my daughters?”

“I’m family. And I’m trying to be better family than I what grew up with. So if you want to lie to your daughters, do it to their faces.” Lena gripped his forearm with one hand, kneeling. She tore up the wreckage in her wake, opening the landing up, and jumped through it, pulling him with her.

She gripped the edge of the hole, inching along it until they were close enough that she could drop him, then herself, on the stairs below.

“There are Cadmus defectors,” Jeremiah gasped, righting himself after a hard landing. “I’ll find them. They can handle this for me.”

“And then you come back.” Lena wrapped her fist in the collar of his shirt and stared him dead in the eye. “They need you. So you are coming back.”

“I am. Now go.”

“Can I trust you?”

Jeremiah hesitated. As he opened his mouth to give an answer, Lena heard metal tearing up above them.


“Yes, now go.”

Lena did. She let him go and jumped off the stairs, ricocheting from railing to pillar until she passed a window. Her fingers dented the sill, nearly shredded it, but she managed not to destroy the wall as she pried it open and flung herself out.

It was sunrise.

Lena started to run.

☆

She made it back to the DEO with the shiny-red imprints on her arm almost all the way faded. The cut on the back of her neck was gone, though the headache wasn’t.

It felt like someone had put her brain in a blender and the blender in a dryer set to tumble.

Still, that didn’t hurt as badly as it once had, and it was probably sentiment serving as a palliative, but as soon as she landed on the DEO balcony, she felt almost entirely better.

Then, of course, her vision tilted and she nearly passed out, but still. Better here than there.
“Lena?”

She straightened up, swallowing hard. “Hey, Alex.”

She didn’t know a human could hug so hard.

“Where. The hell. Have you been? Kara’s been searching nonstop through that list of Cadmus sites you gave her, she couldn’t find you anywhere, it’s been weeks.”

“Your dad. He got me out.”

Alex stuttered for a moment, almost buffering, but she never broke stride, half-carrying Lena towards the med bay.

“He’s finding people to remove the arm so Cadmus can’t find him. I made him promise. He’s going to come back.”

Alex pushed her onto a sun bed and turned the light on, snapping on a pair of gloves. Under that concentrated yellow glow, Lena’s burns looked especially shiny.

“She had these chains. They burned me. I guess, whatever I am, we have something analogous to Kryptonite, but I managed to get around that.” Lena let out a groan when Alex touched one of the burns. “Not fast enough, obviously.”

“You’re here now. That’s what matters.” Alex frowned, then rifled around for something. She came back with a tube full of goo. “It’s sterile; works sort of like tanning lotion, to increase the amount of UV radiation you absorb.”

“You said Kara was looking for me?” Lena asked, hissing as Alex started applying the runny liquid to her arms.

“We’ve been on high alert. She’s even had Winn working on interdimensional travel; she was gonna bring in all her weird assassin buddies to track you down. Hell, even the desert base has had feet on the ground.”

Lena bit her lip, let her eyes close. “Did you hand Mon-El over?”

“I mean, he was just taking up a cell, so, yeah. We interrogated him, about his time with Cadmus, but he didn’t know anything, so when his parents came looking for their lost little prince - ”

“Prince?”

“Yeah. That was a doozy of a plot twist.” Alex gestured for Lena to sit up; when she complied, she started working on her back. “There’s blood on your neck.”

“Lillian wanted stem cells and cerebrospinal fluid so she could make some sort of power transference serum for her grunts. Very The First Avenger; I half expected her to peel off her face and go all Johann Schmidt.” Lena winced when Alex touched it. “Tender. The PDP headache is almost gone now, though, so that’s a relief. I would’ve been here an hour ago if I hadn’t had to stop because of it.”

“Did they get any?”

“I don’t think so. Jeremiah hauled her off me during the procedure, and I didn’t feel any suction.”

“He just… ripped a syringe out of your spine?” Alex shook her head, wincing.
“I guess so.”

“That doesn’t sound like him. That’s not just dangerous; they teach you not to do specifically that in med school.”

“It was kind of neck-on-the-block,” Lena quipped. “Speaking of, while you’re there, is there anything weird about it?”

“About your spine?”

“Lillian got a look at it and found something interesting.”

“Nothing I can see, but then, I don’t have x-ray vision.” Alex peeled off her gloves and tossed them out. “Once Kara’s here, she can have a look. She should be here soon; we’re filling Mon-El’s cell today. Some high-level prisoner, so it’s all hands on deck.”

“Including mine?”

Alex looked away, tucking an auburn curl behind her ear.

“I can help. I want to.”

“You’ve been held captive, experimented on…”

“It wasn’t much worse than Memorial Day Weekend of ’04.” The joke fell flat. “I was stuck in that cell, doing nothing. I knew she was up to no good, I knew people were in danger, and I was useless. I need to be useful again.”

“Fine. Stay in bed until we get the delivery, and then you can get down to business. Deal?”

“Deal.”

Things happened fast.

Kara arrived, and Alex had to push Lena back into bed before she went out to greet her and Winn. Before she could get a word out, or even reach them, a man in a black suit with a red pocket square and DEO special issue handcuffs was frog-marched into the command floor.

“Oh,” he sighed, “there you are.”

“Um.” Kara looked around, like everyone else, but once she saw Winn pointing her way, her eyes widened. “Who, me?”

“Yes. Yes, you, why else would I let myself be caught? Come on.” He looked towards the agents corralling him like he was caught between two comedic straight men. “She’s funny.”

Lena was on her feet. Her head was still a little swimmy, so she paced herself, steps towards him measured.

“I’ve been looking for you,” he said, suddenly quite serious, eyes flashing silver.

“Supergirl…” Alex cautioned.

Kara was walking towards him. Lena’s stride lengthened. Like hell is something happening to Kara, not now.
She shook herself, stopped.

He snapped his cuffs like twigs, dispatched the guards with speed and a strange elegance.

Every agent had their gun out, and Lena threw herself over their heads, soaring gracelessly through the air.

It felt like the world was moving impossibly slowly, like Xeno’s Paradox had Lena hung on a wire.

He had something, something shiny.

Alex told him to drop his weapon; he insisted it wasn’t one, and was gone.

*The Fastest Man Alive. Who the hell is he?*

As soon as the portal collapsed, so did Kara, but Lena was there, arms around her, Alex at her side.

**Chapter End Notes**

Lena is in captivity for a few weeks in which Lillian abuses Lena, holds her in a red sun lamp cell, wraps her in chains that burn her skin on contact, has DNA samples taken from her without consent, and compensates her with amenities like alcohol or entertainment. The latter comes in the form of a tablet, which Lena uses to hack into the surveillance system and adjust the red sun lamp that keeps her powerless, slowly charging herself back up; it also shows her the Daxamites’ broadcast. Jeremiah comes and warns her that Lillian has found out about the hack, but not the lamp. In order to cover her deceit and Jeremiah’s technical betrayal, Lena tells Jeremiah to beat her up, and he destroys her surveillance rig before hitting her and pinning her to the ground and after she cranks the lamp up to max. Lillian arrives and reveals her plan to take Lena’s cerebrospinal fluid and stem cells to create a gene therapy that will give her soldiers Lena’s powers; this will enable her to understand how to take Lena’s away, and, she hopes, Supergirl’s. Lena knows that would probably kill Kara, and she says that Lillian would rather pick Superman, because he hurt Lex, and Lillian actually gives a shit about him. Lillian begins to perform the procedure, the first time she’s done one herself since Lena’s captivity, and finds something ‘interesting’ with her spine. As she goes in to examine further, she is hurled across the cell. Jeremiah helps Lena escape, but will not go with her because Lillian finally implanted a tracker in his arm, and it is attached to his spine. He intends to go to other Cadmus traitors for help removing it, because he refuses to endanger the DEO or his daughters. Lena promises to fight for him if and when he comes back to the DEO. They both escape. Lena gets back to the DEO, where Alex looks her over and apprises her of recent events - Mon-El is the Daxamite prince, his parents are looking for him, he went with them, Kara has been searching for her nonstop. Lena asks about her neck; Alex says Kara can use her x-ray vision on it once she gets there, which should be soon, as there is a top-priority alien prisoner coming their way. Lena stays in the med bay at Alex’s behest during the transfer until the Music Meister starts to whammy Kara; then she runs over and catches her.

Okay, summary over! I know that was a lot, but I need you guys to hang around a little longer while I talk about Duet. That crossover is in two parts - Lena’s PoV from Earth-1, waiting for Kara’s return, and Kara’s PoV from inside the bubble universe - and I’d like to know which part you’d like first.
Also, I have midterms, which means I'm going to be hella busy, so for the next little while, chapters are going to be once a week while I get caught up on studying and writing. I'm so sorry about the change in schedule; I hope you can forgive me, and I hope the story still holds your interest and entertains you. Thank you for reading.
Interlude: Duet

Chapter Summary

What Kara sees during the 3x17: Duet crossover event.

Chapter Notes

So, I know my posting has been erratic. I know I don't post on Wednesdays. I have a bunch of school stuff going on, including a group project that's really just a solo project that other people get credit for (isn't that always the way?), and I had to rewrite this chapter literally five times. I'm not 100% satisfied with this - there were songs I wanted to put in but couldn't make fit and I wanted a little romantic number, but it just wasn't gonna work - but I owe you guys this chapter, and I want to hear what you think.

(Lena's PoV will be up tomorrow. And by tomorrow, I may mean 12.02a.m.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You. Come with me.”

Kara was still half-blinded by the bright stage lights, but she could quite clearly make out a solidly built man in a double-breasted white suit, a red flower tucked into his lapel. He grabbed her by the arm, grip harsh, and she was so shocked that she let herself be dragged along for a few steps. Once she realized what was happening, though, she twisted in his grip and jabbed her would-be captor in the ribs, just missing his solar plexus.

In response, he calmly pulled out a knife - a switchblade, engraved and well-balanced - and pointed at her with the steady, practiced hand of someone who’s done this many times before.

“I knew birds had hollow bones,” he gritted out, “but I didn’t think it meant you canaries had empty brainpans, too.”

His broad Mid-Atlantic accent, the cut of his suit, the canary jibe - Kara connected the dots, concluding that, whatever this trap actually was, it was modeled after the American Dirty Thirties.

*This would probably be fun, she mused, if not for the threat of death.*

*Or my missing powers.*

If Kara was fully powered, the man threatening her would’ve been mulch. As it was, he was winded, sure, but still standing and utterly unruffled.

*Crap.*

“If this wasn’t so damn important, you’d find out first hand why they call me Cutter.”

Eyes on his knife, Kara asked in a remarkably steady voice, “Is it because you like to cut people?”
“You’re sharp.” Cutter closed his knife and put it away with a subtle flourish. “That’s why I’m talkin’ to you, and not your pally, Allen.”

“Barry?”

Cutter gave her a look that lived up to his nickname, and Kara swallowed hard.

“Sorry. You, um, you said you had something important?”

“I pay you to sing, not to pepper me with questions.” Cutter started walking, and Kara scurried after him until she caught up; even with his cane, which sounded too heavy to be just a walking stick, he was fast, stride decisive. “By the way, I hope you got somethin’ better in your songbook than what you were belting out up there, blondie.”

“Don’t call me blondie.”

“I pay you. I’ll call you whatever I want.”

Kara clenched her jaw and lengthened her stride, overtaking him with ease. “Not if you want my help.” Even in the face of Cutter’s steely glare, Kara persisted. “Which I assume you do, seeing as how you hunted me down.”

Cutter turned sharply, pulling her into a stairwell. Kara stumbled, nearly sprawling up the steps after him, but she righted herself immediately, smoothing her hands over her skirt like nothing had happened at all before following him up to a locked door. He made quick work of unlocking it and took a heavy step in.

For a moment, he stood with his back to her. She could see the wood grip of his knife in his pocket, and a tiny voice in the back of her head told her to grab it. That tiny voice had conveniently forgotten that, night now, Kara wasn’t fast or strong or invulnerable.

She was powerless, stuck in a trap with no way out. Even this conversation could just be a way to keep her contained - that alien with the red pocket square, who knew what he was up to? Who knew what he was planning or why he’d come to the DEO? There was no way he’d actually been captured; he’d broken out of those cuffs so easily. Being taken in was part of his plan, but his plan to do what?

*I want to go home.*

“Look, Mr. Cutter, I don’t have time for this - ”

“You have time for what I tell you you have time for.” He turned, jaw tight, eyes bright. “And I’m telling you, you have time for this.”

“Time for what?”

Wordless, Cutter reached into his breast pocket. The flower in his lapel bobbed as his fingers dug around in the lining of his jacket, and Kara took a step back, shoe scuffing on the lip of the top step. Just in case.

Cutter removed his hand from his jacket and extended it to her, palm down, a piece of paper in his fingers.

“Do you - ?”

He gave her a look.

“Right.”

Kara took the piece of paper out of his hand. It was a photograph, a carbon process print. She could hear James talking about the evolution of the process, the first color photographs being available, if prohibitively expensive, as early as the 1850s.

Kara turned the picture over in her hand and promptly dropped it.

“Oh, god, I’m - ” She dropped, fingers clumsy as she picked it up. “I’m sorry.”

Cutter stared at her like a sideshow attraction that hadn’t managed to amuse. She hadn’t seen that look since her early days on Earth, since before she could pull off human, and it hurt.

Not as badly as the photograph, though.

Immortalized in three layers of gelatin pigment with a few flubs - the cyan layer was too far up the page, the yellow too far down, and there was a smudge, like someone had picked it up before the dark room chemicals had set, on the bottom left-hand corner - was Lena Luthor.

She was dead serious, face square with the camera, all sharp features with her chin tilted defiantly upwards, though there was a nervous set to her mouth, like she didn’t know how she felt about being photographed. Her eyes, with their dark dramatic eyeshadow, were cast to her left, and pale, vibrant green. Her lipstick looked wet, shiny. She stood half in, half out of a doorway in a paisley dress that hung just crooked enough that Kara could see a sliver of red poking out from underneath the collar.

It was Lena. She couldn’t be anyone else.

“That’s my daughter.”

“What?”

“Joan Moran.” Cutter tapped the picture with his index finger, and Kara looked up to see a faraway gleam in his eyes. “Best thing I ever did in this life.”

“She’s your - ” Kara swallowed, hard, around the Gordian knot in her throat. “Your daughter?”

“Didn’t have much of a hand in raising her.” Cutter snatched the photograph back and tucked it away again, patting the pocket twice before shoving his hand into his pocket. “She was born - ”

October 22nd, 1993.

“October 22nd, 1908. Me and her ma, we weren’t married. When she was six, I got drafted, and when I came back, she was in the system. Took forever and a day to find her, but I did it, I took her in.” Cutter shook his head. “She doesn’t remember me, from before, and I ain’t gonna tell her what happened - and neither are you.”

“I don’t see how I could.” Kara flexed her fingers, working the nerves out of her twitchy hands. “I - I haven’t seen her before.”

“Well, I haven’t seen her, either.” Letting out a slow breath, Cutter looked Kara dead in the eyes. “Whether she knows it or not, she’s blood, and even if she wasn’t, she’s still part of the family.

“She offered to do a job for me, play bodyguard and spy on someone, only she stopped reporting back. Nobody’s seen hide nor hair of her for weeks. I need you to find her.”
“Me?”

“I sent my boy after her, but he swanned off to hell if I know. I can’t send one of my men - someone’d make ‘em on the spot. No one’s gonna think twice of you lookin’ for her.”

“Right,” said Kara faintly.

“I need you to bring her home.”

This is so weird, thought Kara, closing her eyes. This is so weird, and so obviously a trap.

Behind her eyelids, she could see Lena, though, in a million tiny moments, all snowballing up to the last time she’d seen her face to face: the Galaxy Girl interviews, where she’d put herself on the line for Kara and for every alien in National City; at CatCo, resolute and ferocious as she promised Ride or die; in her own office, up to her eyeballs in evidence of everything her family had done, unflinching; on the phone, cool and flippant in the face of Cadmus cronies attacking her on her own turf.

She tried very hard not to picture the pair of stiletto heels embedded in the sidewalk, buried in the rubble of Lena’s collapsed balcony. She tried and tried and tried and failed, but at least it wasn’t picturing her in a Cadmus cell, helpless.

Then her mind supplied her with that photograph, with the idea of this woman, who was not Lena, in trouble, with her family wanting her safe.

“Okay.” Kara nodded, steady. “I’ll - I’ll find her for you.”

“Fantastic!”

Someone snapped their fingers, and Kara opened her eyes to see the alien with the red pocket handkerchief standing in Cutter’s place.

“Hey!”

He grinned. “Hello, Supergirl.”

“Who are you? What is this place? What do you want from me?”

He rolled his eyes, grin unwavering. “So curious. Your friend’s the same way.”

“Barry’s here. You better not have hurt him!”

“Relax. I’m a big fan - loved your rendition of Moon River, such a beautiful song! You were a little flat in places, but I’m willing to let it slide because you’re just so cute! Why would I hurt either of you?” He linked one arm through hers, jauntily raising his free hand and cocking one eyebrow. “Now, come on. You’re going to miss the show!”

“Show, what sho - oh!”

The alien snapped his fingers and suddenly, Kara was back on the main floor, standing beside Barry, who looked just as confused as she did.

“Barry? It’s really you, right?”

“Yeah. Yeah, it’s - it’s me.”
Whoever moved first, dragging them both into a hug, they both clearly needed it, clinging to each other like barnacles to the bottom of a boat in choppy waters. It was over, though, as fast as Kara had appeared, and they pulled apart to the sound of the lights coming up onstage.

Standing dead center in front of the silver mic she’d used was the alien who had trapped them. His suit was tailored to fit the era - wider shoulders, pinstripes, a wider, gaudier tie - but his pocket square was the same.

“So moving. But as much as I love this little reunion, the show must go on!” He hopped off the stage, chattering away, and Kara wanted to punch him.

“Hold on,” Barry interjected, brow furrowed. “What did you do to us?”

“Oh, nothing much. Just put a little song in your heart!” He passed between them, all casual, confident swagger, and Kara scoffed.

“Put a little - ? Why did you bring us here?”

“I didn’t bring you anywhere. We’re inside your heads. *You* created this world.” His grin widened. “And we got lucky, because it could have been a war movie, or a space opera, but thanks to your love of musicals - with the countless times you watched, um,” he pointed a pair of jovial finger guns at Kara, “*Wizard of Oz* with your adoptive parents - ”

“How did you know that?” Kara asked, voice sharp. He’d been watching her, watching her family, for how long? She more than wanted to punch him; she was ready to sock him in the jaw so hard he sneezed out his own teeth.

“And, you,” he continued, ignoring her and turning to Barry, “all those rainy nights watching Fred Astaire and Frank Sinatra with mom. Well, where else would we be?”

“Alright,” Kara said, stepping towards him, “alright.” She swung - too hard, too wide; it was weird, fighting without her powers, without her strength, in silk gloves and stilettos, and her balance was way off. Even with all that working against her, she should have connected.

Instead, her fist went clean through his head; he dissolved into amber light while her fist passed through what should have been his jaw, then reformed, beaming.

“Oooh, swing and a miss!” His humor remained, but it was a little more crisp: he was getting down to business. “I didn’t tell you. I’m not really here. See, I’m out there in the real world.” He clasped his hands, rubbing them together giddily. “Central City’s mine for the taking.”

Barry, a little stunned, flicked a finger at himself and Kara. “We’re gonna stop you.”

“Yeah!”

“You’re welcome to try that,” said Pocket Square, stepping towards them with his hands out and his voice *rife* with condescension, “*if* you can get out of here.”

“How do we get out of here?”

“You’re in a movie musical. So all you have to do is just…”

“Follow the yellow brick road?”

“No. The script.”
“Oh. Yeah.”

“Reach the end of the plot and, presto change-o, you get to go home!”

Kara was suddenly hyperaware of the mission Cutter had given her. That was her ticket out: find the girl and bring her home.

“One little detail, though. I should mention: if you die in here, you die out there.”

“Lovely,” Barry muttered.

“I’ve reached my limit with magical creeps.” Kara marked out said limit, right around her eyebrows, where a tension headache was slowly but surely gathering steam.

“In the meantime, I hope you’re both ready to get the rust off those pipes.”

“We’re not singing for you! Uh, any - ” Kara swallowed. “Any more, I mean.”

“Ah, come on, just one little…” He started shrugging out of his jacket, revealing some admittedly snazzy suspenders that, if not for the kidnapping and death threats, Kara would ask after the provenance of. “Fun opening number to…”

“Leave your jacket on,” Barry said, evidently as frustrated and impatient as Kara was with this whole situation.

“- kick things off?”

The alien threw his jacket aside and then the jacket was gone, disappeared mid-arc, mid-air.

“Where did it go?”

“Think of your fellow man,” he sang, walking back between them and extending one hand, palm up, towards Kara. “Lend him a helping hand, put a little love in your heart!”

He did a little chassé towards the piano, where Grady was sitting as if he’d been there the whole time. He tapped his finger on the glossy black wood, and Grady came to life like a wind-up toy and started to play.

“You see it’s getting late - oh, please don’t hesitate.” The alien put his hands on Grady’s shoulders, and Grady got louder, more polished. “Put a little love in your heart.”

And now a bunch of people were there, people who hadn’t been there a split second prior, girls in pretty dresses in teal or rose, skirts twirling as they spun around holding champagne coupes on trays that didn’t slide or shift, no matter how poorly they were leveled. Pablo came in on a dinner service cart, hopping off and handing his empty glass to the nearest dancing waitress as he sang, “And the world will be a better place, and the world will be a better place! For you…”

The alien pointed at Pablo, welcoming him over to the piano, where he came up behind Grady, who sang, “And me…”

“You just wait…”

“And see!”

And then there was a full janitorial staff in emerald green tuxedos, dancing with push brooms. Because why not?
Then Cutter Moran was back, out of nowhere, dancing with two girls - one with pointed ears, the other with a dark triangle under her right eye stretching from her temple to the bridge of her nose. “Another day goes by; still the children cry, ‘put a little love in your heart!’ If you want the world to know,” he sang, spinning them out under his arms before reeling them back in, hands curled around their waists, “we won’t let hatred grow, put a little love in your heart!”

“And the world will be a better place!” The alien leapt off the stage from behind them, though for the life of her, Kara had no idea how he’d gotten back there. She let out a little shriek, more from shock than anything else, but at least Barry was as startled by it as she was.

He joined ranks with everyone else - Pablo, the waitresses, the janitors, Cutter - and they all began to dance together with fluid ease, though he continued to sing lead alone. “And the world will be a better place, all the world will be a better place - for you!”

Grady chimed in, “And me!”

“You just wait,” crooned Cutter.

Power sliding across the floor, Pablo belted out, “And see!”

For a moment, it was actually fun, but then Not-Winn bade her to take a good look around and she remembered: this was all a trap, she had work to do, she had people to protect.

“ - and if you’re looking down, put a little love in your heart!”

“And the world,” crooned the alien, pointing at his ears and grinning wide.

“ - will be a better place,” cut in Pablo, dancing with one of the alien girls in pink.

“And the world will be a better place for you - ”

“And me!”

“You just wait!”

“And see!”

“Put a little love in your heart!”

“Put a little love, put a little love!”

“Put a little love in your heart!”

“Put a little love in your heart!”

“Put a little love in your heart!”

“Put a little love in your heart!”

“Put a little love - put a little love in your heart! Put a little love in your heart!”

Just like that, the number was over. The alien walked out with a girl on his arm; the waitresses cleared away the trays they’d brought in for absolutely no real reason; the janitors collected their brooms; Pablo and Grady vanished like a mirage.

“So what do we do now?”
“I don’t know.” Kara sighed. “I guess we just do what he says, right? Figure out what the plot of the musical is - ”

“And we follow the story.” Nodding, Barry set his jaw.

“Okay, so what do we know so far?”

“We’re singers.”

“And apparently we work for a gangster.” Kara stopped - was stopped, by a flash of the conversation she’d had with that gangster.

“Who wants us to perform for him,” Barry added, moving forward like he hadn’t noticed her trailing off. “Honestly, it’s pretty straightforward.”

“Maybe not,” she said.

“Kara?”

“I’m sorry, I have to go.”

“Go do what?”

“Follow the script.”

And then Kara was in Cutter’s office. He sat behind his leather-topped desk, looked up when she walked in.

“Did you just..?”

“Just what?” He set down a pen and looked at her. “Expect you to do your job?”

“I’m - I’m going to do it. I’m going to find her.” Kara took a step closer and crossed her arms over her chest. “I just need more information first.”

☆

The next thought in Kara’s head was that the script must have read CUT TO: EXT. Sidewalk - technical morning. KARA DANVERS, still trapped inside her own mind by some dapper alien, walks down the street and smacks straight into the only other actual person here.

Because she was suddenly outside, on the sidewalk, in murky daylight, smacking straight into Barry Allen.

She couldn’t recall how she’d gotten there - not exactly, anyways. It was like remembering a story someone else had told her about their day.

She’d gone to find Cutter. He was in his office, which looked straight off the set of Clue or any of the serious film noir pieces it drew from, with absolutely no memory of the musical number he’d just performed, but plenty of information about the woman who was not Lena.

She’s been playing bodyguard for the Foss bosses’ kid, serving as a watchdog. She was supposed to report back if they ever planned to make a direct move, but in the six months she’d been working as a double agent, they hadn’t made a single move against Cutter. It wasn’t much, but it was still useful to a point.
But then she didn’t send a note one week.

Or the next.

Or the next.

Cutter had sent his son out to look, but he’d come back to take advantage of the club’s bar with empty hands. They’d fought, and Tommy stormed off; Cutter wasn’t worried because Tommy didn’t know how to do anything on his own, and he’d be back within a week’s time. It was during that fight, though, that Cutter had laid eyes on her and decided she, a relative unknown, had better use than singing standards on his stage - at least for now.

It all lined up, sure, but Kara couldn’t actually remember being a part of that conversation, or the time between then and now. She couldn’t remember changing out of her evening gown, either, and into a tweed jacket that she probably would have worn in real life and a skirt she definitely wouldn’t have.

It was then, lamenting her lack of trousers, that Kara blinked into awareness on a street corner and walked straight into Barry, knocking him to the ground.

“We’ve got to stop meeting like this,” she joked, helping him to his feet.

“No kidding.” He dusted off his hands, inspecting them for a moment before looking her in the face. “How’s the script treating you?”

“Well, our boss’ daughter is my missing girlfriend’s doppelgänger, and her last known location was his enemy’s doorstep, so…” Kara made a face. “How about you?”

“I got kidnapped by someone who looked like Iris’ dad to find a missing girl who looked like Iris, but the last time he saw her, she was going into Moran’s nightclub.”

“Kidnapped - are you okay?”

“Yeah. There was some sort of time skip, and the bump on my head’s gone down.” As if he was checking, Barry reached up and rubbed the back of his head. He didn’t wince, so Kara took his word for it.

“You felt it, too?”

“Yeah. It was like the scene just changed, and all of a sudden, I was walking down the street, bumping into you.”

“Do you remember anything?”

“Sort of. I went back to the club, asked around. Pablo said he might know something and told me to meet him at tomorrow - today - at noon. But we’ve got a few hours to kill until then, though, so I don’t know why I’m here right now.”

“Exposition?”

Barry laughed. “You think?”

“Whoever Pocket Square is, he said he was a fan of ours.”

“You’d think he’d be a little less creepy, then.”

“Oh, you’d think that, but it’s almost never the case. Working for Ms. Grant, you’d be surprised how
much awful fan mail I had to sort through. Plus, the other week, I tangled with another reality-warping super fan who wanted to marry me.”

“Ugh.”

“Yes.” Kara gave a dramatic shudder, only partly to try and rattle the dour expression off of Barry’s face, before gently knocking her shoulder into his. “It’s not so bad, though, right? At least we sort of know what’s going on.”

“And we know how to get out.” Barry half-smiled and bumped her back before offering his elbow. “You said you’ve dealt with this kind of thing before?”

“That’s why the desert base transferred Pocket Square to us.” Kara looped her arm through his, and they started to walk. “They figured we could banish him the same way we banished Mxyzptlk.”

“That’s a mouthful.”

“Try saying it backwards.” Kara let out a sigh.

“Do you think we could banish this guy the same way? Get back to our real worlds?”

“I don’t think so. This is different, and we don’t even know his name, or have the technology to trap him. I don’t even know if I could do it again here. Last time I had help. I had Lena.”

Barry opened his mouth, as if to speak, but Kara barreled on.

“And his powers felt different. Because he was at the DEO, I thought he was an alien, but maybe he’s a metahuman instead.

“I’ve never dealt with anything like this before.”

“Shoot.”

“I mean, it could be a parallel dimension, or maybe just some elaborate illusion. As inconvenient as it is, at least we know the way out.”

“I’d hate to try clicking my heels together three times and have it not work.”

With a snort, Barry started across the intersection, only for Kara to yank him back.

“Traffic!”

“What traffic?”

Kara had to concede that the streets were not only incredibly empty, but also extraordinarily orderly.

“Besides, in what musical has someone ever been hit by a car?”

“Fine.” Kara allowed him to drag her into jaywalking, a melancholy smile flickering across her face. “My first home on Earth was in the suburbs. Terrible drivers. Alex had to teach me how to cross the street so that I didn’t get hit.”

“But you’re invulnerable.”

“Yeah, and if a Subaru T-bones a teenage girl who didn’t look both ways before crossing the street and ends up looking like an empty beer can at a frat party while she walks away without so much as
a scratch...?”

“Right.”

Kara shook her head, smile a little brighter. “I just... She was always looking out for me, y’know? And I always tried to look out for her, but she never let me. She was always three steps ahead, hiding problems from me so I wouldn’t worry.

“I was so happy when she told me about Maggie. I was so happy she was letting me in. So what do I do?” She scoffed. “I lie to my sister, who just came out to me, about getting a girlfriend. So that she didn’t feel like I was... stealing her thunder. And the worst part is that I asked Lena to lie about it, too, and now she’s missing, and I can’t help but feel like I’m failing everyone. I’m not being a good enough sister. I’m not being a good enough girlfriend, a good enough friend.

“This past month, I’ve been shutting everyone out, like if I could just fix this one thing, everything else would fall into place. I mean, I threw myself into this trap, first thing, because Cutter Moran showed me a picture of someone who looked like Lena and said she might be in trouble, but she’s not Lena. Lena’s out there, and I’m not helping her, and I couldn’t protect her, and I just...”

Kara cut herself off, jaw tight, white-knuckling her empty hands.

“When Digsy Foss,” started Barry slowly, “the guy who looks like Iris’ dad, told me she was in trouble, he said she was the only good and decent thing in his life. He said the streets of this city would run red with blood if she was hurt.”

“Wow.”

“And I agreed to help him for the same reasons you agreed to help Cutter. I can’t not try when it comes to Iris, even if it’s not really her. How he feels about losing her - that’s all I can think, knowing there’s a deadline, knowing exactly when she’s going to stop existing. I need to save her, because I can’t be in a world without her. I don’t know who I’d be if I didn’t save her.”

Kara loosened her fists, with infinite care, just to give his arm a reassuring squeeze. “It’s not going to come to that. Okay? You two are practically a Matrix match. You’re going to get through this.”

“You are, too, you know. Lena’s fine. She’s - ”

“There you are!”

Through plot provenance, or another scene change, there was Pablo, waiting outside a building and waving his arm in the air, the sun high up above them. Though they’d only been talking for a few minutes, somehow, hours had passed, and they were right where they needed to be.

“This is so weird.”

“Super weird.”

As they approached the building, Kara took note of the address and how it pinged something in the back of her head.

“This is me,” Barry said. “Do you have an address to look for her?”

“No.” Kara squinted up at the apartment, ramshackle red brick and dirty windows. Faintly, she repeated herself, adding, “But I’m sure the script will teleport me to it when the time comes.”
Pablo didn’t seem flapped by her showing up, leading them both inside and up the stairs. “This is the place,” he said after a few flights, walking them down the hall and stopping outside one door in particular: “Apartment 4B.”

“This is where we can find Iris?”

“Millie.”

“Millie, right.”

“Yeah, she’s in there, alright.”

Kara marveled at just how easy things were in movie musicals.

“Now, you two listen to me,” Pablo said, pointing his finger at them. “Don’t you go tellin’ anyone I showed you this.”

“Oh, yeah, we promise.”

“Word to the wise. You go digging around in this dirt, you might not like what you find.”

With that, he was gone, leaving Kara and Barry alone outside 4B with the dust and that mild-mannered, yet ominous, warning.

“Okay, so remember,” Kara began gently, “she may look like Iris, but she is not Iris.”

“I know.” Barry eyed the door mistrustfully even as he took a step towards it. “This is gonna be weird.”

“I know.” Barry eyed the door mistrustfully even as he took a step towards it. “This is gonna be weird.”

“Tell me about it.” Sizing it up, Kara moved in closer and muttered, “I wish we saw someone who looked like Mon-El. It’d be nice to have someone to punch.”

And then from behind the door came a thin sort of cry, followed by an “Oh, my god!” and a heavy thud, like something solid slamming into a wall.

“That’s her.” A panicked look came across Barry’s face, and he shifted between Kara and the door. “It sounds like she’s in trouble. Stand back. I’m gonna kick the door down.”

“You stand back, I’ll kick it down.”

“I - I didn’t mean it as, like, a gender thing,” Barry managed, stepping back from where Kara had maneuvered her way into prime door-kicking real estate. “I just wanted to kick it in real quick -”

“Barry.”

“Right. We’ll do it together.”

Together, they counted down. Together, they fired off identical kicks that knocked the door wide open.

“What the hell?”

Kara slapped her hand over Barry’s eyes, her own wide over burning cheeks. One woman, dark hair falling in careful curls around her shoulders, had been pinning someone to the wall until the door flew open with a bang. As soon as that sound echoed through the apartment, though, they switched positions, and Kara could see a lot more of Joan Moran than she’d ever intended to.
From the waist down, she was fine. Totally PG-13 - PG, even. It was just that, above what Kara could have sworn was her own favorite leather belt cinching the waist of her black skirt in place, she wore a silky-looking blouse that was just entirely open, her lipstick was a mess, and her elegant and period-accurate updo had clearly had someone’s hands in it.

Millie’s hands in it, judging by the smudge of red on her throat that precisely matched Joan’s shade.

Also, she was pointing a gun at them, but Kara’s first instincts apparently hadn’t yet adapted to include her current lack of bulletproofing.

For a moment, she thought the same of Joan, only to remember that she wasn’t Lena and see a strangely bulky, silky-looking purple vest, cut too oddly to be a fashion choice.

“You make that yourself?”

“In my line of work, you tend to get shot at a bit. I don’t like being shot.”

Kara swallowed around the rapid heartbeat in her throat. “That’s fair.”

“Now, who the hell are you,” she asked, remarkably calm and handling her pearl-handled pistol, “and am I going to have to ask that question again with an empty chamber?”

“Oh, don’t waste a bullet on us,” said Barry, nervous laughter in his voice.


Kara should have been more focused on the gun pointed towards them, cocked and ready to fire. Instead, all she could see was the pleased pink flush that bloomed on Joan’s cheeks at the pet name, the way that her calculating eyes twinkled as Millie draped her hands over her hips.

“I’m Kara,” she managed, “and this is Barry. We’re singers at your dad - your boss’ nightclub.”

“Yeah. Millie, your dad thinks you’ve been kidnapped.”

“Well,” she drawled, “clearly he’s mistaken.”

Kara offered, “He really wants you to come home,” but it was plain to see that Millie didn’t particularly care.

“Listen, I am never goin’ back there.”

“Why not? There’s no place like home!”

Kara cringed at the reference, because now was neither the time nor the place, but she couldn’t help how true it rang. Now, more than ever, she wanted to go home, and this stand off was the only thing standing in her way.

“Joan O’Neil is my home,” said Millie, with the conviction of a thousand armies, hooking her chin over Joan’s shoulder. She wrapped her arms around Joan’s waist, hugging her closer, and Joan melted into a blissful little smile as she lowered the gun, tucking it into a shoulder holster that matched what was definitely Kara’s belt before linking their fingers together.

Now it was Barry’s turn to cringe.

“Besides, I want no part in my Dads’ rivalry with Cutter Moran. If my Dads found out my bodyguard was a Moran mole, or if Moran found out my girl was workin’ for the coppers, they’d go
to war. More’n just the two of us are at stake.”

“Millie’s right,” Joan turned her head, forehead knocking into Millie’s cheek. “Those old men are running this city into the ground. Tellin’ ‘em just what’s goin’ on would put too many people at risk.”

“Cutter Moran’s been looking for you, too, Joan,” Kara blurted.

“Yeah, ‘cause he’s missin’ a snitch. Well, I ain’t snitchin’ for him no more.”

“Not as an employee.” Please work, please work, please work. “As a father.”

Joan’s eyes flew open, but she showed no other signs of shock. Millie’s arms tightened around her, steadying her.

“And I wasn’t supposed to tell you that, because he said you’d forgotten all about it. Because he left when you were so young. But he’s already come to blows with his son over this - I don’t think the city is safe if you stay in hiding.”

“Like I didn’t already know? Me bein’ a bastard is the worst kept secret in this city. And you can stop playin’ peepers with your friend,” Joan grumbled, turning away from him with a frown on her face. She pivoted so smoothly that, with the sudden simple piano melody sweeping into the air, she almost resembled the doll in a music box.

Kara took her hand away from Barry’s eyes as she started to button her blouse and almost wished she hadn’t. Now both of them were condemned to watch the casually intimate way Millie batted Joan’s hands aside and handled the buttons for her, the way Joan’s empty, idle hands settled around her waist.

“We have this under control. The best thing you can do is step back and let us handle this.”

“What?”

Millie wrapped her arm around Joan as she turned to face the two interlopers and said sharply, “The point is, we ain’t tellin’ nobody nothin’, and neither are you. Capisce?”

“Um.” Kara really, really tried not to look at Joan next to Millie, one hand on her hip, silent backup with CEO eyes, and tried even harder not to connect it to what peeked through the Galaxy Girl mask. “Not quite.”

Barry held up a hesitant finger and asked, “Can you give us a second?” When granted said second, he turned the other way, and Kara followed suit, arms crossed tight against her ribs. “Okay, look. He says we need to follow the script.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Right? And we’re in a musical. So I think if we convince them to tell their fathers they’re in love, maybe that’ll get us out of here.”

“Do you think that’s even possible?” Kara chanced a peek over her shoulder at the women in question; as melty as they were around each other, they looked tougher than steel - tougher than marionite. “They’re both pretty stubborn.”

Barry huffed a laugh. “Worth a shot, right?”
Kara caved, and they both turned to face Millie, who was straightening Joan’s collar, and Joan, whose hand on Millie’s waist wouldn’t have been complete without the absentminded caress of her thumb along Millie’s ribs.

“Okay, so, look.”

_Oh, god, Barry._

“Your fathers aren’t perfect.”

“Love isn’t perfect.”

With a grateful glance Kara’s way, Barry hit his stride. “No, but you can’t let your love for somebody cause you to be afraid of what might happen. You gotta take the good with the bad, no matter what.”

“Right!”

“And that includes… telling your fathers how you feel about each other.”

There was an interminable stretch of silence, every second of which felt longer and more insufferable, until Millie shrugged, throwing her free hand into the air, and said, “Alright, you make a convincing argument.”

“You do,” Joan ceded from behind her fingers where they held her bottom lip hostage.

“We’ll do it. We’ll tell ’em about us, right?”

“I mean, it’s not like you got much to worry about,” Joan said with a crooked grin. “Y’know, considering.”

Millie rolled her eyes fondly and tucked a lock of Joan’s undone hair behind her ear.

“We should go right now.” Suddenly, the small apartment was a flurry of motion, Joan skirting past Barry on her way to the couch where a heap of outerwear lay discarded and saying, “Gee, thanks, kid,” in passing.

“Okay.”

Joan scooped up a fur stole and looped it around Millie’s shoulders, murmuring, “For you,” and pecking her on the lips.

“Thank you.” In turn, Millie took a double-breasted black coat off of Joan’s hands and helped her into it. Her hands were efficient but full of affection as she smoothed it over Joan’s arms and back with lingering touches, tugging on the tail hem briskly before giving her a playful swat on the butt that turned her cheeks a soft, glowy pink. Both onlookers managed to match it.

“Wow.” Clearing his throat, Barry averted his eyes.

“We just gotta make a phone call,” said Joan, chin jutting, and just like that, she and Millie were gone.

“Okay, uh, convincing people in musicals is really easy.”

“Let’s just hope getting out of one is just as easy.”
Kara really hoped that wasn’t the movie musical version of *I’ll be right back.*

☆

There was another horribly unnerving shift, and then Kara had a vague sense of a split screen as she stood in the rehearsal room in Cutter Moran’s nightclub, a respectful two feet behind Joan as she laid everything out on the metaphorical table. Somehow, she could almost see just what was happening across town, where she had a foggy recollection of Barry agreeing to go with Millie - to save time and, in the event of any boiling points being approached, to stop a bunch of paternalistic mobsters from pointing their guns at each other.

A man with white hair, severely parted, sat at a desk facing the man Kara supposed was based on Iris’ father. When Millie and Barry walked in, he was the one who saw her first, and he lit up from head to toe. “Digsy! She’s back!”

In another flurry of movement, Millie wrapped each man in a hug.

“Thank god you’re safe,” Digsy murmured into her hair.

“Mm. Of course I’m safe.” She squeezed back tight, eyes closed, and said, “I was with my bodyguard the whole time.”

“Where is she?”

Millie stepped out of the hug and away from the question. “Barry said you sent him to find me.”

“We were concerned!”

“Dads, there’s no reason to be concerned.”

Oh. That’s what ‘considering’ meant.

“Dads?”

Everyone turned and gave Barry quite possibly the hardest Look anyone had ever managed, and both Foss men said, “You got a problem with that?”

Barry, why?

“No. I love musicals, so…”

Oh, Rao, why?

“Okay…” Millie turned back towards her fathers, squaring her shoulders, and said, “Look, Dads, there’s something that… I need to tell you.”

“Mm-hm.”

“I’m in love!” Just saying it put a giddy gleam in Millie’s eyes. She sort of bounced where she stood, grinning from ear to ear.

It was the face Alex made when she told Kara about liking Maggie, and even though Millie wasn’t real - even though none of this was real - Kara felt a swell of pride for her.

Millie’s giggle stretched on a little too long as her fathers eyed each other, but it eventually petered out as she retreated into a more neutral stance, swinging away her nervous energy.
“Who is the, uh, lucky boy?”

“Girl, actually,” she said, and the giggle was back.

“Who’s the lucky girl, then?”

“Um.” Millie twisted, peeking back at Barry, who shot her a wink that was somehow wholly supportive and nothing more. “Joanie.”

“You mean Cutter Moran’s kid?”

“Dad, look, we’re in love!”

“The hell you are!”

“We figured she was playing traitor, sure, but we kept her around to keep tabs on Moran, not to - to pitch woo to our baby girl! Her father is a hooligan! And her mother is - !”

“Hey!” Digsy pointed an emphatic finger at his husband. “Not in front of the girl.” Then he turned it towards Millie, losing no power in the process, and said, “And you’re not loving that girl.”

And then Kara was back in Cutter’s club, listening to him bellow, “Have you lost your mind? She is the daughter of my enemy!”

Joan crossed her arms, gripping her bicep so tight that her knuckles were the color of bone, chin jutting as she stood, unmoved, in the wake of his rant.

“Digsy Foss is a dirty, rotten scoundrel - ”

“And the same could be said about you,” she said coolly.

_I may be a little bit in love with her_, Kara thought.

“ - and the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree! What?”

“You’re in the same business as Digsy - you’re the same kind of man, and you’d both do anything for your family. For your daughters.” Joan’s mouth twisted. “To a point, that is.”

“To what point?” The ruse was thin, at best; everyone knew to what point. “You were better off not knowing.”

“You were better off with me in the dark.” Joan uncrossed one arm, extending her hand. “I’ll listen, alright? If you let me explain.”

Before Kara could hear Cutter’s rebuttal, she was back at Foss HQ.

“She isn’t your little girl anymore,” Barry said, managing to keep steady even as, once again, a room full of gang bangers all wheeled on him. “Well, she isn’t. She’s an incredibly brave, strong woman.”

Millie smiled, eyes soft.

“One look,” he continued, voice matching, “and you can see that. And she wants to be with her. No matter how scared she was to tell you, no matter how dangerous it is to be with her, all that matters is they’re together. And when you find a love like that, well, you gotta hold onto it. No matter who’s trying to stop you.” He let out a breath, a sad smile crossing his face. “That’s clear to me now.”
Back in Cutter’s club, Kara watched as Joan listened to Cutter’s explanation - the same one he’d given her; at least he was consistent. As much as she wanted to step in and fight, something in her held her back. Maybe it was awe, unbridled awe at how capably and competently Joan handled him.

Once he was done talking, Joan said, “So you love me. Even though you left, even though you lied, what matters is, you love me?”

“Yes.”

“That’s how I feel about her.” Joan smiled, hapless and shaky and moonstruck. “How can you not love someone the people you protect?

“How can you not want them to be happy?”

“Babydoll,” Digsy said, shaking his head, “it’s just, you’ll never understand what it means to be a father.”

“Millie, my darling, we’ve always taken care of you. We just want you to be happy.”

Gentle guitar filled the air, and Barry sat on an empty crate as Digsy began to sing.

“Right and wrong, who’s to say which we should refuse? All we know, love survives either way we choose. Here you are at the edge, go ahead and fall.”

“Don’t resist,” his husband crooned, taking his hand “I insist: love still conquers all.”

Eyes warm, Digsy offered his hand to Millie, and she raced to take it. “It even conquered you, my little Attila. You’re growing up.”

“And you’re alright with that?” she asked, the wobble in her voice barely audible.

“Yes,” they said together, “and no.”

The music picked up, and Barry, in his seat, looked as pumped as everyone else around him looked like a prop - entirely.

“I’m feeling happy, I’m feeling sad. A little childish, a little Dad.” Cutter shot Joan a funny sort of smile, which she returned with only a moment’s hesitation. “I think of all the days you’ve known, all the ways you’ve grown, see you on your own and then I’m feeling happy and sad again.” He rose to his feet, walking to her with the even stride of someone who knows the floors beneath their feet better than almost anything else. “I think I’m rested, but then I’m tired - today requested, tomorrow fired. And now a girl says he adores she who once was yours.”

Joan’s forehead crinkled, and, suspicious, she ducked her chin.

Cutter reached out and lifted it with a tender finger, looking her in the eye. “How can I ignore such news? I’m sad and happy, why should I choose?”

“Life is full of contradictions, every inch a mile, and the moment we start weeping,” all three fathers harmonized, “that’s when we should smile.”

“In every Heaven, you’ll find some Hell.”

“And there’s a welcome in every farewell.”

“Life can be harsh, the future strict - oh! What they’ll predict.”
“And the girl you’ve picked, not bad. So let’s be happy, forever happy, completely happy, and a tiny bit sad.”

Millie, in her dads’ arms, giggled wetly, squeezing their shoulders.

“Thanks for telling us, baby,” Digsy murmured.

“I love you both so much.”

“And we love you.”

They each picked a temple on which to bestow a kiss, and Millie let out a little squeal and a burst of applause before racing off to find her girl.

“I appreciate your honesty, mo banphrionsa,” Cutter said, voice heavy as he pulled Joan into a tight hug.

“You, too,” she replied, pulling back just far enough to adjust the flower in his lapel and meaningfully say, “Poppy.”

He left, just like that, and Joan strode off with quick, decisive steps. “You should be on your toes,” she whispered as she passed Kara on her way out. “Just in case.”

On both sides of town, at least some of the truth finally aired, two women prepared for war.

☆

“What do we do now?” Barry asked, pacing. “We got Millie and Joan to tell their fathers that they’re in love.”

“Which, I know we’re in a musical and everything, but seeing Lena at all, seeing her in love with someone else was…”

“It was hard to watch. I know.”

Kara let out a heavy sigh, slumping onto her elbows.

“Anyway. I mean, what are we supposed to do? What do you think this Music Meister needs us to do now?”

“I get the feeling that its out of our -”

“Ah! There you are!” In came Grady, boundlessly energetic in his little red bow tie. “You two ready?”

Barry looked Kara’s way for an answer and found only the same confusion. “Ready for..?”

“Rehearsal, you dolt.” He parked himself at the piano like Winn parked himself at his monitors. “Mr. Moran told me that you got more songs in your repertoire.”

“Ah,” said Barry mildly, eyes equally mild in their conveyance of his inner state of oh, fuck.

Kara bolted to her feet, at least one thing clicking into place. “We have to finish the musical.”

“Yeah.”
She turned towards Grady, resting her elbow on the piano, and asked, “Uh, do you… do you happen to know anything original?”

“As a matter of fact,” he said, grinning wider and proudly fixing his tie, “I’ve been working on something all day.”

“Wow.”

“Things really are easier in musicals.”

Grady began to pick out a gentle melody, and after the first little run, he looked to Barry to start them off.

“Alright.” He cleared his throat and began. “At times like these, when life is getting me down, and the world seems like it’s gonna end… ship?”

He looked to Kara, who shrugged from head to toe.

“There’s at least one power,” he barreled on, “that we both still have, and that’s the power of…”

“Friendship?”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what I was going to say!”

“It’s an easy rhyme.”

“I’m your super friend,” he sang, grinning. Kara laughed, feeling genuinely lighthearted for the first time in a while as he swung into a deceptively simple softshoe routine. “Super friend! I’ll be there in the nick of time, if you’re ever in a spot.”

Kara watched his feet, absorbing the steps, and as he melted into a series of seemingly endless pencil turns, she stepped in. “And if you’re not there in time, you can just go back in time, and give it another shot!”

“I’m actually not supposed to do that anymore.”

“Oh. Okay.”

Sliding stage right, Barry flung out his arms, giving her center and insisting, “Sing!”

And she did, and it was fun. “I’m your super friend,” she chorused, improvising a few steps that Barry somehow already knew, “super friend!”

As she slipped into a seat by a vanity, he shuffled after her, his reflection hyping hers up. “When you need a compliment, I can rattle off a dozen. For instance: I have to say, I’m not impressed by your more famous cousin.”

“Thank you!” Kara cried, turning to face him. “No one ever says that!”

“Oh, he’s all like, ‘I’m Superman, whoop-di-whoop-di-whoo!’”

Kara laughed, tossing him a conveniently placed top hat. “That’s a really good impression.”

“Thanks.”

Together, they popped the hats to their full extension and sang together, “I’m your super friend,
“super friend!”

“When it comes to buddies, pal, you’re the best!”

“I love you more than the lightning bolt I wear on my chest.”

Barry, quite smoothly, knelt down and offered her his hat, which she took, somehow knowing to set aside with her own, giving him just enough time to get back on his feet, before chasséing off with him, trilling, “If you’re ever sad, I’ll bring you flowers!”

“And you can list soprano as one of your powers.”

“If you’re ever broke - ”

“I’ve got the cash - ”

Kara flopped dramatically onto a well-positioned velvety couch, singing, “On my couch - ”

“You’re welcome to crash - ”

“And if you ever need a hand - ”

Grinning from ear to ear, like a massive dork, Barry crossed his legs with a flourish and finished the line with, “I’ll be there in a flash!”

“Barry!”

“That was funny!”

Kara had to admit that, yeah, it was.

Not as funny, though, as another time skip happening mid-step, complete with a costume change into a gorgeous gold dress with Ginger Rogers weights in the skirt so it swung cinematically around her legs as she danced, which, ow.

Out in the audience sat Joan, dressed like Marlene Dietrich save for the vibrant purple of her waistcoat, and Millie, in a stunning bias cut red dress that matched both of their lipsticks perfectly. Kara could almost remember inviting them, enough so that seeing them there felt right.

“I’m your super - that has a double meaning - friend!”

The music cut out, and she and Barry piled off the stage to greet their guests in the audience.

“You two are pretty good,” Millie said, smiling at them, running her fingers along the brim of Joan’s hat. “You got another job lined up after this one?”

“Um.”

“If you don’t mind movin’ too far, you could always hit up Caput Mundi.”

Kara snorted, cheeks pink, but the giddy rush she felt after that compliment washed away like it had never been there at all when she heard gunshots outside.

“Stay put,” she said, at the same time as Joan, who snatched up her hat and dashed for the exit, Joan on her heels, pulling on her coat.
It took a split second and a communicative glance to Barry - *are we staying put? hell no* - before they raced after them.

They got out there just in time to see both women take a slug to the chest.

Kara’s heart definitely stopped. She didn’t know how long for; probably long enough that she should have been dead.

*Am I dead?* she asked herself, watching Joan and Millie rise back up off the pavement to the faraway wail of sirens.

“Can’t you play nice for five minutes?” Joan asked, pulling out her own guns and pointing them square at Cutter Moran’s head.

“No way in hell are you marrying her,” he replied, holding his Tommy gun on Digsy while reaching for a pistol to point at his daughter. “I don’t wanna hurt you - ”

“You hurt me when you shot to kill at the woman I love.”

*Bang!*

Joan’s shot was Holliday impressive, and he dropped the pistol - safety still on, thankfully - when her bullet glanced off the grip. “You,” she crooned, “you think you’re a lion, out in the wild - you need to be tamed.”

“And ooh!” Red and blue lights reflected off Millie’s hair, flashed deep in her dark eyes, glinted off the hefty pistol she pulled out from her thigh holster. “Can you hear the sirens? Imma put you under like novocaine.”

Cutter’s right hand man - familiar, too, in a way Kara couldn’t place before he fired a shot at Joan - took a slug to the thigh from Millie’s Glock and went down.

*Boys are like rules, they were made to be broken. Boys are like rules, they were made to be broken.* Grinning ear to ear, standing back to back, both girls proceeded to shoot guns out of hands without ever drawing blood, in perfect synch. *Girls are like guns, you better run when they’re smokin’. Boys are like rules, they were made to be broken.*

Finally, the police car that had been threatening its arrival for an entire verse pulled up, and out hopped someone Kara definitely hadn’t been expecting to see in the eleventh hour.

“That’s your sister,” Barry hissed.

“I know!”

*Boys,* sang the cop who probably wasn’t actually Alex Danvers, slamming the heel of her shoe into the back of a Foss crony’s knee, *are like rules, they were made to be broken.*

She tossed spare cuffs across the street to Millie and Joan southpaw, and like that, it was all over, the three of them moving like a well-oiled machine, apprehending gangsters left, right, and center, harmonizing, *Girls are like guns: you better run, run, run, run when they’re smokin’! Boys are like rules they were made to be broken.*

Snapping cuffs around her father’s wrists, Joan rasped, *You better run.*

Kara was applauding before she actually knew what she was doing, and by the time she figured it
out, not only was it too late to take it back, but she didn’t want to.

“That,” she breathed, “was the coolest freaking thing I have ever seen, and I’m from a planet with sentient rainbows.”

“No kidding?”

“No kidding.”

Everyone present who’d participated in what could’ve been a massacre was stowed safely in the back of a cop car, leaving a shingle-bobbed Alex doppelgänger to flash her badge at the two witnesses.

“Detective Hunter, ACPD Mob Unit.” She tucked the badge away, cool as can be. “You got questions.”

“Um. Yes.”

“What just happened?”

“I told you, Ms. Danvers,” Joan said, kissing Millie on the cheek and tossing her father’s knife up and snatching it out of the air. “We had it all under control.”

“We’ve been planning this sting for a month. You’re lucky Commissioner Boon okayed us moving things up, or else you’d’ve had one cross kitty-cat comin’ after you.”

Kara tried really, really hard not to make the clear and present connection between the police commissioner who had just shut down two all-powerful gangs and her boss - ex-boss? boss? it was a lot to process - who she really, really missed.

“You don’t say.”

“These two,” Detective Hunter said, expression neutral but eyes brimming with pride, “masterminded the whole thing. I never met two people who could handle themselves better under pressure.”

“I bet.”

“Y’know, it woulda been nice if our geezers hadn’t gone all Sailles, Bienville Parish, but we’re gonna be just aces.”

“Yeah?”

Up above, the sky rumbled and split open, tiny raindrops sprinkling down on them. Joan and Millie wrapped their arms around each other, foreheads pressed together.

“Yeah.”

And just like that, the street was clean, free of any and all signs of crime.

“We should hang out more when people’s lives aren’t on the line,” Barry mused.

It was really pouring now - cats and dogs, buckets, every possible confusing Earthling idiom for heavy weather - but it wasn’t bad.

“Hey, Barry?” Kara said slyly.
He turned to look at her, eyes bright. “Are you thinking what I’m thinking?”

“Well, I’m not thinking.” Kara shrugged one shoulder, incapable of repressing her grin any further, and executed an impressive pirouette, considering her weighted, waterlogged skirts. “I’m singing in the rain!”

Barry cackled.

“Just singing in the rain! What a glorious feelin’, I’m happy again.” Kara splashed up to a car and perched on the hood, offering her hand, drawing him in.

“I’m laughing at clouds.” he sang back, caving to the melody and her infectious smile, “so dark up above. The sun’s in my heart, and I’m ready for love.”

He managed to get enough momentum to jump up onto the car next to her, plopping down on the roof and sprawling back for a faceful of precipitation. With a giggle, Kara sprung up, then fell back beside him.

“Let the stormy clouds chase everyone from the place. Come on with the rain,” they belted, “I’ve a smile on my face!”

Barry hopped off the car, and lifted Kara down off of it. He couldn’t quite keep his grip, what with the soggy sequins covering her waist, and they both collapsed into a fit of laughter as he nearly dropped her on the asphalt. They managed to rescue the step, spinning down into a chorus line and kicking up great sprays of rainwater with giddy high kicks.

“I walk down the lane - ”

“With a happy refrain - ”

“Just singin’ - ”

“Singin’ in the - ”

The music cut out, replaced by tires squealing and water splashing, and then Kara found out what it felt like to be hit by a car.

Chapter End Notes

The songs used in this are:

Put A Little Love In Your Heart - Al Green
Happy/Sad - The Addams Family Musical (because More I Cannot Wish You is not a dynamic song and there were THREE A+ singers in that number who did not get to flex at all)
It doesn't really have a name, but it's from Wynonna Earp and it worked
Singing In The Rain - Singing In The Rain

I considered having Somewhere That's Green from Little Shop Of Horrors, Mr. & Mrs. Smith from Smash, Origin Of Love from Hedwig and the Angry Inch, and There Once Was A Man from Pajama Game as the romantic ballad moment, but none of them were cooperating.
Don't worry, everything is fine! Kara lives! Everybody lives! I wouldn't give you bulletproof WLW if I was going to kill superheroes with a car accident.

Also, this is the picture I based Cutter's photograph off of. This is a gifset with that same outfit. This is what an improperly aligned carbon print looks like. This is Marlene Dietrich, looking fabulously futch and making my wee gay heart flutter.

I doubt this was worth the wait, and I'm sorry you had to wait for so long. Thank you for putting up with me!
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

What Lena sees during the 3x17: Duet crossover event.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Kara.” Alex touched her sister’s cheek, her neck - she was still warm. Still breathing. “Kara, are you okay?”

Lena’s breath shook. “She’s alive. Who the hell was that?”

“High-level reality-warping interloper,” J’onn said. “We were entrusted with him since we handled Mxyzptlk.”

“And now he’s going after Barry Allen.” Winn raised the tiny silvery thing, jaw tight. “The fastest man alive.”

“Barry?”

“Yeah.”

“Agent Schott, is that thing still functional?”

“Um. Should be. I didn’t see him tamper with it, and there’s no apparent damage.”

“Alex, assemble a team. You take Supergirl with you to Earth-1. Apprehend him, whoever he is, and bring our girl home safe.”

“Yes, sir.”

The base sprang into action, agents moving like ants. Lena couldn’t bring herself to put Kara down.

“Lena.” Alex tucked both blasters into her holster. “We’re going.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“J’onn, can you come, too?” Alex’s jaw ticked. “I - she’d want you there.”

“Until that intruder is captured, this case is my top priority.” J’onn laid a heavy, comforting hand on her arm and gently squeezed. “There’s nowhere else I’d rather be.”

Winn pushed the button; a silvery portal exploded into being.

They crossed through. Lena held Kara a little tighter through the transition, and her head fell onto Lena’s shoulder.
“- Supergirl?”

“Kara…” Barry’s eyes went dark. “What happened to her?”

“We don’t know,” J’onn said, “but whoever did it, has come to this world.”

One of the women, a pretty brunette in a striped blouse, said, “We should get her to the med bay.”

Lena followed, laying Kara out on one of the beds, watching as Alex helped apply sensors to her temples and attach an oxygen drip. She had her hands in tight claws around her upper arms, like she could squeeze out this crushing anxiety, like if she applied enough pressure, Kara would just miraculously wake up and be fine, and then everything would be fine.

“Her vitals are low, how long has she been like this?” the woman asked.

“A few hours,” J’onn said, voice tight.

“The being who did this said he’d been looking for her.” Lena almost choked on the lump in her throat. “I - I haven’t seen her in almost a month, and then the first thing that happens is she gets attacked by some interdimensional asshat in a three piece suit.”

“Yeah. Kara mentioned you were missing.” Barry offered a smile that was probably meant to be reassuring, but mostly just managed to look as busted up as Lena felt. “She’d be glad to see you, Lena.”

“Lena?” The woman - Caitlin - blinked, eyes going wide. “You’re Kara’s girlfriend!”

It hit Lena just then that she and Kara might not get to ever actually call each other girlfriends, and she closed her eyes like she could block the thought out. “Um.”

“Not… girlfriend?”

Lena gave a useless sort of shrug, bound by her promise not to spill those particular beans, peering at Alex out of the corner of her eye. She didn’t look happy.

“I’m sorry, I just assumed - the way she talks about you - ”

“Tell you what,” said the man in faded rocker blacks, “I know better than to mention the breakup between Barry and, um…”

The pretty woman in yellow closed her eyes, muttered, “H.R.,” and he stopped, apologized, but the shadow on Barry’s face made sense, and Lena saw one on her’s, too, connected the dots.

At least Iris and Barry had the chance to be together to break up, was Lena’s morose knee-jerk of a thought, immediately followed by Oh, god, I’m an awful person.

“I can’t leave Kara like this,” Alex said. “None of us can. Whatever happened, whoever the guy who did this was, we’re getting her back.”

“Someone did this?” Iris frowned. “What happened to her?”

“An alien prisoner escaped our custody. He did something to her, put her in some kind of a coma.”

“He said he had ‘to go chase down the fastest man alive,’” Lena said. “Which is you.”

“Someone had to warn you, so this didn’t happen again.” Alex’s fingers curled into Kara’s,
squeaking on the hospital bed’s padding.

“What does he want with Barry?” Iris asked.

“We don’t know.”

“Well, clearly, we’re talking about a breacher here.” Cisco spread his hands, tone deliberately light. “And if there’s one thing I can do, it’s find breached.”

Everyone separated, going off to do their part. Even J’onn parted ways, following Barry to work on hunting this breacher down, leaving Alex and Lena alone around Kara’s bedside.

“Girlfriend, huh.”

“It’s not like that.”

“Please, Lena, I’m not an idiot. Even people who’ve never met you can tell how Kara feels, so don’t lie to my face when my sister is comatose right in front of us.”

“She didn’t want to ruin your happiness,” Lena whispered. “She was so proud of you, of how hard you worked, of how far you’d come… She didn’t want to steal that from you. She asked me to keep it private; how could I say no?”

“She’s my sister.” Alex’s knuckles, clutching Kara’s hand, went white. “She could never ruin my happiness. I thought - I thought we were past hiding things from each other like this.”

“Secret keeping is a hard habit to break.”

“Yeah.” Alex swallowed hard. “Yeah, it is.”

There was a stretch of heavy quiet, long and cloying, and then Barry was being dragged into the med bay, suited up and unconscious.

Wally, the kid, was also in a suit, and he looked like he was calm only by fighting tooth and nail to stay that way; Lena hated that she could relate. “This guy. He said he wanted to teach Barry a lesson.”

“Black suit, red pocket square?”

“Yeah.”

“He got Barry.”

“Goddamnit.”

They hooked him up, too, and things didn’t look good. Things looked downright awful. They sat out a night’s tense vigil and things didn’t look any better in the morning.

“The Speed Force levels in Barry’s cells have been severely depleted, as has the amount solar radiation in Kara’s.” Caitlin looked up from her tablet, brows drawn together.

J’onn’s eyes went hard. “What does that mean?”

“They’re being drained.” She shook her head. “The guy who did this to them, I think he’s stealing their powers.”
“I can help,” Lena blurted. “With Kara, at least. I can rig up a solar lamp. That should help keep her powers. I don’t know anything about Speed Force, but if I get a look at your information on it, I might be able to build something for him, too.”

“Charge their batteries,” Cisco said. “I like how you think.”

“You might not say that, depending on whether or not there’s interdimensional copyright law.”

Cisco showed Lena down to his lab, the setup of which was remarkably like her own. “Someone will come down with our notes soon, but I have to go.”

“On the lookout?”

“Yes. Least I can do.”

The someone with the notes ended up being Iris, who Lena was pretty sure didn’t actually work there, but hey: information is information.

Information just so happened to also be scarce as hell.

“This is it?” Lena asked, looking up at Iris over the top of a very slim folder.

“This is it.” Iris let out a sigh and leaned into a wall, arms crossed tight against her ribs. “I hate not having more information on this. I mean, I investigate for a living.”

“Are you a detective?”

Iris shook her head. “Journalist.”

Lena laughed wetly. “So’s Kara. The only one who can get a quote from Supergirl.”

Now it was Iris’ turn to snort. “I had a blog about the Flash. That was my foot in the door.”

Somehow, Lena was smiling. She opened the folder, ripping through it, soaking in every bit of information she could, picking at the bits that could be useful, trying to tiptoe around every aching hint of humanity woven inextricably into every word. It didn’t work.

“You pulled him out?”

“Yes. Yeah, I did. We - we always looked out for each other. Always protected each other. He’s tried to rewrite time for me.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah.”

“So, then, why aren’t you two still together?” Lena’s brain caught up with her mouth and she cringed. “Sorry. You don’t have to answer that.”

“He tried to rewrite time by proposing to me, to save me. And that was the wrong reason.” Iris let out a shaky breath. “He didn’t want to marry me for the wrong reason. Saving me came first.”

“Saving you from what?”

“I’m gonna die in three months. A monster from the Speed Force is going to kill me.”
“I’m - I’m so sorry.”

“I’m not. I believe in Barry, I’ll always believe in him. If he says he’s going to save my life, then I trust him to do that.”

Lena nodded, playing with a creased corner of a piece of paper in the file. “Do you trust me to figure out a way to - to preserve his power? Keep him going? I know we don’t know each other, but - the way you feel about Barry is the way I feel about Kara, and I will never let her down.” Lena sighed, heavy, and pressed the file onto the table, jaw tight. “I won’t let them be swallowed up by this… thing, whatever it is. Either of them.”

“Yeah, Lena, I trust you.” Iris rapped her knuckles gently on the file, desk thudding dully, and gave a wan smile. “Hope that helps.”

“Me, too.”

It did. Lena managed to jerry-rig something similar to Kara’s lamps for the both of them, though neither were very pretty, and they responded right away. Alex’s white-knuckled fists loosened; Iris’ tense shoulders softened.

Then something happened, and their vitals were all over the place. The generators shorted, spewing sparks, and Lena ripped them off the beds so hard they cracked in her hands.

“Fire extinguisher!” Caitlin called.

While she ran off to grab one, Lena and Alex tugged off their DEO issue half-zips and smothered the tiny hazard fires the overloaded machines had caused. With that, the latest among many disasters, handled, Alex tossed their charred jackets in the trash and sank back down on the stool by Kara’s bed.

“I’m sorry,” Lena whispered, crossing her arms.

“It’s fine.” Iris’ voice wasn’t patronizing in its softness, but nonetheless, Lena felt small and raw. “It was a long shot, anyway, wasn’t it?”

“It should’ve worked - I don’t know what happened.”

“He’s using their powers,” Cisco shouted, charging in. “You have to come see this.”

Everyone followed over to a monitor currently tapped into the city’s CCTV. A man in a black three piece suit was using heat vision and super speed that crackled with lightning to rob Central City Bank.

“We gotta bring him in.”

Wally zapped up, suit zipped to his chin and an anxious set to his eyes. “No. Not we - me. I’m the reason Barry got whammied.”

“We win or lose as a team,” Cisco said firmly. “I’m coming with you.”

“Need a third?” Alex offered. “Lena works with Supergirl.”

“Do you want to?”

“No!” Lena shook her head. “I mean, no. I - I need to figure out something else for the two of them. If this guy can swallow up the charge straight through them, like a conduit, then there needs to be
"some other way to keep them powered up."

"I'll go," J'onn said.

"Look, J'onn, I respect this whole special agent situation you’ve got going on," Cisco started, "but this problem right here needs someone with…"

J'onn crossed his arms and shifted into his Martian skin, and you could actually hear minds being blown if you listened carefully.

"…with green skin and a sick-ass cape."

"Call me the Martian Manhunter."

"J’onn’s full of surprises," Alex said dryly. "Go get ’em, boss."

They went; almost everyone stayed to watch the fight, but Lena couldn’t stomach it. She went turned her back to the screens and went over her notes, S.T.A.R. Lab’s notes, everything she had. There had to be a way to close the damn circuit, to ground the energy transfer so no one could tap into it.

Ten minutes was all it took for them to apprehend the man in the suit. Ten minutes minutes of cold dread to knock him out and drag him back into a holding cell designed for metahumans.

Lena couldn’t help but feel a little outclassed and a lot impressed.

"What now?" Alex asked. "Because if we’re interrogating him, a) I have training and b) that smug face needs to be punched, and hard, for hurting my sister."

"Alex," said J’onn. The warning in his tone was gentle, but sure.

"Well, I’m talking to him." Iris pushed up out of her chair, jaw set. "I want to hear what he has to say for himself."

Lena looked over at them - at Iris, the tenacity in her eyes and the good in her heart - and said, "I’m going, too. If he tries to pull something, I’m fast enough to stop him."

*And strong enough to choke him out a little.*

They went down.

There he was, languishing in his cell like he was on a goddamn vacation. “Well, well, well, if it isn’t the two people I was hoping to visit me most, and one tagalong.”

Lena crossed her arms. *Tagalong. That sounds about right.*

"Fix them," Iris spat. "Now."

"Or you will find out just how unpleasant a boring little human can make having a physical body.” Alex’s eyes gleamed, hard and full of smoke.

“As intimidating as that is - and believe me, if I was wearing boots, I’d be quaking in them, this is all very impressive - I’m sorry.” He didn’t look very sorry. “I can’t.”

“If you want to be able to walk outside that cell ever again, you will,” threatened Alex, fists clenching. “I know eighteen ways to break you with just what’s inside those four walls.”
He laughed. The slick, smug, self-satisfied asshole had the audacity to laugh. “You don’t get it,” he chuckled, pushing up onto his feet. “You don’t understand, sister: that’s just not how it works. My powers don’t work that way.”

“How do they work?” Lena asked. Her arms were crossed stoutly over her chest, but she gripped her arm anxiously, the pads of her fingers digging into scar tissue shaped like links she wasn’t sure would ever fade. “What are you?”

“They’re the only ones that are in control of what happens now - them, and you.” His eyes sparkled, too giddy and too calm at the same time.

“Us?” Iris took a step closer. “What does that mean?”

“It means… how much do you love him, Iris?” He stepped closer to the glass, the toes of his shoes touching it where it was anchored into the floor. “And you, Alex, how much do you love her? Lena, how about you? Is your love strong enough to save them?”

Lena’s eyes flitted over to Alex, who looked vaguely ill and concretely ready to kill someone.

“You want Kara and Barry back from the world they’re in, you can go get them yourselves.” He stepped back, buoyant as a cloud. “You have that power!”

“How?”

“Ah! I can’t tell you.” He shrugged, hapless and careless. “Sorry, you - you’ve gotta figure that out for yourselves. Now, if you don’t mind, I’m gonna just chill in this wonderfully decorated little cell of yours. Bye, guys - good luck!”

Iris started walking away, fast as she could.

“Love will find a way!”

Alex cocked her fist, making to punch the glass, and Lena only just managed to stop her. She’d never seen Alex lose control like that.

“Save your energy,” she whispered, pulling Alex back. “We need you to save her.”

“Power of love and all that!”

The chamber sealed behind them as they left, and Alex jerked her fist out of Lena’s grasp at the base of the stairs.

“Me?” she spat. “Clearly, I wasn’t part of his little lesson plan.”

“You - you think you’re the tagalong?” Lena shook her head. “Alex - Alex, no. No one loves Kara more than you do.”

“He doesn’t seem to think so.”

“He’s an idiot wearing a pocket square, okay? He doesn’t know anything.”

“Kara doesn’t seem to think so.”

“What?”

“How could she keep this from me? How could she think I’d be anything but happy for her, finding
someone who thinks she hung the fucking moon? Does she - does she really think I’m that selfish?”

“No. Alex, she - she knew you’d be happy. She knew you’d be proud. She didn’t want to distract you from your own happiness, your own love, your own life independent of hers.”

“She’s my sister. Everything we are is connected.”

“Kara’s all about connections. She was the two most important people in my life, remember? Maybe she wanted to give you that degree of separation. So you could form a new connection.”

Alex sighed, raking her fingers through her hair. “Oh, god.”

“Come on. We should get back up there and see if they came up with something new.”

Lena started up the stairs, but Alex reached out and grabbed her hand.

“She loves you, too. You know that.”

“I know,” Lena said softly. “I know she does. But, family first, right?”

“You are family.” Alex squeezed her hand. “You’re her family, and you’re my family.” Pulling her into a hug, Alex asked, “You know how I know that?”

Wetly, Lena laughed. “How?”

“Because we’re keeping secrets to make each other happy, and that, Legs, is a Danvers-Zor-El family tradition.”

They made their way up to the top of the stairs and back to the med bay. Alex checked Barry and Kara over - no change. They joined Iris in her quiet vigil, sitting on either side of the beds. Alex held Kara’s hand and, after a moment, Lena’s.

“So we can get them out,” Iris said, fingers curling in Barry’s hair.

“According to him, yeah, but he doesn’t seem to know what he’s talking about.” Alex sighed. “How could we even do it, drag them out of a place that doesn’t physically exist for us?”

Lena, briefly, looked over at Iris, whose eyes widened. They knew it had been done before.

And then change happened. Big change.

They started seizing, monitors going wild.

Alex leapt into action, absorbing the readings, and there was a tight fear in her eyes that made Lena’s stomach drop.

Everyone else piled in, and Caitlin inspected everything, too, but she didn’t come up with any better news.

“I think we’re losing them.”

“Can you stop it?” J’onn asked.

“Not if I don’t know why!”

“What are we gonna do?” Wally asked, staring down at their pale, twitching hands.
“We need to go to whatever world they’re in.” Iris looked over to Cisco. “You can vibe us there. You did it before. You sent me into the Speed Force, you sent Barry and Wally into the future. You can do this, too.”

“What’s she talking about?” J’onn asked.

“Read me,” Lena murmured, watching Cisco grab his equipment. “It’ll work.”

“Come on,” he said, putting on his glasses and laying a hand on Kara and Barry, “just grab onto my shoulders.”

Alex and Iris raced to his side, but Lena hesitated.

“Give me your hand, dummy,” Alex said, voice thick. “We’re pulling her out together.”

Lena took her hand and completed the circuit, grabbing Kara’s shoulder. There was a flash of light, a bone-deep yank, and then they were in the middle of the street.

A car was smoking, upside down, half a block away, but whatever fire might have started was already put out by the torrential rain. The wreckage was unsightly, to say the least, but what ripped the floor out from under Lena and made her feel sick was the sight of Kara, smeared across the blacktop.

*Hit and run?*

Iris let out this godawful cry, screaming Barry’s name, falling to her knees on the wet pavement beside him.

“Kara..?”

Alex’s voice was weak, shaky, but her steps were sure as she started running. The rain splashed up around her calves, soaking through her tactical pants in seconds, but she didn’t care. Her sister was hurt.

“Hey, dummy,” she sniffled. “What the hell happened here? I thought I taught you to look both ways when you’re crossing the street.”

“Choreography didn’t call for a traffic check,” Kara said, voice grating wetly. “We - we were singin’ in the rain.”

“Well, I’ll check the forecast when we get home, okay? You can try again tomorrow.”

“There’s no time.”

Her voice was this awful wheeze, and Lena’s frozen feet began to move, albeit at a glacial pace.

“Bullshit, Kara. There’s always time. Okay? This isn’t over. You’re my sister, and I love you, no matter what.”

“No matter - no matter what.”

“Yeah. I’m happy when you’re happy, okay?” Alex sniffled. “I’m - I’m sorry I haven’t been a good sister lately. I’m sorry I haven’t been here, I’m sorry I haven’t supported you - ”

“Don’t say that. You were the best.”
“You didn’t want to tell me about Lena.”

Kara let out this wet, grinding noise. “Lena… You have to find her. Okay? You have to find her. Lillian - Cadmus still has her - ”

“No. No, they don’t, she’s here. Lena - Lena!”

Lena finally found her feet and started running. She hit the blacktop, puddles splashing up into her eyes, and took Kara’s hand. “I’m here. It’s okay, I’m here, we’re all here.”

“You - got out?”

“Yeah. Turns out I’m not so useless after all.”

Kara coughed. “You were never useless.”

Lena let out a sob, squeezing Kara’s hand in her own. “Come on. We have to get you home, okay? We’re gonna get you home, and you can really hold my hand.”

“I - I don’t know if I can walk right now.” Kara laughed, something rattling in her chest. “Gimme a minute.”

Alex rolled her eyes, wiped at the tears trickling out of them. “Lazybones.”

Kara reached up, hand shaking, and play-punched her in the shoulder. “I love you.”

Alex nodded, took her hand.

“Both of you. I mean it.”

Lena half-laughed, half-sobbed, “We love you, too,” and kissed her knuckles.

There was a flash of light, and that same jerk, and then they were back at S.T.A.R. Labs. Alex’s lips were on Kara’s forehead; Lena was still clutching her hand.

Now, though, Kara was holding on just as tight.

“Lena?”

Lena, in the real world, hadn’t started to cry until right now.

“Hey,” Barry murmured.

Iris’ voice was softer than words could express. “Hi.”

“They’re back!” H.R. whooped, arms thrown up in a victory V.

Alex leaned down, half-hugging Kara and half-pulling her upright, kissing her hair again. “You get one,” she said. “One pocket dimension mishap where you almost die. From now on, that happens, I’m getting you blackballed at every Chinese restaurant in National City.”

Kara laughed, one arm looping back to wrap around Alex’s shoulders and hug her, too. The other hand, though, stayed firmly clasped in Lena’s, thumb rubbing over the back of her knuckles. “I can’t believe it’s you.”

“Bravo! Round of applause! Standing O!” The man with the pocket square walked in, clapping like
a mom at a middle school play. “It was so good!”

Alex kept one arm around Kara. The other came up, blaster in hand, and fired on him.

“Hey! Watch it! I like this construct. And that performance! That was a helluva show. And you *three*, I guess your love really was strong enough after all. Beautiful.”

“Man, how did you get out of the cell?” Cisco shouted, pointing down the hall.

“Cisco. Do you really think that cell was just gonna, like, hold me?”

Cisco nodded, a little offended.

“No, I’m sorry,” Barry said, voice a little slurred, “what’s going on? Why did you do this to us?”

“I did it because I believe in the good guys.” He grinned, hands out. “I told you! When we first met? It was all to teach you a lesson.

“’Cause I see everything, and I saw two people with two broken hearts.”

“So,” Kara started, “the lesson was..?”

“*Love, Supergirl.*” Exasperated, he looked towards the ceiling, and a dreamy look crossed his face. “Love is about… letting yourself be saved. It’s not just about saving other people, even if you are superheroes.” He grinned. “Anyway, sorry if I had to, like, mess with you a little bit. I was just trying to get you to play the game, do the song and dance.”

“Are you from another dimension?” Lena asked. “Fifth, maybe?”

“Ugh! I’m so offended, I’m gonna put you in your own bubble universe to learn a lesson -”

Kara’s heat vision fizzed to life.

“Woah! Kidding, kidding, just kidding!” He sighed. “Yeah, you - you wouldn’t even understand where I come from.”

“Wait,” Barry said as he started to walk off, stopping him in his tracks, “I’m sorry, that’s - that’s it? You’re just gonna teach somebody else a lesson?”

“Yeah. That’s *exactly* what I’m gonna do.” He started walking backwards again and pointed at them all dramatically as he sang, “*Think of your fellow man, lend him a helping hand… Put a little love in your heart!*” and vanished into thin air.

“What the genuine fuck?” Lena muttered.

Kara’s fingers combed into her hair, and the tension leaked out of her body, just a little. “Hey.”

“Hey.”

“I know you said, when we got back, I could hold your hand,” Kara whispered, so low Lena could barely hear her, even with super hearing, “but I was wondering if I could kiss you right now.”

Lena leaned in and kissed Kara first, reaching up to cup the back of her neck.

It was fleeting, because her sister and her space dad were *right there*, but it made everything fall away. The time apart, the fear, everything awful facing them back home - it dissolved like superfine
sugar in hot tea, leaving something perfect and cozy that warmed them from within in its wake.

The clearance level difference between S.T.A.R. Labs and the DEO soon became clear, because Iris’ dad showed up, teasing Barry with the kind of familial ease that Lena was slowly getting used to, the more time she spent with her own people.

“Damn, Barry, I’d have paid money to see you singin’ and dancin’ around.”

Cheeks pink, Barry waved him off, but Kara was undeterred.

“Well, he’s been holding out on you, because Barry has an amazing voice.”

“He does!” Caitlin chimed in. “I’ve actually seen him sing.”

“What? You have?” Incredulous, Cisco pulled a face. “How have we not made a GIF of that?”

“Well, technically, I’m not even the only one here who can sing,” Barry retorted, grinning at Kara.

“Thank you, B.A.”

“What? I was talking about Kara.”

“She puts the Kara in karaoke,” Alex joked, and Kara shot Barry a look like A-ha! I told you!

Ceding, he put his hands up and leaned back, looking just over her shoulder at Iris, who joked, “Well, her name is Supergirl. It’s kind of implied - only thing she can’t do is what she hasn’t done yet.”

J’onn laughed softly. “We’d better get going. We have a world to protect, after all.”

As everyone said their goodbyes, Lena made a beeline towards Iris, who pulled her into a hug.

“Thank you.”

“Thank you.” She let out a soft sigh.

“Look out for her,” Iris said. “And yourself.” As she pulled back, her hands trailed down Lena’s arms, over the faint texture of the almost-faded scars left behind from the chains at Cadmus.

“Oh, that’s just - ” Lena shrugged. “Mommy issues.”

Iris laughed. “Tell me about it.”

“I will, though. Look after her. Look after all of them.” Lena spared a glance over her shoulder and, for a second, locked eyes with Kara. That warmth in her chest bloomed again, and she turned back around. “You look after him, too.”

“Always do.”

Lena couldn’t resist one last quick hug, or the realization that she was getting almost as huggy as Kara, before crossing the room to meet her.

Kara locked their fingers together as soon as she was near, beaming.

“So,” Barry said, a teasing grin on his face, “congratulations.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Kara’s cheeks were pink. “Are you and Iris gonna be okay?”
His smile shifted into something smaller, softer, and he said, “We’ll see.”

“As someone who spent the past twenty four hours with her,” Lena said, “things look good.”

Barry offered a shrug, and a hug, and then they departed.

Back at the DEO, things seemed almost exactly the same, right down to the panicked Winn chasing them down.

“‘The Daxamites - Mon-El - ’”

“What happened?”

“There’s another Daxamite on Earth,” Winn said, “and they’re coming for them.”

Chapter End Notes

I still haven't, like, watched any of The Flash?? so everything I know is from the Arrowverse wiki pages and this one, singular episode. And, like, the one where he came to Kara's Earth, but that has just him and no one else, so it doesn't super count.

Anyways, I hope you liked this chapter. It's honestly so short; I only had one page break and it didn't even really need to be there, so now it's just one long, anxious BlahBlahBlah... Feel free to give me conspiracy theories in the comments, or just yell at me for my poor writing/posting etiquette.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Set during 2x17: Distant Sun. Our heroines play catch up, and so does the past.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Strangely enough, the NCPD was already out looking for Mon-El.

Apparently, he’d been spotted, throwing tantrums, in a couple of places, and while a drunk, entitled white boy complaining and getting violent isn’t exactly news, one who punches a mailbox so hard it flies ten city blocks and breaks a traffic light is.

“Maggie says there’s nothing we can do,” Alex said, tucking her phone back into her pocket, “so we should just go home and meet her there. I mean! I should just go home and meet her there.” She grinned. “I’m gonna go wait at my girlfriend’s apartment until her shift is over.”

“Okay. Have fun, be safe, don’t do anything I wouldn’t do!” Kara called after her.

“Okay, I promise I’ll just sigh longingly and eat cookie dough ice cream while talking about how perfect she is!”

“Alex!”

“What? Cat’s out of the bag. It is my sisterly duty to tease you about your love life.”

Lena laughed.

“Hey, what’s so funny? You think you’re coming out of this unscathed?” Alex’s eyes twinkled. “Family means I get to make fun of you, too, Legs.”

Lena grinned. “I look forward to it.” After Alex left, her words sank in. “I’m not looking forward to it, am I?”

“No,” Kara agreed, giggling. “you’re really not. C’mon, you heard her.”

“Say she’s going to make fun of my weak gay ass? Yes, I did.”

“No, silly.” Kara reached up and tucked a lock of hair behind Lena’s ear, fingertips tracing the curve of her jaw. “Let’s go home.”

☆

They went home.

Took a shower - Lena washed off a month’s captivity and terror with Kara’s brown sugar body wash and stole her pajamas; Kara got her to wash her hair and hummed in the shower, not bothering to hide her sporadic checks that they were both still real and whole.
Curled up together in Kara’s bed, they ordered a disgusting amount of takeout. Kara picked at hers for a solid minute before Lena said something.

“You have to be starving,” she murmured. “What’s going on inside your head right now?”

“You got captured.” Kara set down her slice of pizza and drew her knees up to her chest. “I was on the phone with you. There was a scuffle, and then I heard you say ‘I can do this all day,’ and then the call ended. I thought you were okay. I got - I got sucked into the article I was writing. Snapper commended me on my work ethic. It got published, I came to find you, and - ”

Lena remembered her balcony breaking off. Her shoes, stuck in the pavement. Her office a total wreck.

“Oh, god, Kara - ”

“I was so scared.” Her voice was quiet and hoarse, and she fumbled for Lena’s hand. Lena took it, pressed it between her palms, and Kara gave a funny sort of shudder. “I was terrified, Lena, and the press was saying you were dead, no matter how much I fought it.”

“I’m okay, Kara.”

“You were trapped with your mother for so long, and no matter what I did, I couldn’t find you. Jess came back from her vacation to handle the company in your absence and she was a wreck the whole time, fighting with the board, fighting with lawyers. I was a wreck the whole time.”

“I don’t know how Mother shielded her base, but I got out. I’m okay!”

Kara’s shaking fingers ghosted over Lena’s forearm. Her skin was finally smooth again, and there was only the faintest hint of the shiny-tight pattern, but Kara’s eyes were preternaturally better than everyone’s.

“I couldn’t save you,” she whispered. “I wanted to, and I couldn’t.”

Lena pushed the box away and climbed into Kara’s lap, wrapping her arms around her. “You don’t have to save me all the time, remember?”

Kara hooked her chin over Lena’s head and hugged her back. “I know. I just - I want to protect you. I want to keep you safe.”

“Me, too.” Lena closed her eyes and tucked her face into Kara’s throat. “I got there in time to see the Music Meister whammy you. You just… dropped. Seeing you on that bed in S.T.A.R. Labs was horrible. It was like Parasite all over again, but I felt even more useless.”

Kara hugged tighter. “So, from now on, neither of us are going to run into danger and do stupid stuff that might get us hurt, like fighting armed assailants sent by an anti-alien cult alone, and both of us are going to let ourselves be taken care of. Deal?”

“Deal.” Lena planted a kiss over Kara’s pulse point, cheeks heating when Kara kissed the top of her head. “So, what say you we finish our food, and you tell me all about your weird bubble universe?”

Kara laughed, the rumble of it warm against Lena’s face. “Weird is right. You were there.”

“Is this an Oz joke? Like, my shoes were found in the wreck of a disaster, Wicked Witch of the East, ding-dong, da-da-da-da?”
“No. I mean, the people there were based off real people. People Barry knew, people I know. He got some enemies thrown in, but me… It was just people I missed, people I loved.”

“And musical numbers?”

“Of course.”

“And the car that hit you was a ’32 Ford Tudor 18, which means - ?”

“I was in a movie musical with the mob, yes.”

Lena grinned. “Awesome.”

They ate; they slept. Come morning, both felt better than they had in weeks, but they couldn’t revel in it, even over beignets and coffee. Kara had a press conference to prepare for, debunking Lena’s disappearance, and Lena had a company to take back.

Jess tackled her as soon as she set foot inside the office.

“Woah, hey, hi!”

“I hate corporate America,” Jess sniffled.

“I’m sorry you had to cut your vacation short. I know you and Liz were busy.”

“Are you kidding me?” Jess pulled back and stared Lena down, hard. “If I hadn’t come back, Dr. Luthor might have had a chance at retaking control of the company, and the aliens you set aside provisions for would’ve been captured or killed. I was happy to come in and play roadblock.”

“Oh, good, some of them got help.”

“Not many, since Ms. Danvers’ article seems to have put a stop to the registry kidnappings, but it was good press. A lot of people think you got…” Her voice dropped to a whisper. “Assassinated for being too openly pro-alien.”

“That’s the long and the short of it.”

Jess hugged Lena again, stretching to reach her in her stupid stilettos, and said, “I’m so glad you’re back.”

Lena surveyed her office. It was pristine, with a new balcony enclosed in glass that, upon further inspection, would prove to be bomb-proof, because you don’t get a job with L Corp doing things halfway. Her desk had been put back in place, and was covered - covered - in orderly stacks of papers, divided unevenly by a desk planter full of proud red blooms.

“Everything to the left of the gladioluses is everyone supporting you, the company, or a business endeavor, including new investors. Everything to the right is everyone we want to burn in hell, and who will probably self-immolate if they get a scathing response from the woman who rose from the dead to give it to them.”

Faintly, Lena asked, “Left from here, or left from the chair?”

“From the chair.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen so much good news in my life.”
She sat down and found three stacks of papers that required a firm and intimidating hand sitting to her right. Everything else was to the left, in towers so tall they threatened to topple.

“Thank you, Jess.”

“Any time, Lena.”

“If you can, please assemble a board meeting for this afternoon; I’d like to address this internally before the press conference.”

“Scheduled for four fifteen p.m.?”

“Kara called?”

“Added it to your Google calendar.”

Lena couldn’t help but smile, because Kara was editing her calendar. “Have flowers sent to CatCo for her, please.”

“Of course.” Jess started for the door, but paused before crossing the threshold. “Lizzie wants you to know she was considering earning jail time while you were missing if it meant, and I quote, ‘your pristine ass was still bouncing.’”

Snorting, Lena said, “Tell Lizzie to keep her hands out of cuffs, and I’ll be just fine.”

Jess’ cheeks went pink. “Of - of course.”

Lena put maximum effort into not drawing conclusions about her secretary’s sex life, and into getting through her mountain of papers.

There were letters from the children’s hospital and from the orphanages she donated to, written with varying degrees of fine motor skill - some from parents and employees, some from kids. There were investors she’d been courting who were now firmly in her court, new partners begging to fund or purvey her projects. There were thank you notes and printed-out emails from Neighborhood Watch associations that were looking for her.

There was one job application, from a person named Von who came from a planet called Cradle 9, who wanted to work in security. Their resume included a hopefully tongue-in-cheek work reference as Maaldorian slave labor.

That one, alongside the cards from the kids, meant the most of all.

Lena burned through the stack with an hour to spare before the press conference, which, with California traffic, was just enough time to get there and case out the joint before anyone showed up.

Well - almost anyone.

Kara, of course, was early.

“It’s so good to see you,” Lena whispered, knowing the sound would carry to her highly attuned ears.

“I neglected to mention something.”

“What?”
“So, you know how Snapper was really proud of my article? Well, not angry at it?”

“Yes.”

“Well, when everyone was saying you were…” Kara winced, skipping the word. “And I wasn’t, he was, um, significantly less not angry.”

*Oh, god. Oh, no.*

“I got fired.”

“Wait, then what are you doing here?”

Kara fingered her press pass with a half smile. “Citizen journalist. I’m here on my own behalf. And yours.”

“That’s so sweet!” Lena wanted to climb down off the makeshift stage and give Kara a hug, but that would be a whole ordeal, and Kara was very clearly trying to blend into the landscape - down to her camouflage outfit, blue-grey chinos and a tweed blazer that almost perfectly matched the trees a few yards away - so Lena restrained herself. “You didn’t have to do that.”

“Oh, please. Asking a question at this press conference means putting my name out there and helping… organize the narrative. Good career move.”

“You’re so cute when you strategize.” Out of the corner of her eye, Lena caught Jess moving, and said, slightly louder, “I’ll call you back after the conference. Let’s reschedule for this weekend.” Then she tapped her ear, because what’s not suave about pretending you’re wearing a Bluetooth earpiece, and turned to Jess. “Five minutes?”

“T minus four minutes, thirty seven seconds,” she replied with a crisp nod.

“Perfect.”

Four minutes and thirty seven seconds later, their little section of the park was overflowing with people. Cameras were flashing; journalists were jostling for position. There was so much happening that it felt like Lena’s ears were bleeding. She closed her eyes and, for just a moment, listened - *tha-thump, tha-thump, tha-thump, tha-thump* - before stepping up to the podium and beginning.

“Rumors of my demise have been greatly exaggerated,” she said, steeling herself against the clicking and flashing.

“Ms. Luthor! Ms. Luthor!”

“No questions until after the preamble,” Jess interjected. Hector, head of security, crossed his impressive arms and scowled into the crowd.

“L Corp is still operational. There are no plans to change leadership, no financial collapse, and no conspiracies. We are going strong, and we see no reason to suspect that to change. Our work continues, and our mission remains the same: to make National City, and the world, a better place.”

“Is it true you were kidnapped by a terrorist cell?”

Lena swallowed hard.

“What happened to your building?”
“Who tore off your balcony? Was it Supergirl, avenging her cousin after all your family’s done to him?”

“How did you survive the fall?”

“One at a time! One at a time!”

“To answer your questions in order, I was taken hostage by Cadmus. I was assisting in an investigation into their properties - they were using a loophole in company paperwork to siphon off L Corp funds to purchase property for labs and supplies; that loophole has been closed, and those assets are in the process of being seized - and when they caught wind of that, they weren’t pleased.

“In the attack in which I was taken, Cadmus agents used experimental weaponry to render me unconscious. That weapon, I assume, also caused the damage my building sustained, but it has since been repaired. No one tore off my balcony, and Supergirl has better things to do with her time than come after me for the sins of my family. I do not align myself with their causes or beliefs, and I have done all I can do to distance myself from their misdeeds.

“I was knocked out during the struggle. I don’t remember everything that happened, but I’m glad to hear I survived a thirty six story drop.”

“Snapper Carr, CatCo. Do you think your pro-alien policies are a smart business decision?”

“I think it’s more nuanced than that. There is a thriving population of aliens within National City, and that population is mimicked across the globe. These people contribute to the economy, contribute to society… I see no reason not to accept their existence, or their business. They’re people, plain and simple.” Seeing the stubbornness in that reporter’s eyes, Lena simplified: “Yes, it is a smart business decision, and it’s one I will never stop supporting.”

“What about giving away all your company’s money to take care of illegal intergalactic immigrants?”

“People can’t be illegal. Even non-citizens aren’t illegal. As for my donations towards the victims and potential victims of Cadmus, that’s just doing the right thing. My family has acted erroneously against aliens for years, and I’d like to start chipping away at that damage and make things better. Also, I would like to point out that, since its inception, L Corp has had policies in place to support terrestrial immigrants, and that the victims of these attacks were registered citizens of the United States.”

“What happened to you while you were in Cadmus custody?”

“Custody implies a caretaking arrangement. Next question.”

Someone stood, hand thrust up in the air, pen glinting in the sun.

Oh, Kara, I love you so much.

“Yes?”

“Kara Danvers, um, karadanvers.com. What more can you tell us about your corporate policies in regards to the registry, and alien citizenry in general?”

“In the face of this heightened Cadmus threat, L Corp will continue to sponsor endangered individuals. We are also proud to announce that, as of today, we have explicit language in our hiring policy not only welcoming alien applicants, but ensuring a safe work environment. The greatest gift in all of this is the chance to learn about other civilizations, the advancements they’ve made, the
adaptations formed in other cultures, and L Corp wants to be a part of protecting that legacy. Whether you are a scientist from Uxor or an accountant from Ysmault, L Corp is hiring and your work will be valued."

There was a shrill whine, and then an explosion.

_Goddamnit._

Lena pushed Jess down, behind the podium, then stood back up and stared out at the source of the blast, smoke rising up behind her. “Whoever you are,” she shouted, “whoever sent you, you don’t scare me!”

Through the scramble of fleeing bodies and plasma discharge fumes, Lena could barely see the shooter, but she could tell this:

The shooter didn’t carry a gun.

Another thin whine filled her ears, and his freaking eye - eye patch - began to glow as his weapon charged.

He didn’t fire at her, though, but just above her head. The blast didn’t hit, and firm hands gripped her waist, scooping her up and soaring her out of danger’s path.

“What - ? Kara!”

“So, I know we said take it easy on the rescuing,” she joked, voice tight, “but you can’t Galaxy Girl yourself.”

“Thank you.”

“I’m going to head back, protect the civilians.” Kara kissed her temple and zoomed off.

Lena stripped out of her clothes - actually quite nice ones, too, a deep green sheath dress and a black suit jacket that made her look business formal scary - and got her costume on in less than a second before launching herself seventeen city blocks back into the fray.

The attacker had Kara pinned to the stage, the two of them locking laser eyes - giving the straggling reporters time to run. Of course, there were only two or three of them in range, and it was only fair that Lena got to save Kara that afternoon, too, so her landing wasn’t a slick three point pose on the ground.

It was the sole of her foot rearranging his face for better arch support and knocking him out cold.

“Remember how I’m supposed to let myself be saved?” Kara asked, blinking away the residual heat in her eyes.

“Don’t tell me you gave me this one.”

“Oh, Rao, _no_, you earned it. I was just going to say that, if me being saved means I get to watch you kick the crap out of a great hulking space lizard twice your size, I’m going to get into a lot more trouble.”

Lena really wanted to kiss the impish grin off Kara’s face, but they had an arrest to make.

Still: priorities.
Lena bounced over to the stage, landing carefully, and found only the faintest of electrical scorch marks where Jess had been huddled.

“Good going, Livewire,” she murmured.

“What was that?”

“Nothing!”

According to Winn, the assailant was one of a race of bounty hunters called Amalaks. This one, in particular, had a bounty on Kara’s head.

A hefty one. One that made the Luthor fortune, plus the Wayne estate, look like pocket change.

“For that kind of bounty, every low life killer in the universe will be headed this way to take their shot.”

“Oh, that’s fine. I’ll just take ‘em out, one by one.”

“That won’t stop them coming, though, and who knows if whoever issued the kill order has access to other universes. Or if we have enough cells.”

“Fair.”

“I could pretend to kill you,” Lena offered. “Use the quartz crowns to fund rescue missions off world, bring separated families back together, help relocate aliens who don’t feel safe on Earth.”

“And risk Galaxy Girl’s reputation? I don’t think so.”

“No,” Alex said. “No, to all of this, because a) a series of battles with interstellar bounty hunters is a terrible way to ensure public safety and b) we know who issued the bounty.”

“We do?”

“According to Maggie, we have an old friend in police custody.”

☆

Mon-El pouted like a child in the NCPD reinforced holding cell, legs splayed out so he ate up almost all of the space.

Kara, arms crossed and glasses square, stared him down through the bars. “So. You and your parents put a hit out on me. Why?”

“They - oh, of course they would.” He groaned, scrubbing at his overgrown stubble. “I never put out any hit, okay? I don’t want anything to do with Daxam. That’s why I’m running away.”

“Getting drunk at the bar and destroying public property, terrifying civilians - that doesn’t sound like running,” Kara said, stepping in closer. “That sounds like a cry for attention. And we can’t afford the attention you might get.”

Something about her stance, about the whole situation, felt a lot like watching Iris in the basement of S.T.A.R. Labs. Lena had been lingering by the door, too afraid to come any closer, because she really could not afford the headache today, but that flash of connection made her want to throw herself between Kara and the glass, between Kara and Mon-El. She resisted, if only because Alex was already there, doing just that.
“My parents want me to rebuild Daxam with them, but there’s something missing. They said there was another Daxamite on this planet, they released a distress call two or three days ago. I haven’t been keeping track.”

“And you’re looking for this person?” Alex asked, gaze flickering.

“No! They’re not in charge of me. I don’t want to be Prince of Daxam, I don’t want to go back to the way things were, I don’t want to rebuild! I just want to be free.”

“Your freedom comes at the cost of lives, Mon-El - Kara, don’t.”

Kara pushed forwards against Alex’s hand, eyes burning. “You have a chance, here, Mon-El! You don’t want to go back to the way things were? Your people are alive! You’ve been given the greatest gift, a chance to start over, and you’re throwing it away on some tiny, twisted misapplication of the word freedom. How can you even ask for freedom? You’ve never been anything but free, riding around on the backs of literal slaves, and yet you sit here, ruining things, and saying this is your escape?”

“I never asked for slaves!”

“Kara - ”

“People have died, Mon-El! Your people! And you don’t care!”

“Kara, stop.”

“Your planet isn’t dead, Mon-El, you can go back! I can never go back!”

“Kara!”

Her eyes had reached their boiling point. Lena ran over and put one hand over Kara’s eyes, stopping the heat vision from damaging police property. The other came to rest on her back, rubbing in little circles. “It’s not okay. I know it’s not okay, and I can’t begin to understand how you feel right now. But we’re here, okay? You’re not alone.”

Kara’s eyes stopped glowing, and Lena went to pull her hand away. Kara stopped her, reaching up and touching her wrist. She kissed the palm of her hand - warm, but not injured - and laced their fingers together, holding on tight. Without having to look, Lena knew Alex had her other hand and spared a moment to be grateful that Kara, even through the loss of her whole world, had people to support her.

Back to him, without so much as chancing a look, she said, “You’ve been given a position of power. Power is freedom. If you don’t want things to be the way they were, go back and change them. Abolish slavery. Redesign your planet’s governmental structure. You have the power to do that. As… prince, it’s not only your right, but your duty, to govern your people and guide your sovereignty into a better future. Go home, Mon-El, and give your whole species a fresh start.”

He stood, and Alex pulled a blaster on him.

“What?”

“Not so fast. We’re taking you to the DEO. If there’s another Daxamite on this planet, we need to be appraised of the situation immediately.”

He groaned. “Do I have to?”
“Yes.”

“Are you putting me back in a cell?”

“If you don’t cooperate.”

He put his hands up and sighed. “I’ll cooperate.”

Alex tilted her head, beckoning, and Maggie came in to unlock the door. As soon as it was open, Mon-El pushed it, hard, and sent her sprawling.

“Maggie!”

Kara started after him, and Lena did, too, but Alex grabbed her arm from where she knelt at Maggie’s side.

“Don’t fight him,” she said, voice hard even as she pleaded. Why was she pleading? “You’ll get hurt.”

“I’m covering Kara, I’m covering the cops.” Lena shrugged out of her grip. “I’ll be fine. Maggie?”

“All good. Tell Kara to break his nose for me.”

“Will do.” Lena started to run. She vaulted up onto the wall, careening into the open hallway between the cells and the office bullpen where Kara, still in uniform, was being pinned by her cape.

“I don’t want to hurt you, Kara!” Mon-El insisted. “I - ”

“If you say you love her, I may be sick.”

Lena closed her eyes and launched herself at him, barreling into his exposed flank and bowling him over, face down; she could hear his nose crunch. Still, he squirmed, reaching back to jab his elbow into her throat, and she didn’t see it coming, got the breath knocked out of her.

Still, she stayed on top of him, even as she gasped for breath, and pinned that arm to his back. Forcing herself to turn her ears all the way on, she focused on him, on his breathing, on the blood moving through his veins, on the electricity in his nerves.

Left arm coming up.

She caught that elbow before it hit her. With a twist and a push, she had him all but immobilized, and then she heard the swish of his pants as he aimed a kick at the back of her head. She dodged, switching both his wrists to one hand so she could catch his calf and yank it up higher.

He let out a wounded yelp. “Why are you hurting me?”

“You started this fight, Mon-El. Don’t complain that you’re losing.”

“Not lost, then.”

Mon-El reared back, flipping so he had her pinned, her head slamming into the tiled floor. There was a whoosh, and Mon-El buckled under a blow to the gut. Lena twisted her face aside, dodging as his took punch after punch.

When he finally lifted off her, it wasn’t under his own power. Kara’s soft hand gripped hers, pulled her off the floor.
“You okay?”

“I’m good.” Lena opened her eyes, blinking them clear, and saw Kara peering down at her. Her hand came up to cup Lena’s cheek, and she leaned into it, feeling the warmth of her skin even through the fabric of the cowl. “Is he out?”

“Not for long. C’mon, we need to move.”

Alex was waiting with cuffs and transport. She bound his wrists with a satisfied cut to her mouth, then threw him in the back of their van. “Hop in.”

Kara climbed into the backseat, ready to knock him out again at a moment’s notice, then offered Lena her hand.

“Nuh-uh.”

“What? Why?”

“You have to get back to the office.” Alex shrugged. “Corporations don’t run themselves.”

“Shit. I’m going to have board members crawling up my ass - fill me in if you need me.”

“When we need you,” Kara promised, kissing her softly, fingers tender as they cradled the back of her head. “Stay safe.”

“You, too.”

☆

Lena changed in her office bathroom, shinnying down through the vents after landing on the roof. When she got out, Jess was there, nervously pacing.

“Ms. Luthor!”

“I’m fine. Just. Washing up.”

“I - I knocked half an hour ago.”

“...I fell asleep?”

Jess almost said something, then changed her mind. “The board is coming.”

“I thought you hadn’t scheduled a meeting yet.”

“I hadn’t.”

Oh, shit.

“How long do we have?”

“No more than seven minutes.”

“Lucky number seven, okay.” Lena sighed, smoothing her hair and finding a tiny chip of floor tile still tangled in there. She plucked it out and flicked it into her trash can, where it hit with a ping! and settled into anonymity. “We can handle this.”

It turned out they only had three minutes until the board members had all arrived. There were ten
besides Lena, six holdouts from Lex’s era she couldn’t quite shake and four who she’d brought on herself, who were in her corner.

Mr and Mrs. Studwick had met through the board under Lionel and, together, were responsible for about 8% of the company’s holdings; they never really took Lena seriously because, unfortunately, they remembered her as a tiny girl, freshly indoctrinated into the family, clinging to Lionel’s trousers and a teddy bear as big as her torso.

Ms. Erika del Portenza was a 5% shareholder who represented an Italian bank, distantly related to some countess or other, and Lena had never been sure whether the flirtation between her and Lex was for business or pleasure, but after his arrest, it became clear that, whatever the nature of their relationship, it would endure even through Cell Block X.

Mr. Rose, who claimed 2% of all L Corp shares back when they were Luthor Corp and another 1.5% when Lex had to hand over his holdings as part of his sentencing, insisted that his proudest achievement was meeting Margaret Thatcher - enough said.

Dr. Van Nifterik was a Swedish scientist who had worked closely with the R&D department until his technical retirement in 1999, but he still kept his seat on the board and was about as willing to relinquish it as a dog is a bone.

Dr. Specht, a bubbly woman from Austria, was probably the most stubbornly anti-alien person Lena had ever met. Lena had hated her before finding out she wasn’t entirely human, but now that she knew that about herself, it wasn’t the cold principled hate of someone who knows you’re in the wrong. It was the hot, sick, fearful kind of hate you have towards someone you know wouldn’t think twice about hurting you in the worst way they could imagine.

Luckily, there were still the four she could trust. Mr. Foerstner was someone she’d met through the organization of her TED talk, and when three prior board members had died - car crash; awful thing - she’d managed to bequeath him their shares before any real power vacuum could develop over that 10%.

Dr. Scriven was the latest in a long line of research analysts whose family had been linked to the Luthors through bitter rivalry for years. One drunken chance encounter when Lena was twenty-two in a bar in Alsace-Lorraine, with such standout moments as hair-holding, Tasing a too-ardent stalker, and finishing three bottles of Glennmorangie, had resulted in an airtight business relationship that, due to just how shamefully drunk they’d gotten, remained resolutely business. Beyond their many similarities, both took deep pleasure in overhauling the Luthor name, though for very different reasons, which meant, no matter what, Pippa was in Lena’s corner.

Pía Aikema was a nuclear astrophysicist who had developed a massive Twitter following after three pro-vaccine, pro-alien, and pro-welfare rants had overloaded the site’s servers in 2012; she’d bought 3% of the company through crowdsourced funding on top of 2% she’d purchased with her own cash.

Loretta Waters had been poached from Lord Industries, where she’d served as the head of the Legal department. She’d survived three company hostage situations and won every suit she’d ever been put in court to prosecute, including a harassment case against her boss. Also, she’d punched Maxwell Lord in the face twice on the front steps of National City’s courthouse. Lena had brought her on while the blood was still dripping from his nose; she sat with 1% of the company’s holdings because she wouldn’t take any more of Lena’s.

All of them were waiting for her, sitting around the massive oblong table with their assistants looking utterly terrified.
“So good of you to schedule this meeting,” Lena said in lieu of a more polite greeting. “Here I was, thinking I’d have a moment to land before launching back into this. Before we begin, no, my 64% share in the company is not for sale. As you can see, I am still alive and still in charge.”

“What you’re doing with your position is unconscionable,” spat Specht. “This company’s money should not be going to those diseased - ”

The room, previously entrenched in bitter silence, erupted in a savage roar. Lena closed her eyes, blocking out the sound and counting to four. By three, she’d managed to get her hearing back under control. On four, she let out a shrill whistle and clapped her hands hard enough to sting.

They fell silent.

“Doktor, for the seven hundred and thirty sixth time: this company will not tolerate bigotry, in any form. I don’t care if the person in question is from Mars or from Gotham - within the walls of this building, and within your functions as a representative of this company, you will treat them with respect.”

“You aren’t prepared for this kind of authority,” Genevieve Studwick crooned. “Especially after this… ordeal.”

“After my mother kidnapped me for offering help, out of my own pocket, not company funds, to those most in need of it, you mean?”

Mrs. Studwick swallowed like she’d tasted something sour rising in the back of her throat.

“After my mother kidnapped me - for the second time, might I add - I see more clearly than ever that this is the right thing to do. I am the CEO. I am the majority shareholder. If you don’t like the direction in which I’m taking this company, sell your shares and get out.”

Mr. Studwick bristled. “Now, Lena - ”

“In this room, you can address me by Ms. Luthor. I won’t be spoken down to.”

The sunlight burned on her back through the window, and Lena had never felt stronger. She’d never been so calm in facing the board before.

“Let me repeat myself, so I can be excruciatingly clear.” Her voice was black ice, insidious and lethal and cold. “I am in charge. If you don’t like how I spend my own money, if you don’t like the internal policies I set forth, if you don’t like my political stances, you can either try to respectfully change my opinion or get the hell out.

“And it seems none of you grown adults are capable of the former.”

Erika crossed her lovely arms, dark eyes flinty and hard. “Ms. Luthor… think of the consequences. Your politics are your own, but this company has a reputation to maintain, and you will cut a lot of ties going down this path.”

“Ms. Del Portenza, I have been sawing at those ties for months. I can only hope that this is the final straw.”

Pía leaned back in her chair, olive green hair shining against olive skin, and drummed her fingers. “There are plenty of people who would jump onboard with a pro-alien corporation of this caliber, by the way. More than enough to counterbalance, and even outweigh, the loss of all six of you and your contacts.”
Loretta crooked her fingers at her assistant, an intern with slowly closing snakebite piercings. He retrieved and opened her suitcase, setting it down on the table facing her before retreating. She smiled. “Thank you, Seth. Now! I have taken great personal and professional pleasure in drawing up multiple contracts that should settle this matter quite neatly. Any and all dissenters can sell their shares; they’ll be put in trust and then sold off again to current employees or new prospective board members, and you can wash your hands of this whole affair.”

Lena grinned. “Board members, this is the tipping point. Get behind me or get out; I don’t have time for this bullshit anymore.”

Mr. Rose was the first to cave, a fleshy red hand with hairy knuckles reaching out and snatching a contract. “I want 7% more return on my shares,” he said after reading it front to back. “And I want to keep my jet.”

“Mr. Rose, with 7% more on the sale of your shares, you’ll be able to pre-order next year’s model. The plane stays.”

He signed, and that was the first domino. From there, things snowballed, pens flying, pages flipping, until only Del Portenza and Van Nifterik were left. Looking Lena dead in the face, Erika’s neat burgundy nails shredded the document like tissue.

“I will not be ousted from this company,” Van Nifterik drawled. “I have sat on this board for decades, longer than you’ve been alive. You can’t throw me out.”

“Actually,” Dr. Scriven said, “you currently hold 1.5% of the company. Even without the trust, the Board collectively maintains 70% of L Corp. We most certainly can.”

“And we most certainly will.” Lena walked around the table, collecting Van Nifterik’s contract and Erika’s shreds. Standing behind her, Lena clicked Erika’s pen twice, then crumpled it up with the paper and threw it out. “Your termination papers will find you at your home address in two to three business days. I hear the severance package is quite nice.”

Del Portenza pushed up from the table, eyes flashing, and into Lena’s space, towering over her and looking down her long nose with a heavy set to her lips. “You will regret this. I will ensure it.”

“As you will regret threatening me in my own house. Jess, have her removed. Through the front exit.”

“Yes, Ms. Luthor.”

When the hubbub finally settled, ousted members long since fled, Lena sat back down at the head of the table and let out a satisfied sigh. “I was thinking an additional ten shares per employee, with an extra two for every year they’ve been employed; that should handle the scope of the good doctors’ involvement, as well as Mr. Rose’s. The approximate value of the Studwicks’ holdings, and Ms. del Portenza’s, will go into trust for three thoroughly vetted board members. Feel free to submit candidates; I encourage it. I’ll be putting in my own - is everyone free at some point next week? We should put this to a vote as soon as possible.”

“Three? We need an odd number, so there’s always a tiebreaker.”

“The fourth is already in this room, so let’s put it to a vote now. Jess?”

Jess’ eyes widened. “Ms. Luthor?”

“In my absence, you served well as my stand-in. You always set me straight, you know how to run
this company, and you’re smarter than everyone who just left this room combined.” Lena shot her a soft, grateful smile over her shoulder before turning to the assembled board members. “All in favor of Ms. Wang becoming a member of the board?”

All five hands went up.

Sensing hesitation, Lena said, “If you decline this position, it will not effect your current employment. At all. This is supposed to be a boon, not a burden.”

“I - I’ll take it, Ms. Luthor, but before we set this in stone, I think we need to bring up your press conference one last time.”

“Um. Of course.” Lena sat, shoulders suddenly, ineffably, rigis. “You have the floor.”

“If we want this to be an alien inclusive company, I think we need aliens on the board.”

“Great minds.” The stiffness in Lena’s back melted away. “Who did you think I was going to submit for approval?”

☆

There were days when Lena really liked being a superhero.

Today was one of them.

She’d given Georgie a day off from driving her around town in part so she could run across rooftops, but mostly because his husband was pissed that he’d been near the alien attack in the park, and they deserved some time together to recoup. He’d resisted, but when Frankie had yelled at him, he’d caved with the caveat that Lena had to get home safe.

She gave him her solemn oath, then suited up, scrambling across the city skyline to stop three muggings, an armed robbery, and a would-be bomber.

He hadn’t even finished building the bomb yet, thankfully; she’d heard the distinctive thud of plastic explosives, gone to investigate, and found a shitty little bomb shop in someone’s garage.

“Garages,” she had said, frog-marching the man into police custody, “are for car maintenance and productive projects, not demolition derby for domestic terrorists.”

The city seemed relieved to have Galaxy Girl back, to hear the evening news tell it, and she was relieved to be back, both in action and on Kara’s couch, under her blankets, eating the biggest bowl of tomato soup she could get her hands on.

The focaccia it came with was warm and a little greasy, and she had never been more thankful for Kara’s takeout menu drawer.

Her phone, however, was less thankful for the olive oil smeary fingerprints its screen received when she accepted a call from Kara.

“I’m grounded,” she whined.

“What?”

“Alex is sending me home. There’s a bounty on my head and I’m bad at resisting the urge to punch Mon-El, so I’m coming home early. Winn and James are going to join us for an impromptu Game Night, if that’s okay?”
“Kara, it’s your apartment. You do what makes you happy.”

“Yeah, but you’re already there, you had your board meeting - how did that go, by the way?”

“Amazing. If all board meetings were like that, I would actually like being a CEO.”

Kara laughed softly. “You’re so cute. I’m glad.”

“Come home,” Lena said, sparks going off in her chest that she could say that to Kara, “and I’ll be waiting to tell you all about it.”

Kara got there in an hour. Lena would have worried more if she hadn’t known about the Supergirl ban; as it was, she greeted Kara at the door with a deep kiss and a deeper hug.

“Hi,” she murmured, nose brushing against the tip of Kara’s.

“Hi.” Kara kissed her one more time, arms draped warmly over her shoulders, before pulling back to smile down at her. “So, board meeting and takeout.”

“I got you the chili you had circled on the menu for that soup place.”

“And cornbread?”

“And cornbread, and garlic bread, and the focaccia is the size of a house and a half, so you can have some of that, too.” Lena pulled away and dragged Kara towards the kitchen.

Kara’s grin deepened, and she pulled Lena into her arms, walking her up to the counter. “You’re my favorite.”

Cheeks pink, Lena said, “Right back at you, though I revoke that title if you don’t use a spoon.”

“I don’t need to use spoons, Lena,” Kara decreed, hooking her chin over the top of Lena’s head. “I am a spoon.”

“If you drink chili, Kara, I’m serious, I’m - ” Lena paused, a frown tugging at her lips. “I’m going to - ”

Kara’s grin was practically audible. “Take your time.”

“I’m going to sew actual buttons onto all your shirts. No more snaps. Once you rip one off, it’s out of commission.”

“Oh, i zhor, that sounds less like retaliation and more like an excuse to see me without a shirt.”

Kara’s voice was richer, softer when she spoke Kryptonese, and Lena’s brain blanked out for a moment. “Tell that to your secret identity,” she finally said, snatching up a plastic spoon and jabbing it into the chili while definitely not thinking about Kara in a busted shirt, just wandering around, comfy.

“Until the hit’s handled, there is no secret identity.” Kara sat, breaking the embrace but leaving a hand on the small of Lena’s back. “All Danvers, all day.”

Bracing her hand on Lena’s knee, Lena stretched over to kiss her on the cheek and said, “Sounds like fun.”

“Yeah?”
“Yeah.”

Kara’s fingers curled into the fabric of Lena’s dress, knuckles grazing the curve of her waist, and she made a big show of picking up her spoon and taking a bite with it. Lena’s mouth twisted around a giggle, and she covered it with a hand. As she started curling into Kara’s shoulder, Kara pulled her in, and they just sort of nestled together.

“Nice jacket, by the way,” Lena said after a while. She gave the pink leather hem a gentle tug. “Steal it from your sister?”

“Alex doesn’t believe in pink. It’s an imaginary color. It’s between violet and fuchsia, but it doesn’t exist as a midpoint between them.” Kara rolled her eyes. “According to the color spectrum filtered through Earth’s atmosphere and visible to human eyes, that is.”

“Wait. That explains Slavers’ Moon! I thought I was just hallucinating because of blood loss, but that was - those were real colors?”

“Yup.” Kara grinned. “Pretty, huh?”

“Pretty - ?” Without venom, Lena knocked her forehead against Kara’s shoulder. “Pretty is, I don’t know, an apple pie that looks like a rose, or a mascara campaign. This was - what’s a step or two below magnificent?”

“Breathtaking?”

“No.”

“Spectacular?”

“Mm…”

“Gorgeous.”

“That’s you, Kara. Even new colors don’t rank that high.”

Scoffing, cheeks rosy, Kara kissed Lena’s hair - really, hid her face in it. “You’re ridiculous,” she mumbled.

“I’m frank.”

“You’re ridiculous, and you’re adorable, and I… am very flattered.”

…ustrial fire on 7th and 86th…

Lena cursed the news in her own head. 7th and 86th was right on the border of a cute little neighborhood that had its own fire station, sure, but also a local daycare and a Painted Pot and a phalanx of Golden Retrievers. It was Kara bait.

“Do you want me to turn it off?” Lena asked softly.

Kara shook her head. “I want to go.”

“No. Not allowed.”

“Freeze breath and flying, I could be in and out in two minutes. Forty five seconds, if I come in cold at the gas main.”
Mouth screwed up, Lena swung into Kara’s lap, knees tight against the sides of the stool to pin Kara to her seat. “You are very good at what you do, Kara. At all of it. You’re a good writer, a good reporter, a good hero. Right now, though, you need to turn all your significant skill and ability towards being very good at staying put.”

Mouth snapping shut with a clack, Kara fussed with her glasses and said, “Staying put sucks.”

“I have a desk job, Kara, I get it.” Lena let out a sigh and curled her fingers into Kara’s hair, gently scratching at her scalp. “Or, I don’t. Not really. I can’t totally understand how you feel right now, but I do know how horrible it is to feel useless. And I know that I have never felt useless when I’m with you. So whatever you need, however I can help: tell me.”

Kara’s hand on Lena’s waist curled all the way around her, pulling her close, and rested her forehead on top of Lena’s. “You’re not useless.”

“So put me to use.”

...

ire spreading...

Lena pressed on. “Do you need me to keep you occupied?” She dropped her head, kissing the hook of Kara’s collarbone through her soft grey sweater. “Do you need a distraction?”

Her heart was close enough it could almost drown out the news and, further out, the actual fire. No one was screaming, thankfully, but the blaze itself seemed to be calling out to Lena - and if she felt that way, she could only imagine how much greater the call was for Kara.

“I need you…” Kara swallowed. “I need you to tap in.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Suit up.” Kara tucked Lena’s head under her chin and took a breath. “The city needs Galaxy Girl.”

Lena didn’t laugh at that, as much as she wanted to, because she could taste the sincerity in Kara’s voice. “I won’t let them down. I won’t let you down.”

“That’s my girl.”

Lena hopped down and quick-changed into her suit. It felt good; the plating was the right kind of heavy, and it moved fluidly with her. She’d taken her hair out after getting home from the office, and it wasn’t cooperating. She ended up just cramming the cowl on over everything, tucking strands behind her ears, hoping for the best.

On her way out, she stopped to give Kara a kiss. Kara’s fingers crept under her cowl and, too fast for her to really feel it, tucked it all away without so much as a bump. “Go get ’em,” she murmured.

“Will do.”

Lena opened the window, then backed up all the way to the oven to give herself a running start. If she picked up enough speed, she could launch herself across the street to the opposite roof so fast no one could trace her back to that apartment.

Kara watched, grinning, and Lena couldn’t resist flashing her a wink before sprinting out the window and into the open air.
The gas main under the corner of 7th and 86th was leaking and on fire, but the leak was so slow and the gas pressure so low that there wasn’t any real risk of explosion. Lena found an access panel three blocks away from the rupture and went in underground. She managed to pinch the fissure shut like piecrust pretty quickly before climbing back to the surface. The ground floor was taken care of, but the stairs were all burnt out and too weak to bear a fireman’s weight. Lena ended up leaping onto the roof and carrying the hose in that way.

_It wasn’t as fast as it would’ve been with freeze breath, she thought, but I got the job done, right?_

Lena bounded back to the apartment to find Kara glued to the TV, takeout containers mangled by her nervous grip. “Honey, I’m home.”

Kara hugged her. “You went in at the gas main.”

“You come up with good plans.”

They sat. Lena eschewed a blanket because she didn’t want to risk one snagging on her suit, and that turned out to be a provident move, because there was another _thing_.

Lena went; Lena handled it; Lena came back and cuddled her girlfriend. Every excursion ended with an itchier, twitchier Kara, but every breaking bulletin that came across their screen had her shooing Lena out the door.

After the third trip, Kara pushed Lena onto the floor in front of the couch by her shoulders and set about properly braiding her hair. It coiled around her head, elegant and smooth in a way Lena could never manage, no matter how hard she practiced.

The fifth one looked big - a car chase heading out of the city onto the highway would take more than a few minutes’ time out of the apartment - so Lena texted a few people and impressed upon them the need to hurry.

“You don’t have to get me babysitters,” Kara pouted.

“You’re right, I don’t. I do, however, get to be a nervous girlfriend who doesn’t want you to be lonely, and who knows you haven’t had a Game Night in a while. Eat pretzels, drink beer, steal James’ sheep. I will be back as fast as I can.”

“Should we wait for you?”

“No, no, go ahead.”

“You sure?”

Lena pecked her on the lips and smiled. “Positive.”

With that, she launched herself out the window again.

“Careful,” Kara called after her. “People are gonna start to think we’re dating!”

Lena nearly missed her handhold across the street, laughing as she flew through the air. It was just a superpowered hop, skip, and a jump to the interstate. She landed on bridge cables so she didn’t crack pavement and managed to slide down without destroying public property, which was always a bonus. The car was only twenty feet ahead of her, but the cop cars were forty feet back, so she poured on the speed. When she was only five feet behind the white van, she veered sideways and jumped off the concrete partition along the side of the highway in a high arc over it and shifted her
batons out into a line of road spikes that laid out across the lanes. The van’s front wheels popped, and it skidded in a lopsided doughnut, blowing out its back tires, too.

*That’s gonna be fun to tow.*

The cops pulled up behind her as she retracted her batons, jamming one into the handle on the drivers’ side door so the driver couldn’t escape.

Cops still made her nervous. She didn’t like that they made her nervous, but they just did. When the officer in pursuit approached, cuffs out, she quickly pulled her baton free and took a few hasty steps back.

The cop in question, stockily built, caught the driver as they tumbled out of the vehicle and cuffed them efficiently before shooting Lena a glance.

“He’s all yours,” she said, finding that her voice was a little more even from behind her mask.

“Good to have you back, Galaxy Girl.”

A smile crept onto Lena’s face before she noticed. “Good to be back.”

With that, she leapt - forward this time - and made the trek back towards Kara’s apartment.

Lena swung back through the window, sweaty but unharmed, to find Kara, Winn, and James circled around Settlers of Catan, beers ignored. There was something bad about her landing, sloppy and uncontrolled, but it didn’t particularly matter, because Kara was there in a split second, snatching her into a hug before she could hit the floor.

“You’re back!” Kara cheered. “Are you okay? You were great out there.”

“Very minimalist,” Winn added. “In and out like a burger.”

James shook his head, grinning easily. “Thank god you’re not a reporter. The wordplay would be insufferable.”

“I’m fine.” Lena, cheeks pink under her cowl, hugged Kara back just as tight, pulling back just far enough to plant one on her. “So, who’s winning?”

“Right now?”

“Yeah, right now.”

Kara, still holding Lena in the air, marched back to her seat and flopped down in it with Lena in her lap and decreed, “Me!”

Winn snorted.

“Kara, you haven’t even played a turn,” teased James. “You’ve been glued to your screen harder than you were during the Venture launch.”

“Were you worried about me?”

“I wasn’t worried,” Kara protested, tugging off Lena’s cowl. “I was in awe.”

“Liar,” said Lena fondly, turning to give Kara another kiss.
Except suddenly she was all pins and needles, numb from head to toe, and then she was headbutting her girlfriend so hard they fell out of their chair and cracked the exposed brick wall behind them.

“Ow.” Kara sounded more surprised than hurt, but Lena was panicking, because that should have hurt and it didn’t.

“Something’s wrong.”

“You miscalibrated, it’s fine.”

“No, Kara, something’s wrong.” Lena tried to scramble off of Kara, tried to help her up, tried to move even a pinkie finger - nothing. “I’m not in control of my body.”

Her body then decided to prove her right by having her swing on Kara, a sloppy left hook that got buried in the wall when she dodged, rolling out of the way.

“Throw me out the window.” Her voice was remarkably steady, considering that her body wasn’t even hers and someone was using it to hurt her girlfriend. “Please.”

“Lena - ”

“Now!”

Lena got up and was thrown at Kara, fist cocked, only for Kara to catch her by the arm and pitch her out the window, as requested.

She landed on a rooftop across the street - the one she usually picked as her second launch point whenever she had to leave Kara’s apartment in a hurry - only seconds before Kara did. It was just enough time for her to get to her feet and start walking towards the opposite edge.

“Don’t follow me,” Lena begged, turning on her heel and driving her elbow towards Kara’s throat; Kara caught it and deflected, carefully not causing harm as she pushed Lena back a few feet. “Whoever’s in charge of me right now wants to hurt you.”

“You can fight this.” Kara caught another blow as it came, ducking Lena’s too-wide punch and gently nudging her back. “You are fighting this.”

“You said you would stop me, if I ever went bad.”

“You’re - not - going - bad.” Between each word came another blow, all sloppy, all weak, all easily evaded or deflected by Kara, who wasn’t making a single offensive move. “This isn’t you in control, but you’re fighting them off. You’re much better in a fight than this, okay? You’re pulling punches, I can tell.”

“But they’re still punches!” Lena rushed Kara, tackling her off the edge of the roof. As they soared up, up, up, Lena’s voice cracked. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“I don’t want to hurt you, either!”

The higher they flew, the harder Lena’s heart pounded in her chest. “I hate flying,” she gritted out, squirming in Kara’s grip.

“Well, I’m not dropping you.”

Lena’s hand, with a mind of its own, reached out and snagged on a telephone wire. The poles groaned; sparks flew.
“I don’t think that’s an option.”

“Lena!”

*Let go. Let go. Let go. Let go.*

Lena wanted to reply, to say something that would abate the nauseous tightness in her girlfriend’s voice, but all her energy was channeled into her hand, into regaining control of just those three nerves.

“Lena, *izhor*, please. Let go of it!”

And Lena let go. Just like that, she let go, but for all that Kara had begged her to, she wasn’t prepared for the sudden release of tension. It was like two little kids playing tug of war - one drops their end, the other goes sprawling.

Or, in this case, flying.

Kara shot backwards through the air and lost her grip. Lena’s throat closed up around a scream as she fell, clawing at the air. She landed, hard, on top of something metal, and ripped right through it.

“Woah!”

“*Winn?*”

Lena opened her eyes and saw James’ shield. James' shield moved.

“I reconfigured the last guy’s communicator to go off if there was another messaging device nearby,” Winn explained, glancing over his shoulder at her from the drivers’ seat. “This is another bounty hunter.”

James slowly stretched out of his defensive posture, and later, he and Lena would both agree that that was probably a stupid move. Not because Lena tried to attack him, because she didn’t, but because he might have managed to tackle her if he hadn’t wasted that momentum.

Lena rolled right out of the van, busting the back doors open and using one as a cantilever to swing herself up onto the roof.

Which she’d punched a big ass hole through.

“Sorry!” she called, pushing off.

James fired a grappling hook at her, catching her around the ankle. “Me, too.”

Lena fell back onto the roof of the van, thankfully without enough momentum to do much further damage, her lower body dangling in like bait on a hook. She managed not to strike out at the wire, because helmet or no, kicking James in the face would probably kill him. Instead, she grabbed for her baton and it shifted into a knife.

A dagger, flat and tapered, with a hammer-marked guard that curved down towards the blade instead of back over her hand.

It cut through the wire with ease, and she dropped it as she launched herself back into the sky, scaling buildings until she was on a rooftop she could run on.

She heard, distantly, wind rippling in a cape, and started running faster. Away from it.
Why am I running away from Kara if I’m supposed to kill her?

That thought stopped Lena dead in her tracks, somehow, heels digging deep furrows into the poured concrete roof she was mid-sprint over. That was enough of a pause for Kara to tackle her, yelping, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry!” all the way over as she knocked Lena down and out.

☆

Lena came to in the DEO with a killer headache. Otherwise, she was unharmed, according to Alex, who stood over her, adjusting the yellow sun lamp.

“Is Kara okay?”

“She’s fine. And you are, too,” Alex said, sitting down, “in case you were wondering.”

“Did you get the - ?”

“Bounty hunter’s in holding right now. Winn and James doubled back. Winn actually threatened him with a knife.”

“Where did he get the - ?”

“You, apparently, left it behind.” Alex passed it to her, eyes guarded.

Lena didn’t touch it, just staring at it where it lay in her lap. Without Lena controlling it, it had lost its shape a little, blade warping to fit the contours of someone’s fingers. Folding her hands together in front of her stomach, she quietly asked, “What’s going to happen to me?”

“Absolutely nothing.”

“But I - ”

“Fought off mind control? Didn’t actually hurt anyone?” Alex took the knife back and offered Lena a hand. It was only the sheer insistence in her eyes that made Lena take it, and she let herself be dragged to her feet. “You did good, Lena. Okay?”

Lena said nothing.

“Wanna go scare the shit out of the creep who did this to you?”

Silently, Lena nodded, and followed Alex into lockup.

There, in a cell, was a tall, angular man with blue eyes and a rounded bald head. The resemblance to Lex was passing, but present, and Lena jutted her chin out defiantly and crossed her arms in a way that she hoped looked more intimidating and less like she was trying to hold herself together.

“So,” said Winn, pacing in front of the glass with an easy stride, “Creepy McGee here got inside Galaxy Girl’s brain and thought he could use her to kill Supergirl.”

Creepy McGee’s smug face got, somehow, ineffably, smugger.

Lena, from behind her cowl, watched him. That wasn’t the face of someone who had been captured and defeated, his plan laid out before him a failure.

“Who put the bounty out on me?” Kara asked.
It was strange, seeing her in hero mode in civilian clothes. She was a little scuffed up, but her jacket and jeans had taken the worst of it. Still, Lena couldn’t help but feel -

Worse than monstrous.

Creepy McGee said nothing.

“He knows,” Alex muttered, hand going to the blaster clipped to her thigh. “You can tell he knows.”

“I’m the most powerful telepath in the Alcorian system,” he drawled. “I know more than you can imagine.”

“Oh, yeah,” Winn jeered, hand up, “except which end of a knife can actually hurt you.”

His hand wasn’t bandaged.

Good.

“You’ll never get me to talk. You humans are too moral to do what’s necessary to penetrate my mind.”

“Not human.” Lena stepped forward, snatching the knife deftly from Alex’s hand. Immediately, it responded to the sensors in her suit and took on the last form she had assigned it - the knife. “And you already invaded my mind and made me headbutt my girlfriend, wreck my friends’ van, and damage public property tonight, so I see no reason not to penetrate - ” ugh “ - something else.”

“No need to get your hands dirty,” Alex said, voice slick and sharp, stepping around Lena and staring the psychic down. “Turn that thing into a wrench and I’ll handle it. This creep tried to hurt my family.”

“Stand down.” J’onn strode into the room, easily the most level of anyone within its walls. “Both of you.”

Lena shifted the baton back into a baton and stepped back, hoping no one had seen it grow a socket-torquing head.

J’onn crossed his arms behind his back and just stared at the Alcorian through the glass. For a moment, nothing happened, and then the prisoner’s eyes flared blue and it became clear that they were watching some kind of psychic warfare à la ‘remedial potions’ lessons in Order of the Phoenix.

Kara reached for Lena’s hand.

Lena jumped at her touch, eyes wide as she looked her way.

She didn’t look angry. She wasn’t hurt. She bit her lip, pinkie finger grazing Lena’s bottom knuckle, and held Lena’s gaze unflinchingly. When Lena gave a tiny nod, Kara linked their fingers together and gave a tiny pulse of pressure.

The Alcorian cried out, cringing away from J’onn. “It was the Daxamites! Queen Rhea hired me!”

Out of the corner of her eye, Lena saw Alex look over her shoulder in her and Kara’s direction. When Lena turned to meet her gaze, though, she looked away so fast, she could put Kara’s super speed to shame.

“Then let’s go talk to her son.”
“No!”

What.

Alex, for a moment, looked like she was recalibrating. “I just meant. Mon-El came back to get the other…” She swallowed. “Daxamite, right? He was a part of his mother’s plan, a plan that apparently includes killing you now, Kara. It’s not safe. J’onn?”

J’onn looked a little woozy as the red faded from his eyes, but still solid. He glanced at Alex and nodded. “Alex is right. It’s unwise for you to be near him.”

“Why? He’s in a cell, he can’t hurt me.”

“You should take Lena home.”

“You said I was fine.”

“You are, for now, but Mon-El gives you those headaches, and after an evening of mind control, I don’t think you need to deal with that.” Alex crossed her arms and gave her a killer combo - the Danvers Pout, patent pending, with the I’m the big sister so do what I say stare.

Lena didn’t have much of a choice in the matter.

“We’re not leaving,” Kara said stoutly. “We’re going to wait upstairs, and once you’re done, you’re going to tell us everything you know.”

Alex nodded and shot them a grateful smile, lips thinned against each other. Lena and Kara went back up to the control room, Winn on their heels. He plopped down at his monitors and, before Lena could even broach the subject, he was already calling up security feeds.

“Linking the audio to our comms and… Done!”

“You’re just killing it tonight, aren’t you,” Lena murmured, leaning against his desk. “If you ever get tired of all this excitement, I’d be happy to have you on my payroll.”

Winn snorted, pulling open his snack drawer.

Kara, pressed against Lena’s back, reached around her and rummaged around for a minute before retrieving, somehow, a box of Girl Scout cookies. “Do Girl Scouts deliver to the DEO?” she gasped, ripping open the Thin Mints.

“Only one Thanagarian kid.” Winn snagged two and bit into them. “She has singlehandedly averted multiple break room brawls. Real hero.”

“Yeah.”

Kara’s arm curled tighter around Lena’s waist as the tiny on-screen Alex started to speak.

“Why didn’t you tell us about your mother’s little pack of Blade Runners?”

“I - I didn’t know.”

J’onn crossed his arms. “After what you just saw, do you really want to try lying?”

“They’re just trying to get me back. I know them; in their minds, they honestly believe that if they get rid of Kara, then I’m just gonna complete the mission and go back home.”
“Why do they think Kara is stopping you from finding this other Daxamite?”

“Um, in case you hadn’t noticed,” Mon-El said, spreading his hands and gesturing at the cell around him, “she kind of is.”

“No. No, the DEO is stopping you. She is not any more a part of this than any other agent.”

“Well…”

Alex, quick as a flash, pounded her fist against the glass. “What. Did. You. Tell them?”

“They asked about my time on Earth. Mother wanted to know all she could about this place, its strengths and weaknesses, everything I had experienced. I told her about Supergirl - about all Earth’s heroes."

“You told her?” Alex ran her fingers through her hair. “Wow. Wow. I knew, I knew you were stupid, but this? Are you kidding me?”

“Alex.” J’onn laid a hand on Alex’s shoulder, and she stilled, just a little. “Why does your mother care so deeply about finding the other Daxamite? From what we know about Daxam, from what you’ve told us, the ruling family doesn’t give any other class a second thought.”

“This Daxamite isn’t any other class,” Mon-El admitted. “My mother wants to find them because they’re hers.”

“She wants her slave back?”

“No. She wants her baby.”

Winn nearly choked on cookie crumbs. Hell, Kara nearly choked on cookie crumbs. Pounding on two backs of differing levels of destructibility at the same time was tough work.

Alex was frenetic again. “That’s what - ? Oh, my god.”

“How did you not know about this?” J’onn asked. “How were you not aware of your sibling’s existence?”

“After Daxam fell, when I escaped, Mother and Father thought I was dead. They planned to start over, and they needed an heir to rebuild, so they created a child with a human and hid it on Earth.”

“Someone would have noticed a baby with no family and superpowers.”

“She embedded something in it, something to suppress its genes so they could grow up undiscovered until an envoy could be sent to find it. When I came back, I guess they didn’t think they needed the second kid.”

“So why didn’t they just leave?”

“The other day, someone tried to tamper with the device, and it sent off a distress signal.”

Alex’s pacing slowed. “So it can’t be removed?”

“Not without setting off another beacon that would lead my parents straight to them.” Mon-El crossed his arms. “Can’t you just give them the kid? I mean, obviously, you know where it is, right? It was designed to replace me! Just hand it over and everything’ll be fine. My parents will leave me, and this planet, alone. It belongs to them, anyway.”
“People don’t belong to other people! How hard a concept is that to grasp?”

“This child was born on Earth,” J’onn said. “Daxamite DNA or not, that makes them a citizen of Earth, and that means they are under our protection. Besides, we don’t negotiate with innocent people as collateral.”

“Then I don’t know what to tell you.” Mon-El sat back, propping his heels up on the wall. “I can’t help you out of this cell.”

“Like you even want to help,” Alex snorted.

“You have nothing else to tell us?”

“Nope.”

“Then there’s nothing we can do for you.”

With that, J’onn turned and strode off. Alex followed after only a moment’s hesitation, a moment’s hard stare into Mon-El’s cell.

Winn shut off the feed and spun his chair the long way around to face Kara and Lena, letting out a low whistle as he did.

Lena laughed, a short, quiet thing. “And I thought I had familial drama.”

“Right?”

“It’s not funny,” Kara said. “This poor kid - their whole life is a lie. Did you hear how Mon-El was talking about them? Calling them an ‘it,’ saying they were designed… Like they’re not even a person. How awful.”

“You’re right.” Lena laid her hand over Kara’s where it curled around her waist and gave a gentle squeeze. “That isn’t funny.”

“It’s just a morbid sense of relief, you know? For once, our families aren’t the biggest disasters in the room.” Winn’s mouth twisted into a rueful knot. “We’ll find the kid, though. You heard J’onn, they’re under our protection.”

“And I can’t imagine they won’t feel better knowing Supergirl is defending them.”

Kara huffed a laugh and knocked her head into Lena’s. “Or knowing Galaxy Girl is like them. An alien, born on Earth and raised like a human? You two are gonna get along great.”

Alex and J’onn exited the stairwell, marching over. Clearly, they’d been talking on the way up, because Alex was mid-sentence and fired up in a way she hadn’t been on the security feed. “- the bounty and leave Earth!”

“They have an impenetrable warship,” Winn reminded her as she approached.

Lena said, “Well, Winn, we could find a way in,” and got the strangest look from Alex, who spoke in eerie stereo with J’onn.

“No, you can’t.”

“I mean, we might be able to,” Winn said, eyebrows arched indignantly.
“We can’t take any action against the Daxamite ship whatsoever. I have orders from President Marsdin.”

J’onn’s voice was deeply no nonsense and brooked no argument, which meant, of course, Alex would argue.

Which made no sense, because she’d literally been on his side two seconds prior to the reveal of that stunning new nugget of information.

“What?”

“Attacking them could spark an intergalactic war.”

“They attacked us!”

“I’ll brief President Marsdin and wait for further instructions. Until then, our only mission is to keep Supergirl and this heir safe.”

“Well, then, we should go find them, right?”

“We,” J’onn said, indicating the building around them and its swarm of agents, “will. Putting the two of you in the same place puts both of you at risk. Go home.”

Kara crinkled, and Lena squeezed her hand. “Come on. We should go check on James, anyway, he’s probably pissed at me for hurting his gear.”

J’onn nodded, the same sort of silent approval he’d given Lena before she’d gone and listened in to find out about Guardian, and Lena tried not to get too big about it as he walked off, Alex on his heels with a dour set to her features.

What else did they talk about in that stairwell?

“James is at CatCo,” said Winn, pushing out of his chair. “He wanted to see if someone posted anything about Guardian and Galaxy Girl going all fast and furious, or about a mysterious civilian flying through the air.”

“Should we bother him?” Lena asked, suddenly very reluctant to. He was covering all of their asses over her mistake, even after she’d wrecked his stuff and fought him.

“Don’t worry, he isn’t angry.” Winn shut his monitor down, sparing her a look over the screen’s edge. “Not about this, anyway. If anything, he’s mad that he didn’t do more, which is ridiculous, because Guardian kicked all kinds of ass tonight. Is that, like, a hero thing in general, or is he the only one with a Krypton complex?”

“A Krypton complex?” Kara laughed, starting towards the stairs. “That’s a thing?”

“Yeah. They used to call it a Superman complex, but then you happened, and there was this whole thing - I can send you the articles about it, if you want.” Winn shook his head. “Anyway, it’s when people think they have to save everyone all the time, and they keep taking on more and more responsibility to do so until they explode or something.”

Kara wrinkled her nose. “Is that how people think of us?”

“I can’t vouch for everyone, but I don’t think of you like that.” Lena pulled open the door for Kara, offering a crooked smile. “I mean, yes, you do try and save everyone, but that’s your job. And it’s
James’ job, and Alex’s job, and Winn’s, and mine. And it’s not all any of you - any of us - are.”

As the door swung shut behind them, and they started on the stairs, Lena considered the possibility that she wasn’t exactly an expert on what constituted mental health, but she meant what she said, and Winn was backing her up. Besides, even if some weird interdimensional aesthete said that was a lesson Kara needed to learn, she was learning it.

“Good,” Kara chirped, hopping over the bannister and onto the next flight down.

Lena laughed and, when Kara held her hands out, urging her to jump, too, Lena did, lightly enough that she didn’t even make a sound.

“I’m not gonna try that,” Winn said, pointing at them. “I was a theatre geek, not a jock.”

“I wasn’t even a theatre geek. Just straight nerdy.” Lena grinned. “Actually, that’s a lie. The only thing. straight about me is my hair.”

“Nice one.”

“Thank you.”

They walked Winn down to the garage, where his beat-up van lay battered. Apparently, as a DEO agent, he had license to borrow the odd vehicle in the instance that his own was damaged in the line of work, so Lena wasn’t allowed to feel too bad about turning his van into Swiss cheese.

“I mean it, Legs,” he said, eyeing her over the half-rolled window of some intimidatingly anonymous black car. “No moping.”

“I have never moped a day in my life.”

“Sure. Sure, I believe you.” He rolled up the window, giving her the universal sign for I’m watching you through the glass before pulling out of the parking lot and driving off.

“So,” Kara said, stretching the syllable like taffy, “is it… Krypton complex-y, or whatever, to go try and talk to Mon-El’s parents and see if we can talk them down?”

“I’m not an expert…”

But they mind controlled me into breaking your apartment, and Winn and James’s van, and they’re using a kid as a bargaining chip.

“Do you want to?” Kara fidgeted with her fingers. “That’s the question I should be asking. Because I don’t care if it’s possible to save people too much - at least, not right now; ask me in the morning and I’ll probably be petrified about it - but I do care about you. Someone already made you do things you didn’t want to this evening, and I don’t want to push the pattern.”

Lena reached over and took Kara’s hands in hers, bringing her knuckles to her lips briefly before saying, “I’m with you. Besides, J’onn only said we couldn’t attack; he never said we couldn’t engage.”

Kara grinned.

“But Alex is right. I shouldn’t be in the same room as him.” Lena let go with one hand to rub the back of her neck. Say what you like about Lillian Luthor, but she knows how not to leave a scar.

“Comms on.”
“Check. I’ll just stay down here and see if I there’s anything lying around that I can use to fix up the van.”

The garage was fully stocked, not just with vehicles, but with parts and tools - everything a girl could ever want.

Lena hadn’t really worked on a car in decades - ever, technically. When she was little, Marion would set her car seat down on the floor of their little house’s tiny garage and talk aloud about what she was doing, explaining every step - *this valve got knocked loose, princess, so I’m just going to put it back into place, and then our engine’ll be good as new; the brake pads are shot, baby girl, so I’m going to pop ’em out and replace them, and then that annoying squeaky sound is gone for good!* - and Lena had loved every minute of it. She had loved the sounds and the smells of rebuilding some big, metal beast from the bolts up. The fact that she’d grown up to be an engineer - that she’d grown up to do exactly what Marion had waited eagerly all week to have time for - was something she always hoped would have made her mother proud.

Before she actually got to work, though, she texted Winn, asking if she was actually allowed to tamper with it.

He texted back right when Kara got into holding:

*{10.43p.m.} hell yeah you can give me free automotive repair that i don’t have to explain the suspicious nature of to a total stranger*

*{10.43p.m.} G-Man is cool with it too btw*

Lena grinned, scooping up a few big sheets of metal with one arm and morphing her baton into a clip for a soldering torch with the other, and got to work.

She could barely hear what Mon-El was saying, even with super hearing - the glass used in DEO cells was some high-quality shit - but working with her hands made it even easier to focus on what was being said.

“Hey, so I’ve been thinking about a solution to our problem.”

“Yeah, me, too.”

“Yeah?”

Remembering his supposedly short-lived crush on Kara, Lena wondered if she sounded so bright-eyed and eager whenever Kara talked to her.

“There’s only one thing we can do: talk to your mother.”

“Run for our lives.”

“Wait, what?”

“What?” There was a moment of silence, in which Lena gently ripped the whole top off of the van and tossed it aside. “There’s this planet that a Durlan emissary told me about when I was a kid. It’s got water, a yellow sun, everything I need to survive. And I know you don’t want me on your planet
- you made that very clear when you handed me over to my parents.”

“You make it sound like I fed you to hungry lions. They’re your family, and they love you.”

“Yeah, well, I love them, too, but that doesn’t mean I want to be around them.”

Another pause. Lena worked the dents her impact had left on the side of the van out with her kneecap.

“Look, Kara, you don’t want me here, and I don’t want to go back. If you let me leave, that’s one less problem you have to deal with.”

“I’m not letting you run away again. You started this, all of this, when you sent off that distress beacon in October. How do I know you won’t just lead them off to some other planet for them to terrorize?”

“My parents wouldn’t find me there. And if you still don’t trust me… you could always come with me. Keep guard.”

Kara scoffed. “Run away with you? Are you kidding me?”

“You could look after that planet, protect the people there from my parents, protect them from me. I just - I thought of this because I was reading this play, Ro-mayo and Juliet?”

Dryly, Kara said, “I’ve heard of it,” and Lena had to stifle a cackle.

“Right! And there’s this moment at the end, where I was, where they’re about to run away together and to live happily ever after, and I can’t help but think - ”

“What, that that could be us?”

“Is that so hard to see?”

“Yes! Yes, it is! I don’t love you, Mon-El. Rao, I don’t even like you. You’re selfish and shortsighted, and I’m with someone, and zhed nahn i zhor.”

Lena caught the pet name and her eyes widened. Her brain started working on a third level - repairing, listening, and now digging through the pidgin Kryptonese that she’d caught from Lex’s conversations with Superman.

“Besides, Mon-El, you don’t want to end up like Romeo and Juliet. They die in the end.”

“I did not see that coming.”

“We’re not going to your secret planet. I’m Supergirl. I don’t run from anything.”

“I know. It’s one of the more annoying things about you.”

Lena set everything down and chimed in, just so Kara could hear, “It’s one of my favorite things about you. I love that you’re stubborn. I love that you’re brave, because you make me braver.”

“Thank you.”

Two voices said, “You’re welcome,” but only one of them had earned the thanks that instigated it.

“You don’t know my parents,” Mon-El continued. “They want you dead and they want their
children home, and they’re - they get what they want.”

“That’s why we talk to your mother. You can get her to realize that all she wants is for her children to be happy, and she’ll realize that Earth is the best place for you. Both of you. Your mother can change.”

“People don’t really change.”

“Sure they do. Just give her a chance.”

Lena bit her lip and got to welding, mashing a sheet of steel over the open roof like it was plastic wrap and soldering it into place.

“And if, after all this is over, you still want to find that planet… Well, I’m sure no one will stop you.”

“You’ll let me go?”

“I’ll talk to the DEO on your behalf. Because you’re right, you know. We don’t want you here.”

“Okay, well, I’ll contact the ship. If it’ll get me out of here, it’s worth a shot.”

“You have five minutes to plan what you’re going to say.” Kara took a steadying breath, and Lena closed her eyes, just listening - tha-thump, tha-thump. “I know family is tough. I know not having a purpose is tough. You were raised to rule, and now you find out that you might not even get to do that. But when you… when you think you’ve lost everything? You’ll do anything to get it back, even in the tiniest way. Your parents will listen to you, Mon-El.”

With that, Kara walked away, footfalls in time with her even pulse until a door closed behind her. Then, she stopped.

“How’s it going?”

“On my end?” Lena clicked the torch off and blew, playing prideful cowboy proxy for her girlfriend. “Great. I’m most of the way done.”

“Do you - ?”

“I’ll hang back. If Mon-El makes my head hurt, can you imagine how bad it would be with him and his parents in the same room? I would probably turn into dust.”

Kara snorted.

“How about you? I know this is tough on you.” There were a million reasons why that was so, and Lena could have listed every one if them, given the time, but she didn’t want to and she didn’t need to. “If there’s anything I can do…”

“I’m okay.” Kara’s voice was very small, very soft. Lena wanted to hug her. “But I just wanted to say, I don’t know how well the comms will work, through the Fortress of Solitude, with the whole royal family teleporting in.”

“I’ll get off the comms, then.” Lena smiled, even though she knew Kara couldn’t see it. “You’re going to be incredible. Kara Zor-El, brokering interstellar peace!”

Kara laughed.

“They would be proud of you. And everyone here is going to be proud of you when they find out,
and I am so, so, so, so proud of you right now.”

“Flatterer.”

“Hey, when you come back, we can make milkshakes and finally finish Funny Face.”

“I love - that movie!”

“I know you do. So go, be brilliant, and come home.”

“Always.”

Kara hung up, and Lena popped out her earpiece.

It only took another minute and a half for her to regret the decision. She knew a thing or two about parents who played god, about what happens when people used to getting what they want don’t get it for once. She even knew a little bit about blood feuds, watching Lex go cold and hard, watching him throw everything away for vengeance, and if Daxamites still hated Kryptonians as much as Kryptonians hated Daxamites, she wouldn’t put it past Mon-El’s parents to play dirty.

Dirty bomb levels of dirty.

Tuning in to Kara’s heartbeat kept Lena steady for a while, but then it went wobbly, jagged - like she was being hurt.

Shit.

Lena was on her feet and ready to run before the first aching tha-thump was finished. All that stopped her was the awful gnawing realization that she didn’t know where the Fortress of Solitude was.

So she did something she really, really hoped Kara would forgive her for, cracking her screen with shaky fingers as she dialed.

“Lena? What’s wrong? Where - ”

“Kara.” Lena gulped down a lungful of air and set her phone down, putting it on speaker so she could talk without snapping it. “She went to - to parley with Mon-El’s family at the Fortress of Solitude, but she’s hurt, I can hear it.”

Tha-tha-tha-tha!

“I mean, their planet caught the wake of Krypton’s destruction, there had to be Kryptonite everywhere, and I don’t know how to get to them.”

“It’s Kara, she’s hurt. I’m sorry, I have to go. We’ll talk later, okay?”

Lena realized, like a slap in the face, that she’d interrupted Alex and Maggie. Alex had been on edge all day.

Asshole! You’re such an asshole!

A door closed, and Alex said, “She’s in the Arctic. There’s a key, Kara said ‘under the doormat,’ only someone with super strength can lift, so that shouldn’t be a problem for you, but be careful.”

“Yeah, sure.”
“I mean it. You don’t know what they’d do to - to Supergirl’s ally.”

“I’ll be careful,” Lena said, hanging up. She pushed off the ground, realizing too late that she’d just broken the garage and, a second later, that she didn’t quite have it in her to give a fuck about that.

Kara was hurt. Kara was hurt, and Lena could have stopped her, and Lena didn’t stop her, and Jesus fucking Christ, she thought, why does everything have to be horrible?

She aimed herself northeast, following stars, and then following Kara’s erratic pulse. Hopscotching over the patchier northernmost tip of Canada would probably have been fun under other circumstances, as would skidding through chin-deep snowbanks, but the only thing Lena could think or feel other than fear for Kara was the sudden impact of a crystal wall.

She couldn’t break it.

She slid down into the snowbank below it and landed on an ice shelf with a thud. As she scrambled up out of the powder, she accidentally kicked something, and that something hurt.

“Key!”

Lena got on her knees and brushed the rest of the snow away, scooping up what looked more like a battering ram than a key. It was golden, and one end had Kara’s crest - the crest of the House of El - printed on it in relief, the perfect inverse of the same crest on the door. Lena pushed to her feet and slid it into place, and the door glowed where they joined before sliding open.

Racing in and throwing the key aside, Lena found Mon-El crouched over Kara’s prone form and didn’t stop to think before slamming her fist straight into his face, sending him flying.

“She was going to help you!”

“I didn’t do this!” he yelped, but Lena wasn’t listening - couldn’t, past the ringing in her head - but furthermore, Lena didn’t give a shit.

Lena hovered at Kara’s side, taking a moment to look her over. She had a stab wound in her thigh, a slash mark on her cheek, and a rip in her uniform, right over her diaphragm. All three glowed green.

“Hey, there,” Kara gasped.

“This is the second time this week I’ve seen you like this,” Lena said, vision blurring. “Pace yourself.”

Kara managed to laugh, but it clearly hurt, and Lena was all business.

“What happened?”

“His mom. Cheek and thigh are - not fine, but not - not the priority.” Kara winced, pushing upright and clutching her stomach. “She put a Kryptonite capsule in my chest. I have twenty four hours to find her baby or the casing degrades and I die.”

“Well, fuck that.”

Kara laughed again, wincing.

“Alex is on her way to the DEO, okay, and she is going to be so pissed off.” Lena kissed Kara’s forehead, pulling her closer. “She can take care of it for you.”
“Can’t.” With a shaky hand, Kara pushed her split uniform aside and revealed that her skin had sealed up around the incision, which left a rapidly fading scar. “She can’t break my skin, and she won’t put me in the Kryptonite room to cut me open again, not with it already in my system.”

“Super strength, huh? Okay, so why didn’t he help?”

“Mother worked around that,” Mon-El said, poking at his frozen bloody nose. “I can’t touch the casing.”

“Hey.” Kara grabbed Lena’s wrist, kissed her knuckles. “I trust you, okay? You can do this.”

Lena detached a plate of armor from her suit, a tiny scale with a steeply beveled edge that, like this, would work as a knife. Since neither of them could break it, maybe it could break them, just a little. She instructed herself not to cry under any circumstances before she followed the line of the Queen’s incision. This was worse, far worse, for Kara, who had not shed a single tear.

Just under the surface was a little dull grey metal capsule, maybe the size of Lena’s pinkie nail. An outlawed sob punched out of her, and she found herself repeating, “I’m sorry,” over and over again before reaching in and pulling the little pod out.

Lena just stared at it for a moment. This tiny, insignificant little thing had almost killed the love of her life - oh, my god, she thought, Kara is the love of my life - and now it was powerless. It hurt, somehow, even though it hadn’t been designed with her in mind as its victim; she stuffed it in her pocket instead of throwing it away.

“Come on,” she said, more to herself than Kara. “We need to go.”

“Mon-El, too,” Kara insisted, but when they turned to look, Mon-El was gone.

“Shit.”

With infinite care, Lena helped Kara to her feet and out the door. There, she paused to close and lock it behind them, and hide the key, before gingerly scooping Kara up and murmuring, “Hold on to me, okay?”

Kara nodded, clinging, and Lena took off. She followed the same path back, moving faster, somehow. Now that she had Kara, maybe the adrenaline should have worn off, but she could smell Kara’s blood the one place she never wanted it to be - on her hands - and she could tell that she would be a jittery wreck until Kara was back at 104%.

They landed, far more gently than they could have, on the DEO balcony right when Alex got onto the floor, shouting, “Where is she?”

J’onn was there, grabbing Lena before she dropped under her own velocity; Alex was there, shuffling under Kara’s arm and holding her up.

“What did she do to you?”

“Lena has it,” Kara managed, swaying where she stood.

Lena pulled it out of her pocket and let out a hiss, shocked at a sticky flare of pain, and Alex snatched it out of her fingers, protecting her own palm with the cuff of her sleeve. “We need to get you under a yellow sun lamp.”

“Mon-El. He ran. She - she said it didn’t matter when he came with them, because he would always
he would always come back.”

“He’s with them now?”

“Think so.” Kara took a step on her left leg and let out a surprised grunt, knee buckling, so Lena picked her up again. “My comms made the same noise they did when she warped in and out.”

“I’m gonna find some toxic paint and mummify him in lead.”

“You can’t.” J’onn pushed open the med bay door and let it fall shut behind him, hovering there with his fists tight at his sides. “The president has given us strict orders not to engage, I’m sorry.”

The yellow sun bed hummed to life, and Lena laid Kara down under its glow. Without the weight of her, Lena’s hands began to shake.

“He - he tried to help,” Kara managed. “When she attacked me, he pushed her off. Offered to go with her. Didn’t matter. She’s - she’s strong. Just wants her baby.”

“That,” Lena said, pointing to the tiny capsule, “was supposed to be the motivation for Kara to find them and hand them over.”

Alex looked at the capsule, then at Lena’s hands - at the blistering on her fingertips. “What is that?”

“I don’t know. The Queen did something to the capsule so Mon-El couldn’t tamper with it, maybe it’s entirely tamper-proof.”

Kara pushed up onto her elbows to look at Lena’s hands, strong enough to resist as Alex tried to push her back down. “That - that happened when you touched it?”

“Yeah.”

“Can I - ?”

Alex pulled the tiny pod away. “Kryptonite, plus - some sort of toxin, designed to work even against skin made impervious by a yellow sun. That’s probably what she meant. No one is touching this without gloves and lab clearance.”

Kara looked at her sister, just looked at her, for a long moment, watching as she dropped it into a test tube and passed it to a lab tech on standby. When she turned back towards them, she crossed her arms tight, clenched her jaw tight. She looked like a spring wound just shy of the point where it snapped, flying to pieces and poking someone’s eye out.

Lena swallowed the knot in her throat and said, “I - ” before she was cut off.

“We need to talk.”

Nodding, Lena took her first step towards the door, but Kara stopped her, holding her hand tight. “Don’t go.”

“J’onn and Alex are just gonna yell at me for letting you walk into a trap. It’s fine, I can take it.”

“No, just - ” Kara laced their fingers together and laid back under the lamps. “Can she stay, please? Just until her hand heals?”

“Kara…”

“She saved my life. We have another twenty three hours and fifty three minutes to get the - to get this
situation under control. I just want five minutes with the woman who saved my life.” Her throat bobbed. “Please.”

Alex, for a moment, looked like she was going to protest, but of her own accord, she stopped, and she left the room, waiting with her back to the door. J’onn slipped out, too, making his way towards his office.

“I just - I need you to know how much I - ”

Lena shook her head, closing her eyes so they didn’t spill over. “Don’t you dare. You’re not allowed to make any big emotional declarations within the next twenty three hours and fifty five minutes, okay?”

“What’s with the extra two minutes?”

“That’s time to celebrate this whole mess being over.” Lena wiped her eyes on the back of her wrist, avoiding the blisters and the blood that she wished was hers instead. “Two minutes after the Daxamites’ deadline is up, you can - you can say whatever you need to say to me.”

Kara nodded, pulling Lena down onto the bed beside her. She took Lena’s injured hand and laid it over the crest on her chest - palm up; no funny business - holding it in place with her fingertips and no pressure while her other arm wrapped around Lena’s shoulders.

“You saved my life, y’know,” she said after a moment. “Again.”

“You’re getting too good at being saved.”

Kara laughed, and she didn’t wince. “Ugh, I messed up Winn’s suit.”

“You? That was that horrible woman who tried to kill you.”

Kara flinched then, and Lena regretted bringing up the latest NDE immediately.

“I’m sorry. I just - he’ll be happy to fix it, I’m sure. Maybe not when I tell him to get rid of the skirt, because your legs need protecting, but he’ll probably just be excited to have a chance to make a new one.”

“He does love a project.”

“And he loves you.” Lena closed her eyes, hiding them in Kara’s collarbone. “We all do.”

“What happened to your moratorium, huh?”

“That’s not a declaration. It’s not even news.”

Kara snorted, pressing a strangely shaky kiss to the top of Lena’s head through her cowl. “I suppose, if anyone is qualified to discern what is and isn’t news, it’s the people in the headlines.”

“Bullshit.”

“Yeah.”

“It’s the unbiased press’ job to do that.”

“You sure about the unbiased part, Ms. I Only Write Articles About Me, Myself, and My Girlfriend?”
Kara cackled, clasping her hand over her mouth to stifle the sound. Lena would never have said, but she wished Kara hadn’t. Hearing her laugh, no longer pained, made a world of difference in the reserves within Lena. She was ready to go out there and face the music.

Another two minutes passed. Her respite was almost up.

“Once you guys are done talking.” Kara took a breath. “Once you guys are done talking, do you want to carry me home?”

Lena’s heart began to pound. Kara wasn’t getting better, Kara still felt sick, Kara -

“I didn’t like much about tonight, but that was kind of nice.”

“You’re terrible,” Lena said, meaning precisely the opposite.

Kara pulled her closer, somehow, and sighed. “I am having the biggest craving for sugar right now.”

“Sounds about right.”

“I know we said milkshakes, but can those milkshakes just be, like, served in a mixing bowl? With a Twizzler for a straw?”

“A Twizzler?”

“Yeah! You’ve never done that?”

“I - no! Not with a milkshake! Is that even physically possible?”

“We’ll find out.”

“Or, and hear me out, we could just fill said aforementioned mixing bowls with ice cream cover that ice cream with everything sugary and appealing at the twenty-four-hour bodega two blocks away from your apartment, and avoid that terrifying experiment?”

“Chicken.”

“Can you try that again, but more profane? Because then I can make a joke, ‘you are what you -’”

Kara pulled Lena up into a kiss, pushing her cowl off of her face. It was brief in the grand scheme of things, but rather drawn out for the workplace, and it probably would have gone on longer if the door hadn’t opened.

Alex’s voice was oddly soft, for the chewing out Lena surmised she was about to receive, as she said, “Time’s up.”

Lena slid off the bed and padded towards the door, halted when Alex touched her shoulder and murmured quiet thanks. Alex stayed behind, just for a moment, and Lena stood out in the open alone, refusing to eavesdrop. She focused, instead, on her hand, which was now baby smooth again.

After a minute or two, Alex came back out, definitely not sniffling. She swallowed, the door clicking shut behind her, and said, “Come on. It’s time to talk.”

The heavy, dull thud of Alex’s tactical boots was the only thing that kept this from feeling like she was about to be lectured by Lillian, the only thing that kept her thoroughly sane. When they got to J’onn’s office, and that door closed behind them with a much weightier sound, Lena wrapped her arms around herself and insisted, *This is going to be fine.*
“You’re lucky the President hadn’t forbidden engaging at all,” J’onn said finally, “before Kara went off.”

“I know.”

“You’re also lucky she’s alive.”

Lena’s voice hitched. “I know.”

“Why would you let her do this?” burst Alex. “She just came home from all that mess with the Music Meister. Why would you let her endanger herself like this?”

“I don’t know. I - I thought it would be okay. She was so confident, talking through the plan, I just - I felt like she could handle it.”

“Daxamites aren’t like - they’re not like any enemy Kara’s faced before. This is a blood feud centuries old.”

“As soon as she left, I realized I’d made a mistake, but it was too late for me to go get her.” Lena swallowed, took a shaky breath. “I’m so sorry. I - I never thought she’d get hurt, I never wanted her to get hurt. I should have gone with her - ”

“No!”

There was this piano wire sharpness to Alex’s voice, and Lena’s grip on her arm tightened. I already took her father away from her. Tonight, she almost lost her sister because of me. I’m surprised I’m not in one of the cells downstairs right now, or just dead.

“No one should have gone,” J’onn said. “This can never happen again. The President said we are not allowed to make contact with them, in any capacity, and I cannot disobey a direct order.”

Lena nodded. Every word she wanted to say, every apology she needed to make, was caught in her throat, clogging it up. She couldn’t have said a syllable to save her life.

“That being said, once things went south, you did the right thing. You contacted a senior agent, you got to the scene as quickly as you could, you saved Supergirl’s life.”

Another nod.

“Until the Daxamites are gone, you’re suspended. For the next…” J’onn checked the time; Lena would have marked it as a power move, one she’d made time and time again, but everyone looked too weary for that kind of thing. “Twenty three hours and forty five minutes, you are not to attend to any active DEO duty.”

“Does that mean - ?”

“You can stop human crime, in cooperation with the NCPD. If an alien commits a crime, you call us, and we will handle it.”

“Yes, sir.”

“The same goes for Kara.”

“I’ll tell her. Thank you.”

“And if you step out of line again, you’re done.”
“Of course. I won’t - ” She let out a breath, deflating. “I won’t disappoint you again.”

Alex showed her the door, though they both knew she didn’t need to, stopping once they were outside to inspect Lena’s hand. Once she had seen her fill, she started up again just as abruptly. They walked back towards the med bay in silence broken only once, by Alex saying, “Before you and Kara leave, you’ll both need to fill out incident reports.” When they got onto that floor, they saw that Kara wasn’t in bed.

Rather, she was at Winn’s desk, with him. Her suit was stitched up, a neat if hasty job, and as soon as they entered the control room, she turned to face them.

Before either of them could say a word, Winn spun around, too, and said, “King Lar Gand of Daxam has sent us a message.”

“He wants to meet me,” Kara tacked on. “He says I can bring back up, weapons, and that I can pick the time and place.”

“Well, unless the time is the day after tomorrow, he’s not meeting you.” Staunchly, Alex crossed her arms. “Lena?”

“The two of us are suspended until the Daxamite deadline is up.”

Kara frowned. “How am I supposed to meet with him when we’ll have sent that ship away by then?”

“Then you don’t meet with him.”

“I have to. Alex, I know you understand.” Kara reached out, fingers curling around Alex’s arm. “Please.”

Alex closed her eyes and, for a stretch, did and said nothing. Then she rearranged her arms so she could lay her hand over Kara’s. “This is what you want?”

“He seems reasonable. Maybe he’ll listen. Maybe I can convince him.” Kara sighed, wrapping one arm around her ribs, covering the recently-made and recently-mended hole in her suit. “I need to talk to him, Alex. I need to understand.”

“Okay.” Alex took a deep breath. “Okay. You can make a video call, through a secure server and, like, eight billion proxies, from a protected location. Not here, not your apartment, not L Corp, not CatCo.”

“Thank you.”

“And you don’t talk to him. You show your face, show him that this is legit, and then I do the talking.”

“Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

Kara pulled Alex into a hug, and Alex slumped into it, face tucked into Kara’s shoulder. She groaned, hooking her chin over her shoulder. “Oh, god, I’m gonna be in so much trouble.”

“No,” Kara murmured. “We are going to be fine.”

Brow furrowed, eyes squeezed shut, Alex asked, “Yeah?”

“Yeah.”
They went to the desert.

Specifically, they went to a plot of desert twenty five miles out from the desert base of the DEO, an old Lord Tech facility - they being Winn, to set up the tech, and Alex, to do the talking, and Kara, to show her face for, like, five seconds. Lena offered to go and was heartily shut down.

Which was fine.

She deserved that.

She went back to Kara’s apartment and set about making what repairs she could to the place. Thankfully, all those hours ago when she’d been mind-controlled by that Alcorian bounty hunter, she hadn’t made too much of a mess. A few bricks were busted, but the window was still open from when she’d come back home, so at least there wasn’t a bunch of broken glass to injure pedestrians below. Lena spent far too long patching up bricks with QwikCrete because there was nowhere she could buy bricks at midnight on a weekday and because it would keep her hands busy, her mind occupied by the infinitesimally particular puzzle before her.

Lena couldn’t watch the feed because A) it was nigh unto impossible to break into and B) she’d been told not to. She couldn’t even listen in on the comms because they weren’t using them, for fear of J’onn finding out.

For the hour and a half that Kara, Alex, and Winn were out in the desert, talking to the husband of the woman who had tried to murder Kara, Lena pieced bricks back together from dust and pretended she wasn’t panicking.

At around one fifteen, she got a text from an unknown number - they’re coming home okay - and actually burst into tears. Ugly, relieved sobs. Five minutes after that, Winn texted her and let her know that everything was fine. Five minutes after that, Alex texted that she was fine, too, and she and Maggie were going to take care of something unrelated, and warned Lena not to worry if she didn’t answer for a little bit. Lena was happy they’d survived the night, and happier still not to be given any more explicit details about what she assumed would be her girlfriend’s sister’s adrenalin-fueled make up sex marathon.

Alex fired off another text in only the time it took to type it:

[1.26a.m.] Kara’s taking a lap but she’ll be home soon Don’t Be Weird

Lena laughed wetly and went to rinse the tears and brick dust off her face. Kara’s lap could take anywhere from three seconds to three hours, but not being weird meant not crying when there was no real reason to, so Lena destroyed evidence like she’d committed a crime and ended up having two minutes to go through emails.

She was stupidly busy the next day and had to be up in three hours. Ugh.

Kara landed through the open window and wordlessly wrapped her arms around Lena, who threw - actually threw - her already wrecked phone off to the side just so her hands were free to pull Kara
“Hey,” she murmured, praying her voice didn’t catch.

“It’s done,” Kara said in lieu of a greeting. “It’s over. I talked to - I talked to the king.”

“That’s good. What did he say?”

“He said… Mon-El talked to him about rebuilding Daxam right. And he thought about his - his child, and he needed to know if a person like him, like me, could grow up happy on Earth. Because, for them, the most important thing is being happy.”

“Not a bad philosophy.”

Kara hugged tighter. “He wanted to come claim the kid, but he wanted to do it right. Legally. And since the DEO is the governing body that presides over aliens on Earth, he wanted to talk to us, but because I’m - ”

“The best case scenario?”

“I asked him what would make him happiest, and he said knowing that his child was happy with a family who loved her.” Kara’s fingers curled into Lena’s shirt, something she’d stolen from Kara, and she let out a sigh. “I told him that, whoever she is, she doesn’t know him. After all these years, she probably won’t trust him. She might - she might feel like she’s been abandoned, once she finds out everything. Unwanted.

“And I said that, right now, she’s living a life, here on Earth, and it’s whole, and it’s happy, and it’s all she’s ever known, and that if he loves her, that matters much, much more than whatever he had planned for her.”

Lena closed her eyes, pressing her cheek against Kara’s hair, running her fingers through it. “And what did he say?”

“He said I was right. He said he would make the ship leave.”

“My hero. Maybe not every Daxamite is awful,” Lena murmured, and Kara twitched in her arms, like she was jerking herself awake. “C’mon. You need to eat, and then you need to sleep.”

“Can we just… Just for a minute?”

“Okay.” Lena sank back into the couch, stroking Kara’s hair in a slow, steady pattern, and prepared herself to wait.

“Hey, Lena?”

“Yeah?”

“Does the deadline hold even if they leave early?”

Lena swallowed. “Why?”

“Because I really need to tell you something.”

Lena let her head tip over the back of the couch and willed her heart to be still. “Once they’re gone,” she said quietly. “Once they’re all gone, and everything goes back to normal, you can tell me anything.”
“Okay.”

“Including what i zhor means.”

Kara laughed, a short breath. “Can I tell you that right now?”

Smiling, twirling a finger in one of Kara’s curls, Lena said, “If you must.”

“It’s Kryptonese,” she said slowly. “It’s a term of endearment. A - a pet name.”

“So long as it doesn’t mean sugar tits or something atrocious like that, I’m sure I’ll love it.”

“Do you want a hint?”

Lena’s grin widened, even with her lower lip caught between her teeth, and she nodded, knowing Kara would recognize the gesture by its sound.

“You once told me that you listen to it. All the time. You said it made your life, and I quote, ‘incalculably better.’”

“Oh.”

“Yeah.”

“I was right.”

“Generally, yes,” said Kara, shifting to look up at Lena with her cheek on her shoulder, “but about what?”

“I love it.”

I love you.

Chapter End Notes

So, this chapter was thirty two pages long and almost 20k words. I feel like you guys need to understand the magnitude of this. The previous chapter was so damn short, and I'm so damn sorry, but this. This.

Also, like, so much happened??? The big twist is pretty much 100% not even a twist anymore, these idiots are gonna say they love each other, there's more information about Marion Smith, yes, that was Lucy who texted Lena, and I wrote a joke about Lena buying Kara a company literal weeks before she actually did it in canon. Feel free to scream at me about all of it in the comments section; I promise to scream back.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Set during 2x18, Ace Reporter. An old friend comes to town, and Lena wants everything to go well.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lena didn’t have time for this shit.

She really, really didn’t.

Like, not even a little bit.

She envied Kara, just a little, for her technical lack of the need to sleep on a planet with a yellow sun. Being fully Kryptonian, Lena’s girlfriend - girlfriend! - could just wear shorts and a sports bra and plop down to write in a sunny patch and photosynthesize or whatever, and not need to sleep or even really eat that much.

Being half of whatever she was - and Lena really did want to ask, but every time she broached the subject with Alex, Alex was attending to something pressing, and Lena still felt she was on thin ice after the whole Daxamite thing, especially because there hadn’t been any ion thruster activity, which meant their ship was still in orbit, which meant Lar Gand was still trying to convince his wife to leave their second child on Earth to live the only life she’d ever known - Lena was still human enough that her eyesight was sort of sucky and she needed to sleep at least four hours a night, no matter how much UV radiation she soaked up.

Upside, since her powers had kicked in, at least she didn’t get sunburns anymore, which was a boon, since she spent so much time in her office, handling everything.

There were now dozens, rapidly approaching hundreds, of job applications from extraterrestrial individuals. Her R&D sector was booming with new ideas and productivity; security had never run smoother than it did when Xi’or, a seven foot tall musclebound land squid from the Horsehead Nebula, signed on. A Syvillian who went by Tina handled intradepartmental disputes so skillfully that Lena just had to approve paperwork.

But there was a lot of paperwork. Like the new employee handbook, which had to be rewritten to include things like not being racist about people from other planets and then translated into seventy-six languages, and then checked to make sure the language still lined up. Or the health insurance policy, which now encompassed things like scale rot in humanoids and hatchling leave. Or the hunt for new board members, which had been hard enough the first time around just trying to get alien sympathizers.

To unwind, Lena tried to go out and fight crime. But there was no crime - zip, zero, zilch, bubkes - which meant Lena just went back to Kara’s apartment, where they commiserated and fidgeted, if she wasn’t immediately called back to her desk to approve a reorder of the break room fridge because someone had sneezed fire on their lunch break.
So, no, Lena Luthor decidedly did not have time for Jack Spheer to send her a personal invitation to a press conference about the baby she abandoned, especially not when it was what she woke up to after a nigh unto sleepless night.

Part of her would always wish she hadn’t left BioMax behind in that tiny garage in New Jersey. Curing cancer wasn’t easy, but the work felt simpler than running a corporation, and if she made a mistake then, no one was depending on her. The world was no better or worse off if Lena Luthor wasn’t singlehandedly squashing every sarcoma.

But then, that part of her was shrinking daily, bit by tiny bit. It shrank when Kara kissed her goodbye that morning and almost made her late. It shrank when Xi’or and Hector showed up to work with inside jokes about blackberries, of all things. It shrank when Jess thanked her, belatedly, for the generator, and when Winn sent her new supersuit sketches, and when she saw pictures of herself in costume on that shelter’s website with a puppy in one arm and her girlfriend in the other.

It shrank a lot when she read the words ‘celebrating something we’ve both been waiting for’ in the body of that email and saw that Jacky had finally done it.

He was better off without me,” she thought, pounding espresso shots so thick she had to shake them out of their little tasse.

“Ms. Luthor?”

“Jess.” Lena sniffled, setting the cup down, and eyed her. “You know you don’t have to be my assistant anymore, now that you’re a board member.”

“And you know that I like my job and won’t just pass on the role to the first applicant. Remember last time?”

“Last time wasn’t your fault.”

“Last time was that temp agency’s fault, which is why I am personally selecting my replacement.” Crossing her arms, Jess eyed Lena right back. “You have a face.”

“Correct. It sits on the front of my skull.”

“No. A Face.”

Lena scowled and tried to get the dregs out of her cup, to no avail.

“You don’t have any meetings today, and your desk is clear -”

“For now.”

Jess narrowed her eyes, barreling on. “- so, if you wanted to, perhaps, take a long lunch with a certain reporter, I can email you if and when something comes across it that requires your attention.”

Lena’s gaze flickered over her screen, over the personal invitation from Jack’s stupid personal email to her equally stupid personal email, for a split second.

“You were kidnapped.”

“Multiple times,” sighed Lena, to Jess’ visible disapproval, “so what’s your point?”

“My point is that you have not stopped moving since. The other day, Supergirl decided it was her job to fly you home because you had passed out at your desk and somehow called her in your sleep, and
you woke up and told her to put you down.”

Cheeks burning, Lena wished her sludgy overbrewed coffee would drown her. She had been reviewing the employee handbook rewrites and texted Kara with questions about a translation, then conked out. Her face landed on her still broken screen, which she had yet to take the time to fix, square on the call button.

It was a low point.

“You need to take a nap. Or a personal day,” Jess insisted, and that was one personal too many to be a coincidence.

With a sigh, Lena closed down everything on her work computer and pushed back from her desk. “Fine. I - I will take a long lunch, and I will take it with my girlfriend.”

A stupid grin crossed Lena’s face, mirrored on Jess’.

“Get in touch with me if you need anything scheduled, I will contact you if something requires your attention, now go.”

For a brief moment, Lena resisted Jess manhandling her out the door, but then she remembered her reinforced heels, and the non-reinforced floors, and that she hadn’t told her assistant about her second job (though she suspected Jess suspected) and allowed herself to be pushed.

“I want to know immediately if anything happens,” Lena said as she skidded into the elevator. “Immediately. Anything.”

“Crystal clear.” Jess stabbed a floor number and the close doors button before leaning back out of the way. “Relax with your girlfriend.”

There was a fondly mocking sing-song lilt to the word that had Lena blushing again, and she fought a grin until the doors had slid all the way shut. Then, in the privacy of an empty elevator, she squealed, “Girlfriend!” and punched the air.

Just then, she got a phone call from said girlfriend, and her heart skipped a beat. “Hi.”

“So, Jess tells me you’re taking a long lunch. Did my invitation get lost in the mail?”

Lena leaned back against the wall and bit her lip. “No. She’s making me take a break.”

“Good.”

“Have I been weird? Lately?”

Something clattered, and Kara set down her phone and scrambled after whatever it was with a trail of PG-rated cussing in her wake. Lena waited, and didn’t laugh too much, until a breathless Kara said, “Weird? No. Nothing’s weird. Why would you say something was weird? Are you okay?”

“No, no, I’m - I’m fine. Jess seems to be under the impression that I’m not taking care of myself, and she cited that little rescue as evidence.”

Kara laughed. “Oh, Lena.”

“I mean, so what? I got kidnapped. Big deal! It happens all the time.” Before Kara could scold her about taking her own safety so lightly, Lena sighed. “Yes, I know, my safety matters and it’s still a big deal, but there are bigger deals. Like our skybound friends.”
Spluttering, Kara dropped something else. “Shoot!”

“Am I distracting you?”

“No,” said Kara, oddly wistful.

“Do you want me to distract you?”

“I can hear your elevator’s hydraulics!”

Lena pressed her fingers to her lips as she listened to her girlfriend - her girlfriend - sputter, scandalized. “It’s not my elevator. Anyone is allowed to use it.”

“You’re - ” Kara cut herself off and hummed softly. “Have I mentioned, lately, how much I like you?”

“Yes. Quite often, and in those exact terms.”

“Your moratorium sucks.”

“I just don’t want… stress to change how we act. My family didn’t exactly model healthy coping mechanisms for handling pressure.”

Another clang. “Crap!”

Lena got out of the elevator and cut through to her private lab. She pinned her phone to her face with her shoulder as she locked up behind her and stopped at the patch of new-ish concrete to change into her suit for some rooftop running.

Except she liked this outfit. The dress was comfortable but dressy, and clingy in a way that meant Kara’s eyes had followed her all the way out the door this morning.

“Kara?”

“Yes?”

“How fast can I run again?”

“Um.”

“Faster than, say, thirty eight thousand, one hundred and forty six miles per hour?”

Another drop. Lena hoped Kara’s downstairs neighbors had gone to work.

“Never mind.”

“What are you planning?”

“Me? Planning? That’s absurd.”

Kara scoffed affectionately, and Lena decided she would just stay in her regular clothes and have Georgie drop her off far enough from Kara’s apartment that she could stretch her legs, clear her head.

“Goodbye, Kara. Try not to destroy your apartment, I know how much you like it.”

“Ehrosh bem, i zhor.”
Lena put her phone away and headed out to the garage, where Georgie was waiting.

“Nice to see you when the sun’s up.”

“It’s California. The sun is always up.”

The drive was fine - no protestors, no roadblocks, traffic wasn’t even that horrible. Georgie’s granddaughter, Ellie, was joining the Girl Scouts, and Frankie had finally gotten a prescription for his glaucoma, which meant their house smelled like the goddamn seventies, and I already lived through that the first time. Lena’s restlessness didn’t abate, though, even with the purring engine and the cozy chatter, so about ten blocks away, she said, “You can just stop here.”

“You should see about getting a parking spot closer to your gal’s apartment.”

“I don’t mind the walk.”

“Hector minds the walk.”

“Well, you saw the pictures. Superheroes hang out in this neighborhood. I’m safe as houses on Hope Street.”

Georgie laughed. “Can’t believe that’s an actual street.”

“Can’t believe it’s where Kara lives.”

Lena got out, and turned the corner to wait for Georgie to drive off. It only took a few seconds. Then, alone, she started walking at a totally legitimate human pace, phone in hand. Once she reached the end of the block, she checked for messages, just in case.

No new messages. Jack’s email greeted her, unassuming.

_I know how much this project meant to you, and if you want to come and you’ve got the time, there’ll be seats saved._

Lena shoved her phone into her purse and started speed walking like a good Metropolis native.

_(I read the interviews, by the way. You’re still the best of us.)_

She checked for people and, seeing none, started to run.

Nine blocks passed in less than a second, and Kara’s door opened to Lena’s key with a plume of smoke, and Lena coughed her greeting, rather than said it.

“Hey!” Kara tossed down her apron and zoomed over, kissing Lena gently, like brown sugar crumbling from the shape of a spoon. “What brings you to the rent controlled side of town before quittin’ time?”

Suddenly, her favor is hard to ask for, and she wrinkled her nose fondly. “Are you grief-baking?”

“What? No!”

Fondly, Lena scoffed, “Liar,” and kissed her again, palm cupping her cheek.

“Being unemployed is not fun anymore,” Kara grumbled into her lips.

“I can always open up a proper PR department at L Corp.” Lena scratched the nape of her neck
gently, blunt nails rasping over skin in a soothing rhythm. “Or buy up a news outlet for you to run.”

“Nepotism is charming and everything, Lena, but I want to make it as a reporter on my own merit.” Kara sighed. “Wait, is everything okay?”


Kara’s thumb rubbed over the small of Lena’s back, skimmed the bottom of her bra’s band, and Lena had nothing in her left to fight with.

“So, today, there’s going to be this press conference for Spheerical Industries’ new unveiling. Whatever they announce is going to be the next big thing everybody wants.”

“Wait, I know that name…” Kara’s brow furrowed, all cute and kissable. “CEO Jack Spheer, right? You’ve talked about him. He’s not competition, is he?”

“No, he’s - we were close.” Lena shook her head, grinning. “Until I moved to National City, actually, we were - close.”

“Oh.” A beat. “Oh! Wait, I thought - ”

“I was a raging lesbian? You wouldn’t be wrong.”

Kara snickered, but the laugh soon petered out, and she waited with infinite patience for Lena to start the story.

“I met him the year I graduated from MIT. He was going to a lecture at Oxford about cellular regeneration, I was - not on vacation. Recon, for Lex. We sat next to each other, started talking - the guest speaker had no idea what he was talking about, and we both knew it. He’d heard of Luthor Corp. He was looking for startup money, and when I couldn’t convince Mother or Lex, I decided to throw myself into his project, these robots that could excise tumors, cure cancer, without major surgery - without symptoms. We lived together, worked together, for five years, but we dated for two.”

Kara’s eyes were wide.

“And I made it two, feeling nothing when he kissed me, wanting nothing more. He was like my brother, and while I lived and worked with him, I fought tooth and nail to keep Lex… Lex.” Lena laughed. “Then Lex went insane, and I didn’t have it in me to pretend I saw anything more than a brother in Jack because my actual brother was gone from me. I had to go handle Luthor Corp, I had to go fight for my name. I broke up with him, with his business. I had every belief in him, I still do, but I couldn’t be there, be that person.”

“Oh, wow, Lena.”

“No, it’s - it was startlingly lower school,” Lena joked, rubbing Kara’s arm where it bulged with sympathetic tension. “He never pushed me, never pressured me - that’s part of why it lasted so long. We were both so occupied by work that sex was never a thought for either of us - or, if it was for him, he knew it wasn’t in the cards and he let it lie.”

“He sounds…” Kara smiled, just a little. “Nice.”

“He’s a good man.” Lena swallowed. “And he sent me a personal invitation to his press conference.”

Kara offered, “Do you want me to come with you?” right away, and Lena’s heart fluttered.
“Who knows? Maybe it’ll give you the scoop you need to find a new outlet.”

Kara kissed the top of Lena’s head, and Lena’s eyes fell shut as she gave her girlfriend a squeeze. “I just - we didn’t part on the best of terms, and I don’t know if I can face everything. If you’re with me… I’m stronger when you’re there.”

“El mayarah,” Kara murmured, and curiosity bubbled. Lena knew her own family wouldn’t have approved, not on any level, and looking back on the person she hid herself behind to avoid another layer of loathing, she couldn’t help but wonder.

“Did your planet have relationships like ours? Like Alex and Maggie’s? Two women, two men - two of the same gender? Did your even planet have gender constructs?”

“We sort of had a binary like Earth, but my parents’ generation was the last to be born naturally. They all had… problems conceiving. Kal and I were both tube babies. There was this whole system that matched people perfectly, and plenty of those matches were composed of, as you so eloquently put it, raging lesbians.”

Lena laughed, gently knocking her forehead into Kara’s shoulder.

“If you and someone else got married, then they took your genetic material - sometimes artificially randomized, sometimes carefully selected - and made you a child.” Kara hummed softly. “Just the one. I was so jealous of Aunt Astra and my mother for having a sister, and I was so happy to have one in Alex.”

“Sisters and brothers must be very different,” Lena said.

“Not always.” Then, with a heavy sigh, like pulling away from Lena was some great effort, Kara peeled off of her, pouting. “When’s this press conference?”

“Five, why?”

Kara, grinning slowly, started towards the door and grabbed her coat. “I was wondering if we had time to make some lucky bakery’s day before your girlfriend, Kara, came with you and had your back.”

“Thank you!”

“I mean, it’s so much better than grief baking, and I always have your back.”

Lena helped Kara into her jacket, closing her eyes to press a soft kiss to the back of her neck. “You’re my favorite.”

☆

When Lena was nervous, Lena did what she was taught to do: intimidate.

When Lena was nervous, Lena dressed to kill.

So, when she woke up to see the name of her ex-boyfriend - who was good and kind and clever and patient and bore out her hucking a microscope at him and never pushed past her occasional flinching or cringing or not kissing back and always asked about how she was, who was all those things and still unwanted, who gave her half of the Oh, Shit, I’m Gay equation - at a conference for their baby, which she abandoned (along with him), that she’d been personally invited to, she didn’t just dress to kill.
She dressed for felony murder - blue silk jersey that clung like a magnet, deep neckline appropriate only on technicality, lipstick florid under green eyes, heels high enough that she didn’t have to stretch up to kiss Kara.

She really wanted to kiss Kara.

“Oh, wow.” Kara blinked like butterfly wings drying outside a cocoon. “You look - ”

“Nervous?”

“Gorgeous. Scary gorgeous.”

Lena grabbed her hand, fingers interlocking, squeezing too hard for a human and hard enough that Kara’s hand will start to hurt. “Thank you.”

“And if you’re nervous, just know that’s okay, but I’m with you.” Kara rubbed her thumb along the back of Lena’s hand and they dug around for their seats - dead center; Jack was nothing if not considerate to those he cared for.

*Oh, god, he cared for me.*

Kara squeezed back, pulsing a message into her palm that abruptly stopped in the face of a grouchy looking man squarely in the middle age bracket.

“Wow, they’ll let anyone into these events now,” he sneered.

“I’m just here with my girlfriend,” said Kara, ever diplomatic.

“Good. I was starting to worry that a dotcom counted as a press pass.”

Lena could almost hear that stinging.

“And I was worried that only people born before 1980 read your magazine,” Kara scoffed.

“That’s because we value *real* news,” he rebutted sourly, “we’re not all clickbait millennials.”

Maybe it was how on edge Lena had been, too much time in the office with nothing high-octane to sap the nervous energy she had in spades. Maybe it was the fact that he’d fired Kara for saying she wasn’t dead. Maybe it was the fact that he was why Kara wasn’t at the company she’d spent four years at, made a home at, built an identity with, anymore. Maybe it was because she was anxious and guilty about Jack.

Maybe she just didn’t have it in her to resist the ever-present urge to make old white men squirm.

Whatever it was, she went off.

“Firstly - Snapper Carr? - Kara’s status as a millennial is dubious at best, since plenty of demographics studies categorize her birth year in Gen X. You know, the entrepreneurial generation who got things done, while baby boomers sat back and coasted.” Lena gave the tightest, coldest smile. “And secondly, as someone who is definitely a millennial, I have read your magazine, and Kara Danvers’ articles were, without a doubt, the draw. Now I suppose I’ll have to resort to - what was it, clickbait? - like the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the SAGE medical journal, the IJRERD…” Lena tapped her cheek, exaggeratedly pensive. “There are so many more, but I suppose since I don’t have an overpriced Moleskine notebook that needs to be replaced every two weeks with me to keep track of the list, I’m absolutely up creek, sans paddle.” Then, *le pièce de résistance*, she
lifted her phone, brought up her subscriptions list, and said, “Oh! Never mind. Have them all here. Kara, I think I see our seats - they’re reserved.”

They went; they sat.

“I’m sorry,” Lena whispered. “That was too much. But he’s the man who fired you, right? He had no right being so snide, especially when you were invited, especially when any illegitimacy you may have right now is on his unnecessarily shiny head.”

“Don’t apologize.” Kara knocked their ankles together. “It’s nice, having you stand up for me. And watching you rip into him on behalf of an entire generation was actually kind of…” Kara bit her lip, arched an eyebrow.

Lena flushed, sitting up a little taller in her seat. The lights dimmed, and she was thankful no one could see her red face or her hand untangling from Kara’s long fingers to rest a hair too high on her knee.

She was still nowhere inappropriate, and it’s only because the muscle of Kara’s thigh was less anxiety-provoking to grip than the shifting floating bone of her knee, and Kara was wearing sturdy trousers that were about as thick as two pairs of women’s jeans, but she could hear Kara’s heart uptick and her breath catch. She would have almost moved her hand away, but then Kara’s hand was on top of hers and she was whispering, too soft for any human, don’t you dare move.

Music flared, and Lena thought, god, Jack’s such a nerd, fondly.

And then the nerd appeared, in his lucky suit - monochromatic dark blue worsted wool, with a brighter shirt, cool against his warm skin - and started talking about progress and medicine and then his CFO (in her coordinating little sheath dress) was slicing his hand open and his hand was healing and, “Oh, my god. He did it.”

“That was the project you were working on with Jack?” Kara whispered.

“We were so close on our research.” Lena watched the red glow fade and couldn’t help but grin, pride rushing through her. “He finally cracked the code!”

“What you have just witnessed is the fourth medical miracle, BioMax.” He grinned, wiggling his fingers, and Lena really wanted to clap. And maybe hug him. And tell him how happy she was for him.

Especially because, under the flashing lights and in the face of all those leering lenses, he looked nervous. He clicked his tongue, which he always did when he was nervous, before pushing forward. “No longer will we need to inoculate ourselves against disease, risk complications with going under anesthesia, or combat increasingly resistant bacteria with antibiotics. We are proud to launch our BioMax Medical Nano Bot program across National City.” He smiled. He hit his stride. “Be happy to answer your questions.”

Kara was standing. Snapper Carr was standing. It seemed like half the damn auditorium was on its feet, clamoring for his attention, and Jack was nervous again.

And then he picked Kara, and Kara was nervous.

Lena put her hand on Kara’s calf, thumb working along the outseam of her trousers, and she stilled, and scooped Carr when he tried to make her look incompetent, and goddamn, was Lena proud of her girlfriend.
The rest of the conference went smoothly, Kara’s superspeed definitely not in check as she transcribed every word spoken, Jack finally comfortable talking about the science, rather than being a showman.

*That was always supposed to be my job,* Lena found herself thinking, but it didn’t hurt as badly as it would have before she saw him, happy and thriving.

Somehow, he saw her face in the crowd. For a moment, she was paralyzed by it, but then he gave her the tiniest smile, and she could smile back, and she was okay.

As she watched everything unfold, she realized that Kara was doing the same things here as she did with L Corp press conferences. Whenever Jack looked a little too nervous, she asked a question totally out of left field to the one preceding, but still related to the topic at hand.

*That ship better have fucked off, because I need to tell my girlfriend that I love her yesterday.*

She coasted on endorphins through the whole talk, following Kara out with their fingers interlaced, and once they were out of the auditorium, she could barely hold back a squeal. “That was incredible. *He* was incredible. *You* were incredible.”

“I should certainly say so.”

Lena turned, and those endorphins up and ditched her like they’d gotten a better offer halfway around the world, leaving her a fidgety wreck again. There, in his stupid lucky suit, was Jack.

“I hate these things,” he continued, smiling wryly and sticking out his hand for Kara to shake. “You grilled me good.”

“I did.”

“Oh, this is Kara Danvers,” Lena managed. “She is one of the best reporters in National City.”

Kara giggled, retracting her hand from Jack’s to cover her smiling mouth. “*Stop.*”

Jack lit up. Lena didn’t know how, didn’t know *why,* but he did - from top to toe like a goddamn Christmas tree - before stepping forward the way he always did before hugging her, telegraphing so she had enough time to pull away.

She didn’t pull away. She launched herself into that hug like she launched herself out of windows, rocking up onto the very edge of her toes to get her arms around him right.

“I’m so glad you came,” he said, squeezing.

“I wouldn’t have missed this for the world.”

The hug was brief, and Lena was probably pink-faced, and Kara squeezing her hand and kissing her cheek before fleeing to write a self-directed article about the conference didn’t help.

“So, tell me: the nano swarm.” Lena arched an eyebrow. “How did you finally crack it?”

“I’ll tell you at dinner.” Sensing her hesitance, he pushed forwards gently. “Come on, it’s been so long. I’d love to catch up.”

“I should tell you, um.” *Oh, my god. I’m - ”*

“Jack - excuse me.” Beth Breen, CFO, rolled up a blur of precise lines and crisp words. Lena
probably would have liked her. “You really should spend some time with the shareholders for a
while.”

“Oh. I, uh…” He gestured towards Lena.

“I should let you do that,” she fumbled, taking an uncertain step back. “It really has been great to see
you.”

Jack opened his mouth, as if to say something, but Beth practically dragged him off, and Lena was
hightailing it as fast as humanly possible. She both wished she had been able to tell him what she’d
meant to, that Kara was her girlfriend, and that she hadn’t tried in the first place.

She checked her phone and found one - one - email from Jess. It informed her that she had one - one
- dossier on her desk about a potential junior assistant to meet with, a nice boy named Hector.

Jess had specified both nice and junior. Lena would have laughed, if not for the weird tumult of
nerves in her chest blocking its way out, and called Georgie to ask for a ride.

☆

Hector Castillo was, in fact, a very nice boy. He was twenty two, who had double majored in
Business Admin and Computer Science at Yale. He lived with a roommate named Anya, who was
working her way through a Masters in Finance at Yale; they had graduated together almost a year
ago, and were very consistent about their garbage disposal and recycling, as well as the care and
keeping of their mutually adopted pet Komodo dragon, Toothless. For the past eleven months, he’d
been working data entry at a nonprofit that delivered food to people who were housebound. He was
from Baltimore, had no criminal record, an Instagram full of smiling selfies with friends and family
and college professors and shelter animals, and a subscription to - get this!!! Jess had written - CatCo
magazine.

He was tall and solid, but he had the babiest of baby faces, and he’d been very nervous to meet her.

“Not nervous, Ms. Luthor!” he’d insisted. “I’m just excited to be here.”

Apparently, his mom had an L Corp prosthetic. She’d gotten it as part of a clinical trial, and the
upkeep had been gratis, as per policy, and ever since, well…

“You’ve sort of been my hero.”

Jess had shown him out, professionally neutral, once the interview was over and promised to email
him within the week with a decision. Once she’d packed him into the elevator, she marched back,
hands on hips, and said, “What do you think?”

“I think he’s qualified, and he seems earnest enough.”

“Do you want to hire him?”

Lena hesitated, stealing a glance at her brand new bomb-proof balcony. “I like him.”

“Because I was thinking we bring him on, on a trial basis - just to learn under me - for a month. If he
slips up, even once, he’s out on his ass.”

“He’s not going to slip up.”

“You don’t know that.” Jess clacked up to her desk, jaw set.
“I do know that, because you vetted him yourself, and you trusted him enough to put him in here with me.” Lena sighed, leaning forward onto her elbows. “Do you want to hire him?”

“I - ” Jess dropped her chin, just a hair. “Yeah. He’s a great kid, and he’ll do good work. His resumé is impeccably organized, his references all love him, and he reads - ”

“CatCo magazine. Speaking of, was that really pertinent?”

“Yes. CatCo is the only publication to speak reliably in this company’s favor, it was founded by one of your heroes, and its politics are similar to ours. That wasn’t me prodding at your relationship, that was a character witness that costs $12.99 a year and speaks volumes.”

Sinking back into her chair, Lena closed her eyes and nodded. “Trial basis, studying under you.”

Jess nodded sharply back.

“And Jess?”

“Yes, Ms. Luthor?”

“No one can ever replace you.”

With a shockingly watery smile, Jess made her escape, leaving Lena alone in her office.

Lena waited, listening for the sound of Jess dialing and saying, “Hector? Hi. This is Jess, from L Corp.”

Once she was certain Jess was too engrossed in laying out terms and conditions to notice, Lena let out a long, low groan and slumped over her desk. She allowed herself to wallow mindlessly for a moment longer than her standard allotment before going over Hector’s resumé one last time.

The PDF version had a link embedded in his Instagram username, because he’d gone for full transparency, and Lena clicked on it absently.

*That is one cute dragon,* she mused, watching a short clip of Toothless staring at a cupcake with a solitary birthday candle stuck in the top while Hector and, presumably, Anya sang him happy birthday. The video ended with Toothless sticking out his tongue and knocking the candle over before looping back to the start, cutting off in the middle of a sudden, bright burst of laughter.

Before she knew it, Lena was clicking away from her new junior assistant’s Instagram and over to Jack’s.

Not Spheerical Industries’ official Instagram page. Not CEO Jack Spheer’s account, verified by that little blue check and full of photoshoots and news clippings.

No, she went to his private account, the one they’d made one drunken night to procrastinate because they could smell a dead end coming a mile away, the one full of stupid jokes - including the name, jason_oorbs, which she had insisted on.

In return, he made her use lu.lu.lu.lu for her own account.

His most recent activity was from a few months back, the account practically an ancient artifact.

Lena recalled, faintly, a brief six month stint after her mother’s death in which she had become obsessed with archaeology, immortalizing buried things. To say that Lillian hadn’t been a fan would be a woeful understatement.
She clicked through and was almost immediately slapped in the face with a brick wall of nostalgia. Five years of her life were there. The person she used to be was there.

The selfies all sucked, because their faces were smushed together cheek to cheek and neither of them were paying much attention to the camera. There was one picture of him that she’d taken while he was brushing his teeth, snatching his phone up off the lip of the sink and stealing a shot before he could snatch it back; he’d been so surprised that he’d spat toothpaste on himself, and there was blue-white foam clinging to his first attempt at a beard. There were more selfies, progress pictures of their first iterations of the nanobots with badly drawn cat ears or dicks or snail shells, Lena from Valentine’s Day 2016, an ice pack on her burnt foot, gaily flipping him off from behind a giant mug with her glasses steamed opaque.

Her twenty-first birthday, when they’d both pretended she’d never been drunk before and tagged the picture #drinkresponsibly, like anyone would ever see it.

Lena wanted to be drunk. Obnoxiously drunk. She wanted to get white girl wasted.

The nice Scotch in her office was supposed to be for business associates she needed to impress, and it didn’t get her even the tiniest bit tipsy, but it was familiar going down, and she stayed in her office, doing ineffective shots out of her espresso tasse until she ran out.

It was dark, then, well past even nautical twilight because Lena could pace herself, and she realized she hadn’t heard from Kara since she’d left to start writing. Usually she would’ve gotten at least one picture of the cat at Kara’s neighborhood Chinese place from a break, or a shot of the city skyline at dusk on a fruitless patrol.

[10.02p.m.] hey r u ok?

Staring at her phone, waiting for Kara to text back, would probably have driven Lena thoroughly bonkers, so she ended up staring at her computer instead - the evil microscope; their attempt to create a game called caffeine Jenga, in which one tried to stack paper coffee cups and energy drink cans into intricate towers and tear them apart without tearing them down; Jack in Lena’s MIT sweatpants, which were miles too short on him, and her being engulfed by his Oxford sweatshirt.

That didn’t exactly help.

She didn’t miss pretending to be in love with him, the numb nausea she felt kissing him at events, the clunky shape of the word boyfriend in her mouth. She missed being friends with him. She missed scribbling silver Sharpie onto his fingernails while he slept and him retaliating by putting glue in her empty conditioner bottle. She missed the green corduroy couch they kept in the garage lab to pass out on, and waking up on it to the sound of his electric kettle, plugged into eighteen different power strips just so it would fit into an American wall socket. She missed She missed not even having a last name with him, the way he clipped her atrocious middle name down to Lulu if he didn’t call her Tony Stark’s worst nightmare or pass me the microscope, I can’t see you without 400x magnification or by one of the Spice Girls’ names, usually Posh or Scary, depending on the hour of the day; she always replied by calling him Sporty Spice, not because he was particularly athletic, but because he actually had team merchandise.

She got why Kara hadn’t told her about being Supergirl - not intellectually, the way she had from the moment she’d figured it out. It was nice having someone who didn’t see any further than your face,
the way you squabbled over what to get for lunch, the dumb jokes you made.

She missed her best friend, and how comparatively simple things had once been.

[Kara, 10.09 p.m.] i’m fine i’m Real Into this article

[Lena, 10.09 p.m.] it’s gonna be gr9

[10.09 p.m.] i’ll leave you to it

[Kara, 10.10 p.m.] be safe

Lena looked at the timestamp and managed a laugh, shooting back, is that ur wish? and grinning at
the immediate response.

[Kara, 10.10 p.m.] of course dummy!

She typed I Love You, but did not send it, rapidly deleting and replacing the statement with a single
❤ before getting up from her desk and heading to her own apartment.

It was a weird place to be, since she spent so little time there, but the bed was still comfortable, so she
kicked off her heels, shimmied out of her dress and evil underwear, and threw on the first pajamas
she laid hands on before falling face first into it and knocking out.

Come morning, she was not well-rested, but she wasn’t hungover, either, so she considered it a win.
She showered, dressed, drank a smoothie the size of a water tower, and went back to the office.

Hector greeted her at the door.

Not her office door, the front door.

“Good morning, Ms. Luthor.”

“Jess called you in?”

“I was ready to get to work! Um, coffee.”

Lena took a sip; big as a barn and black as tar. Go, Hector.

“Also, you have a new patent to approve and a dinner meeting tonight at six.”

“Doesn’t sound so bad.”

They stepped into the elevator and Lena only just beat him to pressing the button.

“You haven’t seen the project.”

Lena eyed the folder in his arms - and, yes, the plural was necessary. “Oh, boy.”
“There’s also a PDF of the file on your servers,” he said, voice tinged with apology as he handed it over. Lena made a big show of adjusting to the weight. “The change in display should help keep everything in focus.”

“Thank you, Hector.”

They got out on the thirty-sixth floor and Hector rushed over to his seat behind Jess’ desk. Jess widened her eyes and tilted her head, and Lena shot her a covert thumbs up before pushing through her own doors and sitting down at her desk. She downed the coffee in one long chain of gulps, not even feeling how it could have burned her tongue, before cracking the file open.

The patent was for a capacitor to hook up to cars that would take the momentum and cycle it back into propulsion. Other than the initial kick to get it rolling, there would be no carbon footprint.

Only problem was that the entire thing was written in a language Lena couldn’t totally read. She was quick to pick it up, in the grand scheme of things, because she was almost fluent by noon, but at that point, she’d marked up the hard copy so much it looked more like the notes of a student who had gotten bored in a university lecture than a piece of official documentation, so she chucked it and switched to the PDF.

Of course, that presented a whole new set of challenges, and she realized that there was no way she’d make her meeting and have this finished, so when the door opened, she said, “Hector, can you cancel dinner? This is gonna take me until at least eight o’clock and I fully intend on crashing afterwards.”

_PREFERABLY ON KARA’S COUCH WITH HOT FOOD I Didn’T HAVE TO MAKE._

“That’s disappointing.”

Lena looked up, a grin tugging at the left corner of her mouth. “You don’t have an appointment.”

Jack strolled in, hands in his pockets, and shook his head, eyeing her shelves - the ones she couldn’t comfortably reach. “No. But I was hoping to get one.”

“How did you get past Hector?” she asked his back.

“No one’s above a snack break.”

Lena almost laughed, imagining Jack trying to bribe Hector with food, but she shook herself clear of the image and managed to move past it.

“So.” He started towards her desk. “I know you’re free for dinner, good news, but you have no interest in dinner, bad news.”

He paused, looking her in the eye so deadpan she knew he was _trying_ to make her laugh.

“It’s been an emotional rollercoaster since I walked in here.”

“Oh, yeah, you seem wrecked,” she ribbed, cocking her head at his coordinated and deliberately slightly-too-casual outfit.

“Oh,” said Jack, sitting down, “completely. But I’m hoping I don’t have enough data. For instance, would you be willing to go to dinner if I was a factor?”

Lena arched an eyebrow. “No.”
“Are you mad at me?”

Never.

“Is it because I cracked the nano code alone?” He leaned in for the kill. “Seems petty for you.”

“Stop, Jacky,” Lena said, grinning, the nickname slipping out before she could catch herself. “You know I wish you all the success.”

“But?”

“I’m still not going for dinner with you.”

As she watched him drum his thumbs together, his own individual nervous tic, Lena realized that she wasn’t the only one joking through a bad case of nostalgic loneliness.

“Do you have fun here?” he asked her, and her heart broke a little.

Because, no. L Corp wasn’t fun. L Corp was a duty, an obligation, and she would never take that choice back, because choosing to rehabilitate her family company had brought her to Kara and Jess and Alex and Winn and even Livewire, and it had brought James back into her life, and it had given her at least part of a truth she never would have understood if she hadn’t gone.

She finally settled on, “I feel good about the work we do,” but they both knew that wasn’t an answer.

“You had fun with me. I mean, ruining your eyesight staring into a microscope.”

Lena fought a smirk.

“Throwing said microscope at my head when I was insufferable.” Jack started thumb-drumming again, and he shook his head. “I don’t like the way things ended with us,” he said, all pretense of joking aside, and Lena could suddenly hear him, clear as a bell, telling her he loved her when she could bear to hear that the least.

“You could’ve made it easier on me,” she ceded. “It’s not like I wanted to go.”

“I’m not here to make it harder.” Jack shook his head, shrugged. “I just miss you.”

Looking away, Lena didn’t bother to school her features, and neither did he his.

“May I please have dinner with you? Simple as that.”

“Just dinner?” She managed to meet his gaze as she asked, and that was no small feat.

“That’s your prerogative.”

The joking was back. A weight lifted, just a little - just enough to loosen her tongue.

“I’m seeing someone,” she blurted, wrapping an arm around herself and gripping her tricep like a vice. “Kara Danvers. She’s my -”

“Girlfriend?”

He wasn’t angry. Wasn’t jilted, judgmental.
Lena looked at him like he’d just declared himself to be Louis XIV.

“I mean, I’m not the smartest person in this room, but I saw how you two looked at each other.” He was all lit up again, beaming. “I’m happy for you, Lulu. Invite her along.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, of course! I want to know all about the woman who stole your heart.”

☆

Jack couldn’t stay as long as either of them would have liked him to; Beth called him back before they even really got to talking, but Lena didn’t entirely mind, because she had just six and a half hours until the only friend she’d ever made for herself besides Kara was about to properly meet her.

She supposed this was what it felt like bringing someone home to meet the folks, when your folks weren’t murderers. Outside of the extended ersatz Danvers family, and the people who worked for her, Jack was about it for her, and having him back was giddying.

“Lena? What’s wrong?”

Kara’s urgent tone wasn’t even enough to burst her bubble.

“Nothing. I mean, there’s the whole ship-in-the-sky rigmarole and a few unanswered questions, but by and large, things are…” Lena stopped, grinning. “Good. Really, really good. And I have you to thank.”

“Me?”

“If you hadn’t come with me, I don’t know that I would have had the fortitude to go to that conference, and now I have Jack back. I have my best friend again.”

Kara made a weird little noise, and worry started to creep in around the edges.

“But, um, I was calling to say that he invited me to dinner tonight, and we both wanted you to come along.”

“He wants me to come to dinner.”

“Yeah. I - I told him we were dating, and he’s really happy for me. He wants to get to know you.”

“…Huh.”

Lena got up out of her chair, too restless to be still, and started pacing the width of her office. “He was a really big part of my life for a really long time. The closest thing I had to family before you. I don’t think I ever let myself think about how much I missed talking to him; we only got to speak for a grand total of, what, five minutes, and it felt incredible.”

Kara didn’t say anything. Lena stepped out of her shoes so the clacking wouldn’t draw Hector or Jess’ attention, wiggling her bare toes into the cold floor to keep herself focused.

“What are you thinking?”

“I’m thinking…” Kara let out a sigh, long and drawn-out, and Lena turned on the balls of her feet, collapsing back onto her couch. “Maybe this isn’t a good idea?”

“Are you jealous?” teased Lena through her mounting nerves. “You know you’re the most
important person in my life.”

“I’m not jealous.”

Lena drew her knees up to her chest, brow furrowed. Wrapping an arm around her shins, she asked, “What is it, then?”

“I just - you were really hurt, just this morning. You were so worried about talking to him, and now he’s convinced you to have dinner with him after five minutes? And I - ”

“You’re worried about me.” Lena toppled onto her side, heart fluttering in her chest. “You don’t have to do that.”

“Well, too bad.”

Lena grinned crookedly. “If you’re so worried, come to dinner with us. He’s a good man, Kara, and he wants to fix things.”

“Do you?”

“Yeah.” Shifting onto her back, Lena stretched her legs out, propping her feet up on the arm of the couch. “Yeah, I do.”

Kara didn’t respond right away, and Lena worried her lip between her teeth.

“If you don’t want to come, you don’t have to.” She sat up, sinking into the back of the couch. “I don’t mind just having a meal between friends to catch up, and you’re still working on your article, so if you’re too busy, I understand.”

“No. No, I want to be there. You matter to me, and I want to be there. I will be there.”

“Great!” A grin split Lena’s face wide open; her cheeks ached a little with it. “I’m - thank you, Kara. I promise, you won’t regret this.”

“I trust you.”

“Can I come by around seven?”

“Sounds good.”

“I’ll - I’ll let you get back to work.”

“Bye.”

“Bye.”

Phone call ended, Lena put her phone facedown on her stomach and covered her smiling face with her hands, sliding back down until her head met the cushions.

Her best friend and her girlfriend were going to have dinner. Kara would stop worrying once she knew him a little better. She and Jack might even get along. Jack would definitely appreciate Kara’s awful puns, while Kara would see straight to the heart of his deadpan sarcasm, and they both had a deep and abiding love for 90s pop, albeit from opposite sides of the Atlantic.

Lena had high hopes, and she couldn’t imagine anything bringing them down.
“What’s wrong with what I’m wearing?” Kara pouted.

“Absolutely nothing, but there is a dress code.”

Lena padded over to Kara, who looked absolutely breathtaking in her pencil skirt and sweater, and wrapped her up in a hug from behind, hooking her chin over Kara’s shoulder and kissing the hinge of her jaw. Kara’s pout wavered.

“I think he’s trying to impress you,” Lena sing-songed, swaying from foot to foot. “He used to go a full hour on why dress codes were idiotic.”

Kara huffed softly, swaying with her. “You’re in a good mood.”

“Um.” Lena dropped her eyes. “Yeah.”

“So!” Kara draped an arm over Lena’s shoulders and planted a kiss on her temple. “Walk me through the dress code, because jacket required sounds like someone just used a word randomizer to fill up space.”

Lena nodded, darting over to Kara’s closet and, after glancing over her shoulder for permission and receiving an encouraging nod, started rooting around.

“You,” she said after a moment’s searching, “have a suit.”

“I do,” was Kara’s hesitant reply.

“I’ve never seen you in a suit.” Lena whipped around, hanger in hand and eyes wide. “I mean, supersuit aside.”

“Well, Vasquez was showing me pictures of a wedding she went to over the summer, and she wore a suit, and that looked way more comfortable than wearing a dress. Plus an actual suit would be easier to hide a supersuit under.”

“This counts as jacket required,” Lena managed, holding the tailored jacket up to Kara’s shoulders, “just so you know.”

“Makes sense, since it has one. It’s not going to be weird if I don’t wear a dress?”

“Not at all. It’s going to be delightful, are you kidding? I get to look at you in a suit.”

“Then we’re both winners.” Kara kissed Lena on the cheek and snatched the suit out of her hands before bustling off to the bathroom and closing the door behind her.

“I’ve seen you naked before,” Lena called, sitting down on the foot of Kara’s bed to deal with her own sartorial situation. And to take a little breather, because Kara Zor-El Danvers in a suit.

Cheerfully, Kara called, “Don’t I know it!” through the door, and Lena laughed, unbuttoning her blouse.

While Kara got herself into a suit that was probably picked out by the DEO’s resident butch badass, Lena managed to get herself halfway into a wide-necked red number and promptly get her zipper stuck.

The door clicked open, and she said, “Give a girl a hand?”
Kara came over on silent feet and zipped Lena up, no problem. “That’s better.”

Lena turned, took in the sight of Kara in a suit. “You can say that again.”

The suit was a dark shade of blue that brought out Kara’s eyes and harkened back to the only other suit she owned. The pants were cut like all of her other pants, minus the extra fabric to hide muscle, which meant that the fact that she could easily kill a man with her thighs was plain to see. The jacket emphasized her shoulders - her drool-worthy shoulders - and the long lines of her torso.

“Remind me to send Agent Vasquez a thank-you gift,” Lena muttered, hands fluttering to rest on Kara’s waist. “And to buy you more suits.”

“How do I look?”

Lena shot Kara a Look - do you really need to ask? - and was about to wax poetic when her phone rang.

“Ooh!” She bent and snatched it up, saw Jack’s name, and grinned. “Jacky! You’d better not be calling to cancel.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it. I am, however, sending a car around to pick you and Ms. Danvers up, but I don’t know your address.”


“Why wouldn’t I try and kiss up to, what was it, the most important person in your life?”

Cheeks pink, Lena leaned into Kara’s shoulder, receiving a kiss on the forehead for her troubles. She pressed the phone to her chest and said, “He wants to send a car to pick us up.”

“Um…”

“Want to head over to mine first?”

Kara nodded.

Lena rattled off her own address and, after the briefest of chats, hung up. “He’ll be there in ten minutes.”

“More than enough time,” said Kara. “You look great, too, by the way. Great doesn’t even cut it, actually. Red is definitely your color.”

“Flirt.”

“Only with you.”

She scooped Lena up and flew her to the roof, taking extra care since she didn’t have her cape on. With Kara in her flat shoes and Lena in heels, they were nearly the same height, able to look each other dead in the eyes before taking off, racing uptown.

Running like that wasn’t something Lena had been able to do much of lately. Under the cover of night, it was extra unlikely that no one would see them, which meant she had one less thing to worry about. With Kara zooming overhead, she wasn’t alone up there, and racing with her gave Lena an excuse to really push herself.

She had to jump to reach her own apartment’s rooftop, a serious vertical leap, and Kara caught her at
the apex of the arc before bringing them both to a landing.

“I would’ve beat you,” Lena said, kissing Kara’s cheek.

“Sure, Jan.”

Lena cackled, and didn’t hop down.

“Am I carrying you inside?”

“Thank you for offering.”

Now it was Kara’s turn to laugh, and Lena’s breath was snatched straight out of her lungs. Kara, happy, blonde hair haloed in moonlight - could there be anything better?

When Kara carried her down into her apartment proper, shifting her out of a bridal carry and sandwiching her up against the wall before kissing her like they’d been oceans apart for twelve years, Lena ceded that, perhaps, one thing might edge it out.

Her hair had tumbled out of its low ponytail, which meant it was perfect to tangle Lena’s fingers into, pulling her closer. Kara’s grip on her waist moved lower, and Lena nipped at her lower lip in response.

Time felt particularly fake, and neither of them noticed its passing until, once again, Lena’s phone went off.

“This is why silent exists,” she muttered, fishing it out of her bra. “I take it your driver’s here?”

“Should I have him drive around the block a few times?”

“God, no. California traffic, we’d never make it to dinner.”

“We could spare one lap,” Kara murmured in her ear, lips grazing her skin, sending goosebumps over her whole body, “couldn’t we?”

Lena stifled a noise, cleared her throat, and said, “We’ll be down in just a minute. See you at dinner.”

“See you at dinner.”

Grateful that Kara wasn’t much one for lipstick, Lena hung up. “Come on. Car’s waiting.”

“He’s awfully dramatic,” Kara groused, reluctantly setting Lena down.

“Perhaps I have a type.”

They took the stairs, oft ignored in such a tall building and thus totally free of bystanders who might see two women running far faster than the average human can manage, and made it into a very nice car within fifty two seconds.

“I told you he wanted to impress you,” Lena said, kissing Kara on the cheek. She could feel an odd tension in Kara’s posture and gave her shoulders a squeeze. “He’s not a bad sort.”

Kara didn’t answer, leaning into Lena’s arms. The ride was tense - not as tense as it could be, not as tense as some Lena’d been on, but she could practically taste it in the air, and it rubbed off on her.

They pulled up to the restaurant and were ushered in by a maître d whose suit did not hold a candle
to Kara’s, even if you took away Lena’s obviously preferential gaze. Jack was already at their table, but he stood at the sight of them, and Lena grinned.

No jacket. Power move. He’s nervous, too.

They passed the piano and Lena greeted Jack with a hug.

“Thanks for coming. I know L Corp’s very demanding.”

Lena cocked an eyebrow at him. “I do enjoy it, for what it’s worth.”

“You always did love a challenge. You look stunning, by the way. Both of you.” He offered Kara his hand to shake, pouring on the charm. “And I specifically asked that I be in the best suit in the restaurant tonight.”

“That’s difficult to do when you’re not even wearing yours, Jacky,” Lena teased, taking her seat and pulling Kara’s out for her.

Kara sat down beside her, rolling her shoulders in a way that would’ve been more distracting if it wasn’t indicative of how little Kara wanted to be there.

“Fair enough.” Eyes twinkling, Jack rubbed the back of his neck, crookedly grinning. “So, tell me everything.”

Lena crossed her legs, smiling right back. “Awfully forward of you.”

“I thought I might give it a shot, if it works so well for Ms. Danvers here.”

“How about one question for one question?” Kara offered abruptly.

“Are you trying to get me in your crosshairs, Ms. Danvers?”

She shrugged coolly. “A reporter’s job is never done.”

“I can respect it. Ask away.”

Strangely - or, perhaps not - Kara’s first question had nothing to do with Biomax. “How did you and Lena meet?”

Jack eyed Lena, eyebrows high. “Do you want to handle this one?”

“I met Jack the year I graduated from MIT,” Lena began, giggles already creeping up in her throat at the memory of herself, too-serious and too-excited all at once, attending a bioengineering seminar at Oxford after three days’ sleep had been thrown out the window for hotel instant coffee and touristy bullshit and studying for finals because even a LuthorCorp trip couldn’t come before her degree.

“I thought she was someone’s kid sister, snuck in to scope the place out.” Jack snickered. At Lena’s first sign of protest, he cut her off. “Don’t lie, you were drowning in an MIT hoodie, you had your hair gelled back fencing-bout tight and tied in these - ”

“Don’t you dare!”

Jack dared.

“- these little pigtails!”
Lena reached over and socked Jack in the shoulder, and he looked shocked.

“Ow.” He rubbed his shoulder, slowly grinning. “Who are you training with, Miss Guns of Titanium Alloy?”

“That would be me,” Kara piped, beaming tightly - tighter than Lena’s fencing braids.

“My god!” Jack’s voice is dry, but warm, like a radiator humming. “Who knew reporters needed muscles like mountain ranges!” He nudged Lena’s knee, knocking into it with his own. “Good for you.”

“Yeah.” Lena smiles, soft and stupid, tucking a loose hair behind her ear. “So great.” She cleared her throat and pushed through. “So, we were both at this guest lecturer’s seminar, and as he went on, it became painfully clear that he had no idea what he was talking about, but we couldn’t say anything! The whole auditorium was enraptured, and he was talking so fast, no one had the chance to pick up on the fact that every impressive scientific term he was using, he was using wrong.”

“And I could see her, just one row ahead of me, fighting to stay awake and not to remind him what exactly mitochondria do. Every time she started drifting - ” Jack cut himself off, fighting a laugh.

“He thought it would be funny to yank on my pigtails.”

“I did not yank,” he gasped, affronted. “I tugged! Gently!”

“Either way, about ten minutes into the lecture, I whipped around and said - ”

“‘If you keep pulling my hair, I’ll pull yours - clean off your head.’” Jack’s exaggerated brogue brought high color to Lena’s cheeks, and even managed to make Kara laugh, though she stifled it immediately. “So, naturally, I apologized and offered to take her to lunch. Curry favor, as it were.”

Lena snorted. “You’re horrible.”

“You made that exact joke, Lulu.”

“You took me to a pub with curry on the menu and made a face at me when I ordered it. What was I supposed to say?”

“No, it was funny. She waited until it showed up, bland as all hell, then stared at me and said, ‘You know, judging my food choices isn’t a clever way to curry favor,’ before taking a truly massive bite and almost spitting it out.”

“It was objectively horrible.”

“Hence my face.”

Lena stuck out her tongue at him, surprised at how much lighter she felt.

“So, how about you, Ms. Danvers?” Jack asked, swirling his wine glass. “How did the two of you meet?”

“Um.”

This was the part Lena wasn’t a fan of: the active secret keeping. Jack couldn’t find out about Supergirl, and a public, albeit exclusive, restaurant was decidedly not the right place to tell him that she was an alien.
“I mean, I’ve read the articles,” he hedged, filling the silence.

Both Kara and Lena asked the same question at the same time: “You did?”

“Well, we weren’t exactly talking, you and I, so how was I meant to know you were okay?”

“You worried.”

The smile that crossed his face wasn’t as effervescent as all the others this evening; it was softer, almost sad. “I was right to, wasn’t I?”

Lena took a sip of wine that was really more of a gulp. Great, she thought, swallowing hard. That’s what they’ll bond over.

“We did meet through an article,” Kara said finally, “but it wasn’t mine. My cousin was in town, and he works for the Daily Planet.”

“Clark Kent! The prior author of all Luthor exclusives.” Eyes wide, Jack laughed breathlessly for a beat before he got himself back under control. “Well, I must say, I prefer CatCo’s coverage. Or, I did. Up to a point.”

“Well, you have Lena to thank for that.” Kara took Lena’s hand, lacing their fingers together and shooting her a smile. “She actually gave me the idea to get into journalism.”

Jack grinned. “You flirt.”

“Was that you flirting?”

“It’s not my fault you didn’t notice,” was Lena’s fond reply as she squeezed Kara’s hand. “Then, or with the office full of flowers.”

“Oh, my god,” Kara groaned. “Do you ever look back on something you did and think, Wow, was I stupid? How did I not see that?”

Promptly, both Jack and Lena said, “Yes,” and started to laugh.

“Well, me, I know what I thought that about,” Lena managed, thinking Supergirl, “but when have you ever been stupid?”

“Oh, I’m always being stupid.”

Lena scoffed fondly, rolling her eyes, and drawled, “How did I not see that?”

Dinner went well - as well as it could. Kara’s questions were all personal, rather than business, which meant she had a whole new arsenal of Embarrassing Lena Stories, while Jack accrued an undetectably incomplete account of the past seven months of Lena’s life which, she now realized, had been inextricably intertwined with Kara’s.

It was only when the main course had been cleared away and the dessert menu promised that things got less touchy-feely. Jack had just finished recounting the Tale of the Microscope, a woeful story with the moral of Never call Lena Luthor Baby Spice at seven a.m., and Lena wondered if it was the return of science as a topic of conversation that instigated Kara’s next question.

“So, how did you know Biomax was ready?” she asked. “Did you do any trials? Human trials?”

Jack handled it well. “It’s all public record, if you’re curious.”
“How did you figure it out?” Lena shrugged when both her companions turned their gaze to her. “I wanna know.”

“Is that the only reason you came?”

“No.”

“Oh, okay.”

He’s embarrassed.

“So, it was about six months after you left,” he began, avoiding eye contact, and then the why slotted into place, because six months after Lena left, she was missing, presumed dead. “I stayed up all night. And the sun came up, and there was a flock of starlings going by. And they were all moving in perfect sync, like when one turned, all the others turned. And I thought…” He looked up. “I’ve made a terrible mistake.” He swallowed. “I should’ve gone with her. I’m no good without her.” And then I realized I was modeling the swarm after the wrong kind of animal.”

With the science taking center stage, he wasn’t as anxious, but it still lingered, leaving him blurry at the edges. “See, bees need a base, a queen, to revolve around. We’d been trying to make a nanobot into a queen by programming a protective algorithm, but…”

“Oh, my god. Murmuration!”

He grinned, nodding. “Yeah.”

“The nano swarm, it migrates!”

“Yes!”

“Linked AI sentience!”

“It’s all controlled through the Spheerical lab mainframe,” he said, leaning forward in his chair, “and I would never have gotten there if I hadn’t been thinking about you.”

“Anyway, I - I was also wondering - ”

“Maybe another time,” Jack rebuffed softly.

“Lena, are - are you, um - ?”

“I think Jack and I need to talk,” she murmured, squeezing Kara’s hand again, drawing it up to her mouth and kissing her knuckles. “We’ll be okay.”

Kara nodded, rising to her feet and kissing Lena goodbye. “It was nice to meet you properly,” she said to Jack, who also stood, ever polite, to see her off.

“You, too. I’m happy she’s got you in her life.”

Haltingly, Kara said, “And I’m happy she’s got you in yours.”

She pulled Jack into a hug, and Lena could see just how carefully she was calculating her strength, and she melted a little in her chair. This was just about everything she could have asked of that night, and she couldn’t conceive of a better result.

When Jack sat back down, Lena nudged his shin with the toe of her shoe and said, “It’s good to
know you’re maudlin for a cause, Jacky.”

“It’s good to know you’re not dead.”

“I’m like a cockroach. Indestructible.”

“We both know that’s not true.”

Lena deflated, just a little. When she’d gotten the news about Lex - not even from their mother, but from the family lawyer, informing her that she had a company now - she’d imploded. She’d been a wreck. For months, for years, she’d done everything in her power to keep Lex good, and she’d woken up to a slap in the face: nothing she’d done had been enough.

Jack found her drinking vodka, which she hated, out of the bottle because she’d dropped the cappuccino mug she’d been intending to use, pacing barefoot closer and closer to the edge of the shatter radius and crying completely silent. He always said it scared him when she cried like that, without making a sound, and Lena never admitted to him that it sometimes scared her, too. He’d had to drag her away from all that broken pottery just so she didn’t step in it, and when he’d asked what was wrong - when she’d told him - he begged her not to go. He used every dirty trick in the book to get her to stay, and she’d only been able to resist because she felt like she deserved how badly being at Luthor Corp would hurt. The last straw was him saying he loved her, and it felt different from every time he’d said it before they started dating. Not just because it felt like a manipulation, not just because she didn’t want him to love her that way, but because right then, being loved felt like a death sentence. She’d walked away from him, from their tiny rental house, and all the way back to the Luthor mansion, looking back but seeing nothing the whole time.

“Yeah,” she said quietly. “Yeah, we do.”

“We don’t have to talk about this,” he promised, instantaneous. “I - tonight was nice, wasn’t it? I don’t want to ruin your evening.”

“No. You’re not ruining anything.” She gave him a smile that came and went too quickly and sniffled. “But not here. I don’t want to talk about anything serious with the busboy snapping pictures.”

They stood, payed, left. Jack’s car was waiting for them out front, and they piled into the back.

“My place or yours?” he asked.

“Yours,” Lena said. She didn’t want him to see just how empty her apartment was, see how much it was everything she hated in a home, and worry all over again.

His hotel room was nice, all plush linens and mile-wide king sized bed, and messy the way he always kept things when he traveled, so he could make a lap of the room and stuff everything back into his suitcase in one go. Lena kicked off her heels and flopped back onto the bed, and he flopped back next to her.

“I wished I had gone with you,” he said, starting them off. “I don’t know why.”

“Yes, you do.”

“Yeah. Yeah, I do. Because when we worked together, we weren’t holed up in our offices after everyone else had gone home. You wouldn’t have been there to get jumped by your mother’s goons. You would’ve been, I don’t know, playing karaoke versions of our favorite songs and singing along while you welded something, or making me watch those godawful comic book movies. You
would’ve been *safe.*"

Staring up at the ceiling, Lena grabbed his hand. “I was okay.”

“You were gone for a month, Lulu. Everyone was saying you were dead, and there wasn’t - wasn’t a funeral, wasn’t anyone saying kind words or remembering you. The one person who was got fired for printing fake news.”

“Kara has faith in me.”

“So do I, but I’ve also seen your mother when she’s angry with you, and after that interview, I knew she was going to be *apoplectic.*”

Lena closed her eyes. “It could have been worse, Jacky.”

“Every time you’d talk to her, you would say that, and every time, it got worse. How bad does it have to get?”

“She didn’t get what she wanted, and I got out. I got home. I actually had people waiting for me, people who knew me, people who cared whether I lived or died. For once in my life, there were people, plural, in my corner. I came back to a desk full of good news.” She took a shaky breath. “And if I think about that. If I think about coming home to someone, and about people looking for me, people wanting me back. Then I don’t have to think about what happened before.”

Jack squeezed her hand, and Lena wiped her eyes, squeezing back.

“I’m sorry that you worried,” she managed after a moment. “I was never in any real danger.”

“You do have a cavalcade of superheroes in your corner.” He grinned. “I couldn’t believe it when I found out you, the biggest superhero nerd of them all, had moved out to Superhero Central.”

“What about you? You once asked Lex if he could introduce you to Superman.”

“That wasn’t because he was a hero. That was because he was hot.”

Lena blinked. “You’re bi?”

“Gay.”

“But we *dated.*”

“Says the lesbian with the girlfriend.”

Lena rolled over and stared at him. “How did I not see it?”

“I didn’t realize you were gay, either, if that helps.” He rolled over, too, cushioning his head on his folded arm. “Why do you think I only ever put the moves on you in public?”

“Oh, my god.” Lena gave his shoulder a shove, toppling him onto his back. “I thought you were being considerate!”

“I was! I figured if I was going to kiss you, I should at least do it when it would actually help.”

Lena cackled, shifting onto her stomach, propping her chin in her hands. “We were both so invested in being in the closet, we didn’t see each other in there with us. *Fuck.*”
“That about sums it up.” Jack looked up at her and grinned. “I did figure it out first, though.”

“You did not!”

“As soon as you introduced Kara Danvers, the best reporter in National City, I just knew.”

“Shut up.”

“I will not! I’m serious. You two are painfully obvious about each other. Her articles read like a love letter.”

“Do they really?”

“Mm-hm. ‘Lena Luthor, in the face of a world that seems, at times, pitted against her, does not stand down. Through this interview, no matter how trying the topic, she remained strong in a way I don’t imagine anyone else could manage, answering every question with grace and eloquence.’”

“She wrote that?”

“Yeah, in that triptych with you and girls both Super and Galaxy.”

Lena snorted, cheeks burning.

“You love her,” Jack teased, poking her.

“Yeah, I really, really do.” Lena dropped face-first into the covers and groaned. “I love her so much!”

“She loves you, too.”

Lena groaned again, even more drawn-out and dramatic.

“This is great. Finally, I get to make fun of you for something new!”

“Your old material was getting a bit stale.”

Jack rolled onto his stomach and draped an arm over Lena’s shoulders. “You love my old material.”

“I just give you plenty to work with.”

“That, you do, but I do it with love.”

“I know.” Lena pulled her face out of the mattress and eyed him. “Speaking of love and teasing about it, now that your only beard is homegrown - ”

Jack scoffed, cheeks pinking, rolling his eyes.

“Do I get anything new to work off of?”

“I’m still based in New Jersey. Would you want to date someone in New Jersey?”

“I have standards.”

“Exactly.”

“Hm.” Lena pursed her lips, narrowed her eyes. “I know you came all the way out here to see me – and don’t deny it – and since you’re releasing Biomax in California, you could, in theory, relocate.
Part time.”

Jack shrugged.

“Think about it! National City right next to San Francisco, home of the sixth best Pride parade in the nation. Our hometown hero is a gay icon. Max Lord up and left after last year’s whole invasion kerfuffle, which means we are in dire need of a charming tech CEO who knows his way around a suit.”

“I wasn’t aware you’d opened that position.”

“Hilarious.” Lena knocked her toe into his calf and looked down at her hands. “You should come to my office.”

“I’ve been to your office.”

“But you didn’t get to see the view.”

Jack gasped, deliberately overzealous, and clasped his hands to his chest. “From the infamous Supergirl balcony?”

“She won’t introduce you to her cousin.”

“I wouldn’t dream of asking.”

So they went to her office. The building was deserted, so far as she could tell, and that meant she didn’t have to bother putting her heels back on. Part of her wanted to show him the view from the roof, but that would have involved an explanation she wasn’t sure she could give.

Jack wandered out onto the balcony, peering past the bomb-proof glass. “That’s a nice view, Lena.”

“Pretty decent.”

“Oh, pretty dec.”

“Oh, no.” Lena grinned. “You did not just say that.”

“I’m ridiculous,” he said, turning back to face her with a matching smile, “I know.”

“Yeah.”

They laughed, and for a moment, it was like no time had passed, and they were back in Metropolis, making stupid jokes at some Luthor party.

But then she saw the years on Jack’s face, and felt them on hers, and he sighed, apologizing.

“For what?” she asked.

“I made you choose. L Corp or me. I was greedy.”

“You were hurt.”

Jack cast his eyes down - away.

“You know,” she said, “I sometimes wonder what would’ve happened if I’d stayed. Maybe we would’ve figured the nano swarm out together. Maybe I’d have a legacy of my own apart from my
family.”

“Now I wonder what would’ve happened if I hadn’t pushed. If I’d been better about you needing to go, if I had made room.” He managed a nervous half-smile, drumming his thumbs. “If I could still do that.”

Lena practically tackled him into a hug, jumping high enough to tuck her face into his shoulder. “For what it’s worth, I think you can.”

Jack wrapped his arms around her waist, as tight as any human could, and said, “Think you could make me a desk that cool?”

“I’ll even try to make it red, to match your whole space noir aesthetic.”

Jack laughed, and it felt good to make him laugh like that, but then something clicked, and he sort of froze, cutting himself off. “I have to go.”

“Of course.” Lena dropped. “I totally get it.”

“I forgot about something at the office.”

Just like that, he was gone, and Lena did get it. Moving cities, rolling out a new product - he had so much on his plate, it was no wonder he was distracted.

Hell, she’d been distracted, too, by Cadmus and the Daxamites and L Corp and Kara’s weirdness at dinner. Part of her felt a little slighted, a little ditched, but mostly, she was just glad they’d talked.

She’d never been able to talk like that before, and it worked out.

Who knew?

☆

Come morning, Lena had finished approving the patent, and sent it off to be processed. By next week, hopefully, production would begin, and within the year, greenhouse gas emissions would be cut by a quarter. She was still riding high on the night before and how well it had gone, and a lull in productivity found her exactly where she’d been the day before, but in a much better mood. The nostalgia she felt looking at old photos of herself and Jack was actually fun, consumptive to the point that she actually didn’t hear Kara knocking the first time.

“Sorry, sorry. I didn’t hear you.”

Kara smiled, walking in. “You’re distracted.”

“Busted.”

Softly chuckling, Kara came to a stop just before Lena’s desk, playing with the band of her watch. “So, uh…” She looked up, cheeks pink. “Sorry about last night.”

“Yeah. Yeah, that was… interesting.”

“ Weird.”

Lena laughed. “It went well, though. Maybe we could give it a second try sometime soon. Jack’s actually considering making National City his base of operations.”
“Yeah, uh…” And then Kara looked away.

And then Lena knew something was wrong.

“I actually came here to talk to you about Jack. Um… I’ve been investigating him.”

“Yeah, I can tell,” joked Lena, hoping the tension would be diffused and everything could be okay again.

She just wanted things to be, not even okay, just baseline not terrible.

“Lena, Biomax is dangerous, and he’s covering it up.”

“That’s not true.”

“I’m not lying.”

And the worst part was, Lena knew she wasn’t. She knew Kara wasn’t lying, even without listening for a liar’s heartbeat, and god, it hurt.

“Well, then,” she said, pushing out of her chair so she didn’t have to look Kara in the face, “you’re mistaken. Jack would never hurt anyone.”

She poured herself a glass of water with shaky hands and hoped, against all reason, that Kara wouldn’t walk over to her.

Kara offered Lena her phone, pressed play on a video whose thumbnail was Jack, exhausted, at his desk.

“Biomax version 38. Human trial one.”

She watched him inject himself with nanites, watched him melt into a swarm - their swarm.

Heard him scream in pain.

“He’s using the nano swarm to kill people,” Kara explained gently, putting her phone away like she could protect Lena from the horrible things hidden on it.

Lena clenched her jaw. “Who else knows?”

“Just us.”

“I won’t ask you to bury it,” Lena managed, “but please, let me go talk to him before it gets out.”

“Lena, he’s killed two people. I know how you feel about him, but you will be the third if you confront him.”

“Whatever I am,” said Lena, watching Kara’s flinch, “I’m nigh- unto indestructible. He can’t kill me.”

“Please, just promise me you’ll stay away from him for now. If not for your own safety, at least so I don’t have to worry.”

“Thank you for telling me. I won’t go see him, I promise.”

“Are you okay?”
Lena laughed wetly. “I actually… I’ve got some work to do.”

That was the second time she’d lied to Kara in less than a minute and she had never hated herself so much.

“Would you mind, Kara..?”

“Right. Yeah, of course.” Kara turned, starting towards the door, but she stopped. Turned back. Her eyes were so earnest when she apologized, and that made it all the worse.

“You were just doing your job. It’s all any of us can do.”

All Lena could do was put herself off. She convinced herself not to go talk to Jack for hours and hours, but then night fell, and she looked out at her bomb-proof balcony and couldn’t fight it anymore. She went to Spheerical Industries under cover of darkness and caught herself wishing Jack had better security when no one even noticed her sneaking in.

“Jack?”

“Hey!” He smiled. He smiled to see her, and Lena had to swallow a knot in her throat, and he saw it on her face like he always did. “What’s wrong?”

“What’s the stupidest thing a scientist can do?” she asked, wrapping her arms around herself. “What is the one thing you hated most about the stupid comic book movies I watched?”

He at least had the decency to look ashamed.

“Using yourself as a guinea pig.” She shook her head, squeezed her eyes shut until she was certain they weren’t going to spill over. “Biomax. I saw the video, Jack. You shot those things into yourself, faked the human trials.” She swallowed hard. “You - you killed people.”

“Oh, my god. You’re telling the truth.”

He made a face at her - duh, Posh - but then he just shut down, like he had the night before, when she’d chalked that shift up to the noise she assumed was his work ringtone.

It wasn’t his work ringtone.

“Ms. Luthor.” Just behind Jack’s left shoulder stood Beth Breen, CFO, her bluetooth glowing, a smug smile on her face. “He can’t hear you. No one can.”

The nano bots rippled, breaking up his skin with patches of shimmering metal.

“So who killed all those people?”

Her smile widened. “Jack did. I mean, he didn’t choose to, and he doesn’t remember it, but he did.” Beth tapped her earpiece, coy and nonchalant, and Lena wanted to break her fingers off one by one.

“You’ve been controlling him this whole time.”
“The poor sweet boy actually wanted to scrap the whole thing just because of a pesky little side effect that removes free will. Not financially responsible. Luckily, I was there to step in. You know it’s true, what they say: behind every great man is a strong woman.”

“I wouldn’t know,” Lena spat. “I’ve never stood behind a man.”

“You just clean up after your brother. Idiot. You walked away from the breakthrough of a century.”

“It doesn’t work.”

“See, I think it works beautifully. I have a brilliant figurehead that will do everything I say. The entire world will welcome the nano swarm into every hospital, army base, and, eventually, home.”

“God, you’re repulsive.”

“I’m a realist.”

You’re everything I hate about corporations, about the life I live and always wanted to escape, and now you’re going to try and kill me.

Lena laughed.

“What’s funny?”

“Now you’re going to kill me,” she said, laughing still, because it wouldn’t work. “That’s the only reason you’re telling me all of this.”

“Again, not very financially responsible.” Beth tapped her earpiece, and with a quiet beep and some clicking - the bots moving - Jack turned and started to walk. “I already control Jack. Why would I kill you when I can control you and, by extension, L Corp? Think of that merger.”

Jack picked up the injector and started walking back towards her. Lena knew it wouldn’t break skin, but she also knew she was going to save Jack, and that he would hate himself if he tried to do this to her.

“Okay, Jacky, but it down, alright?”

He didn’t put it down. She wondered, somewhere in the back of her head, if he felt numb all over, like she did under the Alcorian bounty hunter’s control, and the thought that he might made her heart pound inside her chest in sympathetic anxiety.

“Jack, listen, I know you’re in there somewhere, okay? You listen to me, alright?”

The skylight shattered, the telltale whoosh of Supergirl’s cape only audible through it to Lena’s hypersensitive ears, and she’d never been happier that Jack was stupidly fearless about heights. Kara snatched her up out of his path and carried her back a good forty feet, and was too good to be angry at her first, asking, “Are you okay?” with her hands still on Lena’s waist.

“Yeah.”

Jack dissolved into the swarm, and Lena thought she might be sick.

“You’ve got to get out of here,” Kara said, but Lena shook her head.

“No. I’ve got a better idea. Can you keep them occupied?”
Kara nodded, somehow still trusting her, and took off, zooming across the lab, leading the swarm away from Lena, who took the opportunity to start for the mainframe. He said that’s where the swarm was controlled; if she could adjust the AI coding, go back to the apian version, she could set his brainwaves as the wavelength for the queen, and he would be in control again.

Beth stood in her path and aimed a swift kick at Lena’s stomach, smug as she said, “Did I mention I’m a black belt?”

Lena let the hit land, didn’t even feel it. Beth cried out, foot already swelling, and Lena might hate herself later for taking some satisfaction in that. “Did I mention I’m an alien?” she replied in the same voice, throwing a right hook with all her power.

At the last second, she realized that full power might turn Beth’s brain to soup. She wasn’t sure if she’d pulled her punch, and Beth hit the floor with a grunt.

And then Kara was struggling, heart hammering against her ribs, held in place by nano bots who only knew they wanted in.

“Jack,” Lena pleaded, “make it stop!” She knew Beth said he couldn’t hear her, but the irrational optimist she’d begun to become wouldn’t give up on the hope that maybe, just maybe, rat brains and human brains were different enough, starlings and bees were different enough, that he could, anyway.

*They’re still operating on their last order,* she realized, and crushed the earpiece to dust.

Jack gasped, “Lena,” and cried out in pain as the nano swarm rippled, begging, pleading with it.

“Jack?”

“Lena, help! The mainframe.”

She ran, not giving a single fuck that she was too fast. The code was familiar enough. “I think I can override it,” she hollered, though she wasn’t sure who she was trying to reassure.

“Lena,” Kara groaned, “hurry!”

Fingers flying, Lena promised, “I’m almost there, okay?”

Beth Breen mumbled something, indistinct through her broken jaw, and Lena saw red, nearly cracking the keyboard as she typed.

“Shut up,” she hissed, “or I will rip your tongue out of your horrible mouth.”

The avian to apian conversion wasn’t working, so she went for a manual override, and that did work. For one moment, everything was peaceful. The swarm abandoned Kara, it abandoned Jack.

For one shining moment, Lena thought she might not lose anyone.

Then the swarm crashed to the floor, and Jack collapsed. His heart was an erratic cacophony, and she jumped, moving so fast she cracked the floor where she landed. “Jack?”

He wheezed, grabbing for her hand, and when she took it, his heart stopped.

Kara was behind her, and Lena looked to her like she could help the one time she couldn’t.

Without making a sound, she started to cry.
Jack’s parents, like hers, were dead. No one lived to mourn him besides her. No one was there to say kind words or to remember him. Because of the nano bots, because of professed risks she wasn’t certain were valid, he had to be cremated.

They gave her the ashes. She didn’t tell anyone, but she kept the nano bots, too. Her inner optimist was dead silent save for one sentence it didn’t dare repeat: *there might be enough of him left to bring back*.

Lena didn’t dare hope for that. He’d died because of an experiment gone wrong, because he’d been stupid and in mourning and done something straight out of a movie he would have needled her to turn off, and she wasn’t going to disregard him like that and do it all again.

Kara came to see her, carrying a vase full of flowers, and Lena didn’t even pick out meanings like she normally would have. She didn’t have the heart.

“I wish there was more that I could do to help,” Kara murmured, setting them down on the table. The clink of glass on glass was so loud it hurt.

“Oh,” Lena said. “You came to see me, that’s more than enough.”

Kara let out a sharp breath and said, “Beth’s in the hospital. They had to operate to repair the fractures to her skull, but once the anesthesia’s worn off and they can read her her rights, she’s going straight to jail.”

“Good.”

Kara threw down her coat and sat next to Lena on the couch, asked, “How are you holding up?”

Lena could have answered in so many ways. She could have lied, again, and noticed that it didn’t feel like anything then, or told the truth numbly and hoped nothing Kara did or said made her start to feel it. She could have asked about the flowers, avoiding the question. She could have said anything, done anything. She could have run away.

Instead, she said, “When Lex was arrested, my mother was there,” and god save her, Kara looked like she knew. “My mother saw her son dragged, bleeding and raving, from her house, and when I got there, Lillian was tidying his room like he’d been away on a business trip.

“That’s how I feel: cold and calm.” Lena shook her head slowly. “Until I think about Beth breaking in my hands, dying in jail, and then I feel warm for a minute.”

“You’re in shock, Lena,” Kara murmured.

“I don’t know. Loss does strange things to my family, and I’ve lost a lot of people.”

Kara shook her head, defiant, insistent. “You’re not gonna lose me.”

“I think,” Lena began carefully, “when I feel things again, I’m gonna be very, very afraid. About the person I might be.”

“You don’t have to be afraid.” Kara wrapped her arms around Lena, pulling her head down onto her shoulder. Lena reached up reflexively and took her hand. “I’m right here.”

Lena hated the broken way her voice lilted upwards when she asked, “Promise?”
“I will always be here, and I will always protect you. I promise.”

“I think I liked it,” Lena said. “Hurting her. I - I know I did. She was threatening you, controlling him, and I only even thought about holding back right before I hit her. When I threatened to rip her tongue out, Kara, I meant it.”

Kara said nothing, and kissed her forehead.

“I don’t want to become like Lex. I don’t want to become like Lillian. I’m powerful, and I don’t want that power to be in the wrong hands, especially if they’re mine. So if I go bad, stop me. That’s the promise I need you to make me today.”

Kara closed her eyes and hid her face in Lena’s hair.

“Please.”

Only after Kara kissed her, a brief and gentle thing too sweet for the sour taste in Lena’s mouth, did she make that promise, and Lena was dully surprised that she didn’t entirely trust it.

Kara tried to take her home, but Lena resisted, and Kara didn’t push. Kara was too good, and too kind, and she stayed until CatCo called, late that night, and even then, she hesitated to leave Lena.

“You should go,” Lena said. “I know how much CatCo means to you.”

“This article… it wasn’t for me, i zhor,” Kara murmured, hugging her tight. “I needed to make sure they got the story straight. He wasn’t the villain here.”

The and neither were you went unspoken, and there was a warm and weighty implication that Lena didn’t let herself unpack even after Kara was gone.

The only thing she unpacked, alone in her office, was a pretty bottle of bourbon-approximate liquor she’d paid more than double for at the bar to take home. She popped it open, with definitely too much force, and fished the larger shards out of her glass before taking a long drink.

It was like that, half-drunk and in the dark, silent tears streaming down her cheeks, that Rhea found her.

She spoke gently, voice somehow soothing even as Lena’s head felt like it was going to split into a million pieces, and she said Lena’s name with the tiniest hint of an accent, hitching between the L and the E of her first name.

“I’m not seeing anyone right now,” Lena sniffled, hiding the bottle.

“I heard about your colleague, Mr. Spheer. I’m so sorry.”

“Who are you?”

Stepping into the light, Rhea offered a soft smile, consolatory, and introduced herself with just what Lena needed: a distraction.

“I have a business proposition for you,” she said, and Lena thought, for just a second, she felt warm.
Sorry this is late. I had a project to work on with a friend, and nothing worked right, and then she left at 11.32. Took me an hour and thirty five minutes to finish this chapter, since I kept putting off Jack's death because goddamnit I like him. I like Lena getting to have friends. I like people caring about my sweet baby fUCK!!! But then it just made me sadder to kill him.

So, yeah.

For the record, I almost had Lena save him. Almost. There was almost going to be enough time; she almost gave him the earpiece, so he could control the swarm; she almost managed to change the code so he was in charge. Almost, almost, almost, but the next chapter (which will be Just As Sad) needs a Lena who feels completely alone so she’ll turn totally to Rhea.

Do you hate me? I hate me. I still have another project to complete, and twelve questions for French, but Fuck That, yell at me about your feelings and Lena getting to be happy for two goddamn seconds, a.k.a. the majority of this twenty seven page chapter.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Set during 2x19: Alex. Everyone is horrible at feelings, and no one explains themselves properly.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lena supposed it was the Danvers way, inserting yourself into someone’s space when they were upset so they’d know you were there for them, and she didn’t mind it, even when Alex’s insertion felt oddly guilty.

They were doing a double dinner date. Alex wanted to make Maggie paella, but Alex was notoriously awful at making anything in a kitchen that wasn’t at least 50% booze, and Lena cooked. She’d learned mostly from hiding in the kitchens at the Luthor house so she didn’t have to see Lillian, soaking up maternal warmth from the cook, who was Irish, like Marion, and called her bradán feasa - to this day, Lena couldn’t imagine eating salmon because of it - but as she’d gotten older, it was a matter of being self-sufficient, of learning even in her downtime. It was a sort of calm-down hobby.

She’d been cooking a lot, lately.

So Alex invited her over to cook dinner for their girlfriends, saying the word in a way that sounded how Lena felt about it (fluttery and gooey and excited), and Lena couldn’t say no to that. Especially after she found out that Alex didn’t have a paellera to cook the dish in. She came by an hour before Kara and Maggie were set to arrive, pan and ingredients in tow, to find Alex ready and waiting with two glasses of wine already poured.

“Hey, Legs,” she said, like she was trying very hard to be cavalier. “Haven’t seen you in a while.”

“I’ve been busy. I do run a company.” Lena subjected herself to a hug, resisting the urge to sink into it.

Alex was a string bean, all wiry muscle, and it must have been a byproduct of being around Kara, but she hugged like she was drowning and you were a life raft. It wasn’t a recent development brought on by pity, either; every Alex Danvers hug came complete with the profound sense that she was desperately fond of you.

It was difficult to stomach, sometimes, how affectionate she could be.

Lena pulled out of the hug and set everything on the counter. “Ready to cook?”

“No.” Alex set the paellera on the stove, cranked it to high, and moved her knife block over to the island, where there was space enough for the two of them to work side by side. “Let’s get started.”

Lena walked Alex through butchering a chicken and was a little surprised that an alien doctor and field agent was queanlish about meat.
“It’s because I’m a doctor that I don’t like raw meat,” Alex groused. “If it were up to me, we’d be doing this in HazMat suits with, like, robot arms to do all the touchy stuff.”

“I’ll do it, if you’re too squeamish.”

“No.” Alex puffed a lock of hair out of her face. “Maggie likes home-cooked food, and I like Maggie, so I am going to cook. Besides, I’m almost thirty. I should be cooking. It’s the adult thing.”

“I feel like you’ve earned some adulthood leeway, considering how many times you’ve saved the world.”

“See? I feel like, I’ve saved the world, it owes me dinner.” Alex gestured wildly with her knife before delivering a lethal chop along the breastbone. “Ha!”

“Way to go. Mind your fingers.”

“They are my bread and butter.” Alex made quick enough work of deboning the chicken, but she was slow and surgically precise in portioning it.

Lena, meanwhile, had pared a few artichokes down to just the hearts and shucked some beans. She scooped up the pods and outer leaves, chucking them into the trash, then turned towards the pan and put her bare hand, palm up, on the hot metal.

Alex cringed. “God, it’s bad enough when Kara does that with her terrible, terrible baking.”

“Sorry.” Lena retracted her hand - whole, not even slightly pink from the heat - and sprinkled in some salt, which started to pop.

“Is it supposed to do that?”

“Yep. It’s more even this way.”

Lena poured in some olive oil, then stepped aside so Alex could brown the chicken. Once it was in the paellera, she was at the sink, scrubbing away at the cutting board and her hands.

“Why,” she lamented, “why the fuck is it so slimy?”

“You’re lucky I didn’t bring snails.”

“Don’t even - ugh. Gastropods aren’t bothering anyone. I used to play with the snails in my parents’ garden. We had a whole family as class pets in kindergarten!” Alex shook her hands free of excess water, then dried them on a paper towel and tossed that out, too. “Okay. What’s next?”

“Chop up the onions, peppers, tomatoes, and garlic. Once the chicken’s ready, I’ll move it out of the pan and throw in the artichokes, onions, and peppers. Then it’s garlic and tomatoes in, paprika in, broth and saffron and rosemary in, rosemary out, rice in, chicken in, and by then, they should be here, and we eat it.”

“That is… so many steps.”

“Mm-hm.” Lena pulled the rest of the veggies out of the bag and tossed Alex the head of garlic. “Do you know krav maga?”

“Pft. Do I know krav maga?”

Lena pointed at the garlic and said only, “Hammer fist.”
Alex grinned, coiling her hand into a fist and raising it high over her head before bringing it down, pinkie-side crashing into the head of garlic, which gave under pressure and split into individual cloves and shreds of papery skin. “That was fun.”

“I bet. Take the ones you already kind of smushed, and hit them again with the flat of your knife between it and your hand.”

Alex smushed.

“Surgery time. How big a garlic fan are you?”

“Huge. Maggie’s not so big on it, though. She makes me take all the garlic bread home with me when we get Italian delivered, which I wouldn’t mind, except…”

“Kara eats it all?”

“In two seconds flat. Skins on or off the tomato?”

“On.”

“Less work for me.” Lena frowned - less than ideal - and started chopping. She was fast enough that there was a good five minutes between the veg being done and the chicken coming out where she had nothing to do, so she rinsed off her hands, washed her knife, and drank her wine. “Nice.”

“Two Buck Chuck.”

“Fantastic.”

Five minutes passed, and Alex’s phone alarm went off. “Chicken’s coming out,” she said with an exaggerated wink, and Lena rolled her eyes. They made a clean enough transfer, and Alex poured them each another glass.

At that point, it was just waiting around. Even the cleanup was already handled, dishes dried and put away. Lena thought, perhaps, she would have made an excellent assistant, but just then, she needed something to do.

Alex, for the most part, seemed as restless as she felt, continually checking her phone. “Sorry.” She made a great show of setting it down further away and shrugged. “Maggie’s up to her eyeballs in hostage negotiation, and she always hates that stuff. She likes the weird, y’know? That’s why she’s in the Science Division. This stuff… it gets her antsy.”

“Which is why you wanted to be Susie Homemaker for the evening.”

“…Shut up.”

Glass No. 2 demolished, Alex moved on to Glass No. 3, and Lena decided she should probably be the one to stand near open flames from then on.

“So,” she asked, dumping in the spices and stirring gently to coat everything, “how are things at the DEO?”

“Good! Good.” Alex cleared her throat and drank. “Things are, um, good.”

“That’s good.”

Lena hovered over the paellera with the excuse that she only wasn’t supposed to stir the rice, doing a
fantastic job of avoiding eye contact.

“We miss you around there,” Alex blurted. “Y’know. It’s - ”

“I know. I fucked up with the Daxamite thing, so until they’re gone for good, I’m out of the loop.” Lena turned back for her glass and poured a refill before Alex had time to blink, let alone look her in the face. “I’d bench me, too, so don’t worry about it.”

“No, it’s just - it’s not that you fucked up. I mean, I ran off to try and take down Cadmus solo, and I didn’t get benched. It’s - mm!” Alex drank. “So, how’s L Corp?”

“Good. Things are good. The new hires are fitting in well. Hector is getting over being so starstruck; I think, if anything, he’s developed a sort of hero crush on Jess, which is great. I bet her girlfriend thinks that’s hilarious.”

Lena didn’t mention that her biometrically sealed lockbox was now full of the nano bots that had effectively murdered her best friend, or that, really, she’d probably murdered him.

Manslaughtered.

Lena drank.

The saffron went in before the broth, just so it could get a little toasty, and once the broth hit the pan, the whole kitchen started smelling deeply of food.

“Once that’s reduced by half,” she narrated, plumping in a few sprigs of rosemary, “we dump in the rice and wait even more!”

“You hungry?”

“No really.”

The broth simmered. Alex turned on some music - Blondie, an enduring holdout from her punk phase - and flopped onto her stool.

_Tide is high, but I'm holding on…_

“How, um, how are you?”

“Busy,” was the best answer Lena could give. Not the easiest, not the most honest, but the one that would have the fewest negative consequences. Busy meant productive, productive meant functional, and functional meant there was no need to worry.

“Y’know, um. After my Dad - we thought he died, right? After that, I got straight As. In, in everything. Because when I was studying, I didn’t have to think about the fact that he wasn’t there.”

_That, Lena thought grimly, sounds an awful lot like worrying._

“You don’t have to do that,” she said, padding over to the stove and fiddling with the knob. It was already on high heat, and the clicking knob just sounded idiotic.

“I know.” Alex shifted in her seat. “I just - you can talk to me. Or whatever. I’m working on all my awkward baggage, and talking about it is…” She sighed. “Good.”

Lena nodded. The broth looked reduced enough, so she poured in the rice by the fistful until it looked right, shaking off a sudden flash of her doing the exact same thing, years and years ago, with
dirt over closed coffins.

“I mean, I hate doing it, but it’s good.”

“Mm-hm.”

“All I’m saying is, if you ever want to talk about it, I’m here.”

Lena nodded again, feeling like a dashboard bobblehead. “I will - I’ll take that into advisement.”

“Good. That’s…” Alex trailed off and drank.

The song faded out, melting into something strangely tinkly.

“I didn’t know Blondie did musicals.”

“Yeah. Her fifth album was just exploratory stuff, but it was Kara’s favorite. Totally destroyed my tapes rewinding to listen to it over and over again.”

“Makes sense.”

“I think I had a crush on Debbie Harry,” Alex admitted. “I bought this album as soon as I saw the cover art.”

Lena took the excuse to wander away and look at Alex’s iPod screen. Sure enough, Blondie circa 1980 was definitely crushable, draped against the side of a bridge, all vibrant blush and long legs.

“Makes sense. I was deeply in love with Geri Halliwell. 2007, reunion tour? She sang It’s Raining Men in a red bodysuit and boots. Could not relate to the lyrics - ”

Alex laughed.

“But I was insistent that I could appreciate the aesthetic.”

Lena stopped herself, peering back over to the paellera - not done.

“I probably have some Spice Girls on there, if you want.”

With shocking ferocity, Lena shook her head. “I’m good. I will allow you to languor in your ye olden crush.”

“You are too kind.”

World farewell, world goodbye…

“I might change the song, though, if that’s okay.”

“Skip around, be my guest.”

Lena hit skip and went back to her seat.

When I was seventeen, I saw a magazine. It had those English boys who had long hair.

Lena skipped again, lightning fast, through song after song.

“Wanna watch the news?” Alex offered.
“God, yes.”

The aerial view of Maggie had her looking very authoritarian, very stoic. According to the newscaster, she’d been at it for almost seventeen hours, and was still going strong.

Alex sighed, tucking her feet up onto the couch. “She is so good at her job.”

“Yeah.”

“Maybe this is where she learned how to make people talk about their feelings.”

“Hostage negotiations for childhood trauma? Fun.”

Alex snorted.

It went on for another ten minutes, Lena flitting back and forth between stove and sofa to add more stock when necessary, before a person-shaped comet crashed through the roof of the bank and, seconds later, strong-armed a bunch of criminals out the front door.

Alex sighed again, for a much different reason. “She’s been reckless lately.”

“I’ve noticed.”

“And I know why. I get why. I just wish she could be reckless on someone else’s shift.”

Lena almost asked why. She had her theories, sure - watching your girlfriend murder someone while you were in robo-bondage probably sucked, and Kara was still off alien duty, since the Daxamites hadn’t left yet and there was still the risk, apparently, that they might send another offworlder after her - but no confirmation. She was too tired, too scared, to ask. As honest and open as Kara was, she’d earned the right not to be pushed on the things she kept quiet over, whether Lena liked it or not, and going behind her back would be just as bad, if not worse.

So she didn’t ask. She sipped and said nothing, humming sympathetically, because, yeah, Kara was being reckless, and, no, Lena wasn’t a fan of it, but there wasn’t a damned thing she could do, so she kept her mouth shut.

Kara was there in two minutes with huggy greetings and shock and awe at something coming out of Alex’s kitchen unburnt, Maggie in ten with a heavy set to her shoulders and a stiffly neutral expression on her face that only softened, just a little, when Alex kissed her hello.

“Is that takeout?” she asked, eyes twinkling.

Alex kissed the tip of her nose and shook her head. “Nope.”

Maggie ran her fingers through Alex’s hair and called, “Thank you, Lena.”

Lena gave a thin-lipped smile and a shrug, cocooned in Kara’s arms, and said, “Alex did most of the work.”

Sure, it might have been an abject lie, but it was a good one, and she doubted Alex would correct her.

“Not even close.” Alex grinned over her shoulder at Lena. “I just came up with the idea of cooking tonight. She’s the one who spearheaded the whole operation.”

“It was a group effort,” Lena said, “let’s leave it at that and eat. I bet the two of you are hungry after
Alex bounded over to the kitchen and scooped the *paellera* up off the stovetop. Lena hot on her heels with plates, forks, and a potholder to rest it on. Once the table was set, wine and all, they dug in.

“Alex,” Maggie said, dumping a scoop onto her plate, “this looks incredible.”

“It’s not burnt on the bottom?”

“That’s *soccarat*, babe, it’s supposed to be there. It’s the best part.”

Alex beamed and stole a bite off Maggie’s plate, eyes wide at the crunch, before serving herself.

Kara wrapped her arm around Lena’s shoulder and kissed her temple. “How great are our girlfriends?”

“Pretty great, little Danvers.”

“I’m glad you could make it, Maggie,” Lena said quietly, obvious effort behind the cheer in her voice, picking at a bite of pepper.

Maggie popped her lips before taking a sip. She didn’t say anything to address just how she actually made it there, and Lena surmised that, maybe, bringing up work was a bad idea.

Kara, perhaps, had not yet reached that conclusion. “We made a pretty good team, too, huh?”

“Why bother trying to talk a guy down when Supergirl can just swoop right in and force him down?” Maggie set her fork aside, a hair too rough, and the clatter of stainless steel on ceramic was like Lena had shoved her head inside a ringing church bell. “Seventeen hours of ‘what do you want, how can I help you?’ - good, old-fashioned hostage negotiation - wasted.”

“You’re not… upset that I caught the bad guys and got everyone out safely, are you?”

“I would have gotten them to free the hostages.”

“Maybe.”

*Oh, Kara, no.*

“But they’re in jail now, where they can’t hurt anyone. That’s all that matters.” Kara waved her hands like she could wave them onto the next topic of conversation, but Lena got why Maggie was so good with Alex - they were both stubborn as hell when they wanted to be, and more often than not, they wanted to be.

“So long as they don’t use the Supergirl defense,” she muttered.

“The what?”

“It’s a thing,” Maggie explained, low on patience, “some criminals use to get their charges dropped. It’s the perfect storm for a defense attorney. Excessive force, evidence contaminated by debris, vigilante justice - ”

“Vigilante justice?”

Lena flinched.
“I stand for hope, help, and compassion! I did what I had to do to get those people out of there.”

“I think,” Alex cut in, in an attempt to diffuse the mounting tension, “what Maggie is trying to say is that what you do is amazing, when we’re up against…”

“A giant purple monster, or a half-cyborg murderer, sure. But most of the time, police work requires a more delicate touch.”

“Delicate?” Kara scoffed.

“Yeah. You broke one guy’s arm and you gave another one a concussion. And that was after you knocked in the roof of a National City landmark. Now there’s just a big, Supergirl-sized hole in it.”

“A thousand things could’ve happened from the time of your call to the hostages walking out. Maybe, yeah, sure, I broke some walls, but I got everyone out of there safely, and that is a win.”

Lena set down her wineglass so she didn’t risk breaking it and hid her shaking hands in her lap.

“Well,” Maggie said sharply, “you should’ve asked. But you never look before you leap.”

“Yeah, because I can fly.”

“Okay.”

Alex locked eyes with Lena, and looked to be about to mouth ‘are you okay’, which would have made Lena a lot less okay, so she looked away, something hot and horrible burning in her throat.

“Not everyone can,” she blurted, “and it’s the job of the people with those powers to use them to help. What’s the point if you can’t help?”

Kara looked at her, and she didn’t even have the decency to be pissed at Lena, or to think Lena was talking about her. She reached over, under the table, and put her hand on Lena’s knee, gentle, so Lena jerked away.

“I’m - I’m sorry, I should’ve - ” She stood, chair screeching horribly out from under her, and put it back much more quietly. “I have to go. There’s stuff at L Corp I need to look over.”

“Lena, wait.”

Kara raced after her, but Lena really, really didn’t need to be caught. She jumped, catching a skylight, and pushed it open to scramble out onto the roof.

Up there, air as cold as it could get in California, Lena tried to breathe more slowly, more evenly, but nothing was working. She could hear so much noise from the city below, like there was the road ragingest traffic jam right between her ears, and even that was barely audible over how loud she was breathing. She tried to stop, to hold her breath, and she jumped off the side of Alex’s building, and only then did things get a little quieter. She could just listen to the wind whistle, the struggling thump of her heart, the immediate way it evened out again once she landed, halfway across town, and started breathing again.

She only had one more solid jump to L Corp, and she took it, not even bothering to run and give herself some more time to calm down, holding her breath through the entire parabolic path.

Her landing was sloppy, and she ended up tumbling across the roof, tearing through the shoulders of her jacket as she skidded to a stop. She rolled up to her feet and ran inside, all the way down to her
Hector had gone home when she had, as per Jess’ instructions. Jess had taken a day out of the office to test what he’d learned. No one would see her scrambling in, panicky, looking like she’d survived a plane crash.

She slammed the door shut behind her and, after a moment’s hesitation, pressed the button that lowered the bomb shields on her balcony. Hopefully, even knowing she could break through them, Kara would take them as a hint that she shouldn’t, and leave Lena to wallow.

As they whirred down, something - someone - zipped through.

“I’m - I’m sorry, about me and Maggie fighting at dinner,” Kara said, tugging at the cuffs of her sweater.

“You don’t have to apologize to me.” Lena clicked across the room and poured herself a glass of water, managing to only crack the glass carafe a little. “Maggie, though…”

“Alex has Maggie. I’ll - I’ll talk to her tomorrow. Right now, though, I want to talk to you.”

Kara laid a comforting hand on Lena’s shoulder. Lena shrugged out of it.

She didn’t angle for denial - what’s there to talk about? - or try and bargain her way out with open, honest discussion - I’m just not ready to talk about this - because that would have been kinder.

No.

Lena just shut down and said nothing. She drank her water, nose in the corner, and tried and failed to block Kara out.

“I know this is hard,” she started. The bones in her neck popped when she shook her head. “No. This isn’t just hard. This is horrible. Your best friend was murdered right in front of you, and you couldn’t save him. It wasn’t a matter of strong or fast or smart, i zhor, okay? There are things in this world that we can’t hope to control, for better or for worse.”

Lena set down her empty glass and clicked over to her desk. Kara didn’t follow, not really; she was so close already that all she had to do was sit down.

She leaned across the table, though, beseeching, hands open but not taking Lena’s. “I - ”

Kara cut herself off with a sigh, and her head dropped. Lena folded her hands neatly in her lap and didn’t look up.

“There are things I want to say to you right now and I can’t. I can’t. I can’t say them, I don’t even know if it would help to hear, or if it would make things worse, but Lena, there is nothing I won’t do for you.”

That - that tender sentiment - was what finally broke her.

“Alex tried that, too. Tried to talk to me before dinner. She kept trying to say something and stopping herself, and I get it.”

“You - you do?”

“The only grief she’s dealt with ended up being a red herring, or yours. And yours… You lost a whole world. This doesn’t even compare.”
“Lena, that’s not what we’re saying.”

“Because you’re too nice to say what needs saying, and that’s fine. I love how good, how kind you are.” Lena sniffed. “But I don’t need kindness. I need - ”

“What do you need?”

“I need not to have murdered my best friend.”

“You didn’t - ”

“I did. I shut down the swarm; the swarm had bonded with him, with his brainwaves. I shut his brain down.” Lena looked up, jaw set, eyes burning. “The most I can hope is that the pain center of his brain was among the first to go. That I didn’t hurt him one last time.”

“You didn’t know. He told you to use the mainframe; what else were you supposed to do?”

“He didn’t tell me to kill him.”

“You didn’t kill him.” Kara curled her fingers into her palms, pressing her fists into the desk. “You didn’t, Lena. He was dead the moment - ”

“Don’t even think about blaming him for this.”

“- Beth Breen took control.” Kara let out a sharp breath. “What we do when we’re mourning - you don’t think I would do something stupid if I lost you? If I lost anyone?”

“I think you’re doing stupid things now, and you haven’t lost anyone. I think you’re usually much more careful with the criminals you capture, which means last week, when you followed me to Sheerical Industries, and were subsequently held hostage and almost possessed by tiny robots that I helped make, something happened that rattled you.” Lena clenched her jaw. “And I can’t help but think that’s on me, too.”

Kara said nothing.

“I’m right, aren’t I?”

“You haven’t done anything,” Kara insisted. “And I’m not leaving you. I promised I wouldn’t, and I’m keeping that promise.”

Lena crossed her arms, aiming for strong and probably coming off as scared as she felt.

“I’m not good with losing control. With not being able to help. And there are things I can’t help with now, things I’m not in control of, and I’m not handling it well.”

A wave of relief washed over Lena. “I’m not such a big fan of being locked out of the DEO, myself.”

Kara let out a sigh. “Yes! Yes, that’s - that’s it.” She ran her hands through her hair and gave an uncertain smile. “I’ve been weird lately, and you don’t need that.”

“Well, that doesn’t matter. You should get to be off your game sometimes, and I’m sorry I haven’t asked about how you’ve been. I’ve been up to my eyeballs at L Corp.”

“It does matter. We’re supposed to support each other.”
“You support me plenty.” Lena ventured out from behind her desk and sat down in Kara’s lap, arms around her neck. The position she was in made it easy not to look Kara in the face, but it also made it easy to fit into her arms, and Kara relaxed a little under her weight. “And I’m going to try not to worry you so badly.”

“You go quiet, when things get bad.”

“Then I’ll make an effort not to. I’ll be obnoxious and I’ll call you all the time.”

“I don’t think you have the capacity to be obnoxious.”

“I’ll give it a shot.”

Kara grinned into Lena’s hair. “Mm. So, whatcha workin’ on?”

“Looking for an exclusive, Ms. CatCo reporter?”

“Maybe,” she laughed.

“Right now, I’ve got some applications and project proposals to go through. A few even got hand-delivered.”

“And that’s good?”

“It means the project matters to them, and it means working with L Corp matters to them.”

“Which matters to you.”

“Mm-hm.”

“I’m glad you’ve got something good to focus on.”

Lena wrinkled her nose, and caved to kindness. “I don’t want to talk about it. If that’s okay.”

“Thank you for telling me. My lips are zipped.” Kara made a great show of zipping her mouth shut, sound effects and all, and Lena stifled a laugh.

“You’re welcome. Now, unzip those lips and kiss me goodnight.”

Kara frowned. “Staying at the office?”

“Just for a little while. I really do have to look at some things. I’ll be home before midnight.”

With a nod, Kara ducked her head and kissed Lena’s forehead, to her indignant surprise. From there, she pecked a line down Lena’s nose before finally reaching her lips.

Lena smiled, a little rusty, and curled her fingers into Kara’s hair. “Now, go home. I’ll be there soon.”

Kara stood, Lena still in her arms, and set her down on her desk. Pointing a mock-warning finger her way, she said, “You’d better be,” with a tiny pout.

“How can I say no to that face?” Lena swung around towards her chair and kissed Kara’s cheek, watched her turn just a little pink and fiddle with her glasses. “If you want to fly home, I can lift the shields.”
“I’m sorry, by the way,” she said sheepishly. “For flying through. That was definitely a signal to stay away, and I ignored it.”

“Apology accepted.” Lena squeezed her hand. “For the record, though, I’m… glad you ignored it.”

“It didn’t seem like a good time to leave you alone.”

“Sometimes, I think you know me better than I know myself.”

Kara laughed, a little too long, and took off, leaving Lena alone with her work and in a slightly better frame of mind.

She opened Rhea’s proposal again.

It was clearly from another planet. The specs had the same feel as her new hires’ proposals did; there was an air of translation, and it was way too advanced for Earth’s standards.

It also resembled her own specs for transmatter transportation, the ones she’d been toying with since interdimensional travel was confirmed as more than just science fiction. They obviously weren’t knockoffs, but the familiar feel was encouraging. It mean, even on her own, Lena had been on the right track.

She scrawled a note on a PostIt and stuck it to Hector’s phone: call Rhea, morning meeting.

Then she kept her word and went home.

☆

Lena left early for work. There was no real reason to; now that Kara was employed again, she was full of so much restless energy that she sometimes even woke before Lena, and more often than not, they left for work more or less together. It was a dim flicker, as highlights go, but it was still often the highlight of Lena’s day.

Today, though, had another prospective highlight: hopefully, Lena would be talking to Rhea today.

This time, she wouldn’t be somehow both drunk and hungover, if the headache she recalled was any indicator, or freshly mourning. This time, she would be focused and passionate and enticing. She would be a competent businesswoman and scientist at the top of her field, and she would meet minds with this genius who may or may not be an alien.

She’s probably an alien, right? Lena thought, swinging into the backseat of Georgie’s car. Or maybe she’s just smart. Maybe I’m a total snob, or a human-hating alien stereotype. Ugh.

“Somethin’ on your mind?”

“Just work - I’m meeting with a potential partner, and her proposal could change the world.”

“That stuff all goes right over my head.”

“You’re smarter than you give yourself credit for.”

“Tell that to my grandson. Thinks just because he doesn’t use Facebook anymore, he’s hot shit.”

“People don’t use Facebook?”

“And I just got started last year, too.”
“Am I getting old?”

“If you’re going grey, it’s stress.”

“Am I going grey?”

“No.”

Lena nodded, the gesture exaggerated in its sharpness just for the fun of it, and leaned back into the upholstery.

“Good to see you feeling better.”

_Transmat transport. Just think about the science: transmat transport. Trans. Mat. Trans. Port._

Lena got to her office half an hour early and found Hector already behind his desk, bright-eyed and metaphorically bushy-tailed.

“Good morning, Ms. Luthor!”

“Good morning, Hector. Have you - ?”

“Rhea will be here at 10.15a.m.”

“Fantastic.”

“Nothing new’s on your desk yet. If you want, I can get you coffee, breakfast.”

“Coffee sounds great.”

“The café Jess recommended has whole wheat croissants and apricot-cardamom scones.”

“Just coffee.”

Hector nodded, maybe a little hesitant. Jess had probably told him horror stories about Lena holing up in a barren office, blown things (only slightly) out of proportion.

“Just coffee, Hector,” she said, eyebrow arched pointedly.

“Yes, Ms. Luthor.”

He got up out of his seat and shrugged into his jacket.

Lena half-wondered why everyone wore jackets when it was so freaking hot in California. Granted, so did she, but she worked in an air-conditioned office and came from the East Coast, where you lived and died by your outerwear.

“If the matcha chasens are ready, do you want green tea, too?”

“Sure. Get yourself something, too - company card.”

“Company card. Got it.”

With that, Hector was gone, and Lena was alone in her office. There were a few other proposals to look over, but she kept going back to the arch. Truth be told, her brain felt sort of foggy, but looking at it again, she knew she’d seen it somewhere before, and not connecting the dots was bugging her, so she kept staring. The longer she looked, though, the more detail she saw, and the more in love
with Rhea’s proposal she became.

It would be a massive undertaking, construction-wise, but theoretically, one could calibrate it to a GPS coordinate and warp there without a mate, and since landmasses were all relatively stationary, the risk would be next to zero. Moving water would be effortless - moving anything! Generators, solar panels, power cells, people, food - even, hypothetically, atmosphere.

_The math might be tricky, but you could transport greenhouse gases to plant-heavy areas, giving the ozone layer time to heal, feeding ecosystems, increasing oxygen output._

Hector came back about an hour later, having caught the nose-end of morning rush hour, to find Lena staring at Rhea’s specs with googly eyes.

“Is that Rhea’s?”

“Um, yes.” Lena scrambled and closed it down. “Sorry. This stuff is - ”

“Super classified, I get it. Don’t we have something like that on file, though?”

“Yes. Could never get it to work, though, but she - she’s done it.”

Hector smiled, setting down the coffee tray on her desk. Sure enough, there was a gigantic black coffee and a cute little iced green tea latte - soy, judging by the color of the foam. “No wonder you’re excited.”

“Mm-hm.” Lena picked up her coffee, popping off the top, and started to chug. As steam washed over her face, she realized that chugging forty ounces of scalding-hot black coffee was probably a bad idea, just on principal, but at that point it was too late. She finished the cup, crumpled it up, and tossed it into her wastepaper bin. “Whoo! Okay. Back to work.”

Hector shook himself and nodded. “Back to work.”

As he was on his way out, Lena stopped him, calling out after him, “Hey! Do people still use Facebook?”

“No.”

“Huh.”

Lena sat down and reopened the specs, realizing only then that she didn’t use it, either.

_“Huh.”_

She only peeled herself away from Rhea’s project to call Kara at eight-ish, because that’s when she knew she’d be on her way to work.

“Hey.”

“Hey! You called!”

“I said I would,” Lena replied, zooming in on a sketch of the arch. “Hey, question.”

“Yeah.”

“Who has transmat?”
“Um..?”

“Sorry. I’m looking at a proposal, and it’s, um, kind of out of this world.”

“Oh. Oh!”

“So, I was wondering, provenance.” Lena zoomed back out and pursed her lips. “Usually, when someone has a project I really like, I try and court them.”

“Court them? Should I be jealous?”

“Never.” Lena tilted her head back and kicked the floor with her toe, spinning her chair on the spot. “It’s positive association: if I take them to dinner at a restaurant that serves food their grandmother might have made them, they subconsciously link me, and L Corp, with the same sort of satisfaction.”

“Sounds nefarious.”

“Corporations always are.” Lena closed her eyes and kept spinning. “But it’s never done with ill intent, and no one gets hurt.”

“I know. Hey, I’m almost at CatCo, I’ve gotta go.”

“Hey! It’s been a week since you went back to work. Congratulations.”

“Um, I - I don’t know off the top of my head, pretty much every planet besides this one does. L Corp is totally leveling Earth up!”

“Nerd.”

“Says the scientist. Okay, I’m here, goodbye, call me whenever!” Kara blew her a kiss through the phone, and Lena was a little moonstruck.

That’s new, she thought, cheeks pink. Okay! Be a mess over it later. Back to work.

And that’s what she did. She even managed to peer at a few other project dossiers, but between every folder, she went back to Rhea’s, running through options.

Without any information on her, Lena was in the dark with how to persuade her to come to L Corp. Sure, there were benefits, great policies, solid paychecks, but there was also a reputation and, to top it all off, ties to a recent murder. Which. Fun!

Lena would have felt a lot better if she at least knew Rhea’s favorite restaurant, or whether or not she drank, or something.

Rhea walked in as Lena’s stress had peaked, leaving her with a tight knot between her eyes, but Lena staunchly ignored it in favor of trying to look less obsessed with her specs. “Rhea!”

Rhea smiled, collected and warm and even regal.

“I’ve been looking at your proposal, and I have never seen anything like it.”

“I hope in a good way,” Rhea said, voice lilting with good humor as she strolled in like she owned the place. When men did that, it usually pissed Lena off to see evidence of their entitlement in her space, but seeing women confident just made her happy, and seeing Rhea confident made her ecstatic.
“A device for matter transformation and reconfiguration?” Lena beamed. “It’s astonishing.”

“Well, I saw your TED talk on the future of quantum technology, which made me think it might be right up your alley.”

That TED talk was Lena’s baby. That TED talk had been the last independent thing she’d done before she became nothing more than the next Luthor. That TED talk had been buried by Lex’s misdeeds, by Cadmus, by everything that had happened in the past seven months.

Lena’s heart fluttered, and she threw back an equally earnest compliment with everything she had, trying to turn her focus towards the specs. “This could revolutionize travel, energy, security - just about anything.” She stood, wandering towards it, swept up by possibilities. “You could move food and water to famine-stricken areas in an instant - solve climate change!”

Then she heard herself, over-eager, and felt very much a pigtailed nineteen-year-old hearing about cancer-curing robots for the first time. She stifled herself, correcting. “That is, if it works. The proposal you lay out is sound, but it is all theoretical.”

“Which is why I need you.”

Lena turned her head, inside turned to bubbles.

“My thought was, if we wed L Corp’s work in zero-size intelligence with my design, I’m confident we can make it a reality. Of course, I’ve kept a few key details out of the proposal - I needed to gauge your interest before revealing all of my secrets.”

There was a cheeky sort of charm to the way Rhea spoke, like she knew she was in charge, and Lena didn’t mind. It was comforting, easy to talk to her, easy to hear her voice even through the ringing in her ears.

“Well,” Lena managed, helpless to stifle her smile any longer, “I’m interested.”

“Good! Because I made us a reservation at Paka’s.”

“Well, how can I say no?”

Rhea smiled, and even through the splitting headache, Lena felt warm again.

☆

So distracted was Lena by the thought of dinner - *Rhea wants to work with L Corp! we’re gonna change the world! she needs me! -* that she didn’t call Kara again for hours. With the transmat account practically set in stone, she felt free to properly look into all the other projects on her desk. They were all fascinating, but they couldn’t match the glow of working with a woman who saw her TED talk and liked it.

She supposed it was like being in a happy relationship. Sure, other people are cute, or funny, or flirtatious, but you have *your person*, so they barely register.

It was that glowy, happy buzz that carried her through a work day and all the way through to dinner. She sent a company car around to pick Rhea up and made her way there on foot. In part, it was a power move, a reminder to herself that she wasn’t some giddy schoolgirl, but it was also a preemptive attempt to keep herself cool, to steel herself against her lingering migraine. Paka’s was spectacularly low key, so there shouldn’t have been any new pain, but Lena had learned to expect the worst, especially when she didn’t want to.
Soft music, mostly string and wind, filled the air, and the low warm light of the table candles gave everything a gentle glow.

This restaurant was one of Lena’s favorites, but she hadn’t gone in months. She hadn’t been courting a potential business partner in months, either, but even so, this place wasn’t just for any old brain trust. This was where she took people she was dying to impress; the only reason Kara hadn’t come here was because it was the kind of place that made her nervous, and Lena never wanted to make her uncomfortable.

But Rhea was different than Kara. She carried herself in that straight-backed way that women of power do, but she wasn’t stiff with it. She bore her might like it didn’t really matter, like it was part of her, not something she’d had to fight to have and keep fighting to keep.

Lena always wanted to be like that.

She asked, “So, where did you study?” and hoped she didn’t sound overeager.

If she did, Rhea was too polite to call her out, only replying, “Undergrad at Oxford, Masters of Engineering from MIT.”

Lena’s heart picked up; she felt like a puppy in a pet store window watching pedestrians with its tongue out. “I went to MIT! Did you have Martinez?”

Dr. Alyssa Martinez was a sharp-featured woman with an even sharper wit, and she’d been so involved in Lena’s studies that there wasn’t a single project she’d made without her professor’s fingerprint on it somewhere. She’d been warm and funny and so smart, and when Lena’d spent a full week in the labs, not sleeping or eating while working on her final project, Martinez pulled her out and gave her a bowl of soup and made her take a nap on her office couch. When she’d woken up, there was a blanket over her that hadn’t been there before, and an insulated travel mug of tea for her - just a little too sweet. Dr. Martinez was just sitting behind her desk, grading papers, like Lena being a mess and being in her office didn’t bother her.

Lena felt the same kind of presence in Rhea, especially when she laughed.

“I think I was there quite a few years before you,” she chuckled, “but I will take the compliment, and I will offer you one in return.” She leaned in on her elbows, highball glass in her long fingers, and said, “The applications of your black body field generator blew me away. You’re quite the genius.”

Lena’s ears were pink, and she barely managed to look back at Rhea to speak to her. “And you’re too kind.”

“I’m being honest! I wish I had a daughter like you.” She smiled, dark eyes open and inviting as she said, “Your mother must be proud.”

Dry, cocking an eyebrow to underscore the absolute enormity of that statement’s irony, Lena said, “That’s not how I’d describe her.”

She wondered if Marion would have been proud. She hoped so.

“Mothers and daughters…” Rhea sighed, sympathetic. “Not always the easiest relationship.”

“It’s more like apocalyptic, but, you know - ”

Rhea assured her, “We don’t have to talk about it,” but Lena wanted to. Rhea made her want to.
“No, no, it’s fine, you know? She never really cared about me, and only came back into my life to steal from me and frame me for a felony, so, you know.” Lena was too glib, knew it, and there was an ache in her stomach, a weight hanging from her ribs. She played with her glass, wished she could be even a little drunk. “Usual mother daughter stuff.”

“Well, you have a sense of humor about it.” Rhea gave an encouraging smile. “I’m impressed. I try, but I’m not usually successful.”

“Are you plagued by your mother, too?” Lena joked, unsure of the answer she wanted. Would empathy or sympathy be better? Would a woman who’d come through what she was still dealing with strong and confident be a blessing, or would the knowledge of someone else bearing out this bullshit hurt worse than bearing it out herself?

“Mmm.” Rhea shook her head. “My children. My son.”

Lex’s smiling face flashed into Lena’s head, melting like wax into that lunatic rictus bathed in glowing Kryptonite green.

“He was always the light of my life. But recently,” and Rhea sighed, unburdening herself, trusting Lena, “he met this horrible girl, and everything changed. My husband and I lost our son.” Rhea sipped her drink, eyes closed. “And on the heels of it, my husband died.”

“That’s awful.” Lena wanted to squeeze her hand, to reassure her, to comfort her, so she did, reaching out as she murmured, “I’m so sorry,” and hope it rang true.

For a moment, Rhea just looked at her hand, and Lena realized she was wearing her birth mother’s ring.

“They were all I had,” she sighed. “Many years ago, I had a daughter. My sweet baby girl. But I had to give her up. She needed someone else to raise her; I couldn’t do it. But I’ve always missed her, and especially now, there’s this ache. I have no one, and it makes me miss her all the more.” She huffed a short laugh, shook her head. “I never open up like this.

“Don’t be silly,” Lena said, again, too engaged. “I started this.”

Rhea smiled at her, and then her eyes caught on Lena’s fingers. “That’s lovely.” Her hand turned over, careful, so her thumb could drag over the etched coral bead.

“It was my birth mother’s.” Lena swallowed. “She died when I was four, and the Luthors took me in. Lionel took me in, and I thought he was such a good man, but that might not even be true.”

“Sometimes, it’s not whether people are good, but whether they’re good to us. We can’t always forgive - they can’t always be forgiven - but remembering their kindnesses is important.”

Lena closed her eyes. “Yeah.”

“I guess since I’m sharing, I should share everything.” Rhea’s change in topic was sudden, but the soft warmth in her voice was the same as she handed Lena a slim black flash drive, not letting her hand go. “These are the key concepts I withheld from the proposal.”

“I can’t wait.” Lena folded it into her fingers like it was something precious, and it was - infinitely so. “And I give you my word, I will not steal it.”

Rhea smiled, right at her, and said, “I trust you,” and Lena felt it, keenly, a warmth in her chest.
“You know, regardless of what happens with business,” she said, overeager and hesitant at the same time, “I have a feeling we're gonna be friends.”

“To new friends!” Rhea raised her glass, first in a toast, then to her lips. Over the rim, she said, “Thank the gods I found you.”

Lena’s heart stopped.

She’s definitely not from around here, is she?

The rest of the meal, Lena watched Rhea with particular care, like she could pick out tiny individual tics that couldn’t be from Earth. She’d had easily four fingers of scotch and didn’t seem at all affected - was that something a human could do? She’d ordered particularly spicy food, particularly rare meat - was that something a human would enjoy?

She’d liked Lena, trusted Lena, right from the start; the only other person to do that had been Kara, Kryptonian Kara.

Could humans do that?

Lena wanted to drop hints somehow, make some witty reference to interstellar travel that would make Rhea come to the same realization, and then remembered she knew nothing about being an alien. She didn’t know what species she was. She didn’t know what planet her mother came from. She didn’t know a damn thing.

When they’d finished eating and the check had been handled, Lena fiddled with her napkin. “I - I should go have a look at your specs. They’re going to be fantastic, I’m sure.”

“One can only hope.” Rhea stood with her, and instead of shaking hands - business casual - someone hugged someone and then Lena had to try really hard not to cry or cling like a tiny, screaming child. Rhea’s soft fingers were warm on the back of her neck, and the tension melted out of Lena’s body. “You have my contact information. Call me if there’s anything you’d like to discuss.”

“Oh course. Feel free to take the car back to your hotel.”

“That’s very kind. Thank you, Lena.” Rhea touched Lena’s cheek, fingers warm, and gave her one last smile before leaving.

Lena snuck out, waiting for the company car to disappear before she hopped up onto Paka’s roof and started back towards L Corp. She kicked off her heels, carrying them on one hand as she leapt from rooftop to rooftop. The wind on her cheeks was exhilarating; the flash drive in her pocket was exhilarating; her dinner with Rhea was exhilarating.

She jumped down onto her office balcony, toeing on her shoes and smoothing her hair, and sat down to get to work.

Rhea’s designs were similar to her own in a few ways, but there was one major difference that had Lena’s heart pounding, her hands pressed over her mouth, her eyes wider than saucer sleds.

The element that Rhea’s whole design hinged upon was not of earthly origin. It would have to be manufactured - and Lena could easily manage it - but atomic number 260 wasn’t a thing.

Which mean Lena was right. Rhea was not of this Earth.

She called, hands shaking, and kept the message she left as brief as possible so she didn’t slip or start...
doing something stupid and embarrassing that would give her away.

“No rush, of course,” she said, and hung up, leaning back in her chair and swallowing what would probably have been an absurd and childish squealing sound.

Then she called Kara, but there was something wrong when she picked up, plain to see.

“Kara, I’m glad I caught you. I have something I want to tell you.”

“Lena - now’s not a good time.”

“Are you okay?”

“I - ” Kara’s voice was thick, raw. “Lena, you should hang up.”

“What’s wrong?” Lena tuned in, heard the anxious thrumming in Kara’s chest. No, not anxious - this was outright fear. “Kara, why are you scared?”

“I can’t do this. I can’t - ” Her heart was faster, lurching. “I can’t.”

“Can I do anything?”

“No. I’m - I’m at the DEO.”

“They lifted our suspensions? I can be there in fifteen se - ”

“You can’t be here. Just mine.”

“Oh. Kara.”


“Okay.” Lena bit her lip, ended the call saying, “I’m sorry,” because here she was, thinking about a maybe-alien who showed her compassion and attention, when something was wrong for Kara and she couldn’t help. When Kara didn’t want her help, actively wanted her gone.

Kara had never wanted her gone before.

Even knowing Kara to be the most honest person on perhaps every world, Lena couldn’t help but fear that everything she’d said the night before was a lie. Lena’s hands were too bloody, and the DEO obviously agreed, because they brought Kara back, but kept her out in the cold.

That was everyone she had, shutting her out.

She leaned against her desk, eyes burning wet, and raked her fingers over her scalp again and again like the rhythm could soothe her, like it could drown out the incessant fear pounding inside Kara’s chest.

“Ms. Luthor?”

“Jess.” Lena sniffed, covertly wiped her eyes behind the shield of her hair. “Is everything alright?”

“I was going to ask you the same thing.”

Lena nodded, gave a tight smile. “I didn’t know you were coming in tonight.”

“Hector and I agreed that I would take nights.” Jess crossed her arms, eyebrow arched expectantly.
“How are you?”

“How good. I’m good.” Lena took a deep breath and managed an even, if watery, smile. “If the front desk says Rhea’s come back, have them send her right up. And put her on the access list.”

“Of course, Ms. Luthor. Is there anything else I can do?”

“No. No, that’s everything. Thank you, Jess.”

The door closed, and Lena began to pace, back and forth, until the too-loud click of her reinforced heels and the rasp of her hair shifting through her fingers drowned out Kara’s jackrabbit heart.

After about ten minutes of that, Jess popped her head in and said, “Front desk says Rhea’s on her way.”

“Oh! Thank you, Jess.”

Jess smiled, a little stiff, like she could smell blood in the water.

“You can take the night off, in fact. It’ll just be shop talk.”

“If you’re sure…”

Lena gave her a much better fake smile and nodded, tucking her hair behind her ear. “Positive. Have a good night.”

“You, too, Ms. Luthor.”

The door closed, and Lena got out of her seat, smoothing her hair back one last time, fiddling with her ring until Rhea walked in. Then she went still. She couldn’t be nervous, be embarrassing. She couldn’t mess this up.

“Do you like what you see?” Rhea asked. She rolled in like she owned the place, and again, Lena found herself envying that confidence.

“It’s all very interesting.” I bet your planet is glorious. “I almost forgot - I want to give you elevator access, so you can come up to this floor without an escort.” Lena turned, slowly picked up her biosampler, offering it in a remarkably steady hand. “Security just needs your thumbprint and they’ll issue a badge.”

Rhea pressed her thumb to it readily, and one-two-three, the light turned red.

Red like Kara.

Red like me.

“Is that good?”

Lena, still shaky, found herself beaming. “Perfect. But I was looking through your designs, and there’s a small problem. It requires an element that doesn’t exist on Earth. You see, we have one hundred and eighteen, and this would be categorized at two hundred and sixty.”

Rhea blinked, but her composure remained intact. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“I think you do.”
Rhea sighed. “It was when I thanked the gods at dinner, wasn’t it?”

“You’re an alien.” Lena’s eyes lit up. “And this device just proved it.”

Shaking her head, Rhea said, “Red is never good on this planet,” and crossed her arms.

“The woman I love most on this world got red,” Lena started, still causelessly nervous. Then she took the sampler from Rhea and pressed her own thumb to the pad. One-two-three: red. “And so do I.”

Rhea’s eyes lit up, and a smile spread slowly across her lips. “I knew you were special, Lena,” she purred. “I didn’t know just how much.”

Lena set the scanner down and grinned. “I - I’ve met other aliens before. Only two who looked like me. One of them is my - ” she flushed “ - girlfriend.”

“It always feels better, finding your own.” Rhea stepped in closer and touched Lena’s shoulder. “I’m happy you have that in your life.”

“But you’re the first I’ve - found. Met on my own.” The stress melted out of Lena, the lines of her shoulders softening, and she looked up at Rhea to ask, “Did you recognize my ring?”

“I did,” Rhea said, measured. “Your mother’s, you said?”

“Yes. Her name was Marion Smith.” Lena laughed. “I suppose that wasn’t her real name, after all, but that’s the name I had for her. That was my family. Where is your family from?”

“My planet was destroyed.” Rhea swallowed. “Long ago - a gravitational disturbance sent us out of orbit, throwing us right into the path of this solar storm. I didn’t know if I’d survive, so I sent my daughter away.”

“That’s - awful. I’m so sorry.”

“I know she’s safe. I know she’s out there, and that’s what matters.” Rhea leaned against Lena’s desk, fingers curling around the edge, and she hummed. “Sturdy.”

“I built it, molecule up.” Lena turned and looked up at Rhea. “I’m positive we can manufacture 260. We’ll build this transmat together.”

“Thank you, Lena.” Rhea smoothed a hand over her hair, and it had no business feeling so damn nice. “Once it’s made, I can go home. I can use it to fix our orbit - make it livable again. Make it safe for my baby girl.”

Lena reached up and touched Rhea’s wrist. “I hope you can see her again. I hope it’s perfect.”

“If you have a hand in it, it will be.”

Lena beamed, looking up at Rhea. The slight swelling in her sinuses from that useless crying made her headache unbearable, and she flinched. “God, sorry. I don’t know what this is.”

“Headache?” Rhea asked, infinitely sympathetic.

“Unfortunately.”

“Let me try something. It’s something from my home - it emits a frequency that addresses pain centers in the brain directly.” Rhea pulled something out of her sleeve - and wasn’t that just the way?
It was a small device about the width of her palm, curved to the contour of the back of a person’s neck. “May I?"

Mutely, Lena nodded. Rhea smoothed a hand over her neck, down the slope of her shoulder, and pressed the device to the top of her spine, right over Lillian’s incision. Lena wondered if her eyesight was good enough that she could see it.

Then there was a click, a flare of pressure. Lena turned around and felt her headache gone completely. In fact, she’d never felt better, never felt stronger.

“Thank you,” she said, rubbing the back of her neck.

“What’s the point of having power if you can’t use it for the greater good?” Rhea asked with a demure shrug.

Lena smiled. “I look forward to working with you, on one condition.”

“Name it.”

“Please don’t lie to me. I understand not wanting a Luthor to know about your history - ”

“Oh, Lena.” There was that warm drag again on the first letter of her name. “You’re right. I pretended to be of this world only because I know how much your mother loathes aliens, but I did not presume that you’d be the same. How could I? You are nothing like your mother.”

“That’s what people do when they hear I’m a Luthor,” Lena said softly. “They presume.”

“Everything else I told you was the truth. Being betrayed by your own blood - there’s nothing more painful. I know you understand that.”

There was a faraway look in Rhea’s eyes, and it ached to see.

“L Corp has already built a large-scale generator ring,” Lena offered. “We can easily adapt it for this.”

“The portal would help this planet immensely, and it would help get me home to mine.” Rhea smiled, this one sadder than all the others, and took Lena’s hand, thumb rubbing over the stone of her ring. “I know we can do great things. Together.”

“I can’t wait.”

Rhea gave her hand a gentle squeeze. “I might have a sample of 260 to use as a jumping-off point.”

“That would be incredible,” Lena breathed.

The smile on Rhea’s face brightened, melancholy burning off like mist, and then she disappeared in a flicker of green.

Lena’s hand hovered in empty air for a moment before dropping as she registered that she was her office’s sole occupant once more.

She didn’t feel so alone, though.

The dull, nervous energy she’d had for the past week had faded, just a little. She had a purpose, a plan. She was going to make good - she was going to save the world.
Normally, at that point, she would have gone home and told Kara all about it. They would have had
dinner - second dinner, at least, for both of them - and cuddled up in bed and it would’ve been the
perfect ending to the perfect day.

There hadn’t been any perfect days in a while, and for a moment, Lena forgot why this one wouldn’t
make that grade, either, but then she looked at her phone and remembered.

Kara didn’t want her - didn’t need her. Rhea did.

And they had work to do.

☆

When Rhea came back, it was nearly midnight, and Lena had reworked her generator ring specs to
match the transmat arch, to fit with the physical properties of soon-to-no-longer-be theoretical 260.

But, for all Rhea had riding on this venture, she didn’t get down to business right off the bat.
“Something’s troubling you,” she said in lieu of a greeting.

Lena couldn’t help the eager rush she felt at someone noticing the problem she actually wanted to
talk about. “My, um.”

Rhea arched an eyebrow. “Girlfriend.”

“How did you know?”

“I used to get the same look on my face when I quarreled with my husband. Luckily, it was a rare
occasion.”

“Kara and I never fight. This is - something’s wrong. And she told me that I couldn’t help. Which is
fine! She actually knows what’s going on, she’s competent and she’s strong and she’s smart, so she’s
definitely going to handle this right, but…” Lena bit her lip. “She turned me away. She’s never done
that before, and I don’t know how to react.”

“Turn her away in response. Withhold. Let her see that she does need you, and let her see that she’s
hurt you.”

Lena laughed. “I don’t think I could do that.”

“No woman - no person - deserves to be brushed aside by those to whom they devote the whole of
their heart.” Rhea stepped forward and laid her hand on Lena’s shoulder. “But if you can’t bear to
leave her to flounder, why not see if the passage of time has changed things?”

“You wouldn’t mind?”

“Never.”

“Thank you.”

Lena dialed, heart in her throat as she waited for Kara’s voice to send her to voicemail.

“Lena,” said Kara - real Kara, sounding much less fraught - “hey. I’m sorry I couldn’t talk earlier.”

“No, no, it’s okay. I was just calling to check up on you. You sounded upset.”

That was, perhaps, the greatest minimization that Lena Luthor, Queen of Ignoring Problems, had
ever managed.

“It worked out. I’ll fill you in later.”

“Are you sure you’re allowed to?”

“I’ll ask.”

Oh. “Hey, brunch next Saturday? I know a place.”

“Yeah, that sounds great. Just, uh, no kale this time. For real.”

Lena grinned.

“Oh! You called to tell me something.”

“Yeah. It’s, um, it’s no big deal.”

Why didn’t I tell her?

“Okay. I still want to hear about it.”

“Okay.”

“Bye.”

“Bye.” With that done, Lena turned back to Rhea. She felt minimally better, and judging by the look on Rhea’s face, it showed. “Ready to change the world?”

“You have no idea.”

Chapter End Notes

sorry about the quality and the timing and just. Everything?? RHPS is on Saturday, so I've been doing nothing but rehearsal, and then today, I had a bunch of errands to run and I was going to write in the car but I took three separate Lyfts and writing in a stranger's vehicle didn't seem smart. So.

I'm bad and sorry.

Because I'm fucking swamped right now, I'm going to try cutting down to one chapter a week. I say try because I might just end up writing and posting all the time once I don't have deadline, because my brain is stupid. I'm gonna try and write up the whole thing this weekend and next week, and then. Like. Finish?? Fingers crossed.

Anyways, I don't know what happened with the first half of this chapter. I didn't plan for Kara to get into Lena's office and for them to have that chat, and I don't know how I feel about that chat, but it's there, and I don't have the energy to try and write around it.

I hope this chapter didn't disappoint anyone, especially ~J, who was concerned that my Lena wasn't unstable enough, emotionally, to be played by Rhea. I didn't see it that way, and I think that's probably where that chat came from, but however this came out, I hope this chapter wasn't a quality dip. Let me know if it was!
Brunch Interlude

Chapter Summary

Set between 2x19 and 2x20. The brunch we were promised and never got to see, plus more cute girlfriend stuff, because Goddamnit, There Needs To Be Some Happiness Before Everything Goes To Shit (Again). You don't really need to read this, because there's not really any plot, but it's cute and it's here, so...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first thing Lena did, once the apartment door was opened for her, was pull Alex into a very careful hug. Alex, for her part in it, hugged back right away, and her laughter was more surprised than mocking.

“Hey, Legs.”

“Hey.”

“The floor’s there to take over if you get tired.”

Oh. Right.

Lena set Alex down sheepishly before being dragged into a second hug. “Good to see you.”

“You, too. I’m sorry I wasn’t - ”

“There were already too many cooks in the kitchen. Don’t worry about it.”

“I’ll give it my best shot.”

Alex looked good. She looked alive. She was nursing some split knuckles and there was a bandage on her shoulder, but she wore it like an epaulette, like it was part of a dress uniform. Plus, as buried as Lena had been in, y’know, synthesizing an entire element, Kara had been just as busy playing anxious guard dog for her lovingly exasperated big sister.

“Speaking of, can you work some girlfriend magic and get her out of my hair?” Alex asked, grinning. “She’s decided that her new excuse for hanging around is organizing my shoes.”

“You have more than one pair of shoes?”

“Tac boots, heels, and sneakers. Only one of those has been replaced in the past year.”

“And it’s not available in stores.”

“Nope.”

“I got it. Kara?”
“Lena!”

One of Alex’s two individual stilettos clattered to the floor. There was a whoosh, and then two strong arms around Lena’s shoulders, pulling her close. Lena got an involuntary but much welcomed whiff of Kara’s shampoo, and gave herself license to sink into that hug, wrapping her arms around Kara’s waist tight and burying her face in Kara’s shoulders.

It had been, at most, a day and a half since she’d seen Kara last, but it felt like decades. Her work ethic went from obscene to absent around her girlfriend, more often than not, so it couldn’t really be helped, but Lena had never been so happy for the advent of the weekend than she was with an armful of Kryptonian.

“I’ve missed you.”

“Missed you, too. Now, c’mon, we have brunch to eat.”

“Is it the place with bottomless mimosas?”

“Bottomless waffles.”

Kara kissed Lena’s forehead. “Ooh! Thank Rao! I already cleaned out Alex’s kitchen.”

“With your face. Unasked.”

“You had food that was about to expire.”

“In a month.”

“Like you would’ve eaten it within the month,” Kara scoffed, still draped over Lena like a blanket. “You and Maggie eat more takeout than me.”

“That’s physically impossible.” Alex crossed her arms, leaning against the wall by the door. “You eat the contents of one Chinese food place a day, minimum.”

“I cook!”

Alex raised an eyebrow.

“…Lena cooks.”

“But not today! My waffle iron is out of commission.”

“Oh, no! What happened?”

I tried to synthesize 260 with cast iron.

“Experiment gone wrong.”

Kara laughed, squeezing tighter. “I really, really missed you.”

“Hate to break up the hug fest,” said Maggie, approaching the open door, “but I come bearing - um, green things?”

“Good save, babe,” Alex teased, dragging her in by the hand and very sneakily hiding what had to be a good gallon of mint chip ice cream, among other Danvers kitchen staples. “So! I have a big, tough cop girlfriend to protect me, you have waffles to eat - go, scoot, skedaddle!”
“Skedaddle?”

“Yes. Skedaddle.”

“Oh.” Kara removed her face from Lena’s shoulder and frowned, scrutinizing. “You’re sure?”

“Yes.”

“Because I know Eliza gave you a waffle iron back when she had hopes and dreams.”

“Get out of here.”

Lena grinned and, arms firmly around Kara’s waist, picked her up off the floor. “So long, farewell, auf wiedershen, goodbye.”

“I love The Sound of Music,” Kara said, a little stunned. “Have you been working out?”

“I think my body’s just used to metabolizing solar energy now. I’m much more efficient.”

Lena set Kara down at the top of the stairs and took in her pink cheeks, her fluttering heart.

“Nice.”

“Mm-hm. Now, c’mom, before our favorite waiter’s shift ends.”

☆

The diner they went to for brunch was a long forgotten relic about as old as Lena. The menus were laminated, tastefully sparing in their use of clipart, and used one of the less ugly dyslexia-friendly fonts. There was, for whatever reason, a motif of farmland alien abductions in the decoration that they both found hilarious, and the waffles were always perfect, even when the chef stretched herself and went liège.

Unfortunately, the rush could not be beat, so they didn’t get to sit beneath the oil painting of a Grey pantsing George W. Bush, but they still scored a booth - the particularly cracked one by the sticker-plastered bathroom door.

Their serveur préféret was still on the clock, which was nice. His name was Pete, and he was funny without being overbearing, and very explicit about allergy information because his own daughter had a peanut problem.

“Hey! It’s been a while since I’ve seen your smiling faces.” Pete grinned, tapping his pen on his order pad with a drummer’s finesse. “What can I getcha?”

“Any specials today?”

“We have a caprese omelet, an Oreo short stack with hot chocolate syrup, a crème brûlée waffle with a little bit of kirsh and some house-candied black cherries, and a cinnamon roll waffle with vanilla bean cream cheese frosting.”

“I’ll take the kirsh, you take the cinnamon, we split them Power Rangers style?”

“Fight to the finish.”

Kara pecked Lena on the lips and confirmed their order, along with coffee for Lena and a milkshake for herself.
“I’ll get that to you right away.”

With that, Pete vanished, leaving them alone in their beloved creaky booth. The table was small enough that their feet occupied the same longitudinal parallel, ankles knocking together. Kara retracted at the knee like she was at a Catholic school dance, hooking her heels over the rung between the chair’s legs and knocking her kneecaps into the bottom of the table itself. The only reason it didn’t go flying, or at least dislodge everything on it, was because Lena surged forwards and held it down.

Hands on Kara’s corners of the table, Lena grinned awkwardly and said, “Efficiency,” with a tiny shrug.

Kara laughed.

“You can sprawl out. You’ve got long legs.”

“It’s okay.”

“I’m on the actual booth side, Kara, I have space to put my feet up.” Lena demonstrated, adjusting her sundress to conceal her feet when she tucked them up onto the cracked vinyl upholstery.

Fussing with her glasses, Kara stretched her legs out, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth. “I just wanted to say I was sorry. About the phone call.”

“No, I get it. Alex pulled the same thing on Maggie when we went, um, exploring? A couple of months ago.” Lena toyed with the rim of her glass and mouthed Maaldoria. and Kara’s eyes widened in understanding. “You two don’t do well with the thought of losing each other. I get that.”

“I just - I felt like it was my fault. If I hadn’t gone flying off - chasing off! I meant chasing! - after…”

Lena gave a thin smile. “Me.”

“You didn’t know someone was going to kidnap her.” Kara sighed. “It’s just, I got into it with Maggie, and Alex really wants us to get along, so she tried to play peacemaker, and if I had just - behaved myself, none of this would’ve happened.”

“You and Maggie get along great!”

“Yeah, but when it comes to work, we disagree. More, lately.”

Lena reached over and took Kara’s fidgety hand in hers, running her thumb across the ridges of her knuckles. “Today, it looked like you two were fixing that.”

“I think we have.”

“It also looked like Maggie and Alex definitely needed a sock to hang on the door.”

“Ugh!” Kara squeezed her eyes shut and shook her head. “But, anyways, back to the point: I’m still sorry. I promised to be there for you, and you’re dealing with a lot right now, and I wasn’t. I shut you out, and that’s not - that’s not okay.”

“It was… office stuff. I’m not cleared to go back yet.”

“It wasn’t like that. We were there for Alex, not for any, um, work. Everything was just moving so fast, and I was so panicked - if Maggie hadn’t been there when I got the call, I don’t even know that I would’ve thought to bring her in.” Kara squeezed Lena’s hand in her own and looked her dead in
the face. “I promise. They’re not fridging you.”

Lena nodded slowly. “Okay. I believe you. And I…”

*Withhold*, said Rhea’s voice in her ear, but Lena didn’t want to take that advice. Rhea was brilliant, but she didn’t have much by way of family or friends since her planet was gone. Shutting herself off from everyone probably made sense; if no one got close to her, she didn’t have to lose anyone else. Lena used to live like that, and it sucked. She didn’t want to live like that ever again.

“I was a little hurt. And I’ll probably be a little hurt for a while, but it’s just…” She sighed, waved her free hand flippantly. “Poking at an old wound. It’ll heal, and I’ll be fine, but for now, you just have to let it be.”

Kara nodded soberly. “Okay.” She pulled Lena’s hand close and kissed her knuckles. “I will let it be.”

“Thank you.” Lena’s cheeks heated, and she smiled at Kara across the table before leaning over and kissing her softly. “Apology accepted.”

Kara grinned against her lips, holding her hand tighter and kissing her back. Lena’s heart fluttered in her chest, and she wrapped her hand around the back of Kara’s neck, absently playing with her hair just to hear her breath hitch.

They only really pulled apart because Pete, the angel, was walking up with their drinks. He set Kara’s chocolate shake, complete with its wobbly mountain of whipped cream, and Lena’s sedate-by-comparison black coffee down with a wink. “Waffles will be out in five minutes.”

“Thank you,” Lena said, clearing her throat.

Once Pete was gone, the two of them broke out in a fit of giggles that neither of them could quite manage to control. Just when they thought they had it handled, Kara dropped her head and let out a sigh. When she straightened up, there was a smudge of whipped cream on her eyebrow, and Lena managed to stifle her laughter only long enough to arch an eyebrow of her own, cluing Kara in.

Finally, they petered out, and Kara looked at Lena for a long moment. “I love it when you’re happy.”

Lena bit her lip. “You’re such a sap.”

“Only for you.”

“Liar. You’re a sap for everything.” Lena reached over and cupped Kara’s cheek, thumbing off a residual streak of white from her temple. She drew the pad of her thumb into her mouth and licked it clean. “It’s one of the *many* reasons you’re so wonderful.”

A megawatt beam glowed on Kara’s face, and Lena nearly spilled coffee in her lap, she was so distracted by the sight of it. Thankfully, she managed not to wreck her dress, and her drink actually made it into her mouth.

“So, how’s business?”

Lena grinned, ear to ear, and took another sip. “Good. And *top secret.*”

“Off the record - not even a hint?”
“Things are… still in synthesis.”
Kara squinted. “Was that a hint? Was that a pun?”
Coyly, Lena shrugged. “Was it?”
Kara stretched out one penny loafered foot and nudged Lena’s knee. “Don’t distract me by being cute.”

“Right now, everything’s just getting started. I’m gathering supplies, delegating work so I can actually get hands-on with this project.”

“Oh!”

“And once everything is finished and tested and perfect, you will be the first one I tell.”
Kara nodded, and Pete swooped in, plates balanced on his fingertips. “Crème brûlée and cinnamon roll waffles - and some hot syrup for the table.”

“You’re a miracle worker, Pete.”

“All in a day’s work. Enjoy!”

Lena looked down at her little baby lièges with their crackly sugar and all the little pockets of custardy goodness, then over at Kara’s waffles, which appeared to be actual cinnamon rolls cooked in a waffle iron instead of in an oven. Quick as a flash - or, perhaps, the Flash - she scooped up her fork and stole a bite off Kara’s plate before her girlfriend even had the chance to blink.

“Hey!”

“This was your idea,” Lena said, popping the bite into her mouth. “Mm. Incredible.”
Kara’s jaw, dropped out of pure shock, clacked shut, and she grinned, eyes calculating. She tilted her head so her glasses slid down her nose and stared at Lena’s waffles for a split second before carving out a bite that Lena was certain had at least two nuggets of pearl sugar.
Judging by the crunch, she was right.

“So good,” Kara groaned.

Lena dragged the tines of her fork through the burnt sugar, listening to the crackle, then stuck her fork in her mouth. “Mm-hm. This is the only place worth ordering specials from.”

“Agreed.” Kara reached out and tried to nab a cherry, and while she managed to grab one, Lena caught her wrist before she could abscond with it.

She was actually in a good mood. Working with Rhea gave her a sense of purpose that she sorely needed - the same sense of purpose that drove her as Galaxy Girl, the same sense of purpose that had her dedicate five years of her life to BioMax, the same sense of purpose that felt lacking since she’d been benched and Jack had died.

And because she was in a good mood, she felt like being a little shit.

Looking Kara square in the eyes, she ate the cherry out of her fingers. The sugary syrup clinging to its skin was sticky on her fingertips, and Lena may or may not have licked it off them.
Kara, wide-eyed, was frozen in her chair.

Lena grinned, kissed her fingertips before letting go of her wrist. “Delicious.”

“You,” Kara breathed, “are the worst.”

“Yup. Sit with me.”

Kara picked up her plate and slid around to the bench side of the table, scooting in close enough that she and Lena were sat hip-to-hip, thigh-to-thigh. Lena stabbed a forkfull of cherries and offered it to her, knocking their knees together. Kara put a hand on Lena’s thigh - barely above her knee - and took the bite.

Lena realized, only too late, that Kara Zor-El Danvers could play dirtier than the best of them. She chewed, made some soft, indecent noise, and swallowed like she hadn’t just shorted out the supercomputer in Lena’s head with magnetism.

The competition leaked out of their meal, and they ended up half in each other’s laps, feeding each other waffles and reigning themselves back from delving too deep into the realm of PDA. Lena went through only two cups of coffee, but two pitchers of ice water, by the time their plates were clean.

“Pick a number,” she said.

“Hm… Four.”

This was, probably, Lena’s favorite part about eating restaurant foods. She liked tipping well, and she could afford to do it; her usual date had worked as a waitress and appreciated just how necessary those tips were, but since Supergirl didn’t have a Social Security number and Kara Danvers was a cub reporter, she couldn’t always go balls to the wall on gratuity, which was where this game came in.

Kara picked a number - any number was allowed, but she usually stayed between two and five - and that was how many times the price of their meal the server got tipped.

“Four it is.”

As if on cue, Pete appeared. “Are you two ready for the check?”

“Yes, but can we get an order of fries to go?”

“Of course. I’ll be right back with that.”

True to his word, Pete returned inside of five minutes with a recycled paper clamshell full of steaming hot fries and the check. Lena scribbled down a triple digit tip, tucked her debit card into the check folder, and took a bite of a fry.

Crispy, golden, and just a little spicy – just how they liked it.

Once the payment had been processed, they ducked out, wandering vaguely towards the park and munching, arm in arm.

“So, what’s - oh, my god.”

Someone had stopped off inside a tiny bookstore with a No Pets policy and left their sesame shiba inu outside.
“Hello, gorgeous,” Lena murmured, closing their takeout box and reaching out to let the puppy sniff her hand.

The puppy sniffed her, then the knee of Kara’s jeans, and barked softly, demanding pets.

Kara dropped to the pavement, allowing the dog to crawl into her lap, and started scratching behind her ears. “What a good girl! Huh? What a good girl!”

Lena crouched down beside her and ran her hand down the puppy’s back, revealing a blue collar with a name tag. “Button, huh?”

Button stuck out her tongue and rolled onto her side.

“Oh, my god. You want a belly rub, huh?” Lena dragged her knuckles along the edge of Button’s stomach, testing the waters. Button rolled onto her back, and Lena moved on to properly petting her belly. “That’s a great belly. Ten out of ten, would pet again.”

Button licked her wrist, tail wagging.

“Now I know why they named you that,” Kara cooed, scrifting under Button’s chin. “Because you are so freaking cute!”

Squeaking back a pretty spot on tonal mimicry, Button play-nipped at Kara’s hand, and she let out a surprised giggle before, dramatically, flopping back onto the sidewalk.

“I am defeated!” she howled. “I am no match for the great and powerful Button!”

Button yipped, padding up Kara’s stomach and licking her chin. Kara peeled one eye open and gasped.

“You have healed me with your magical kisses! How can I ever repay you?”

Boof!

Button rolled onto her back, belly up for more petting, and no one was in any position to deny her. Kara and Lena sat there on the sidewalk for a good ten minutes, just petting puppy tummies and murmuring increasingly nonsensical things to Button, who ate it up with a spoon.

After those ten minutes were up, a harried-looking guy in his late twenties came out with a recycled tote full of books and laughed. “Oh, my god, are you guys okay?”

“Yep. She seemed bored, so we stopped to play with her. Was that okay?”

“Totally fine. She’s kind of high energy, isn’t that right, Button? Huh?”

Button scrambled out of Lena’s arms and pawed at the guy’s jeans.

“Did you have fun?”

Boof!

“Yeah? Good girl!”

Kara and Lena stood, brushing themselves off. “She’s a real sweetie pie.”

“Yeah.” The guy shouldered his bag and untied Button’s leash with one hand, sticking out the other
to shake. “I’m Kyle.”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Kara, and this is my girlfriend, Lena.”

To his credit, Kyle didn’t so much as look twice at Lena, or give any indication that he made the connection between face and name. Instead, he just asked, “You two have a dog?”

“No. We’re both really busy. It wouldn’t be fair to get a dog and leave them alone all the time.”

“Well, if we see you around, I’m sure Button would love to catch up.”

Button wagged her tail and licked Lena’s shin in confirmation before going still, listening. Then she barked and raced off in the other direction, and Kyle was dragged off after her.

“I think she heard a friend,” Kara said, grinning.

“Yeah?” Lena listened for a moment; sure enough, about half a block away, Button was sniffing animatedly with another puppy, and Kyle was chatting away with someone. “She really does have boundless energy.”

“I love dogs.”

“I’ve noticed.”

“Like you don’t!” Kara grinned, draping an arm around Lena’s shoulders and kissing her temple, fry box in hand. “Do you think Alex and Maggie will let us dog sit?”

“They’re getting a dog?”

“And naming her Gertrude.”

“That is a horrible dog name.”

“Yeah, but they’re happy about it.”

Lena knocked her head into Kara’s cheek. “They’ll definitely let us dog sit. They have to go on vacation eventually, right?”

Laughing, Kara laid her head on top of Lena’s. “It’s going to end up being some weird work trip with two minutes of sightseeing. I bet.”

“What, like they run off to hunt down some Plutonian drug smuggler and take a selfie in front of the Boston Bean?”

“Probably.” Kara gasped, stopping dead in the middle of the sidewalk. “Wanna go see our puppies?”

Lena’s brow furrowed. “We don’t have puppies.”

“No, no, no, the ones we delivered.”

“That was, what, two, three months ago?”

“Yeah. They’re old enough to go home with families now, or to be taken on walks by volunteers.”

“You just want a puppy.”

“I really, really do.”
“Let’s go walk some puppies, then.”

☆

They each ended up with one puppy to walk - Kara picked one called Junior, who looked exactly like her mother, and Lena ended up selecting the runt of the litter, ironically dubbed Gigantor - after spending about half an hour just playing with what was left of the litter. Three of the four puppies, as well as their mother, remained, because nobody wanted a pit.

“Bad reputation,” Shelby said with a sigh. “And they don’t deserve it, either. They’re just dumb little noodles - they just want to be loved, and they’re real devoted, too.”

“I bet.”

“Who adopted the one puppy?”

“Oh. This cute little girl came in with her parents after seeing Supergirl and Galaxy Girl on our website with these puppies. Total hero worship - really cute.”

“Huh,” Kara said, nudging Lena in the ribs with her elbow. “You don’t say.”

Lena just wrapped her arm around Kara’s waist and swallowed a grin.

Once they’d been given the rundown of Junior and Gigantor’s walking requirements - Junior was scared of traffic and Gigantor had pretty low stamina, both for walking and for socializing, due to her size - they collected some plastic baggies and two leashes and started for the park.

They went at a lazy pace to give Gigantor a shot at keeping up. She stayed close to her big sister, following her stoically down the street and stopping when she stopped. When they were about two blocks from the entrance to the park, a silver sedan piloted by a dead-eyed man in a golf shirt swerved through the intersection against the lights.

Kara, diligent about traffic law, dragged her jaywalk-prone girlfriend back. Junior cowered away from the car, and Gigantor started barking. At ten weeks, she was the size her siblings had been at one month, and her sandy coat harkened back to teddy bears. She looked like the least threatening or intimidating thing on the planet after a ladybug or a baby bunny.

Which is why the sound that came out of her was so shocking. She let out a ferocious snarl, barking after Polo Shirt’s taillights, standing firm between him and her big sister.

Once the car had turned another corner and disappeared, she turned around and licked Junior’s face. That behavioral about-face was so startling that, for a moment, neither Lena nor Kara moved or made a sound. Only once people started moving around them, casting a wide berth, did they snap back into action, scooping up their respective puppies and bustling across the intersection.

Safely on the other side of the street, Lena ducked her head and planted a kiss on one of Gigantor’s ears. “Good girl.”

Gigantor licked her shoulder and snuffled.

The park started out with a gentle hill, asphalt flanked on either side by municipal grass, and Junior went nuts over it, scrambling out of Kara’s arms and rolling around in the dirt. Gigantor was hot on her heels, and that twenty foot hill took twenty minutes to summit.

The early afternoon sun cast a halo around Kara’s head, and Lena just sort of stared for a moment.
“Ooh! Street fair!” Kara pointed downhill, then turned to gage Lena’s reaction. “What?”

“You’re just… stupendously pretty.”

Kara went pink, and Lena reached over and took her hand. “C’mon. You said there was a street fair?”

“First of the season, probably. Wanna take a look?”

“Sure. Why not?”

Downhill they went, hand-in-hand.

The long center path was flanked by pop-up booths and tents full of hand-knit sweaters and homemade soaps and crystal pendants. About half a mile off, Lena could see a bounce house and a King Kong half-moon ride, and the smell of cotton candy was thick in the air.

“I love these,” Kara sighed, hands swinging. “Everyone’s so happy, and there’s so much fun stuff to do.”

“Did you ever go to them when you were a kid?”

“They didn’t have bouncy castles where I was born - not like that, anyway.”

“I meant in Midvale.”

“Oh. Oh, yeah, all the time! Tiny little beach town? There were street fairs, like, every weekend. I had so many bottles of sand art. So. Many.”

Lena laughed, picturing a tiny teenaged Kara surrounded by jars upon endless jars of stripy rainbow sand, grinning ear to ear besides an exasperated Alex.

“How about you? Are street fairs a thing in Metropolis?”

“Only in summer. They had tree markets for Christmas, though. Fir trees and wreathes and maple syrup from Vermont. I loved it. We would get these big five gallon jugs of syrup that would last us all year, and my mom always got a tiny tree so I could put the star on top.” Lena smiled softly, remembering the red glitter their ornaments shed all over everything. They had scarlet sparkles everywhere until July at least; two months after she moved in with the Luthors, she shook the last of the previous Christmas’ glitter out of her shoes and nearly suffocated under a fresh wave of loneliness. “I was a very… exuberant child.”

“The Danvers’ don’t celebrate Christmas, but Eliza makes these amazing sufganiyot with raspberry jam. Definitely worth the tree trade.”

“I bet. Eliza is incredible.”

“I’ll tell her you said that.”

Lena’s ears burned. “Must you?”

“Like you didn’t already gush about her, to her face, all Thanksgiving long.” Kara squeezed Lena’s hand and grinned slyly.

“Mortifying.”
“No! Eliza liked you.”

Lena balked, unsure of how to respond. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught a familiar word and darted towards the stand.

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“Well, the flavor of the mushrooms helps balance out the bitterness of the coffee.” The guy behind the stand offered Lena a waxed paper shot glass. “Free sample?”

Lena smiled and downed the coffee like a shot. “Oh. Wow.”

Lena smiled and downed the coffee like a shot. “Oh. Wow.”

Usually, she hated cold espresso - it always tasted like the pot it was brewed in - but somehow, the portobello helped. It just tasted like coffee. “That’s fascinating.”

“Fix-it fascinating or delicious fascinating?” Kara asked, staring Lena down over the rims of her glasses.

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“Delicious fascinating.”

The guy behind the stand beamed, standing a little taller. “We sell it by the bag, if you’re interested.”

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“Sounds good.”

As the kid scooped a bag of beans and dehydrated mushrooms, Kara settled her weight onto one hip, pensive. “It’s actually good?”

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“I mean, I actually like vegetables and black coffee, but yeah.”

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“Hm.”

Lena laughed. “Do you want to try it?”

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“Sure,” Kara said, leaning in and kissing her. It was gentle and brief and Lena dropped her wallet for it; Kara just sighed when she pulled back.

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“So?”

“So?”

“Wouldn’t mind it in the morning.”

Lena stuck her tongue out at Kara, who just beamed at her and knelt to pick up her wallet, which she folded back into Lena’s hand with sure fingers. Lena’s fingers were much less sure - or, perhaps, just distracted - as she payed for her bag of beans and grabbed a business card, shoving both into her pocket.

They steadied, though, when they tangled into Kara’s. Hands swinging and puppies in tow, they meandered down the path, skirting screaming kids and impulse buy-beleaguered pedestrians and picking up more than their fair share of fair food. Or the central California equivalent thereof.

“They should be cotton candy.”

“They should be cotton candy.”

“What, pretzels aren’t good enough for you?”

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“Nothing can beat a wad of fluffy sugar the size of a small child, I’m sorry.”

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“It always surprises me to see evidence of your sweet tooth,” Kara said, gesturing with her
Brobdingnagian pretzel.

“You’ve seen me eat twenty four chocolate frosted doughnuts in one sitting.”

“Yeah, but that was an emergency.”

Lena shrugged. “I like sugar, I just don’t always seek it out. Being able to eat unlimited everything is kind of a recent development.”

“Well, I’m glad that development was made. Pretzel?”

“Why not?”

Kara offered it Lena’s way, and she took a bite.

“Good, right?”

“Yeah…” Lena grinned, puckish, “but it’s not cotton candy.”

“Well, if you don’t want it, I’m more than happy to eat a wad of dough the size of my ribcage.” Kara knocked her hip into Lena’s and held the pretzel between her teeth, shifting her grip on the leash so Junior wasn’t directly in the path of someone carrying a tie-dyed body pillow taller than they were. “Ooh, strongman!”

Eyes wide as she glanced between the red metal game, topped with a bell that read ‘It Takes a REAL Man To Ring The Bell’ and her girlfriend with actual super strength, Lena hissed, “Kara, we can’t.”

“What? We can moderate. You’re great at controlling yourself. You never even accidentally broke someone’s bones.”

“No, just lots of furniture.”

“Well, play or not, I believe in you.” Kara grinned. “And I’m gonna play.”

Lena rolled her eyes fondly and took Junior, murmuring, “This is gonna be fun, huh, baby?”

Junior barked and sat down, wagging her tail in what Lena could only assume was anticipation.

Kara handed over a five and picked up the sledgehammer. Making eye contact with Lena, she made a big show of the hammer being impossibly heavy, setting it down in the dirt on the side of the road with a little puff of dust, cheeks round around a mouthful of pretzel. She wiped her hands on the seat of her jeans, rubbed her palms together, and shot Lena a wink over her shoulder before picking it up again.

“You got this, sunshine,” Lena drawled, fighting a goofy smile.

“Fanks.”

Kara picked up the hammer and swung in a smooth arc. She hit the lever square, and Lena could see just how much she was holding back in the way she held herself, the way she choked up on the sledgehammer.

She scored ninety out of one hundred, just shy of the bell, and gave an apple pie shrug. “Pretty good, huh?”
“You’d score higher if you worked out,” Lena teased, kissing her cheek.

“She’d’a scored higher,” the gamerunner said, “if she were a real man.”

Kara bit back a snicker, but Lena had sat through too many business meetings with too many old men to laugh it off. “Darling, hold the dogs.”

“Of - of course.”

Kara took the leashes, and Lena’s bag, bouncing on her toes as she walked up to the game in her sundress and her ballet flats and flawlessly applied makeup. “Five bucks to play, right?”

“Sure.”

Lena pulled her wallet out of her dress pocket, fishing out a five and slapping it into the man’s hand, squinting with her head tilted back so she could stare down the length of her nose at him.

“You got this, Lulu!”

She picked up the hammer, careful not to crack the wood, and swung.

With an ear-splitting clang, she hit the lever, catapulting the weight up the back of the game and clean into the bell.

Which cracked.

Lena shrugged coolly and said, “Girl power,” before grabbing her bag and Gigantor’s leash and East Coast speed walking away, Kara’s arm around her.

“Okay. Number one, that was very impressive. Number two, that crack was tiny. Number three…” Kara swooped down and kissed Lena soundly, fingers curling into the curve of her waist and pulling her closer. “Girl power.”

Lena licked her lips. The mistake was one she definitely should have been able to avoid making. Hearing Lulu had shaken her, but maybe Kara was right, and nobody would notice.

“No one will notice,” Kara promised. “Do you know how many times I’ve ripped out of my clothes on the CatCo balcony and taken flight, and no one’s even noticed?”

“I’m going to need a moment to process the image of you ripping out of your clothes.”

“Take two, they’re small.”

Lena snorted, shaking her head. After a moment, once she’d collected herself, she asked, “Really? No one’s ever noticed?”

“When you work for Cat Grant, you don’t look up from your desk unless it’s your lunch break, and even then, it’s eyes on the elevator doors until you’re through them.”

“Incredible.”

“As in wow, or as in I don’t believe you, all of CatCo knows, including your boss, who once actually questioned you about it and necessitated the use of a shapeshifter to allay suspicion?”

“I… Thank god I haven’t met Cat Grant.”
“Oh, no! I think you two would get along really well.”

“Until I broke her office door. Which is now James’ office door. And he wouldn’t appreciate that very much, either.”

“You always fix your mistakes. It’d turn out okay.”

“Yeah, sure.”

“You do.” Kara stopped, voice earnest. “You’re good that way.”

Lena pressed her mouth tightly shut and leaned into Kara’s side, for just a moment.

“C’mon. I think I see cotton candy.”

☆

“I,” Lena said grandly, “am a genius.”

“Yes,” replied Kara, tucking two protectively-wrapped Mason jar terrariums into her gigantic reusable bag, “you are.”

Said bag contained too many souvenirs, which was precisely the point of street fairs. Lena’s weird yet delicious mushroom coffee, ten tiny terrariums, beeswax candles with dried plants embedded in the wax, local honey imbued with lavender and hibiscus and orange, bags of handmade candies in flavors ranging from apple cider caramel to za’atar taffy, and little hand-bound notebooks with homemade paper.

“Are you Hermione Granger?”

“I wish.”

“That bag is absolutely Undetectably Expanded.”

“Now that you’ve guessed, I’m certain it’s not Undetectable.”

Kara snorted and ripped an organic doggy treat in two, offering the larger piece to Gigantor, who mostly just licked Kara’s fingers as she wolfed it down, tail wagging. Junior ate her piece with just as much puppy gusto, pawing at Kara’s shin through her jeans.

“Aw, June bug, who’s a good girl?”

Junior barked, jumping up into the crook of Kara’s arm.

“That’s right! It’s you!”

Lena scratched behind Gigantor’s ears, smiling crookedly. “Don’t forget, she’s not our puppy.”

“I know.” Kara sighed, kissing the top of Junior’s head. “But she’s still cute, and she still deserves affection.”

“Yeah.” Lena adjusted the bag on her shoulder and her grip on Gigantor, freeing up a hand to take Kara’s. “Yeah, I guess so.”

On they wandered, past booths and games and rides. Part of Lena wanted to ride the half-moon, but more of her knew that, upon giving it a shot, she would absolutely rip through the metal, and there
was no excusing that, no explaining it away, no ‘whoopsie, how’d that happen.’

Until she reacclimatized, until her powers leveled out again, she was going to have to be a lot more careful.

That thought, and Kara’s warm hand in hers, kept Lena pretty preoccupied, but Kara had no such distractions in her head, and she burst out laughing at something she saw.

“I zhør,” she whispered, giggling, “look.”

Lena looked.

Lena cackled.

“Superhero stuffies?”

“I have to tell Winn and James that there’s a Guardian plushie floating around out there.”

The booth they were laughing over had more than just a little fuzzy Guardian with a little fuzzy shield. It had every National City super in plush form, plus toy replicas of their weapons and tools, costume pieces - everything a fan could ask for. They even had stuff for the one-offs, like a Flash swim cap and Silver Banshee masks.

While Kara finagled a shot of Barry’s memorabilia, Lena took a picture of a Livewire patch that read Shock Jock, and a few other things, just so she could covertly get the patch in front of her eerie black eyes.

“I can’t believe they have the batons,” Lena murmured, staring at them where they hung in the back of the frame. “I can’t believe - she’s up there.”

“National City loves Galaxy Girl,” said Kara softly, lowering her phone. “She’s never done anything but good.”

“She’s got good focus.”

“Mm-hm.” Kara set Junior down and walked in closer to the booth, looping the leash through her belt. Two minutes later, she came back with a pair of foam batons and something with Galaxy Girl’s armor plating silkscreened on. “Cover me.”

“What?”

“I’m changing my shirt, and I don’t want to hide out in a PortaPotty.”

Lena rolled her eyes and pushed Kara off the road and onto the grass, behind a tree, where she stood with her feet planted and her arms wide, dogs playing close by. “You’re ridiculous.”

“You love it. Turn around.”

In the time it took for Lena to turn, Kara had dropped into a comic cover-worthy three point pose. Her hoodie was too baggy to really look like Lena’s armor, but the shimmery purple plating, the low-hanging hood, and the batons made a pretty picture. She rose effortlessly to her feet, twirling the batons, mimicking Lena’s fighting style with above-par accuracy.

Lena swallowed hard, pushing Kara’s hood down and tucking stray blonde curls behind her ears, cupping the back of her neck. She stretched up and kissed Kara, backing her up against the trunk.
“So,” Kara said, eyes glassy and a little breathless, “I’m thinking I found my Hallowe’en costume.”

“I’m thinking…” Lena sighed deep and kissed Kara again, right on her forehead. “C’mon. Back to the booth.”

“Well?”

“Galaxy Girl’s not the only hero in National City.”

They filled Lena’s bag with some of everything, Kara holding the bag open as Lena packed like she was playing Tetris. Last minute, Lena saw something and, on impulse, said, “That, too, in a six, if you have it.”

“Everyone loves Supergirl,” said the girl behind the booth with a knowing nod. “Cape chasers in this city have good taste.”

Lena blushed, but she kept her chin square. “I’m her number one fan.”

“So’s everyone else.”
With a shrug and a grin, Lena paid and took her last purchase. “Have a good day.”

“What was that about?” Kara asked, equally pink-cheeked. “‘Number one fan,’ really?”

“It’s true,” said Lena with a shrug, tucking it into her bag. She linked her arm with Kara’s and kissed her on the cheek. “Wouldn’t be dating her if I wasn’t.”

Kara shrugged Lena’s bag higher on her shoulder and grinned from ear to ear. “So, what did you buy, O Number One Fan?”

“Something I’m not changing into behind a tree.”

Very nearly tripping over her own feet, Kara gave Lena a wide-eyed stare that flitted back and forth between her and the bag. “What?”

Lena hummed, innocent as a choir girl, and fluttered her eyelashes.

“I’m…” Kara groaned, knocking her forehead into Lena’s shoulder. “Never going to get that image out of my head.”

“Good image, though?”

“No kidding.”

Junior, at Kara’s feet, plopped down on the blacktop and whined.

“Tired puppy?”

“Let’s take them home,” Lena offered, “and then come back?”

“Sounds good.”

Lena had been carrying Gigantor for most of the afternoon, just to avoid tiring her out, but Junior had finally caught up to her sister, which meant their walk was just about over. Kara carried Junior back to the shelter, and they signed the puppies back in with a drawn-out goodbye.

“Come back any time,” Shelby said, smiling brightly as she clicked the pen shut. “No one ever walks
Junior enough to get her this calm.”

“We’ll be back, right?”

“Absolutely.”

With that promise made, Kara and Lena made their way back towards the park, pace much quicker, and soon, they were passing the superhero swag booth again, and Kara’s face went cherry red.

“Supergirl underwear. Really?”

“Oh, I wish.”

Kara let out a strangled noise.

“No. It’s a Supergirl bikini.”

“Next weekend, we’re going to the beach.”

Lena grinned, nodding jauntily. “Sounds good to me.”

Up ahead, they spotted the end of the twin rows of booths, marked off by a significantly steeper hill than the one that opened the fair.

“I guess we did cover a lot of ground before.”

“Yes, but not all of it.” Lena tapped Kara’s nose with another cloud of cotton candy. “And this path loops back around, which means we’ll be right on track to head back towards your apartment.”

“We should drop off Alex and Maggie’s terrariums.”

“I can’t believe they make bonsai in a jar.”

“It’s so cute.” Kara fished one out of Lena’s bag and inspected it. “So cute.”

“And so tiny.”

“It’s proportionate!”

“I’m telling Maggie you made a short joke.”

“You wouldn’t.”

“We tiny girlfriends have to stick together!”

“You’re five foot six!”

“You’re five foot nine. Comparatively, I am short.”

Kara rolled her eyes. “If you say so.”

“I do.”

As they approached the last booths, Lena started running, dragging Kara behind her, and she stopped just as suddenly.

“How much?”
“Oh. Sand art’s free.”

Lena looked up at Kara, hesitating just a hair. “Wanna?”

“Why not?” said Kara, way too excited for such nonchalant words, and got to work.

The booth was really four folding tables set up in a square, covered in glass bottles and buckets of colored sand with two funnels and two scoops per color. A few kids were finishing their bottles on the other side of the booth, commemorative free refill cups forgotten, and Lena nudged about thirty ounces of grape soda away from the blue sand with a smile playing over her lips.

She watched Kara for a moment, the intense focus on her face, the light in her eyes. “So, what got you to do these the first time? Back in Midvale.”

“Jeremiah. He thought it would be a good way to help me control my strength. The glass is fragile, so no one really notices if it breaks, and it’s sort of meditative.”

“Did it help?”

“Yeah. And it was fun.” Kara tilted a tiny bottle in the light, lips pursed. “And it reminded me of home.”

“The Crystal Mountains.”

“If the weather was right, you could see clear through them to the horizon. To the sun.”

“It must have been beautiful.”

“It was.” Satisfied with her choice - an empty perfume bottle from, easily, the 1890s with flowers etched into the inside walls - Kara started to fill the bottle with sand. She tilted it so the first color caught inside the grooves, marking out the blooms in violet before pouring in a gradient of reds and pinks.

About two minutes into this endeavor, Lena decided she’d join in, too, picking a scrubbed-clean minibar bottle just for the challenge. Because of the size, she couldn’t manage any fancy patterns, but she managed fairly even black, red, and grey stripes all the way up. Focusing on regulating the pattern, Lena managed not to break the bottle, even if it did take her ten minutes to fill a one fluid ounce container.

Kara, munching on what was basically a bag of artisanal Pop Rocks, waited patiently for Lena to finish and, because she couldn’t not, leave a tip in the quart container on the front table. Once Lena was done, bottle screwed shut and tucked into her pocket, Kara ducked her head and opened her mouth so the candy popped in her ear.

Lena jumped, then started to laugh. “Rao!”

“Did I scare you?”

“You startled me.” Lena grinned, shaking her head. “Pop Rocks were my favorite as a kid. Science candy.”

“These aren’t Pop Rocks. They’re ‘carbonated plum and maple sugar crystals.’”

“They’re Pop Rocks.”

Kara shook another mouthful onto her tongue and practically unhinged her jaw, popping noises
filling the air. Lena linked her arm with Kara’s and swayed into her side, stealing a few and sprinkling them into her mouth.

*Plum and maple sugar and carbonation. Who knew?*

The path beneath their feet began to turn, and they followed it in companionable silence broken only by the fizzing candy in their mouths. Only once they exited the park, and had gotten halfway back, did either of them say a word.

“We should ding dong ditch the terrariums,” Kara said. “Right? Since Maggie and Alex are having… ‘alone time,’ or whatever the kids are calling it these days.”

“The kids?” Lena wrinkled her nose, tucking the candy into her pocket. “You’re twenty seven.”

“A grown woman, exactly.”

“They’re both older than you.”

Kara shrugged, smiling.

“Ding dong ditch, it is.”

They swung by Alex’s place, knocking rapidly on the window and leaving their two tiny trees on the outer sill before racing off along the skyline, more than a little giddy. Finally, scaling down the side of Kara’s building and entering her apartment through the window, Lena set down her bag.

“What did James say about the doll?”

“Let me check.” Kara toed off her shoes and flopped onto the couch. “James is glad people like the Guardian enough to make toys; Winn just keysmashed.”

“Really?”

“Oh, and he apparently needs twelve of them.”

Lena snickered, gently shutting the window before laying down on top of Kara. Her legs slotted between Kara’s, and her elbows braced on either side of her hips. “That sounds about right.”

“Good thing you went all out on memorabilia.”

“Hey.” Lena glared, all good humor. “We went all out on memorabilia.”

“Yeah, we did.”

Kara wrapped her arms around Lena, one hand splayed over the top of her back, fingers stretching along the line of her neck. Lena snuggled down, laying her cheek on Kara’s collarbone, and smiled softly, closing her eyes. She never wanted to move from that spot, to pop the perfect soap bubble preserving that moment.

Which was, of course, why her phone rang.

“Grab that for me,” she grumbled. “Left pocket.”

“Gotcha.” Kara fished into Lena’s left pocket and retrieved her phone, passing it to her, and the candy, which she kept for herself.
“It’s probably Jess. I sent her pictures of the superhero booth; there was some stuff I know she would have liked.”

“What stuff?”

“Um…”

It wasn’t Jess.

Rhea had an idea for 260 synthesis based off Lena’s notes.

“Is that work?”

“Yeah.”

“Go for it. Have fun.”

“You sure?”

Kara nodded, genuine. “You love your work.”

“I love spending time with you, too.”

“I know, silly.” Kara kissed Lena’s forehead, then pushed up onto her elbows, sitting Lena up via transitive power. “Now, go. Scoot. Skedaddle.”

Lena got to her feet, pausing for a moment to consider whether or not she should bring her bag or leave it on Kara’s floor. In the end, she decided to come back for it later, and straightened up, returning to Kara’s side to kiss her goodbye.

When she did, she couldn’t help but laugh. Kara’s mouth was fizzing.

*I really, really, really, really love her,* she thought, kissing her again.

“Be safe,” she murmured. “No club soda, or you’ll explode.”

“Ooh, I’m so scared.” Kara ran her fingers through Lena’s hair, hand trailing down her neck to her shoulders, giving her a fond squeeze. “Now, quit procrastinating. Go be incredible.”

“I’ll do my best.”

Chapter End Notes

If you read through all eight thousand and eight words of that, congratulations! You have absorbed the last happy thing in this fic for basically all I have planned out until the end of the finale! Please cling to Kara being a beautiful bi mess over her girlfriend in a Supergirl bikini, Lena’s dress having pockets, puppies, brunch, good tipping, and Fighting The Patriarchy for as long as you can, and feel free to tell me what part of the date was your favorite.

Or yell at me for taking so long.

Take your pick.
I'm gonna decide whether or not sleep is worth the effort right now but it's probably not because it's 5.26 a.m. on a Sunday and I don't have anything to do tomorrow/today/whatever
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Set during 2x20: City of Lost Children. Everything goes to shit.

Chapter Notes

I messed with the science a little bit, just because what they went with in the show was super inconsistent. You probably won't notice, but I figured I should leave a disclaimer in case any of you did.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Rhea’s waiting for you,” Hector said in lieu of greeting. “By your private lab.”

“Good.”

“No one goes into your private lab.”

“She and I are working on a top priority project together.” Lena eyed Hector, whose self-identified spidey senses appeared to be tingling. “Has she given you any reason to mistrust her?”

“Not particularly.”

“Well, she’s given me reason.”

Hector’s eyes widened, and his hands fluttered nervously.

“And she’s given me more reason to trust her. Besides, this project is important enough that I can look past it.”

“Are you going to run it by the board?”

“Emailed them the proposal as soon as Rhea signed on. Probably won’t hear back until Monday, but the likelihood that we’ll get anything worth fuss done by then is slim.”

Hector frowned, but his hands moved back into a more neutral position. “I’ll be right here.”

“Much appreciated.” With what she hoped was a reassuring smile, Lena headed off to her lab. Usually, she stopped off and changed clothes before she started working with molten metal, or even before she set foot inside her more hands-on workspace. Today, though, she hesitated. Rhea, with her regal bearing and tailored clothes, had never seen Lab Lena, and even though they were partners in this now, even though Lena was funding the project and, therefore, should be the one to impress, Lena couldn’t bring herself to dress down. Even her slightly casual weekend wear felt inappropriate.

Closing her eyes, Lena focused her hearing and listened. Rhea didn’t sound impatient; her heart rate wasn’t elevated in frustration, and she wasn’t pacing or tapping her foot or drumming her fingers to
fill the passive wait with *something*. Lena could probably spare thirty seconds to grab her spare office clothes.

But just because she could, didn’t mean she would. The fact that Rhea was waiting so patiently made Lena less willing to prolong the lull, so she steeled herself and strode in.

“Lena,” said Rhea warmly, rising from a lab bench with fluid ease. “I’m sorry to have interrupted your… weekend? I know there’s a custom of leisure days on this planet, but this project is very important to the both of us.”

“No need to apologize,” Lena assured her. “I wasn’t really doing much, just - I was with my girlfriend.”

“Things are better?”

“I think so. We talked a little. She didn’t mean to hurt me.”

“The ones we love are in the best position to hurt us, whether they intend to or not.” Rhea’s squared shoulders suddenly looked weighted with a world of pain, and Lena wanted to say something, to try and comfort her. She didn’t get the chance, though, because Rhea looked at her and smiled. “You look lovely, by the way.”

“Oh! Thank you. I don’t usually wear this sort of thing; my mother would give me hell for it.”

“Your mother?”

“Adoptive mother.” Lena flashed a quick beam, all surface, and rolled a hair elastic off her wrist. “You said you had an idea on synthesizing 260?”

“Yes. Your alloy was what inspired me, actually. I ran the numbers and, with nuclear fusion, it might be the perfect Terran source for 260.”

“I was considering that, too, but the addition of bismuth and titanium make it too weak a conductor for what we have in mind, and then the charge is all wrong. I even considered adding more iron - ”

“But it still didn’t quite work?”

Lena nodded, lips pressed into a thin line, pondering the death of her waffle iron.

“You’ve only been working on this for, what, a day? Isn’t there some bromide on this planet about expecting to accomplish great things in so short a period of time?”

“Rome, yes, but we don’t have one million, nine thousand, four hundred and ninety one days to do this. We both have planets to save.” With that, Lena twisted her hair tie around the base of her bun with a punctuative snap and put her hands on her hips in a posture she definitely got from her girlfriend. “Let’s get to work.”

And so they did. Using the large-scale generator ring L Corp was trying to pitch to city planners to power whole urban landscapes without a carbon footprint, they were able to achieve star-heart levels of pressure - the levels of pressure necessary to fuse atoms of one element into different, denser ones - without a particle accelerator. That, in and of itself, was a feat worth celebrating, and ordinarily, Lena would have called Kara right away to talk about it.

But these were not ordinary times, nor did the passage of time seem ordinary. Once they had synthesized enough 260 to fuel the reaction that would, effectively, rip a stable hole through the
fabric of space, it was just a matter of sustaining that hole safely, which meant it was definitely Lena’s time to shine.

Sixteen hours into the math, she got a call from Jess, acting as a liaison for the Board.

“We’re in,” she said, in lieu of a more traditional greeting.

“Everyone agreed?”

“Everyone agreed, but, actually Scriven and Waters both think there’s something more your partner needs to be doing.”

Lena’s brow furrowed. “And that might be what, exactly?”

“She’s an alien scientist with an obvious history in seats of power: they think she should fill a seat.”

Saying nothing, Lena crossed one arm over her chest, pressing the other tight to the sides of her ribs, squeezing herself. “Rhea’s not going to stay on Earth, Jess. This is her getting home. We can’t - we won’t ask her to give up everything she’s worked so hard for just to fill a seat.”

“It’s a good look. L Corp, striding out amongst the stars, stomping out a legacy of xenophobia through a philanthropic partnership.”

“Don’t you think I know that?”

“I think you like working with her. I think you’ve ignored my last seven calls because you’ve been so focused on working with her.”

Lena opened her mouth to apologize, but Jess steamrollered on.

“I think that, if this machine works, she’s going to need at least a few weeks to regulate gravity and atmosphere conditions, and even longer to get supplies to fill the gap between terraforming restoration and agricultural equilibrium.”

“Pia’s in on this, too.”

“We’re a much more communicative group, now that we’ve paired down. And we all think this is a good idea.”

“I can’t ask this of her.”

“Because you want her to say yes.” Jess sighed. “Lena…”

“Look. Now that the Board has approved, I have to go bring on some of our other engineers. It’ll speed up construction, and once - once we’ve got this thing operational, I will consider it.” Lena could hear the disapproval on Jess’ face, but she didn’t cave to it. “That’s the best I can give you, Jess, and you can tell the rest of the Board I said as much. I have to go.”

“Liz says hi.”

“Tell her I said hi back.”

“And she liked the merch.”

Lena smiled fleetingly. “I’m glad. Now, I have to go. I’ve got work to do.”
“Yeah, don’t we all.”

“Bye.”

“Bye.” Lena hung up and put her phone down, promptly going back to ignoring it.

It took her longer than she would have liked to get back into a working headspace. The downside to working with Jess was that Jess was uniquely qualified to call out her bullshit, and thoroughly willing to do just that. Hector was an excellent assistant, but he wasn’t in a position to point out just why she was so reluctant to ask anything of Rhea. Jess, however, had been hired at one of the lowest points of Lena’s life. She’d been there for the trial, and Lillian, and everything that came after, so she knew.

Which would have been an excellent excuse for why Lena had ignored her phone calls, but that wasn’t the reason. In truth, she was just consumed by the work. Before Lex crossed over to the dark side, and before she met Jack, the plan for Lena had been Head of R&D at Luthor Corp, and she hadn’t minded. She’d been excited about it, actually, about working with her family, about building and innovating and using her brain.

She’d never wanted to fill Lex’s shoes, but now that she had to, she had every intention of walking them in the right direction.

Lena let out a sigh and squared her shoulders, redoing her topknot with far less precision and adjusting her glasses before sinking back into the math. Only half-focused on the world around her, she went to her lab door and called Hector’s name.

“Yes, Ms. Luthor?”

“Send a memo to R&D, please. Any engineers not currently working on a project are needed on this one.”

“Of course. Are they coming into your lab, too?”

“Um.” Were they? “No. Construction is floor thirteen.”

“Got it. Also, you got a phone call - ”

“Already handled.”

And with that, Lena’s exponentially less-interested brain was 100% absorbed by the math. She hunkered down over her tablet, working away, and only snapped away from it when Rhea touched her shoulder.

Actually snapped. She jerked like a gun had gone off, tablet clattering to her lab table.

“Sorry to startle you,” Rhea said, voice soothing.

“No, no, you’re fine.” Lena swallowed hard and checked her tablet - no damage, thank god. “What’s happening?”

“Moving to the construction phase.” Rhea offered her own tablet, of L Corp design, and showed Lena the memo. “How are the calculations coming?”

“They’re…” Lena sighed. “Theoretical. Right now! I’ve been toying with these principles in my free time, but now that I’m working on it all the time, I can’t help but worry that I’m missing something. I
mean, your planet was clearly lightyears ahead of Earth scientifically - what if I can’t grasp the science behind this?”

“Lena.” Rhea smiled down at her, sitting next to her at the bench, hand still on her shoulder. “You are brilliant. Your mind is so far beyond any other on this planet, and more to the point, you are not from this planet. The limitations of Earthlings do not apply to you.”

“So far as education, information, supplies - ”

“Not anymore. You have me.”

Lena shook her head, saying nothing.

“Now,” said Rhea, reaching up and tucking a stray lock of hair back behind Lena’s ear, “I’m really more of a chemical engineer than a mechanical one, but…”

“You’re a chemical engineer, and you came up with this?”

Rhea looked utterly delighted by the thought. “No. That’s kind of you to think, but no, Lena, I didn’t design this. It was - on my planet, this is akin to the public transportation systems you have here. We’ve had them for millennia. I did own the rights to the design, though, and that ownership would have gone down to my children.” There was an air of melancholy to her smile, then, but it wasn’t fading or falling away. “I’m glad to give it to you.”

“I - I just hope to do it justice.”

“You will. I know you will.”

Was it any wonder Lena’s work swallowed her whole?

☆

The construction in Lab Thirteen went faster than any other project of its magnitude in L Corp history, even back before the name was changed. This was, most certainly, due to just how many superpowered lab techs were involved, and to how much Lena did after hours. Even after her engineers went home, she stayed, because she couldn’t bear to be apart from this project before she’d seen it through.

She worked like a woman possessed. Balancing half-ton pieces of rebar was nothing on an ordinary day, but consumed by this intense focus, Lena had thrown together the whole rig like she was juggling hollowed-out eggshells - infinitely precise and careful, the only sweat broken was due to mental strain. She had checked and rechecked and re-rechecked her math, and ordinarily, that would have been enough to allay her concerns. She should have been confident.

She was, in actuality, anything but.

Lena checked her math twice more than usual because she didn’t want to risk a mistake. She didn’t want to ruin Rhea’s plans. She didn’t want some subconscious itch to keep this magnificent mentor around to stand in the way of doing what was right. Perhaps it was selfish, holding up production to make sure the numbers made sense, but Lena couldn’t help but think it would be more selfish to risk letting a mistake slip through.

Monday morning, bright and early, she was certain she’d done it. She finished her calculations around the start of the workday after a frenetically sleepless night and was so exhausted, all she wanted to do was go home and sleep. It didn’t even register as odd that, when she thought of home,
she thought of Kara’s apartment and not her own penthouse, all clean lines and posh asceticism - that’s how tired she was.

Kara texted, right then. It was a selfie from her desk at CatCo, the prep phase of an article open on her laptop and notes spread out over every available flat surface, aiming finger guns at the camera and winking like a goof, because she was adorable and had better timing than a professional drummer. Lena paused, distracted for a long moment or two by her girlfriend’s face, before sending back a single red heart emoji.

Kara’s immediate gleeful response was asking Lena out for lunch and, at the behest of Lena’s suddenly snarling stomach, she fired back an emphatic yes. There were about four hours until Kara’s lunch break, and four hours was time aplenty to check her math.

Four hours was not time aplenty, as it turned out, and Lena came to that conclusion about fifteen minutes before she was supposed to meet Kara.

[11.45a.m.] rain check?

[Kara, 11.45a.m.] of course!! everything ok?

Lena smiled, ear to ear, and cradled her phone to her chest. She fired back, reassuring Kara that everything was fine - she was just up to her eyeballs in math. Kara offered to bring something by, and Lena was about to accept; it would be a fantastic opportunity to have a fresh pair of eyes on her work, and to introduce Kara to Rhea, who was still a little iffy on that front since her first introduction to their relationship was less than ideal.

As she was about to type back, Rhea appeared, food in hand. “Your thrall said this was protocol.”

“Thrall?”

“Yes, the tall one.”

“Hector? My assistant.”

“Ah!”

“He stepped in for my previous assistant, Jess, once she joined the Board after... it’s a long story. But I tend to get very focused when I work, often to my own detriment, and she must have given him instructions.” Lena set her phone down and took the box. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

And so Lena ended up eating lunch with Rhea, picking over her salad and her math. She finished checking the numbers over, and she felt good about them, and she promptly went to her own apartment and passed the hell out.

Tuesday, she came into Lab 13 with every intention of handing the math over to the other engineers for a final crowdsourced once-over. Truly. Honestly.

She showed up, caffeinated and ready to rock, at six in the morning. As she drafted the email, though, she saw a discrepancy.
Which never happened. Lena didn’t make mistakes in her math - she never had; it was something she took great pride in, something she clung to in her lowest moments of self-esteem.

So, horrified, she deleted the email and retreated to her private lab, hoping that the solitude would facilitate better calculations. Piece by piece, line by line, equation by equation, Lena dug through her numbers.

And found nothing.

Nothing.

There was no mistake.

“What,” Lena hissed, “the fuck.”

Her phone rang, and she picked it up without looking or thinking, repeating herself into it.

“Are you okay? What’s going on? Do you - ?”

“Kara! Oh, god, no, no, everything’s - it’s fine, I’m fine, I’m an idiot but I’m fine.” Lena closed her eyes and leaned back onto her bench. “Stay where you are, there’s nothing to worry about.”

“You sound stressed.”

“That’s so accurate.” Lena’s jaw tightened, and she closed her eyes. “But I’m okay. Cross my heart; it’s just been a while since I’ve been on this side of the operation, and my brain’s not cooperating.”

“I trust you.” Kara clacked for a moment, typing furiously with one hand, then said, “I’m distracting you.”

“…yes. I’m sorry -”

“No, no, don’t be sorry!”

“You’re not doing anything wrong!”

“I get it, i zhor, don’t worry.” More typing noises filtered through, and Lena got the sense that Kara was doing mental calculations of her own. “I’m in the early stages of this article, so I can get away from my desk for a little while if you want me to drop by.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Lena insisted, heart fluttering. “Stay, work on your article.”

I love you.

“You sure?”

“I will spend today ironing things out, and you will work on your article, and when we’re done, we can have the most gigantic lunch.”

“I’m gonna hold you to that,” Kara said, a fondly teasing lilt in her voice. “Let me know when you’re done.”

And Lena, with astonishing lack of foresight, said, “I’ll probably be done by, like, tomorrow.”

“Wednesday. Got it. Now get back to work!”
“Yes, dear,” Lena drawled, already feeling more energetic. She hung up, and went back to work.

Her first check was fine, but the second had a glaring flub that would have ruined everything. The third check, however, revealed no mistakes, and Lena probably would have felt like she was going insane if not for that tiny chat with Kara. As things stood, she was ready to go back to work, and so she did.

As she ran through the numbers again, pacing back and forth through Lab 13, every line started to blur together. She stopped cold by the patch of concrete she’d poured after Liveware’s visit, setting her tablet down on the workbench, and ripped her hair out of her ponytail, which was swishing over her shoulders and slipping out of place.

Getting so fixated on her stupid ponytail disobedying was probably a sign that she needed a break, but if Lena had one talent anywhere near as powerful as her mathematic prowess, it was ignoring signs to step back.

Lena’s hands worked so fast they were probably a blur, tying her hair out of her face, but then her hair band snapped as she stretched it around the base of her bun, and she had to swallow a bubble of the sort of language that wasn’t allowed on basic cable.

Rhea, whose focus had so far been evenly split between Lena and construction supervision, turned all her attention to the former, crossing the lab to Lena’s side. “May I?”

“Knock yourself out.”

Out of heels, the two of them were the exact same height, but with Lena in flats, Rhea was tall enough to look down at the top of her head. She, too, made quick work of Lena’s hair, but her efficiency wasn’t so brusque. Her fingers were fast, but they were also painstakingly gentle. Lena’s eyes closed.

The last time someone braided her hair, it was Kara, benched because of Daxamite assassins. She’d been just as quick and capable, and her touch was warm.

The time before that, though, she’d been four years old and going to pre-school. Marion Smith, six hours out from dying, had felt well enough to carefully plait the top of Lena’s hair back and tie it off with an elastic.

After that, it took twenty years for someone to make that particular affectionate overture again, and in the interim, Lena got pretty good at braiding her own hair. She got pretty good at taking care of herself. Being taken care of was still something she was working on.

Rhea’s hands in her hair felt nice, it was as simple as that, and not the way Kara’s had. This felt maternal. Though she was standing in her own lab - the lab she had because she was a grown adult, and a scientist, and a competent, if reluctant, businesswoman - she may as well have been sitting on the living room floor of her mother’s Metropolis apartment, the size of a shoebox, feeling peaceful.

“As much as I appreciate your dedication to this project, Lena, you don’t need to run yourself ragged for it.”

“I think I’ve been looking at the numbers for too long,” she admitted, skirting the issue. “I thought I saw a mistake, but when I went and checked, it wasn’t there. I can’t afford to let any mistakes slip through.”
“You have a whole team at your disposal. You’re in charge. Make use of the people you’re leading - delegate.”

Lena huffed a laugh, dropping her head. “I’ve gotten that advice before.”

“You’re a smart girl, and a gifted leader. It’s hard to step back and cede control when you don’t know if things will be executed to your standards.”

“If you want something done right…” Don’t let Lena near it.

“Do it yourself.” With that, Rhea was finished, tucking the tail of Lena’s braid securely away. “I have faith in you, Lena. I know you can get this done. If getting it done means you need to change the way you look at things, or who’s looking at them, so be it. You will figure this out.”

She gave Lena’s shoulders a squeeze, and Lena stood straighter, opening her eyes. “Thank you, Rhea.”

“Of course. Come take a look at construction - give your mind a chance to settle.”

Lena followed Rhea over to the device, nearly complete. The whole thing felt very Star Trek, and if not for the infinite cocoon of red tape surrounding this, and any, L Corp project, she would have wanted to show it to Winn, who would have probably blown a fuse at the very sight of it. Hell, she’d blown a fuse at the specs alone; seeing it, nearly completed and brimming with promise, she felt like she was finally doing something right.

Being Galaxy Girl, she was a hero in a way that Lex could never be. No one would ever think to compare the two. Being Lena Luthor, CEO, however, was a constant comparison. The board members she still had were the ones who wouldn’t dare to connect those dots, the ones who had never met him.

Still, part of her craved the comparison. Some tiny corner of her heart beat solely for the off chance that the right person would tell her she was just as good as her brother, didn’t dare to dream that she might be better. Jack calling her the best of us didn’t fill that void; Kara’s support and affection didn’t, either, and that in and of itself was monstrous, because how could Kara not be enough?

“Everything’s running smoothly,” said one engineer, offering Lena a glance at their clipboard. “Should be operational by Friday.”

Peering down at the timeline, Lena chirped, “Fantastic,” and tried to sound like she meant it.

Lena worked through the night, infinitesimally slowly.

Look at it in a new way, she thought, remembering Rhea’s advice. Look at it like a new person.

Once everyone else had gone home for the night - once Rhea had teleported off to wherever she slept - Lena holed up in her private lab again.

Look at it like someone new.

She balanced her tablet on her knees, hunching down around a beaker, running her fingers through the dead swarm.

“How would you do this, Jacky?” she murmured. “The math was never your favorite part, but you always got it done. You saw answers I missed.”
The swarm was unresponsive, filtering through her fingers. It may as well have been a beaker full of ball bearings, for all the answers it gave her, but it was sort of comforting.

With a sigh, Lena set the beaker aside and corked it, turning back to her math. “How would Lex do this? The golden boy wouldn’t be lost in his own equations.”

Lena dug through L Corp’s servers, deeper and deeper, until she found her brother’s notes. If she couldn’t figure it out on her own merit, she’d copy him.

Looking at Lex’s notes didn’t make things clearer. In fact, they just made things messy. His handwriting just made her think of the notes he used to leave her, the cards he sent when she was away at school; his projects grew more and more benign the further back she read, and it just made her feel, for a moment, every second of spoiled hope that she might have saved him.

After a while, she gave up on Lex’s notes, on her own notes. She ended up sleeping in her own lab, mulling things over, and when she woke up, she turned back to the numbers with a fresh eye.

An eye that got things right. The equations balanced out with more power output, and they felt finished. The math checked out.

“Ms. Luthor?”

“Hector. What’s going on?”

“Your calendar had a lunch set up for you and Ms. Danvers - ”

“Had?”

“It didn’t look like a good time to disturb you, so I - ”

Lena sighed. “Canceled?”

“Was that wrong?”

“No! No, you’re fine, you did fine.” Lena stood, rolling her shoulders. “Can you have something delivered to her office for me?”

“Of course, Ms. Luthor.”

Lena rattled off Kara’s standard Chinese takeout order, as well as a specifically meaningful bouquet - purple hyacinths, geraniums, hydrangeas, and white ivy tendrils - before heading back down to Lab 13.

Things really took off after that. There was a test field in San Isidro Valley that L Corp had bought up after Lord Industries tanked that was perfect for what Rhea had in mind, and they reallocated the finally finished entry point to the middle of the desert while, back at the lab, Lena inputted the finished algorithm.

“I’m so proud of you, Lena,” Rhea said, standing by her side as they watched everything fall into place.

A smile crept across Lena’s face before she could even think to fight it - one that only widened when, once she left the lab, Hector delivered something from Kara.

The bouquet was barely that - it was a tiny posy of daffodils and nothing else, with the fortune from a fortune cookie attached to the wrapping. The fortune itself read love can turn a cottage into a
“There are lots of meanings for these, but I like this one best: the sun is always shining when I’m with you.’ Oh.” Lena’s cheeks pinked.

The rest of the note went on to say that Lena cancelling was fine; Kara’s article had reached critical mass, and she was lucky if she could get away from her desk to pee, let alone get lunch, so she appreciated Lena sending food by, and they’d see each other that weekend.

“Of course, the one time her handwriting isn’t the size of a truck, it looks like an ant wrote it.” Lena clutched the daffodils as tightly as she could without making an idiot of herself. “Have a good night, Hector.”

“You, too, Ms. Luthor.”

As Lena leaned back against the wall, she made an attempt to furtively bury her face in the flowers - one that would have worked, if Rhea hadn’t stepped into the hall.

“Those are pretty,” she remarked, running her finger along one velvety petal.

“Kara sent them.”

“Oh?”

“I’ve had to cancel on her so many times this week, and she’s been so understanding.” Lena’s shoulders softened. “I can’t wait to introduce you.”

Rhea nodded, plucked the petal, rubbing it between her fingertip and thumb. “I can’t wait to meet her.”

☆

If Kara couldn’t get away from her desk, then Lena would just have to come to her. She stopped off at Noonan’s, because it was close enough that, if her plan didn’t work, it wouldn’t be too obvious that she’d failed, and strode on into CatCo.

There wasn’t any real fuss bringing her in, especially in comparison to the high security at L Corp, and any waiting or obstacles that might have come her way were stymied by three things.

One, she knew the boss.

Two, she’d been here time and time again with Kara.

Three, she was Lena Luthor, oft-editorialized by the very magazine operating out of that building. Being notorious did, on occasion, have its perks.

Knowing Kara, right around now, she’d be just about to leave Snapper’s corner of the main floor, which meant Lena would need to rush to actually catch her before she left.

This is going to be fun, she thought. She walked into the stairwell, found it utterly unoccupied, and started to run - not just fast, not just inhumanly fast, but fast enough to test a theory of hers: whether or not a superspeedy alien could move too fast for the human eye to see.

Or, rather, the motion-detecting security camera. There was one planted on every landing, and none of them went off when Lena ran by. She moved fast enough that, after darting through the doors on
Kara’s floor, she managed to close the door soundlessly before anyone had even cottoned on to her arrival.

Sure enough, Kara was just ducking out of Snapper’s doors as Lena approached them.

“Hey, sunshine.”

“Lena!”

Immediately, Kara swept her off her feet into a huge hug, and Lena melted into it.

“I thought you were - ”

“I figured it out, and I knew you’d be stuck all day, so I thought I’d give being a good girlfriend a shot.”

“Oh, you’re the best girlfriend.” With one last squeeze, Kara unwrapped Lena from her arms and took her hand, lacing their fingers together. “C’mon, let’s go eat on the balcony.”

“Is this the..?”

“No!” Kara nudged her glasses further up her nose. “Different balcony.”

Lena swallowed a laugh and squeezed Kara’s hand. As they strolled off towards the balcony, she shot a look over her shoulder at Snapper, who looked none too pleased to see her.

Good.

Ordinarily, Lena didn’t enjoy people’s slightly fearful disdain towards her, but considering Snapper had fired Kara, and then talked down to her, from him, she welcomed it.

Only one or two other people were out there, and they were too focused on getting ten minutes away from Snapper to pay either of them any mind.

Lunch was actually nice. More than nice. It was a welcome reprieve from the admittedly self-induced high stress environment of Lena’s labs, and Kara seemed genuinely happy just to see her, which made Lena feel all the guiltier for skipping out on her.

Kara knew. Of course Kara knew. But Kara artfully skirted around any and all discussions of plan cancelling, at least three steps ahead at all times while dragging Lena through every conversational rosebush in the metaphoric garden, from local elections to ‘their’ dogs to 90s pop, and Lena loved her for it.

“I mean, I love him.”

Lena nodded, thoroughly charmed.

“I do! I love him,” Kara insisted emphatically, “but come on! JT has got to be the only one holding up a reunion right now.”

“Oh, obviously!” Lena grinned, puckish, and arched an eyebrow before going in for the kill. “Here, but let me ask you this, right? Would you rather have an *NSYNC reunion or JT and Britney back together?”

“Ugh!” Kara clasped her hands to her chest. “My OTP!”
Lena giggled, just soaking up her sunshiny girlfriend’s easy exuberance.

“That is an impossible question - ”

“Yeah?”

“ - and you are cruel for asking!”

“Well, you know, sometimes my Luthor genes just…” Lena gave a blasé shrug, deliberate in her coolness despite Lex’s notes still fresh in her head. “Shine through!”

Mission accomplished. Kara laughed, uproarious, and any reluctance Lena may have had to make that joke disappeared, burned off by her bright, hiccuppy laughter. Lena started laughing, too, swept up in the relief.

Kara reached across the table and took her hand as their giggling petered out. “Thank you for catching lunch with me.”

“Yeah, well…” Lena tried to remain cool and unaffected, and most likely failed. “Since I cancelled the last three times, and you said you couldn’t get away, I figured you were worth the extra effort.”

“Yeah,” said Kara carefully, “what’s keeping you so busy?”

“It’s top secret.”

“Intriguing.”

Lena’s cheeks warmed, and she promised, “As soon as I can tell anyone anything, you’ll get an exclusive.”

Kara beamed, tilting her head to the side and raising her eyebrows, sliding her glasses down her nose - it was a very compelling face.

“I’m working with a new partner,” Lena admitted.

Kara hummed encouragingly, and it didn’t feel like she was prying for information - she was just happy for Lena, and supporting her, and the most amazing girlfriend.

“Yeah, she’s - she’s fantastic. It’s… It’s like having a mentor, you know? You’ll love her.” Lena smiled crookedly, laying her hand overtop of Kara’s, running her thumb over the ridge of her knuckles. “Promise.”

“You’ve got to give me something,” Kara begged, “I have to have something to look forward to!”

“What do you know,” Lena started slowly, “about quantum entanglement?”

“Quantum what?”

A hair flustered, Lena pressed on, tripping over her own tongue: “Polyatomic anions?”

Kara pulled the most excessively befuddled face, and Lena knew she was being messed with.

“I know you know what I’m talking about!” she hissed, eyes wide.

Eyes wide, Kara said, “Negative,” and Lena pulled a face at the atrocious pun, which just made Kara laugh again.
“Well, when you see what we’re doing, you’ll get it, I’m sure. It’ll probably be dreadfully boring.”

“I am *positive* that it will blow me away.”

Lena, blushing red from head to toe, was very tempted to lean over and kiss Kara. If not for the fact that they were at her office, and they hadn’t actually talked about that boundary, she might have.

That, and the infortuitous buzz of her phone.

“Oh! Actually, this is her.” Lena started out of her chair, albeit reluctantly. “I’m gonna have to go, because we’re doing our first test today.”

Kara rose to her feet and leaned over the table, pulling Lena into a perfect hug. “Oh, it was so good to see you.”

Lena tucked her face into Kara’s shoulder under the guise of a nod, holding a little tighter.

“Next time, lunch is on me.”

Of course, things couldn’t be so easy.

Lena answered Rhea’s call in the stairwell, walking at a thoroughly normal pace, and ended up sprinting out of the building just to burn off the swell of impotent anxiety in her chest. This test would quell it for good, she was certain.

Except it didn’t.

The structures couldn’t handle the energy output, shorting out almost catastrophically on the first go. Which meant her math was wrong.

Worse still, the aftermath was interrupted by another call - this one from Kara. Apparently, while things had gone to hell in her lab, they’d gone to hell in Simmons Square, too. An alien with psychic powers had gone berserk, started throwing cars, caused thousands of dollars of property damage. The news was painting an ugly picture, and the DEO had her out patrolling, looking for the Phorian.

“Do they need me to come in?”

“That’s usually why they make these phone calls,” Kara said. “What’s going on?”

“I just…” Lena looked around her lab, at her failures lingering, smoky, in the air. “Am I even allowed? I thought I was still benched.”

“They didn’t call you?”

“No.”

“I’ll - shoot. I’ll talk to Alex.”

“No, it’s fine. I’m - ” Lena sighed. “I’m busy here. Cleanup.”

“Cleanup?”

“I… miscalculated.”

“Oh, Lena.”
“It’s fine! It’s fine, I’m working on it - we’re working on it.”

“I can look at the numbers with you, later. If you want!”

“What happened to ‘quantum wha..?’” Lena teased.

“I was doing calculus at age four.” Kara at least had the decency to sound sheepish. “I can swing by L Corp after work, bring by dinner.”

“Or I could come over?”

“Sounds great. See you then.”

“Bye.”

☆

Lena resisted going to Paka’s with Rhea at first, because Kara was going to bring her dinner, but Kara was also searching one of the largest population centers in the country for someone who didn’t want to be found, and Rhea was difficult to say no to.

Not that she pressured Lena into anything - and wasn’t that a first? - but because every suggestion she made was one Lena would have made herself, and because spending time with Rhea was nice.

Plus, Rhea had offered, “Just drinks, then? I wouldn’t want to tread on your time with your girlfriend,” and that was just the thing Lena needed to hear to assuage any guilt she might have felt about making overlapping plans.

So, before heading out with Rhea to collaboratively pretend they could get drunk off the drinks menu at a human restaurant, Lena sent Kara a text explaining things.

As Kara read the message, Lena typed, deleted, and retyped the same sixteen words - you could come inside and meet Rhea and we can all go over the math together - because Rhea and Kara were both brilliant, strong women who, against all odds, liked her, and if anyone could fix her miscalculations, it was the two of them.

On her fourth iteration of deleting the same message, Kara texted Lena back, so she gave up on the offer and read Kara’s response: i can swing by and pick u up?

Lena shot back a single red heart, followed by the address, then headed out with Rhea.

The atmosphere was elegantly relaxed as always, but it did nothing to soothe her frayed nerves, nor to distract her from the notes on her tablet, which she’d only brought with her with the intent of sharing it with Kara.

Seated at the bar beside her, Rhea reached over and gently turned the tablet face-down by laying her hand overtop of Lena’s. “Today was just our first test. You can’t expect it to be perfect on the first attempt.”

“I quadruple-checked my calculations on this, okay? The reaction of the polyatomic anions was supposed to be strong enough to spark the core of the generator.”

With boundless patience in her low, rich voice, Rhea said, “Neither of us has gotten to where we are without persistence,” but for once, it didn’t work.
“If I can’t make this work, we won’t - ” Lena paused, running her fingertip up and down the stem of her wineglass and glancing around the restaurant before continuing at a whisper. “We won’t be able to power the portal. This was supposed to revolutionize the way everything was transported - eliminate famine, the need for fossil fuels!” She sighed, glancing over at Rhea with unguarded eyes. “I wanted to help my planet. And get you home to yours.”

“And you will,” Rhea murmured, laying her hands over Lena’s shoulders and squeezing fondly. “You’re making advancements in science that most people on Earth could not even dream of! No one said it would be easy.”

Lena’s head drooped. “What if I can’t make it work? What if I can’t get you home?”

“I have confidence in you, Lena.”

There was that strange drawl on her name again, that drag between the first consonant and vowel - like in the way J’onn and M’gann’s names were pronounced. Someday, Lena would ask her why.

Rhea hopped down from her stool, hands still on Lena’s shoulders. “I am going to the test facility to check the progress of the portal.” Her fingertips glided across Lena’s back, one hand coming up to cup her chin with infinite tenderness. “I know you don’t believe it yet, but you’re going to make this work.”

Lena smiled, helpless to stop herself, and fired off a text.

Not two seconds later, an usher approached Lena. “Um, there’s someone for you. Out back?”

“Oh?” Lena picked up her wineglass by the step and swirled it coyly. “Who is it?”

“Um. Supergirl?”

“I’ll be right out.”

Lena settled the check, tipping absurdly well even by her own standards for two glasses of wine, one unfinished, and strolled out to meet her girlfriend.

“You’re so dramatic,” she purred, draping her arms around Kara’s neck.

“You sent me something I’m pretty sure I’ve seen on Straight White Boys Texting - ‘hey babe u up?’” Kara scoffed fondly and wrapped her arms around Lena’s waist. “How else was I supposed to respond?”

“I thought it was funny. Since, you know, you’ve been flying around all day - which, by the way, how did you get away from Snapper?”

“I may be bad for your productivity, but seeing you is great for mine.”

Lena thanked the Frenchman with feelings of inadequacy who’d invented the high heel, and didn’t even have to stretch up or pull Kara down to kiss her.

“You,” she murmured, “are very sweet.”

Kara beamed, megawatt, and kissed her forehead. “Come on. Up, up, and away.”

“Am I racing you?”

“In those shoes?”
Lena arched an eyebrow, then stepped out of her shoes. The asphalt of the alleyway behind Paka’s was, thankfully, not as disgusting as some alleyway asphalt, but it was still a weird sensation, and she wiggled her toes to get used to it as she bent down to pick up her heels. “On your mark…”

“Get set…”

They leapt upwards at the same time, twin blur across the National City skyline. Lena couldn’t quite make her brain turn off all the way, but she did come close, the wind whipping past her cheeks, her bare feet whispering over rooftops.

Kara had the advantage of being able to take the most direct route, as the crow (or Kryptonian) flies, but Lena was stubborn, off the clock, and desperately in need of a win. She threw herself through a cracked-open hallway window, ricocheting up the stairs, and opened Kara’s unlocked front door, bursting into the kitchen as Kara shot through the living room window.

“Tie?”

“You’d look nice in one.”

Kara laughed, flinging her arms around Lena’s waist and twirling on her tiptoes before flopping back onto the couch. Lena grinned, knocking her forehead into Kara’s collarbone.


“What? Been sunbathing naked?”

“Not even remotely what I was going to ask you, but okay, sure. Have you?”

“I’ve been buried in my own lab. The last time I saw the sun was lunch with you.”

“Well,” Kara said, planting a kiss on Lena’s hair, “then I’m doubly glad you came.”

Lena let out a breath, tension oozing out of her body, but that state of pseudo-relaxation didn’t last long. Soon, she sat up, whipping out her tablet and thrusting her calculations into Kara’s face. “Tell me where I fucked up.”

“This is your math?”

“Yes.”

“It doesn’t - this looks like - ”

Lena snatched the tablet back. “I looked over Lex’s notes. Tried to get a feel for how he would have done it.”

“Lena…”

Kara sat up, draping herself over Lena’s shoulder, running her fingers through her hair.

“This needs to go well, Kara. I need to do this right. There’s so much riding on this project, and - ”

“Hey, hey, it’s okay,” Kara murmured. “You’re going to get it. You always do. You’re a genius - ”

“Says the girl who was doing calculus at age four.”

“ - even by Kryptonian standards.”
Something caught in Lena’s throat. “Really?”

“Yeah. You would’ve blown the Science Guild away.”

“Oh.”

Kara kissed the hinge of Lena’s jaw, then opened her palm, silently requesting the equations again. Lena, melting, passed them over and closed her eyes.

“This is a lot of power output,” Kara said after a minute, “but it’s all being wasted. The generator can’t keep up.”

“Tell me about it,” Lena grumbled, “but my math was - it stopped making sense to me. And it was my math!”

“Can I look at that?”

“Yeah, sure.” Lena flicked through the files on that tablet until she found her own numbers, then passed it back. “Ta-da.”

“These are brilliant.”

“Find the mistake.”

Kara’s brow furrowed, but ever diligent, she hunted for an error. Finally, she gave up, sighing, “If there’s a mistake in here, I can’t find it.”

“Neither can I, not consistently, which is the problem.” Lena slumped, knocking her brow bone into Kara’s cheek. “If there is a mistake that I don’t catch, and things go wrong, people could get hurt. If there isn’t a mistake, but I fabricate one to correct, the equation will be unbalanced, the algorithm won’t work, and people -”

“Could get hurt.” Kara gave Lena’s shoulder a good knead, mulling things over. “You need a night off.”

“I can’t take a night off.”

“Yes, you can. Come patrolling with me. See if we can’t find this Phorian.”

“I’m not allowed. I’m still benched, remember?”

“Well, screw that!”

Lena laughed.

“Suit up, Galaxy Girl. You need to give your brain a break so, tomorrow, you can look at your equations with fresh eyes and get this done.”

“Fine.” Lena stood, then pulled Kara to her feet. “You’re just lucky I left it here.”

Along with all my cute underwear. And basically everything in my bathroom. And my favorite coffee cup.

She shed her skirt and blouse like old skin, wondering when pulling on armor-plated spandex had gotten so easy to do. Kara braided her hair up, and it was so recently familiar a gesture that questions Lena wanted to ask Rhea started bubbling up.
“Hey. Does my name mean anything?”

“Um, in English? Not really, but there are plenty of names that it’s short for from other languages, Greek, Gaelic, that have - ”

“No, in - ” Lena swallowed. “Languages from other planets?”

“Well, on Krypton, inah means…”

“What?”

 Quietly, Kara said, “Daughter.”

“Oh, Kara, I’m so - ”

“No, it’s all good.”

Lena could practically hear her smiling.

“But your name, in particular? No.”

☆

A few hours into their patrol, Kara stopped dead midair, alighting gently on a rooftop to answer a phone call. Lena, a block ahead, pivoted on her toes and leapt back to meet her.

“Uh-huh. Okay. Do you need me to come in?”

Who is it? Lena mouthed.

Kara mouthed back Alex, then said, “And he’s okay with that?” After a moment, she shrugged, hooking the fingers of one hand through the opposite elbow - as close to crossing her arms as she could get holding a phone to her ear. “Does J’onn want to end the search?”

Lena, whose hearing had been sharper than usual that past week, had worked so hard to not passively eavesdrop on everything around her that it was hard work to even consider it now. So she didn’t.

“Okay. Bye.” Kara hung up, tucking her phone into her pocket, and sighed. “Search is off. James got a lead while he was out Guardian-ing. Apparently, the Phorian who attacked in the park today has a kid.”

“Oh. Wow.”

“And he likes James, so James is going to take him to work tomorrow, talk to him outside of an interrogation room, see if he can get anything out of him.”

Lena couldn’t help but feel a little bitter that James, who wasn’t even a DEO contractor, got to be an official Director-approved part of this, while she had to tag along on patrol.

As if she hadn’t noticed Kara carefully avoiding mention of her presence.

The adrenaline, the endorphins, the hedonistic joy of just going full tilt with all her powers and focusing solely on the physical, it all dissipated.

“Hey.” Kara reached out and took her hand, skin warm even through the armor. “Wanna just go
fight regular old human crime, instead?"

“No, I should - I should just go to the test site. Do some work.”

“Lena, wait.”

Lena waited.

Kara stepped in close and cradled the line of her jaw, ducking down to kiss her softly. “Wanna watch the sun rise at my place?”

“Sunrise isn’t for another six hours.”

“I’m sure we can figure out something to distract ourselves for that long.”


Lena smiled crookedly. “I wouldn’t put it past us.”

☆

Admittedly, Lena did feel better in the morning, a warm calm settled over her bone-deep as she wrapped Kara’s sheet around herself and wandered into the kitchen.

Kara smiled over two coffee cups - one of which was, indeed, Lena’s own - as soon as Lena’s feet hit the floor and passed one her way. “Good morning.”

“Morning, sunshine.”

Kara, somehow, smiled wider, draping herself along Lena’s bare back and turning them both towards the window. They both stayed like that, wrapped up in each other, as they watched the sun rise.

Once it was up, Lena felt a rush of energy that had absolutely nothing to do with the caffeine. “I need to shower.”

“Go ahead. Your shampoo and everything is in there.”

Lena drained the last of her cup and kissed Kara’s cheek before zipping off to wash her hair. Despite the presence of her own lush spa-brand toiletries, she ended up smelling like Kara’s stuff instead, wondering if four-ish months of being together was too soon to move in.

“You,” Kara said, buttoning her shirt up over her crest, “don’t have any work clothes here. Except for what you wore last night.”

“Crap.”

“You could borrow a pair of my pants.”

“We don’t wear the same size.”

“True.” Kara stood, shirt still half open, and crossed to her closet, which she flung open to reveal a stunning array of khakis. “When I’m not wearing something under them.”

Lena grinned, waiting for Kara to hear her own unintentional innuendo and absolutely eating up the sight of her in, quite possibly, the softest butch outfit she’d ever worn. The shirt was pink, and plaid,
and Lena was in love.

“Not like that! I meant, I tuck my cape into my pants, so I have to size up.” Kara pulled out a hanger with a pair of black work pants folded neatly over the bar and presented it to Lena proudly. “Look! It won’t even disrupt your aesthetic.”

_I love you._

Lena kissed Kara’s cheek and took the pants. Sure enough, they fit, and she did find one of her own silk blouses hiding under all the underwear she’d left behind, so the final result wasn’t too big a departure from her usual work standard. “How do I look?”

“Wonderful.”

Lena beamed and finished buttoning up Kara’s shirt for her, using it as an excuse to pull her down by the collar and give her a proper good morning kiss. “I have to get going. San Isidro Valley waits for no woman.”

“Bye,” Kara said, half-laughing.

Of course, even so nice a morning - or night before - couldn’t form an adequate buffer for another day’s failure. Not even a full day’s failure, either, because it wasn’t even noon when they managed to fry the portal. Again.

“Still isn’t working?” Rhea asked.

Lena crossed her arms, feeling far too petulant. “Was it me throwing it down in disgust or the sparks that gave it away?”

Turning towards the two engineers standing by them, Rhea said, “Can you give us a minute?” and waited until they’d skedaddled to continue speaking. She didn’t have to wait long; something about her just radiated power, and no one dared to disobey her. It was impressive. She put a hand on Lena’s back and, with the air of a stateswoman, said, “Failure is a part of the process, Lena. I told you this was going to take time.”

“It’s not about time. I’m just not getting it.” Acerbic, Lena swished her ponytail, saying, “You know, maybe we should pay a visit to Stryker Island. Get Lex Luthor to come in and save the day.”

“You think _he_ could get this working?”

Lena’s heart sank. Even Rhea had lost faith. “Lex was the genius who was supposed to save the world.” She quickly looked away from her mentor and towards the portal. “You know, I - I just thought that, if I could make this work, I could prove to the world, and to my mother that I was as good as the golden boy. That I wasn’t a liability, or in need of repair.” Lena shook her head slowly. “I think, most of all, I just wanted to prove it to myself.”

“You don’t have to prove _anything,_” said Rhea, emphatic, insistent. “You’re smarter than Lex.”

Laughing, Lena shook her head.

“No. I’m not saying that to make you feel better, I’m saying it as a scientist. As someone who knows.” Rhea turned towards the portal, too, giving Lena the chance to sneak surreptitious glances her way. “But you need to stop thinking like your brother.
“From what you’ve told me about him, he’s a man who is concerned with power. And that’s how you’ve been trying to fix this: give it more power, you think it will work.”

“Yeah, but it just keeps blowing.”

“But you’re not a person who’s concerned with power,” Rhea said, finally catching Lena in the act and holding her gaze, touching her arm. “Are you?”

Lena found herself smiling.

“So, if you weren’t trying to do what Lex would do, what would you do?”

“I’d try to find a way to increase the anion input without overloading the energy output.”

“Not power,” said Rhea, eyes burning bright. “Balance.”

And everything clicked into place. Kara’s advice and Rhea’s were the same, fundamentally, and Lena’s head was clear and refreshed enough that maybe, just maybe, she’d be able to see her own equations correctly.

She had work to do, and as she sat down to do it, Lena felt supercharged. Her fingers were a blur on the keys, matching pace with her brain, as she wrote an all new algorithm for the portal’s systems. She glanced over her shoulder, finally finished, and saw Rhea hovering behind her, looking at her the way Eliza looked at Kara or Alex. She felt good.

“If my mother,” she said, voice bright as she pushed up out of her seat, “had given me pep-talks like you, imagine the things I could’ve done.”

A shadow crossed behind Rhea’s eyes, and but it didn’t dim her. “I’m happy to have mused you. But, trust me, it isn’t always easy being the parents we aspire to be.” She looked at Lena, all fire, and asked, “Shall we test it again?”

“Let me just plug in the algorithm and fire it up.”

Lena raced over to the mainframe, too excited to moderate her speed. She glanced over her shoulder, just once, to look at Rhea as she looked out at the portal - at her way home.

I can’t ask her to take a seat on the board, she decided. I won’t. The way she looks at that portal... only a monster could ask her to leave all that behind.

Once the algorithm was operating, Lena switched controls to a tablet and marched over to stand with Rhea.

“Here goes nothin’.”

The generator whirred; the portal lit up. Lena’s eyes flittered from screen to window, surveying both halves of the project at once, heart pounding delightedly.

“Power is running smoothly to the core,” she said, voice somehow perfectly calm despite the fact that, on the inside, she was jumping through the stratosphere with joy. “Anions are reacting at a steady rate.” She dragged the toggles on her screen down, slowly shutting the portal down, before allowing an easy grin to melt across her face.

Rhea, voice impossibly soft, said, “It’s working.”

And it was.
“We did it!”

“You did it.”

☆

With the portal in perfect working order, technically, Lena’s job was done. Sure, there was scheduling, making certain that it was viable for transport, but, technically? Yeah, she was finished.

But Lena only dealt in technicalities when those technicalities didn’t stand in the way of her helping the people she cared about, so, with the smell of ozone thick in the air, Lena was setting about organizing resources that might help Rhea restore her planet. Ways to help even out the gravitational field, artificial terraforming, agricultural stores and supplies. So absorbed was she in this work, easily the least intellectually taxing project she’d set out to accomplish in the past week, that she didn’t even notice her phone going off at first. Only when she’d reached the end of a bullet point did it strike her as odd that it hadn’t just rung out.

She turned, glancing across the room towards it, and saw Rhea setting it down. “Was that my phone?”

“Telemarketer,” responded Rhea dryly, and Lena found a lump in her throat that hadn’t been there moments before.

Rhea had been on Earth long enough to not only figure out what a telemarketer was, but to develop the same tired disdain for them that every other earthling had.

And now she was as good as gone.

Lena minimized the note and walked over to Rhea’s side, staring out at the portal with her.

“Tomorrow we can begin the material trials,” she offered, but there was a wistfulness in Rhea’s eyes that she couldn’t work around. She let out a sigh. “I keep forgetting that success means you’re leaving. Working with you has meant so much to me.”

“Me, too.” Rhea turned to face her, and reached for her hand. “Whatever happens next, I want you to remember never to doubt yourself again. You are a marvel, Lena, and I am so proud to call you my daughter.”

Lena blinked, mouth opening of its own accord to ask why, but Rhea wasn’t answering questions. The hand on Lena’s slipped away, and with it, the tablet with the controls.

“Wait. Wait, what are you - what are you doing?”

Rhea turned away from her, cranking the portal up to its fullest extent, and Lena didn’t bother grabbing for the tablet. She crossed the lab in seconds, opening up the desktop controls, which proved utterly useless.

“Why won’t it shut down? What did you do?”

“What I had to do,” said Rhea calmly. “For our people.”

“Our?”

“I’m not Kryptonian. I - we checked.”

“And thank the gods for that. We share a root language, like we share a solar system, but our languages evolved separately.” Rhea laid a hand on Lena’s, smiling still. “I’m so glad I’ve found you, l’inah.”

The roof of the test facility’s lab caved under the weight of two superpowered aliens, and Lena whipped around to see Kara, suited up, and J’onn still in his human disguise.

“Turn it off!”

“I can’t.”

“Why won’t it turn off?” he asked.

“I don’t know. She must’ve made it self sustaining somehow.” Lena turned back to Rhea, hands clenched into tight fists at her sides. “What did you do, Rhea?”

Rhea’s smile only widened, and her fingers only curled tighter around a shoulder Lena was too stunned to pull away. “You’ll see.”

Kara launched herself across the lab, tackling Rhea away from a paralyzed Lena and slamming her into a thankfully cosmetic support beam. When J’onn came over to help restrain her, though, it gave Rhea enough of a chance to pull away, to kick him square in the gut and send him flying while pinning Kara to the column with one forearm across her chest.

When she drew back to punch Kara in the face, though, whatever horrible fear inside Lena had frozen her burned off, and Lena grabbed Rhea by the elbow, dragging her off.

“You,” she spat, “don’t get to touch her.”

“I understand, l’inah. Of course you’d protect the Kryptonian girl who bewitched you, your only window to the stars. But now you have me. We can go home. Together.”

J’onn made it onto his feet only after Kara took off, zooming out towards the portal. “No one messes with my family.”

Rhea reached into her pocket and pulled out a device - round, perfectly fitted to her palm - that glowed with red light.

Lena lunged for it, but Rhea managed to twist away, reversing the grip Lena had on her arm so, now, Rhea had all the control.

“What is that?”

“A White Martian gave me this. They developed this technology to keep the Greens under their control. It traps a Martian in his own mind. A never-ending nightmare.” Rhea smiled. “Pretty savvy, if you ask me.”

J’onn dropped to his knees, and Lena struggled, however ineffectually, against Rhea’s hold. Then she remembered the last time she’d seen a red light, the last time her mother - god, Rhea was her mother - had her against her will.

She went slack, a dead weight, and dragged Rhea so far off balance that she managed to pin her to the floor, knocking the device out of her hand.
“You don’t really want to hurt me,” Rhea said, somehow still totally unflappable. For all that Lena had envied that about her when they’d first met, now, it just made her angry. “Think of what you wanted to do with my portal, l’inah. Helping these sad, pathetic -”

“Shut up.”

“You’re a hero of Earth,” she continued, “and a hero wouldn’t kill her own mother.”

“You’re not my mother. My mother - my mother’s name was Marion Smith. She was an engineer.”

“Marion Smith was an engineer, yes, but she wasn’t your mother. She was a human woman, perhaps braver and smarter than most, which is why I chose her to look after you.” Rhea smiled. “Well, that and her lover. Lionel Luthor, the smartest man on Earth - and the wealthiest, too. The only one equipped to give you anything resembling the childhood I could have given you if the Kryptonians hadn’t destroyed our world.

“Even though I had to leave you here, I love you. My affection for you is real.”

Lena shook her head dumbly.

“L’inah, you are not going to kill me. Whatever you think of me, I’m still your mother.” Rhea moved, shifting her hands as if to push herself into a seated position, and Lena pushed down, slamming her back into the concrete floors. “We were not the only ones to escape the destruction of our planet. Thousands of Daxamites survived.”

And that - one little word - was enough to suck the fight out of Lena, clean out of her marrow.

She was what Kara hated more than anything. She was descended from this, from the woman who had trapped J’onn in a nightmare, who had threatened to kill Kara, who had owned slaves.

It was worse than just being a Luthor. Luthors were schoolyard bullies in comparison to the other half of her family tree.

Rhea shot up and pressed something to the back of Lena’s neck, and there was a sharp flare of pain - blinding, worse than any migraine she’d ever had, worse than all of them combined.

Her brain shorted out like the portal had on Lex-like calculations, and Lena’s last thought was that he’d almost saved her.

*Maybe he’s not the worst brother in the universe after all.*

Chapter End Notes


Lena’s bouquet meant "I’m sorry, I’m an idiot, thank you for understanding. I just want to make you happy." :)  

I’m sorry about the late update. This sounds really stupid, but, honestly, the science in this episode is so garbage, it sapped my will to write. First, they need to synthesize this element to build the portal, but then the portal is synthesizing the element? I'm not a scientist! I'm not even taking a science class right now! I just Google things because I
believe in accuracy within my writing, to the best of my capabilities! That, plus my French teacher is an actual garbage monster (on the inside), and I had a choir performance, and my dad came to visit, and nobody actually gives a fig about any of that, but suffice it to say, there aren't many chapters left in this. I was going to split 21 and 22 into pieces, because there's going to be a lot of stuff going on, but at this point, I think I might just squish everything into the same number of chapters as episodes and then make Chapter 24 everyone's life being significantly better after the invasion is over, and also, Lena and Kara getting their day at the beach.

Please, feel free to yell at me in the comments section. I welcome it. And, since next week is Thanksgiving break, all I'm going to be doing is traveling, baking, and avoiding my dad (and spending time with my magnificent sestra), so there will be plenty of writing. Who knows? Maybe I'll have it finished before December!
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Takes place during 2x21: Resist. What's a girl to do the third time she'd been kidnapped by a maternal figure, but the first time she's been made the figurehead of space fascists?

Chapter Notes

Warning: Towards the end, Lena has a panic attack, which, understandable. There's a very brief moment in that panic attack that's sort of... Suicidal Lite? So, if suicidal thoughts are a problem for you, skip from "Things on spaceships don't usually do that, not in private quarters" to "But it wasn't that. It was too rhythmic, too insistent." It's just one paragraph, but it's still there. Put yourself first.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lena would have liked to wake up and have forgotten, if just for a moment. Waking up and wondering why Kara’s bedsheets were so silky, why she wasn’t being actively spooned, would have been a nice two second reprieve.

But she wasn’t so lucky. She woke up, and she remembered everything.

“Hello, l'inah.”

Lena batted Rhea’s hand away and shot across the room, putting as much distance between herself and her mother - Jesus, her mother - as possible. “Where the hell am I?” she asked sharply, the fighting stance she assumed more defense than defensive position.

“We’re on our ship. I’ve been taking care of you since Supergirl attacked our portal.”

“Since you knocked me out.” Lena touched the back of her neck self-consciously. “How did you do that?”

“That, my dear, is a very long story.”

“I doubt you’re going to let me go any time soon, so you’ve got time to tell it.”

Rhea sighed, folding her hands delicately in her lap and remaining perched on the side of the bed. “When you were born, I embedded in you a sort of dampener. Right there, at the nape of your neck. It suppresses your gene expression, your powers. I have a remote control for it that allows me to control the rate of suppression. I knocked you out by overloading the circuits.”

“You… fried my nervous system?”

“Of course. You have more exposure to this system’s yellow sun than I do, and I didn’t have time to convince you on the surface.”
“You could have killed me.”

“I would never take that risk, l’inah.”

A sickly chill ran down Lena’s spine. “Don’t call me that.”

“Why not?”

“It’s not even a name,” Lena spat. “I’m a person, not something you can possess, or own, or control.”

Delicately, Rhea laughed. “Personhood and possession aren’t so diametrically opposed as you might think.”

Lena shuddered.

“But if you insist!” Smiling, Rhea made a ceding sort of gesture before returning to her neutral posture. “What do you want me to call you?”

“Don’t call me anything.” Lena ripped her hand away from the back of her neck and stood as tall as she could in bare feet, sharp jaw jutting. “You don’t get to call me anything. You lied to me, and used me.”

“I did what I had to do,” Rhea said, firm, decisive. “For our people.”

“Your people.”

“Our people.” Rhea stood, pushing up off the mattress with no real effort - it was such a gesture, such a put-upon mother move, that Lena immediately resumed her position, snatching a lamp up from the nearest bedside table and brandishing it like one of her batons - before rounding the bed, unconcerned. “I meant what I said on the ground. You are a marvel. Even without the advancements of our home, you are the brightest technological mind I have ever encountered, and I know that you are meant for bigger things, better things. This is a planet of wasted potential, and you represent the best it could ever offer. I’m going to make it worthy of you.”

She grabbed Lena’s shoulders, hands horrific in their gentleness, and guided her towards the window. Lena couldn’t understand why she wasn’t fighting back, why she wasn’t swinging that lamp at Rhea’s head and clobbering her like any other criminal.

Then she looked out, out at the home she’d made for herself, besieged by the very ship that held her, and dropped the lamp, which shattered at her feet.

“So get comfortable,” Rhea said, rubbing her arms. “You are where you belong, beside me, presiding over this new world that we will create together.”

Lena pulled out of her hands, moving towards the windows with the faltering steps of a baby deer. “There are people down there,” she said, half-amazed and half-aghast. “You’re hurting them.”

“They’re resisting.” Rhea strode silently to meet her, laying her possessive hands on Lena’s back. “Unfortunate, isn’t it? If they would only allow themselves to be ruled, there would be no casualties.”

Lena pressed a trembling hand to her mouth, throat tight.

“But you, my dear… You can save them. Stop the bloodshed.” Rhea ran her fingers through Lena’s
hair, tucking a lock behind her ear, fingertips trailing down the line of her throat and skimming over her erratically pounding pulse point. “Is that something you’d like to do?”

Closing her eyes, concentrating, Lena listened out for the sounds of National City, miles below her. Screaming, screaming, so much screaming. “If I do as you say… you’ll stop hurting them?”

Someone was hit by a blast; Lena could hear them sizzle.

“Yes. Now, come with me.”

Lena opened her eyes, jaw set, and saw that Rhea was offering her a hand. Unwilling and half-numb, she took it, stepping over broken glass to follow her mother through the ship, muscle memory making her scan her surroundings and catalogue everything she saw - possible weaknesses, points of exit.

She didn’t think she’d be using them.

They stopped, after mere moments, in an antechamber just off the throne room. Inside was Lena’s bag, and two women in plain shifts, hands clasped in front of them, eyes down. Rhea snapped her fingers, and they picked it up, carrying it to her before kneeling, resting it over both of their thighs, and opening it for her.

“My - my suit?”

“Galaxy Girl is a symbol that National City believes in,” Rhea said, stroking her hair where it spilled down her back. “Speak to them. Tell your story. The fighting will stop. Everyone will find peace.”

Lena reached for her bag, full of fits and stops, before finally snatching the handles and clutching it to her chest. Eyes down, she murmured, “Thank you,” to the two women, whose heads dropped impossibly lower before they stood, resuming their prior posture and position. For a moment, she waited - for Rhea to say something, to leave - before realizing that wasn’t going to happen. Not on its own, anyway. “If I’m going to change clothes, you need to leave.”

“I removed you from the birthing matrix myself. I dressed you upon arrival. It’s nothing I haven’t seen before.” Her hand felt impossibly heavy on Lena’s back. “I am your mother.”

“I am twenty four years old. Mothers don’t dress their children, not when they’re fully grown.”

“If you insist!” Rhea’s hand lifted. “But be quick. There were four million humans occupying National City when our subjects arrived. I’d hate for that number to dip too low for your liking.”

She left the room, doors whispering shut behind her, and then Lena was left alone with the two women.

“If you could.” She swallowed hard, throat clicking. “I’m sorry, but could you please look away?”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

Lena considered, very briefly, whether or not her suit’s marionite knuckledusters could punch through the window (yes) and how quickly she could gather up everyone being held there against their will (not quickly enough). Her limbs felt leaden as she tried to find her way out of the dress Rhea had put her in.

While she was sleeping.
Eventually, finding no way out of it, she ripped the thing down the back, peeling it off around her ribs, face neutral. At least she’d been left her underwear. Then Lena stepped into her suit. Her hair wouldn’t cooperate, wouldn’t lie flat under her cowl, and it was the tiniest, pettiest frustration against the big picture - even against the smaller picture of that room, her and two enslaved women, all trapped.

No. Not trapped. The way they’re forced to be here and the way I’m forced to be here are different.

Lena knelt, digging through her bag for a hair band or a bobby pin or something, and found nothing she’d been looking for. She did, though, find a tiny piece of metal, no bigger than a ball bearing.

One of Jack’s bots.

She pulled it out of the bag, her own clothes and bits of paper skimming the back of her wrist. It looked smaller than ever in her palm, and Lena curled her fingers over it, turning her hand so she didn’t even have to look its way. A piece of paper had managed to get stuck in the armor plating on her arm, and she plucked it free.

*Love can make a cottage into a golden castle.*

Swallowing the lump in her throat, Lena tucked both things into her pocket and stood, wiping her eyes. “Thank you. Both of you. You may turn around now.”

Simultaneously, as if being pulled by puppet strings, both women turned. Lena itched to look at them and, on impulse, approached them as slowly as if they were injured strays. “Are either of you injured?”

“No, Your Highness.” There was a skittish intensity in their voices, in their taut shoulders. “All is well.”

“Please speak honestly. I just - ” Lena ran her fingers through her hair, jaw tight. “I need to understand how Rhea… behaves.”

“Our Queen is a good ruler, and powerful.”

Slowly, Lena nodded. Their fear was answer enough.

With that, she strode out into the throne room and found Rhea standing there, peering out at the city below, with Mon-El.

“Focus,” Rhea ordered, “on your future.”

“What do you need me for?” he asked, arms flung wide. Over his shoulder, he caught sight of Lena and his jaw pulsed. “You have her.”

“You chose to be here, Mon-El.” Rhea looked tired - of him, of that argument. “If you want to choose to be somewhere else, you are free to make that choice, but there is no guarantee that, amongst all the squabbling on the surface, you won’t be harmed.”

That was enough to quieten him down, and Lena took a step closer. “I’m ready.”

Rhea smiled, then, wide and warm, and Lena put her hands on her hips, feeling the paper crinkle in her pocket. “Let me at least get your hair out of your face.”

Mon-El rolled his eyes, leaning against the windows like a sullen teenager against the walls of a high
school, and Lena wondered if she’d ever made that face when Lillian cosseted Lex in front of her.

“Come,” Rhea said, “sit.” She swept an arm towards one of three thrones, coming to stand by its arm, and Lena sat. Rhea’s fingers in her hair had her covered in goosebumps. It wasn’t like a few days ago, when she knew nothing and just thought she was cared for; no, now, she knew what those hands had done, and playing along, being the good daughter, made her hate herself more than she ever had before. She clenched her hands into fists to keep them from shaking, or from lashing out and attacking when there was no chance she’d win.

“There.” Rhea pulled her cowl up, smoothing her hands down over her shoulders. “Beautiful.”

Mon-El stormed away.

“Stay where you are; we’ll start transmitting in just a moment.”

Lena sat square, deliberately loosening her clenched-shut jaw.

It felt wrong to wear her armor like this. Galaxy Girl was Earth’s, not Daxam’s, and using her - being her - to subjugate the planet and people she was made to protect felt bad, bone-deep.

“You’re doing the right thing.” said Rhea. Even now, her soft voice resonated warmly in Lena, and she hated that she couldn’t shake it. “This planet will finally worship you as the goddess that you are.”

She kissed Lena’s temple, long fingers curling around her shoulders in a brief embrace, then stepped back. A light flared, and Lena knew she was broadcasting.

“People of National City…” Lena swallowed a lump in her throat, closing her eyes for fortification before beginning again, hands flat in her lap, the shape of the nanobot in her pocket pressing gently up into her palm. “People of National City, I am Galaxy Girl. But you may know me by another name: Lena Luthor.” Lena peeled her cowl off, hands shaking. “I fought alongside National City’s heroes to protect you from those who would do you harm - humans and aliens alike, including the terrorist organization known as Cadmus, run by the woman who adopted me when I was four, Lillian Luthor. But she is not my mother.

“My mother is Queen Rhea of Daxam. We are in the sky above National City right now, and she intends to take control.

“But you can’t let her do that.” Lena swallowed hard, setting her jaw. “You cannot let her have this power over you. Fight back! Fight for your rights, for your families, for your friends and neighbors and heroes. Fight for the Earth. Fight for yourselves.”

“Enough,” Rhea hissed, gripping Lena’s shoulder. “End transmission.”

The man running the broadcast killed it immediately before turning back to Rhea for further instructions.

“Set up a blockade and arrest any resisters. I don’t want anyone getting in or out of the city.”

He nodded and began to move away, but the communications array lit up. “We’re receiving a communication from Earth.”

Rhea stepped forward, moving between Lena and the holographic panel. “Put it up.”

“Yes, my Lord.”
He waved his hand and then Olivia Marsdin - *freaking Olivia Marsdin* - flickered into view, with her Edwardian birds’ nest of an updo and an absolutely savage gleam in her eyes.

“Rhea, Queen of Daxam, my name is President Olivia Marsdin.”

Rhea tilted her head back. “You represent planet Earth?”

“I *represent* the United States, but today I speak for all humanity when I demand that you abandon your siege of National City.”

“Well, I’d be happy to move my invasion force to Washington, D.C., if you prefer.”

“Oh, I’m not in Washington.” Grimly, the President smiled, leaning in. “I’m heading straight for you.”

Lena barely had to listen out for a moment to hear Air Force One’s engines rumbling closer.

“National City is mine,” Rhea said, “and you should be thankful that that is all I am currently taking from you.”

“The militaries of Earth will unite against you.”

“I am not afraid of your trembling little militaries.”

“Stand down.”

“‘Stand down?’ I think you are confusing this situation with one in which you have any sort of negotiating leverage.”

“This is not a negotiation. This is a demand.”

“You speak to me like that again and you will feel the consequences - ”

“Oh, my *god*, enough!”

Faintly, Lena thought that, if not for the whole kidnapping and invasion scenario, this would be the coolest argument she’s ever had to soak up secondhand panic from.

“Alright, ladies, ladies!” Cat Grant cocked her hip, bracing one hand on it and the other on the lip of the President’s desk. “If I wanted to listen to this adolescent macho posturing, I would have stayed in D.C.”

Lena eyed Rhea - thoroughly engrossed in this war of words. *Good.*

“Is this really who you want to be? Testosterone-driven windbags, boasting about your big guns? Surely we don’t need to *measure anything.* We’re *women.* We’re tough, we’re wise, and we’re way above this pettiness, so let’s just roll up our sleeves and talk peace.”

“I’m sorry,” Rhea said, clearly not sorry in the slightest, “who are you?”

“I’m Cat Grant,” said Cat *freaking* Grant. “Known on Earth as Queen of All Media.”

“Oh!” Rhea chuckled. “Well, *Cat Grant*, I’m Rhea, and Earth now has a new Queen.”

“Oh. Oh, well, let me just give you a little bit of friendly advice, Rhea. That tiara that you have on the top of your head, it’s overkill. Real royals, they don’t need to try that hard.”
Rhea bristled with rage, and, silently, Lena stood. As Cat’s precisely barbed parley kept Rhea - and by default, everyone in there - distracted, Lena crept towards the control panel.

It wasn’t in English, or in Kryptonese, but it was close enough to the latter that she was certain she could figure out how to pilot the ship away. Since the broadcast was between Rhea’s ship and the President’s plane, the other Daxamite ships wouldn’t know not to follow. Most of the ground troops would beam up in time, and the rest - well, she thought, most bullets have at least some lead, and with few enough of them still on Earth, things will go back to normal soon enough.

“And, the future is female, we’ve all read the t-shirts. So, we are four strong, formidable women - ”

Lena blinked, slipping far enough from the controls that Rhea wouldn’t see her when she turned and looked.

“ - and we can do anything we want. So let’s just talk it out and come up with a harmonious solution, shall we?”

“As I said before, Earth is ours, now.” Rhea wrapped an arm around Lena’s shoulders and pulled her properly into frame. “This planet is her birthright. We don’t confab, we command. This conversation is over.”

With that, the transmission ended, and Rhea fired on Air Force One.

Lena watched, committing the controls to memory with half her mind as the other half listened out for a familiar sound - Kara’s heartbeat and the whoosh of lower atmospheric wind in her cape. She would save everyone down there, and Lena would finish things off from up here.

Sure, she’d never see her friends or girlfriend again, but then, they wouldn’t exactly want to see her, now, would they? Not when she was the face of an invasion that threatened to destroy them.

“Do you understand now, l’inah?” Rhea purred, cupping her cheeks, tilting Lena’s head back and peering down at her. “Your choices have consequences for them. I’m surprised that you let this happen.”

Lena pulled away, dropping her chin.

“Then again, they never did give you your dues. All you’ve ever done is help those insignificant little creatures, and not once did they think to worship you as the goddess you are. No wonder you incited them to fight a fruitless battle.” Rhea smiled. “They’ll have all killed themselves before the day is out.”

“I - ”

“Now. You are to be coronated before the day is out. As much as I’ve enjoyed watching them struggle, there are more important things than making an example of one greasy little stain of a city.”

☆

What was most keenly horrible - not logically, on scales neither grand nor small - was that, under other circumstances, without the logical horror, the big picture and miniature picture horrors, this might have been nice.

Lena hadn’t ever been the sort of little girl that dreamed of being a princess; her favorite Disney movie growing up was *The Rescuers*, immediately followed by *The Great Mouse Detective*. She wore skirts and dresses, in part because they looked nice, but mostly because playing into that
particular expectation made shattering others over people’s heads, no matter how far planted up their asses they were, much simpler.

But, in this unwanted coronation, there seemed to be genuine maternal affection, and a chance to actually do something for Earth. That something, of course, being play goalie from an illusory throne so no one else tried to invade or enslave, then drag New Daxam far off into the emptiest corner of space and succeed in doing to the existing regime what everyone she’s ever loved has done or probably wants to do to her.

Kill.

Who knows how long she’d survive on another planet, since apparently her genetic makeup is as changeable as a radio station - which would also be incredibly cool! as science! under other circumstances! - but at least she’d get to do the one thing she’s actually always wanted: help.

Plenty of things about this could be fascinating. She picked up bits and pieces of Daxam’s language, she was on a space ship, and admittedly, no coronation gown had ever been cooler. Hers fell in line with the same strangely BDSM-based aesthetic of all the other royal garb she’d seen, but in a marginally less overt way, with some elements that she would call Disney foul if she wasn’t entirely certain that no one on this ship besides her and maybe Mon-El had ever even heard of the mega corporation.

The boned bodice and the billowy skirt definitely feel like a reference to Kara’s favorite of the princess canon, but there were slits for each of her legs to work through, and she could actually breathe and move without falling out of the neckline. There were strappy sleeves that covered the exact path of her chain-shaped scars and looped down around her fingers, studded with metal cabochons printed with the same crest as her ring, which was now buried in the bottom of her bag. The whole affair was somewhere between the colors of clouds mid-thunderstorm and an old Roman coin, restored and presented under museum lights in a glass case, which was an accurate way to phrase how she felt - trapped and destructive and, somehow, precious.

It was strange, and she didn’t like it one bit. If someone gave her the option, she would have gladly chosen to go back to being an independent and under-appreciated force for good.

She strode back towards her bag - sauntered, really, because it is nigh unto impossible not to saunter when wearing a corset, no matter how tonally inappropriate - and pulled out two things.

There were, unfortunately, no pockets in her coronation gown, but hey, fabric isn’t made invulnerable by exposure to a yellow sun. She ripped a shallow hole in the lining on the bodice, grabbing a baton and using it to create a hidden zipper, and hid Kara’s note and Jack’s bot in that makeshift pocket.

Rhea knocked, politely, in a rhythm that she executed with all the familiarity of humans and shave and a haircut. “Are you ready?”

“I - ” Lena stepped into her boots, lacing them with superhuman speed, then stood up and smoothed her hands over her hips. “Zhi.”

“Your pronunciation is impressive, my dear,” Rhea said, opening the door and offering Lena her hand.

“Khap gaolom, khap azhuhm.”

I become smarter, I become wiser.
“For our people.”

Mouth tight, Lena smiled. “For my people.”

“Our people.” There was a tension in Rhea’s voice, an emphasis, that worried Lena. “There’s this… funny custom on your planet. Political leaders can’t have a hand in private businesses.”

“Tо help curtail corruption. So someone who works in trading and becomes governor can’t change their state’s trading laws to benefit their company, to the detriment of their constituents.”

“Since you’re going to become regent in just a few short minutes,” Rhea began, looping her arm through Lena’s, “I thought now would be a good time to talk about your private holdings. L Corp.”

It took all of Lena’s bone-deep stubbornness not to flinch. “What about L Corp?”

“I did quite a few things to ensure that I could stay on Earth long enough to bring our people here.” She paused, smiling, squeezing Lena’s elbow fondly. “To bring us closer together. I converted some of my wealth into their currency, I ate their food, I wore their clothes, I spoke their language.”

“Quite well.”

“Daxamites have a gift for languages.” Rhea’s smile grew. “I set up an email at L Corp for internal memos.”

“Did you?”

“I did. And I got one, before we left, offering me something I think I’d quite like to take.”

_Goddamnit, Pia._

“I’m now a member of the L Corp Board of Directors. The exact number doesn’t matter, though apparently, it’s quite high. High enough that, during this… sticky transition, I can use L Corp to ease your way.”

“L Corp has never made anything easy for me,” Lena said, tone deliberately light.

“Well, it’s about time that changed. Accessing National City’s water supply will be easy enough, though I’ll have to send foot soldiers out into other cities for maximum efficiency - ”

“You’re a chemical engineer - oh, god.”

“And, since I’m your mother, and all your other family is dead, in jail, or on the run, your holdings will revert to me, I’m certain, once you’re coronated.” Rhea laughed, as if anything about this could ever be funny. “No one will be there to stop me, anyway.”

Lena ripped her arm out of Rhea’s grasp. “I have worked too hard to make L Corp a force for good for you to swoop in and use it to drug people so they don’t resist!”

“Oh, it’s just through the transition, dear. Once you’ve taken control of the planet, there won’t be any real way for them to fight your claim.”

“I won’t take control. I won’t do it. If - If I’m not _queen of Earth_, then I maintain majority ownership of the company, and I’ll veto any attempt you make to drug everyone into submission.” Lena’s eyes burned cold, staring Rhea down flintily as she squared her jaw. “You will never hurt anyone through me ever again.”
Rhea laughed again, this time deeper, darker. She pulled a device out of her pocket, one Lena immediately recognized as a detonator.

“What are you planning to do with that?”

“One of the things that makes me so proud of you, as a mother, is that you do more with your money and power than live lavishly. You care about the little people.” Rhea inspected the detonator keenly, then looked back up at Lena with eyes as hard and calculating as her own. “The Luthor Family Children’s Hospital is primed to blow at the touch of this button.” Her thumb fluttered over it, and Lena’s heart stopped cold in her chest.

“Please, don’t.”

“You will rule over New Daxam. The question is, will you agree to the ceremony now, or only after I’ve murdered thousands of the people you’ve sworn to protect? After all, the Luthor’s Children’s Hospital isn’t the only hospital in town.”

“Fine. I will do as you ask.”

Rhea smiled again, all warmth, and put the device away, linking her arm and Lena’s once more and leading her down the hall. “I know it’s hard for you to see now, but in time, you will realize you made the right choice. These… humans, they need to be led. On their backs, we can build to surpass the greatness of Old Daxam. They will construct monuments to our people, to our way of life - to you. Great pyramids like the ones we had back home.”

“Humans already have pyramids,” Lena offered, desperation growing, “built to honor their leaders almost five thousand years ago. They can be great all on their own.”

“Good. We won’t need to teach them how.”

Rhea opened the doors to the throne room, where guards and slaves all stood, waiting. Mon-El was seated on one throne with all the care of someone taking up two seats on a public bus, and he made a great show of not looking Lena’s way when she entered the room.

Lena swallowed a lump in her throat, remembering everything she’d said to him in the holding cells of the NCPD. Maybe she could start over. Maybe New Daxam could be better.

Maybe she could do good.

Rhea took her place in the center throne, and Lena knelt, bare knees pressing into the cold, smooth floors, head bowed.

Because they were speaking to Earth and Daxam, Rhea had conceded that languages from both worlds - both native tongues of their new regent - should be used. She asked Lena every question, first in her own language and then in English, and Lena answered in kind, promising to shepherd two worlds into a golden age of unity under the name of New Daxam. Only rote memorization kept her on task; her eyes were squeezed so tightly shut that she saw colors she hadn’t seen since Maaldoria, holding back tears as she listened with infinite care for Kara’s heart.

It was thunderous, pounding like a war drum.

She’d never heard Kara sound so angry.

Even so, it was enough to keep her steady through the ceremony, enough to distract her from the faint whine of the broadcast’s electrical signal until a circlet was placed on her head.
It would have been almost weightless to her before she’d developed powers, but somehow, it felt impossibly heavy. It was as if she wore a chain of black holes around her temples, sucking in everything and demolishing it.

Rhea bid her to stand, and she did, head still drooping. Quietly, she sniffed before lifting her chin and opening her eyes. Staring into the camera, she solemnly swore, “I will do everything in my power to protect you.”

Rhea’s hand on her shoulder gently pushed her down into her throne, and the broadcast stopped. “That was perfect. I am so proud of you.”

Nodding crisply, Lena said, “I think I’d like to go back to my room, for just a moment. If you don’t need me for anything.”

“No, my dear, go take some time to yourself. I’ll send someone for you later.”

“Thank you.”

Lena managed not to run. Somehow, she walked back to her room on the ship with an even stride, slow and measured. Once the doors closed behind her, she sank to the floor in the corner and allowed herself to collapse under the weight of the panic attack that had been waiting in the wings ever since she’d woken up.

*You’re a queen now,* she thought with no small degree of bitterness. *Live lavishly. Treat yourself. Indulge!*

She started to laugh, a horrible, choking sound that she held back with her hands clapped over her mouth, so hard her whole body moved with the force of every chuckle. She wondered what would happen if she found the controller for the genetic dampener in her spine and used it - to overload her brain by ramping her powers up to eleven and shorting it out, keeping it on longer than Rhea had and possibly turning her brain into pudding; to turn herself back into, basically, a human being, but only after she’d thrown herself through the window, and hopefully be impaled on the rooftop spire of some building.

Part of her actually considered it, too, the part that was too tired to handle all of this but not yet tired enough to just stop moving, to be paralyzed by exhaustion, but that part was far smaller than the part already operating under panic as paralytic, so she just stayed there, wheezing and shaking, fingernails clawing into her cheeks, even when something buzzed.

Things on spaceships don’t usually do that, not in private quarters. Faintly, she hoped it was the start of a slave rebellion, and it was a bomb that would blow her up or pump her full of shards of lead, and then everyone who suffered under the old regime on that ship would escape, join the rebellion on the ground, and together, Daxamites and humans would free themselves from their joint oppressors and everything would be fine once she was dead.

But it wasn’t that. It was too rhythmic, too insistent.

*Wow. I even have cell service above skyscrapers! They should put that in their ad campaigns: ‘garbage service whenever you haven’t been abducted and made the figurehead of intergalactic fascism!’*

That set her off laughing again, this time shrill and sharp, and her hands came away from her mouth as she slammed her head back into the wall, snatching her off-kilter tiara off her head and throwing it across the room.
“Nice arm you got there, Baudelaire. You play softball in college?”

Lena opened her eyes, prey instincts taking over.

There, flopping onto the foot of her bed and propping her boots up on the sheets, was the absolute last person Lena would have ever expected to see.

“C’mon,” Livewire said, hopping up and extending her hand to Lena, “it’s only fair I get to rescue your kidnapped ass back.”

Chapter End Notes

So. Yeah. Who expected Livewire? I didn't even expect Livewire; or, rather, I didn't expect her to pull this shit. God love a chaotic neutral pseudo-villain who's befriended your hero over gay crushes.

Thanksgiving was kind of balls, because I've now got confirmation that being home makes my depression worse, but I got to spend time with my sestra, who I love to bits and pieces. I didn't get to bake, my dad was horrible, and I got next to nothing done. Right now, I should be working on homework before class starts, but instead, I'm finishing this chapter I owe you, because I'd like not to be an asshole. Please tell me what you think; I could use some positive feedback right now, or some constructive criticism so I can make the next chapter not suck.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Set during 2x21: Resist and 2x22: Nevertheless, She Persisted. Lena will do whatever it takes to fix this mess.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Traveling via electric current was the least weird thing that had happened to Lena in the past twenty four hours, but that wasn’t saying much.

As soon as they rematerialized, Lena found herself being tackled by someone, and only the familiarity of Jess’ heartbeat stood between her and being thrown through a wall. Lena wrapped her arms around Jess and hugged her back, not allowing herself to properly sink into the embrace and pulling back after only a few seconds.

“I saw the broadcast - Hector called me as soon as they landed, but he had to go make sure his mom and his roommate and his lizard were okay, so I’ve been here, trying to figure out how to - ”

“You’ve done well.”

“Are you okay?” Jess peered up at Lena, who found herself itchy under the gentle scrutiny. “In that transmission, you looked - ”

“I’m fine. You, um, you called my phone?”

“Yeah, well, that’s protocol with crazy mother stuff, right? Make contact, execute a rescue, have said crazy mother arrested. I called, and even though you didn’t pick up, the signal worked, so I knew Livewire could get to you.”

“She’s not - ” Lena let out a breath, dragging her fingers over her scalp, skidding over the intricate braids. “She’s not crazy. She’s entirely in her right mind, and that’s what makes her dangerous. And she’s threatened every hospital in this city, including mine, so Livewire, I need you to take me back.”

“Um.” Livewire crossed her legs, floating on a crackling cloud of electricity and arching one eyebrow. “No?”

“Yes.”

“Look, I came and got you because I owed you one and because Jess asked, but that’s the full extent of the favor I owed you. I’m not taking you back there so you can enact your own little self-flagellatory suffering. You’re out, you’re welcome, Jess and I are going back to Belize.”

“Like hell we are.” Jess set her jaw and braced her hands on her hips. “You can go, if you want to, but you’re putting her back first.”

“Are you kidding me? You’ve never been held hostage, you don’t know what it’s like!” Livewire touched down, the toes of her heavy boots grazing the floor, and hissed, “You didn’t see her up
Jess glanced over at Lena, dark eyes shining with worry. She set her jaw, turning back towards Livewire, and said, “I trust Lena. And I’m not going anywhere until she gets what she asked for.”

Livewire ran her fingers through her hair, electricity crackling through the pale strands and standing them on end, and pivoted on her heel, pacing up through the air. “Baudelaire?”

Lena tightened her fingers in her skirt, crumpling the fabric into fists. “She’s going to use L Corp to drug the water supply. I need your help - both of your help - to stop her on the ground while I keep her placated on the ship.”

“What?”

“She’s going to take control of the company and use it to manufacture some kind of psychotropic to make everyone complacent, and then she’s going to enslave you. All of you. If you can block her - ”

Jess’ brows furrowed, briefly, before a slow smile crept hesitantly across her face. “That’s… not a problem.”

“What do you mean?”

“Um, Arias, from accounting, she’s thrown so much red tape around the controlling seat that you might have a hard time getting back into it.”

Lena let out a breath she hadn’t known she’d been holding, slumping forward, shoulders shaking. “Is she safe?”

“Did it all from her couch with her kid.”

“Thank god,” Lena laughed, vision blurring. She straightened up with a sharp inhalation, wiping her eyes. “All that’s left is getting some information to Supergirl and grabbing some lead.”

“Are you gonna make some cheap toys? Paint a few walls? Poison babies?”

“Queen’s not a baby.” A hiccuping sob crept out of Lena and she shook her head. “Lead is toxic to Daxamites.”

Jess’ eyes widened. “Aren’t you a - ?”

Lena snapped into motion, unzipping the tiny pocket she’d made in her bodice and pulling out the nano bot.

“I was wondering what MacGuffin ex machina you were pulling out of your ass,” Livewire said, eyeing it. “And the walls.”

With a soft smile, Lena eyed the bot in her palm. “This has all the information on the ship’s mainframe - ship’s logs, personal data, the invasion plans. There should be enough storage space in here for - for everything important. I need you to get that to the D.E.O.. J’onn, Lucy, Alex, or - ”

Lena cut herself off, eyes shut tight.

“Got it.”

“Don’t tell them it came from me, or they won’t trust that information. Jess, I need you to load the data onto a private server so, if push comes to shove, we - you - can give everyone the information they need to defend themselves.”
Jess nodded sharply and took the bot, squeezing Lena’s hand. “Protect yourself, okay? With the lead.”

Lena offered no promise but a weak smile and took off for storage. There wasn’t much use for lead, so there wasn’t much kept on site, but she had more than enough to tip her knuckle dusters and form a short blade.

At first, she didn’t bother with gloves, and maybe it was only pure habit that made her reach for the stuff with her bare hands. The lead burned on contact, the same way Lillian’s chains had, the same way the capsule embedded in Kara’s chest had, and it took her a moment too long to withdraw. She gritted her teeth, pulled on a pair of welding gloves, and went back to work. It took only seconds to tear off enough lead to complete her task, but it was time enough for Livewire to appear behind her with a telltale crackle.

“You don’t have to go back.”

“Yes, I do.”

“For who?”

“I have to protect everyone she might hurt.”

“Bullshit.”

“Just because you,” Lena said, voice razor-thin as she turned to face Livewire, “are beholden to no one and don’t give a shit about anyone doesn’t mean we all have that luxury. I brought them here. I put people at risk. Every second I’m not up there is a second more innocent people die. I - I have to make up for everything that’s been lost because of me.”

Livewire popped her wrists, electricity crackling at her fingertips, and floated over a piece of metal for a hilt. “You’re running away.”

“And I’m taking them with me.” Lena pinched and pulled the lead into a short, wicked blade, carefully not meeting Livewire’s gaze. Instead, she eyed the metal - shimmery, deep purple marionite. “All of them.”

“This is what’s wrong with you hero types,” Livewire huffed, soldering the blade to the hilt with a fingertip. “You’re so full of self-sacrificial self loathing, you never consider that the people you’re leaving behind might have shittier lives in your absence.”

“You’re talking about - ” Lena cut herself off with a convulsive gulp.

“You can’t even say her name.”

“I brought destruction to her home. I’m - I’m her worst enemy, on a cellular level! It’s not just a Luthor and a Super, okay? She got past that, because that’s tiny, petty bullshit compared to millennia of blood feuding, but all that blood feuding is in my blood. If she’s going to hate me, I’d rather do something good while avoiding her.”

She snatched back the knife and balanced it in her hands before tucking it, and the rest of the lead, away in her jerry-rigged pocket before starting back up the stairs.

Jess was leaning over her desk, brows furrowed, focus intense. She looked up when Lena walked in, Livewire already at her side with her feet propped up next to the monitor, and stood back. “Time to go?”
“Do you have everything set up?”

“How long do you want me to wait before releasing?”

Lena thought for barely a second. “Give me three days.”

Jess typed in a few vicious keystrokes, then looked Lena’s way again. “Done.”

“Call it in.”

Jess dialed Lena’s number, and once they heard the first ring, Livewire grabbed Lena’s hand and phased into the current. They were back on Rhea’s ship before the tone had cut off.

Lena let go of Livewire’s hand more reluctantly than she’d have liked to admit, striding over to her discarded tiara and picking it up, clutching it nervously to her chest.

Livewire stared her down for a long moment before shaking her head. “The D.E.O.’s gonna question where I got that information.”

“I don’t care what you tell them, so long as they take it.”

“And when Prom Queen asks about you? She’s not half as dumb as I wish she was.”

Lena opened her mouth, hesitating. “Tell her I’m sorry.”

Livewire zapped away, somehow managing to make the crackle of electricity sound disappointed, and Lena was alone again.

Not for long, though. Her door melted open, and all Lena had the energy to think was at least it isn’t Rhea.

Instead, it was Mon-El.

“This is your fault, you know.”

She blinked, feeling strangely as if she’d missed something, remembering only too late that she was wearing welding gloves. She dropped the circlet in her haste to hide her hands, and it clattered jarringly to the floor.

“You, being here. You sent out a distress call. We were going to leave, and you sent out an S.I.S. -”

Lena cringed. “S.O.S.”

Mon-El leaned against the doorframe and clenched his jaw. “The point is, two months ago, you sent out a distress call, and we stayed. Mother just had to have you.”

“Two months ago…” Lena counted back, then laughed. “Two months ago? I was being held against my will by my - by Lillian Luthor. She tried to stick a needle into my brain stem, and Rhea’s little dampener threw her across the room. I didn’t even know she existed.”

Rolling his eyes, Mon-El said nothing.

“I’ve done the whole sibling inadequacy thing before, and it isn’t worth the repeat. I didn’t ask for any of this. I didn’t ask to be some… experiment, I didn’t ask to be kidnapped or manipulated or threatened, and I certainly didn’t ask for yet another mother to see me as sub-par or another brother to disappoint me.”
“Do you think I asked for a sister? Or to end up on Earth, to actually be sub-par? I’m not equipped to be anything other than the heir, and now I can’t even do that, because of you.”

Now it was Lena’s turn to ooze derision. “Trust me, if I thought you were capable of making things better, I’d cede power in a second, but if this is anyone’s fault, it’s - ”

Yours.

The thought was enough of a shock that it stopped Lena cold. Because, yes, it almost was his fault. If she had never met him, that day at CatCo when all she wanted was to ask her friend on a fucking date, the gene suppressor would never have been triggered, and she would have been Lena Luthor, human, forever.

But he hadn’t sought her out. He hadn’t fled a dying planet with hopes to ruin the life of a person who hadn’t even been born yet, or implanted something in her fucking spine.

No, that was all Rhea.

“Look,” Lena said, shoulders sinking, “I don’t - I don’t have the energy to fight you, or to give a shit that you hate me. We’re both stuck here. We can avoid each other, or we can try to get along. I know what I’d rather do - ”

“Avoid each other?”

Dryly, Lena smiled, and said, “Absolutely. Get the hell out.”

Mon-El started out of the threshold, then paused, turning back to look at her. “I would have been good at it. Being king of Old Daxam.”

“But what I’ve seen - drugging your subjects, experimenting on children, invading and enslaving - that’s not something to be proud of.”

If those whispery doors could slam, they would have behind him.

Lena sank back onto the bed, hunching over her knees with her back to the entrance. She plucked the lead dagger from her dress, letting it dangle by the hilt from her fingers, just watching the artificial lights glisten off the keen edge.

She set the knife down and bit down on the fingertips of her gloves, pulling them off and tucking them under the pillow before picking the dagger back up and rising to her feet. She took a few practice swipes and jabs, trying to picture Rhea. If their clothes were anything alike, her bodices would be reinforced to the point that the knife would be useless, which meant Lena had to go for the throat.

Lena didn’t know if she could.

☆

With no real way to tell the time, Lena couldn’t be sure when exactly Rhea summoned her, especially since, at some point, she’d fallen asleep. Thankfully this time she woke up in what she’d conked out in, but there were the two women again, waiting with a change of clothes.

She stifled a shocked noise at the sight of two people standing over her in her sleep and scrambled to find the knife. Thankfully, it had migrated under her hip, and stayed hidden when she sat up.
“Her Majesty is waiting for you in the throne room.”

“I’ll be out shortly,” Lena promised, accepting the clothes. She wondered if it was Rhea’s attempt to mend fences, coordinating them with her armor, and began to dress herself without thinking. Only when she had peeled out of her dress’ bodice did she see her tiny zipper and think better.

Even if she never went back, Galaxy Girl existed to protect National City - to protect everyone who called the planet Earth their home. Galaxy Girl was Lena’s decision, independent of all machinations and greater plans.

Galaxy Girl could kill Rhea.

Lena emptied the pocket, reclaiming the baton she’d fashioned into a zipper, and pulled on her suit. Tucking her knife and Kara’s note into her pockets, she gave herself a once-over and wrapped the purple cloak around herself. With her cowl down, it was impossible to tell what she had planned; with her gloves on, the lead knuckles couldn’t burn her.

She had only just managed to slip them on when two guards burst in.

“You’re lucky I’m finished,” she said sharply, tugging the cloak more surely shut as she whipped around to face them. “You couldn’t have waited for me to walk out on my own?”

They both looked immediately, if reluctantly, cowed. Lena marked the guns on their hips and squared her jaw. She started towards the door, but neither of them moved out of her path.

“You’re, um, you’re forgetting something?”

Tiara. Right.

Lena carefully settled it on her head, then pushed past the two guards and into the hall. Only a few feet on, she saw Mon-El, also flanked by armed guards.

He might be a hiccup, Lena thought. He’s been on Earth long enough to have some serious solar reserves, and he seems to actually want Rhea to love him.

I could beat him in a fight. I’ve done it before. But it’s the timing that’s the problem. How do I incapacitate him and commit regicide - matricide - whatever before someone might think to stop me?

Lena began calculating, plotting out a timeline in her head that could compensate for the added obstacle, and had only just reached the third unsuccessful iteration in her head when a flash of purple light spat out three familiar faces.

Immediately, the four armed guards had their weapons raised, aimed squarely at Supergirl, Hank Henshaw, and Lillian Luthor.

“Weapons down, now.”

Their resolves didn’t even falter.

“As your queen,” Lena said, voice clipped, “I order you to lay your weapons down.”

“We are charged with protecting the royal family.”

“Yeah,” Lena said, clenching her jaw, “I’m good.”
She rammed her elbow back into his throat, slamming him back into the wall so hard she dented it and grabbing his gun by the muzzle with her right hand. She whipped around, pistol-whipping her other guard before switching hands so she had a clearer shot at the two guards charging towards her would-be rescuers, swiftly dispatching them.

Lena knelt down to grab one by his ankle, dragging him back to hide him in her room. She would figure out how to handle everything once they were awake and Rhea was dead. Once she’d dealt with all four of them, Lena turned towards Mon-El. “I trust you won’t breathe a word of this to Rhea?”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.” He smiled grimly, hands up as he took a slow step backwards. “I’m just gonna head back to my room.”

Satisfied, Lena turned towards the intruders, noting with a shudder the gleam of pride in Lillian’s eyes, and said, “You three.” Her voice shook, barely detectible even to her own hypersensitive ears. “Go. Now. You can’t be seen here, or you’re dead.”

“We came to get you,” Kara replied, rock-solid. “And we’re not leaving without you.”

Lena blinked. After how Kara reacted when Maggie had to arrest her after Lillian’s escape, all those months ago, she never could have imagined her girlfriend one day detaining her. It stung, but she got it.

“Look,” she said, lowering the gun, “normally, I wouldn’t resist arrest. I get it, that you don’t trust me. I wouldn’t trust me either - ”

Kara’s eyes widened. “No, Lena - ”

“- because I’m one of them, and I didn’t tell you.” Lena’s breath hitched painfully. “But, Kara… Kara, I didn’t - ”

“I knew!”

“- know!” Then Kara’s words registered. “Wait. What?”

Now it was Kara who approached like she was walking towards a wounded animal. “Rhea made that capsule out of lead, Lena, so the kryptonite wouldn’t affect me until she triggered the release, and so Mon-El couldn’t help me. It burned you when you touched it.”

Lena’s pounding heart roared in her ears.

“Lena,” Kara said, eyes welling up and voice trembling, “Lena, I knew. I should have told you, and I’m so sorry, but we’re running out of time, we have to go!”

“It’s okay.” Lena swallowed hard, clutching her batons. “It’s - it’s fine. You don’t…?”

Somehow, Kara knew exactly what she was going to say, and shook her head. “No. I could never hate you. I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want you to ever think I could hate you. And I know you said nothing big until they’re gone, but - ”

Lena shook her head. “They’re going to be gone.” An uncertain smile wobbled at the corners of her mouth. “I’m going to take care of everything, okay? We’re going to leave, and we’ll never come back.”

Kara’s eyes widened, and finally spilled over. “No. No, you can’t.” She rushed to Lena, a rolling
storm front. “You can’t, Lena, please!”

“Yes,” Lena murmured, cradling Kara’s face in her hands, “I can.”

“You couldn’t even kill me,” Lillian drawled. “Not with two decades of bad blood between us. How could you ever possibly think you had it in you to kill your real mother?”

“This isn’t about me. Or any one person. This is for the fate of every single living person on Earth, and I can do it for them.” Kara wouldn’t meet her gaze, so Lena ducked down to make her. “Hey, it’s okay. It’s going to be fine. You can go home, okay? You can - you can go home, and be Kara Danvers, and live your life - ”

“No.” Kara’s eyes sizzled. “I’m not just going to abandon you - ”

“You’re not abandoning me. You’re not doing anything wrong.” Lena stretched up on her toes and kissed Kara’s forehead. “Rrip vo nim khap tulem.”

Lillian’s mouth shifted, turning down at the corners, upper lip curling, and her eyes went tight. “We’re on a tight schedule here. The president is going to destroy this ship, whether we’re on it or not. Is that really necessary?”

Hackles rising, Lena went on the offensive when she realized she’d effectively outed herself to her mother. She wasn’t sure what had put that sickened, mournful expression on Lillian’s face, whether it was the alien language or “Even if this wasn’t the last time I’d ever see her,” Lena hissed, “it would be necessary.”

Kara wrapped her arms around Lena’s waist, pulling her into a tight hug that made her armor creak, planting a kiss on the top of her head. “Ehrosh-bem, i zhor. Voiehd nahn zha ewuhshehd.”

With a wet, hollow laugh, Lena buried her face in Kara’s shoulder, fingers curling around the back of her neck and tangling in her hair. It seemed Kara could sense her disbelief, because she leaned back, just enough to look Lena square in the eyes, before pulling her into a kiss.

“That,” Lena murmured, soaring, “was one hell of a goodbye.”

“Not a goodbye.”

There was a flash of purple light, and both of them turned to look.

Lillian was gone, and she’d taken Henshaw with her.

“I suppose you’re right,” said Lena faintly.

“Lillian betraying us wasn’t the biggest shock ever,” said Kara with a weak smile. “So, Winn bugged Henshaw and rigged a remote so I could beam us back if she double-crossed us.”

“Hope for the best, have Winn Schott prepare for the worst.” Lena dragged Kara into one last hug before stepping away from her. “Use it. Go.”

“Can’t do that just yet.” Kara retrieved something from her uniform’s hidden pocket - a tiny piece of metal, virtually indistinguishable from a ball bearing. “According to this, there’s one more prisoner I have to rescue.”

Lena’s heart gave an impetuous flutter. “Who?”

“Kal-El.”
“Get him and get out, okay?” Lena tapped Kara’s collarbone emphatically, peering up at her. “Promise me that saving him is your last heroic deed on board this ship.”

“Pinky - ”

Lena cut Kara off at the sound of footsteps, eyes tight. It took only a moment’s focus more to determine who was coming their way, but it was a moment Lena was afraid to spare.

“Rhea?”

“What do we do?”

Kara set her jaw. “We don’t do anything. You hide.”

“Me hide?”

“Yes, you hide!”

“You’re not even supposed to be here! You need to get your cousin and go!”

“Maybe I - Maybe I can talk her down.”

“I have tried.” Lena shook her head, heart pounding faster than the leisurely footsteps clicking nearer and nearer. “Maybe… maybe not hard enough, but if she won’t listen to me, she’s not going to listen to you, and even if she does, you’re not going to have time to get him and get out alive!”

“She and I both know how it feels,” Kara murmured, “to watch your world burn out. To think you’ve lost everything, to have to scrape together something that feels like home and family. If I were in her shoes, I wouldn’t want to give up, either.”

“But that’s why you can get her to.”

Kara smiled, but it didn’t reach her eyes. “Do you trust me?”

“With everything I am.”

“I trust you, too.”

Lena nodded, starting for her door, only to pause and fumble with her knuckle dusters, pressing both pairs into her palm. “This’ll help, if it comes to blows.”

Something crossed Kara’s face, an expression Lena didn’t have time to decode, and she took the lead knuckles, trading them for something much smaller. “Think you can get Kal-El off the ship?”

“If he cooperates.”

One of them, or maybe both, dragged the other into a bruising kiss before Lena darted off, too fast to be seen. Her hand curled protectively around the nanobot in her hand, and only then did she remember the tiny change that she had made.

Lena had adjusted it to project information - that must have been how Kara was planning to find Kal-El and abscond with him unseen. She activated the display and followed the map, swiping past pop-ups and wondering why, for fuck’s sake, there were pop-ups.
I swear to god, if Jack has a Trojan, I’m going to be pissed at the D.E.O..

Finally, she came to a stop, ricocheting off walls to dispel the excess momentum and landing in front of a wall.

It took a second for her to notice the half-hidden control panel in the wall, a more covert version of the ones that opened and closed all the doors on the ship. All it required was the handprint of someone with access.

“Fuck it,” Lena muttered, and smashed the glass. She removed her circlet and wedged it into the circular mechanism of the scanner, jamming it. The gears spasmed, and the door slid open to reveal Superman. The veins in his neck glowed a faint silver that crept ever higher, crawling up his jaw like old ivy, and he was restrained by cuffs that anchored directly into the wall.

Those cuffs were made of a substance with a similar silver glow, and Lena knew immediately that, whatever this was, Rhea had done it to him.

Slowly, she approached, hands out. “Kal-El?”

He opened his eyes halfway. “Who - where are we?”

“We’re on a ship,” Lena said, taking another step, “but you’re getting off, okay? I just need to get these cuffs off.”

“Cuffs?”

“Yeah.” Lena swallowed nervously. “Do you trust me to do that?”

“Of course,” he mumbled. “We’re family, Kara.”

Lena froze, if only for a heartbeat. Then she sprang back into action, walking behind him to inspect the collar around his neck, avoiding the inevitability of trying to tell him the truth. Once she told him who she was, whatever trance he was under might break, and he wouldn’t let her help him.

It was securely attached to the wall, with no weak points that she could detect. As she inspected the shackles on his wrists, she glanced up at him sporadically, making sure he wasn’t about to flip, finally recognizing her face, and attack.

The cuffs had to be kryptonite - if Krypton exploded onto Daxam, then there would have been tons of radioactive material raining down, and Rhea would have an almost unlimited supply - which meant Lena couldn’t risk shattering the cuffs, or the kryptonite might enter his bloodstream. She had to get them off another way.

There was a panel, another palm reader, clearly linked to the cuffs’ controls.

Shit.

Lena ducked her head back outside and attempted to pull the tiara out of the other scanner’s inner workings, but it had sort of fused itself to the machinery.

Shit!

Lena’s hands trembled as she pressed her palm onto the scanner, hoping Kara could forgive her if it went horribly wrong.

But it didn’t.
The scanner beeped, a friendly little sound, and the cuffs came off.

Kal-El beamed, and Lena could see the family resemblance. His face was more angular than Kara’s, sure, but their smiles were the same guileless grins, with the same dimples and the same light.

“Thank you, Kara,” he said, rubbing his wrists. “Keep an eye out, okay? Zod might be anywhere.”

“You defeated Zod.” Lena rushed to his side when he took his first steps away from the shackles, wobbling only slightly. “Years and years ago. Before Lex went bad.”

Superman didn’t seem to have heard a word she said, but he did allow her to help him out into the hall until he regained his sea legs. “You’re right. We can defeat him together. *El mayarah.*”

“*El mayarah,*” Lena parroted grimly. “Let’s get you to to the D.E.O.. They’ll know what to do.”

They moved much more slowly, though Kal-El did eventually find his footing, and soon enough, Lena could hear Kara without using her heightened senses.

“…while you still have time. The fate of every single living person, every human, every Daxamite, they all rest on the two of us finding peace. Think of them, and let us find it together.”

“Touching speech, Supergirl.” Rhea’s voice was as gentle and resonant as always.

Lena’s hands clenched into desperate fists at her sides. “Stay quiet, okay?” she whispered, sub-sonic, to Kal-El, who nodded, tossing her a familial wink that hollowed her stomach. The kryptonite wasn’t making him physically weak, so it had to be affecting the sensory input in his brain, corrupting the interpretation of data. That was the only explanation, and it rattled her enough to pull a few feet ahead of Kara’s cousin.

“Sadly,” Rhea continued, “wasted on the wrong audience.”

Finally, Lena could see Rhea’s back. She wore no armor, only a simple gown and a thin cape that grazed the floor at her feet. Lena reached into her pocket and wrapped her fingers around the hilt of the blade, preparing to strike.

“When my own husband opposed me, I killed him. You really think you can tug at my heartstrings?” Rhea’s weight shifted, her posture shifting with it into something serpentine, self-satisfied. “You were right about one thing though. It is over. *For you.*”

Lena locked eyes with Kara and jerked her head, indicating where Kal-El stood, before pulling up her cowl and gripping the dagger tight, targeting the nape of Rhea’s neck. It wasn’t purely for poetic reasons, though the cyclical nature of the act was pleasant; if she could wedge the lead right between C1 and C2, Rhea’s nervous system would be flooded with it, and it would all be over in an instant.

“You really thought you'd won, didn’t you?”

“No,” said Kara, “but for a moment, I hoped we both might.” She squared her shoulders, head back, and held the most intense eye contact with Rhea before she extended her hand and began to speak, this time as if she’d memorized the words, as if they carried true weight. “Queen Rhea of Daxam. I, Supergirl, champion of planet Earth, invoke the sacred rite of Dakkam Ur, to meet with you in single combat before the gods. May the fate of my people rest on the fate of my life.”

Rhea seemed to be considering Kara’s offer, almost as if she respected those words, and reached out.
As soon as they clasped hands, Lena was thrown aside, and she lost her grip on the knife. Kal-El barreled past her, charging at Kara, and hit her so hard she slammed through Lena’s doors, roaring, “Stay away from them!”

Lena was moving before she even registered what he’d done, rolling up to her feet and racing towards the last two children of Krypton, only for Rhea to reach out and stop her.

“She came through our doors, armed with lead,” Rhea murmured, pushing back Lena’s cowl and tucking a stray hair back into her intricate braids.

_Not. That was supposed to keep her safe!_

“She knew what she risked, crossing me.”

“This is my planet.” Superman grabbed Kara by the arms and threw her down the hall, soaring just out of Lena’s grasp and crashing into a corner so hard the joining walls cracked. “These are my people!”

Kara fumbled for purchase, trying to get on her feet as sparks flew around her, and Lena could hear her panic.

“And I will not let you harm them,” Kal-El snarled, advancing on her once again.

“Don’t!” Lena snagged him by the cape, begging Rhea, “Please, don’t let him hurt her.”

Rhea eyed her, calculating, and the scrutiny was enough to loosen Lena’s grip. Kal-El stepped past her and towards Kara, who found her feet just in time to kick him square in the chest, sending him crashing backwards.

“You poisoned him,” Kara rasped, leaning heavily against the wall as she stumbled forwards.

“Very astute. I once told you that my planet was riddled with the corpse of yours. But not only Green Kryptonite rained down from the skies. There are so many more ways to harm your kind than to simply _weaken_ you.” Rhea grinned, all victory and vengeance. “Silver Kryptonite.”

Kara flinched at the mere word, squaring her shoulders - squaring up for a fight.

Rhea rose to her feet, moving between Lena and Kara, almost as if she was protecting her. “Your cousin is so much like you: reckless, stupid, barreling headfirst into danger.” She laughed, her amusement entirely genuine. “I couldn’t have set a better trap if I tried.”

Kara peered past Rhea, first to Lena and then to Superman. “Kal,” she managed, “please. It’s me, Kara!”

“Oh, he doesn’t see you,” Rhea drawled. “He sees his worst enemy.”

“You should have stayed away, Zod.”

Kara jutted her chin, eyes glistening, and kept trying. “Kal, listen to me.”

Kal-El decided not to listen. He aimed his heat vision at Kara, powering up so fast she barely had time enough to counter the blast.

“You’re his mortal enemy, Supergirl. The person he fears most. You will take everything from him, so, this time, he will not hesitate. This time, he will protect his planet. This time - ”
“I’ll stop you forever,” spat Superman, zooming towards Kara and tackling her. They flew back, through the broken doors, and Lena heard glass shatter.

A split second of Kara plummeting and brawling with her cousin was too much to take; Lena blocked out every sound from below but that of Kara’s thudding pulse, turning her attention towards Rhea.

“What is Dakkam-Ur?” she asked. “I’ve seen that phrase somewhere before.”

“It’s a duel to the death. Whoever wins, reigns.”

Lena’s breath caught in her throat, but her mind zoomed on, snagging on and retrieving a tiny factoid she’d come across when she first started fencing - when she’d first read about Julie D’Aubigny. “There are dueling conventions on Earth. Or, there were. People don’t really duel anymore.”

“Oh?”

Gleaning that she’d piqued Rhea’s interest, Lena continued. “On Earth, when people dueled, they had seconds to step in for them, to arrange everything in advance so all they had to worry about was winning.”

“She may be the stronger Kryptonian, l’inah, but that isn’t enough for me to grant you - ”

“I’m not offering to be her second,” Lena said, voice somehow steady. “If you accept, I’m offering to be yours… Mother.”

Rhea’s eyes lit up at the word, and she smiled, warm and soft. “L’inah,” she murmured, taking Lena in her arms, “I would like nothing better.”

☆

Whatever happened to the President’s weapon, Olivia Marsdin clearly wasn’t going to blast them out of the sky. Nevertheless, Rhea began to bring the troops back onto their ships, all but emptying the streets of Daxamite forces, and that, in and of itself, was suspicious, but Lena didn’t have the heart to question it. Kara’s life was on the line. Kara could die.

Lena meant it when she said she trusted Kara with everything she was, and she believed Kara could win any fight. She also knew, the way she knew gravity was real or that the majority of her life had been a lie, that Kara would never allow someone to hurt her, which meant not a single Daxamite ship would be fired upon.

_Maybe that’s the real reason Rhea brought her soldiers back, Lena mused, so they wouldn’t get hurt. I’m a human shield._

_Daxamite shield, rather._

Absently flicking the nanobot’s display on and off, Lena let her head loll back onto the wall behind her where she sat on the floor, unmoving.

_Maybe I should have let Lillian take me back to Earth. I could have figured something out, shielded the city instead of its invaders. Rhea wouldn’t attack if she thought I might get hurt - at least, I don’t think so. But, then, she has Mon-El. He doesn’t fight her._

_That’s why she doesn’t try with him. Because she knows he’s already hers. Me, she has to fight for._
Why couldn’t I make her fight harder? Why can’t I bargain for a better fate for Earth?

She waited out the night in dull silence, rolling the nanobot in her fingers, hearing honed resolutely in on Kara and Kal-El’s heartbeats, eyes scanning through everything in the ship’s files until she found Dakkam-Ur. When she’d given Kara all the information on the ship, she’d inadvertently given her the idea to fight Rhea to the death.

It was like killing Jack all over again, and this time, nothing could thaw her out. She had failed. She couldn’t kill Rhea; she couldn’t uninvade National City; she couldn’t protect Kara or Kal-El or Winn or James or Alex or Maggie or anyone.

Lena kept looking, desperate, for anything that might give Kara an edge. Eventually, Kal-El’s pulse normalized, adrenaline and kryptonite fading, and some time in the early morning, sun barely risen, Kara’s went from sleep to wakefulness. Lena felt a distant flare of hope that soon extinguished itself.

It was then, when Kara woke up, that Rhea summoned her. This time, she didn’t send guards, but the two cowed women who had given up on trying to dress Lena like some fourteenth century noblewoman. Apparently, she’d surmised that Lena wouldn’t fight someone acting against their own will.

Or maybe she just didn’t think Lena would fight her any more.

Lena followed them out to the throne room, and Rhea greeted her with a smile.

“She’s awake.”

“How do you know that?”

“You’re not the only one who can listen, my dear.” Rhea nodded to one of her seemingly endless grunts, and he activated a transmission feed, broadcasting her across the whole city. “Dakkam-Ur. I accept your challenge, Supergirl. My daughter will serve as my second in this duel; send your second to meet her. May the strongest warrior reign everlasting.”

Moments later, a missive arrived, locked by the same code as Lena’s medical file at the D.E.O.. Alex wanted to meet her.

Lena transmatted down to the coordinates in the message - they were in the desert, near that D.E.O. base, and though she’d come alone, Alex hadn’t.

To her right was Lucy; to her left, Kal-El in civilian clothes, immediately recognizable as Clark Kent. Both humans were armed to the teeth, but neither of them reached for their weapons at the sight of her.

“Figured you’d have company,” Alex said, propping her hands on her hips.

“It took a good deal of convincing to make sure I didn’t.”

“Digging the cloak,” Lucy interjected coolly. “Very Round Table.”

Lena offered a weak smile, saying nothing.

“When and where?”

“D.E.O. You can hold Rhea if she loses, but doesn’t die, and if Kara - ” Lena’s voice caught in her throat, but she pushed on hoarsely. “If she gets hurt - ”
Alex looked as wrecked by the suggestion as Lena felt, nodding shortly. “Solar noon is at… 1:06 p.m. If they fight at, say, half-past, she’ll have enough time to charge up to maximum.”

“She - she needs anti-kryptonite technology, too.” Lena rolled the nanobot between her palms. “Apparently, when Krypton died, it irradiated the atmosphere on Daxam with kryptonite. Everyone who was on the planet when that happened is pumped full of it; if Kara draws blood, she’s at an immediate disadvantage.”

Kal-El eyed her, like he wasn’t quite sure what to make of her, and Lena couldn’t hold his gaze.

“If we’re done…”

“Wait!”

Lena waited.

“Your mother - ” Alex paused, correcting herself. “Lillian. She has a backup plan.”

“Something of your brother’s,” Kal-El continued. “It was a bioweapon intended to do exactly what you just described on Daxam, only to Earth - make the atmosphere toxic to Kryptonians. She thinks you can retool it, so it’ll poison Daxamites instead - ”

Lena snorted. At long last, Lillian had finally decided to kill her.

“ - but she’s reluctant to use it.”

“Really.”

Kal-El shrugged, an unassuming gesture, and reached into the lining of his jacket. “It’s your call.”

Lena began reaching for the device, whatever it was, before she had a chance to think. Once her brain caught up to her body, though, she stopped. “I can’t make it work from the ship. I have no access to lead.”

“Your objection to this plan isn’t the whole suicide part,” Lucy asked, incredulous, “but the lack of supplies?”

“I started this,” said Lena simply. “I have to finish it.”

With that, she cued up the transmat, ready to depart.

As she warped away, she thought she heard Alex apologizing.

Chapter End Notes

Kryptonese translations:
Rrip vo nim khap tulem. = I need you to keep existing (literally, you I need to be, future tense - Kryptonian sentence structure is pretty similar to ASL.)
Voiehd nahn zha ewuhshehd. = This is not the end.
Ehrosh-bem = shalom, basically.

Chap. Recap:
Before they leave, Lena loads the ship's mainframe into the nanobot she kept with her. Livewire rescues Lena, and she says it's because she kind of owes her and because Jess made her go, but she genuinely does give a shit about Lena. Lena demands to be sent back, because Rhea is threatening every hospital in the city, and says as much. She also explains about the whole drugging-the-water-supply thing, which is actually not a problem, because one Samantha Arias from Accounting put the kibosh on Rhea taking control of L Corp. Livewire initially refuses, because A) she knows how shitty it is to be kidnapped in general and B) she saw Lena breaking down, trapped up there, and doesn't want to be responsible for that. Jess, however, trusts Lena's judgement, and even though she doesn't want Lena to suffer, she knows it will be worse if Lena is kept from acting. While Jess loads all the Daxamite ship's information onto a private server and sets it to release if the invaders haven't been defeated within three days, Lena sets about making lead knuckles and a lead knife, because she has decided to kill Rhea to stop everything. Livewire says she's running away, and Lena agrees, saying she'd rather run from her problems and do some good than face them and let the world burn. When she gets back on the ship, she and Mon-El have a chat about family relationships; he thinks this is all Lena's fault, and Lena almost blames him (because, directly, it is sort of his fault), but ultimately settles on the real source of all this bullshit: Rhea. If Rhea had never made her, none of this would have happened.

Lena suits up as Galaxy Girl, because Galaxy Girl feels strong enough to do this when Lena feels weak, and because Galaxy Girl came into being to protect the citizens of Earth, independent of anyone else's greater plan - she belongs to the best of Lena, and that's who will win. Unfortunately, Lillian, Henshaw, and Kara show up to rescue her - and Kal-El. Lena finds out Kara knew what she was, and is too stunned to really process it. She and Kara are momentarily goopy and cute, and Lillian gets snide about it - is it because they got cute in Kryptonian, or because she finally figured out her daughter was gay? The world may never know. Anyways, Lillian and Henshaw leave without her, because she won't go, and Kara tries to talk Rhea down while Lena tries to rescue Kal-El, who, under the influence of Silver Kryptonite, thinks she's Kara. Kara challenges Rhea to Dakkam-Ur, and Rhea is about to accept, but Kal-El sees Zod attacking a civilian and decides It's Clobberin' Time. Lena convinces Rhea that Earth's dueling rites should be incorporated, realizing that when she gave Kara the ship's data, she inadvertently gave her the idea to battle a fascist warrior queen to the death. She meets with Alex, Lucy, and Kal-El to set up the time and place so Kara has the most advantages, warning them about the Kryptonite blood. Kal-El tells her that Lillian has an idea that could banish the Daxamites without a fight, but she's reluctant to use it; Lena wants to use it, but she doesn't have any lead left, having lost all of it in Kara and Rhea's fight on the ship, so she turns him down. Lucy is sort of horrified that she's 100% down to just... McFucking die for this. As Lena returns to the ship, she thinks she hears Alex apologize.

So, I knew this chapter was dense, but I just now realized how dense. Sorry about that. And the nearly two week gap between chapters. It's finals season at college, and I am... procrastinating through fanfiction, and then procrastinating that fanfiction through other fanfiction. It's a lot.

Anyways, I hope this chapter wasn't too much of a slog. This should be finished before Christmas; I recommend reading the last two chapters with some cinnamon hot chocolate and cookies, because 23 is going to hurt, and 24 is going to be fluffy as fuck. Feel free to yell at me in the comments.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Set during 2x22: Nevertheless, She Persisted. Come hell or high water, National City - and the world - will be safe.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Maybe she had, maybe she hadn’t. Lena didn’t have the time to think about what Alex said mid-transmat, or why she would possibly say it; the fate of humanity rested on her girlfriend’s shoulders.

It should have stayed on her own.

In the hours of waiting, Lena paced the length of the ship more times than anyone could count. To Rhea’s credit, reluctant as anyone might be to give it to her, she didn’t interfere in Lena’s frenetic circling. As someone who saw her own husband die, maybe she understood the stakes.

As someone who killed her husband to further her own ends, maybe she didn’t.

Either way, Lena’s pacing wasn’t just anxiety. No, as much as she would have liked to give in and be afraid, to drown in the nauseating swell of terror, she couldn’t let herself.

Because, yes, Kara could probably defeat Rhea. Definitely. She was strong and fast and skilled and she had a reason to fight, a reason to win. The fucking fate of humanity depended on it.

But Kara wanted to win for the same reason that winning would hurt her: because, deep in the heart of her, she was good. She didn’t kill. She stood for hope and help and compassion, not death, and from what Lena knew of her family history, there was better reason than most people had for her to walk that path.

Lena, reluctant Daxamite, recalcitrant Luthor, understood that.

Which was why Lena was looking for her missing knife.

Lost in the scuffle between Kara and Kal-El, the knife had to be somewhere. And if Lena could get her hands on it, if Lena could find it, if Lena could use it, then Kara wouldn’t have to do something that would hurt her so badly.

Whether or not it hurt Lena was immaterial in her frenzy. Everything was immaterial but finding that goddamn lead-bladed knife and fixing that goddamn mess.

After almost six hours of frantic, hyperkinetic, super-speed-walking, Lena still hadn’t found it.

Which meant someone else had.

And she didn’t have time to find them, to steal the knife back, because, finally, after almost six hours, someone interrupted her pacing.
“My Queen.”

The guard was moving so slowly in comparison to Lena that she almost barreled right through him, catching herself just in time.

“It is time.”

Lena’s breath caught, and her heart stopped, but she gave a jerky nod and followed him to the transmat.

Rhea was wearing armor - insufficient, only over her torso - but then, she was probably banking on Kara injuring her badly enough to draw blood. Injury would be permissible if it resulted in her enemy’s defeat.

It was probably a side effect of being largely invulnerable, but the whisper-thin voice in the back of Lena’s head was of the opinion that, maybe, just maybe, it wasn’t all aliens who felt that way. Maybe it was just Rhea, with her poison blood, and Lena, carrying lead with her bare hands.

_Mothers and daughters. Such a complicated relationship._

Rhea glanced Lena’s way fleetingly before nodding at the transmat technician, signaling that he should send them down, and down they went.

They landed on one side of the D.E.O.’s rooftop. Standing opposite them was Kara, grimly determined and accompanied by Alex and, oddly enough, Winn.

Once they landed, Alex started across the rooftop. Lena, fidgeting, peered past her as subtly as she could.

Kara, under the squared jaw and the heroically akimbo stance, looked nervous. Winn reached over and grabbed her hand, giving it a gentle squeeze, and Kara’s shoulders softened infinitesimally. Only then did Lena move to meet Alex halfway.

Before Alex could say a word, Lena’s fingertips began tapping on her thigh, just over the hip pocket of her suit. It was too arrhythmic to be a nervous tic, too fluid to be binary code.

“Is everything ready?” she asked, as if nothing was amiss.

Alex, focus split between decoding the Morse missive and responding, barely took a second to say, “Yes.” Then, she began to tap back: *if you’re sure, we can quarantine a room with a circular air filter so you don’t get poisoned.*

Lena’s jaw clenched, and she gave a tiny dissenting shake of her head, fingers fluttering against her leg.

“Is Rhea ready to go?” Alex asked, ignoring Lena’s frantic spelling, tapping over her. _I don’t know if Kara will do that to you._

*This way,* Lena spelled emphatically, with a sharp nod, _she doesn’t have to do something worse._

Alex let out a sigh through her nose and murmured, “I… hope it doesn’t come down to us.”

“Me, neither.”

Lena returned to Rhea’s side, for just a moment, to relay the message that the battle could begin, before departing. The laws of Dakkam-Ur were very clear on the matter of witnesses - save for the
As she, Winn, and Alex headed down, Lena wished she knew them well enough to call in a favor. Alex’s hand wrapped around her wrist, squeezing a gentle patternless tattoo: long-short-long-long, short, short-short-short.

Lena registered her meaning just in time for a bolt of heat to hit her square in the back of the neck. She managed not to stumble, but suddenly, everything was just so heavy.

“You okay, Legs?” Winn whispered, grabbing her arm, holding her steady.

“I’m fine.” The hatch shut above their heads, and Lena pulled out of their grips, starting down the stairs. “We have to hurry.”

Chasing after her, Alex asked, “Did she really - ?”

“Yes,” Lena hissed. She stopped dead and turned, pinning her with her eyes. “I passed the transmat thousands of times, Alex. Last night, I called the troops back to the fleet, but she’s been sneaking them down all day. I clearly don’t have… pull enough to override her. They need an incentive to leave, and we’re going to give it to them.”

“Fine,” Alex said, settling her hands defiantly on her hips. “But I’m putting something on that.”

“On what?”

“The burn on the back of your neck.”

Lena reached back and touched the spot just under her skull she’d begun to treat as a sort of worry spot. Instead of the smooth hypertrophic lines left by Lillian’s aborted experimentation, there was a blooming blister that hurt like hell under her fingertips. Stalwartly suppressing a wince, Lena said, “Fine. But only if it doesn’t interfere with me working. This is more important - ”

“I am not letting you get an infection in your spine, Lena!”

“Then don’t get in my way.”

☆

Alex didn’t. Unobtrusive and efficient, it was clear to see that she would have made a great ER surgeon. She had the burn sterilized and iced in less time than it took for Lena and Winn to rejigger the inner workings of Lex’s atmospheric dispersal.

Granted, Lena wasn’t working at full speed. It probably felt slower than it actually was, but that hadn’t even occurred to Lena. Her brain was running two programs: engineering and Mom argument.

Lillian stood in the doorway of the top floor lab, eyes hard and shiny.

“If you want to blame me,” Lena said, staring up at her with her jaw set so tight it ached, “for what’s happening out there, go right ahead. I blame me, too. But if you want me to get this done, you need to let me work.”

Lillian took a step back, but it didn’t last, and soon she was back, looming over Lena’s space like she was six again, and painfully stupid, following her to the table bearing her own toolkit. “How could you let that woman deceive you? I taught you to be a scientist! To question everything!”
“No.” Lena grabbed a micro-welding torch, grip careful, voice sharp. “What you taught me was to doubt myself. To look for validation elsewhere, so much that I was willing to take it from the first mentor that offered it to me. There were warning signs that I ignored because I was so…”

Her hands shook. She passed the torch over to Winn and rubbed her hands over the back of her neck, turning on her heel to look back at Lillian.

“Because I was so desperate for someone to love me, and be proud of me. To do good. To make up for everything you’ve done, Lex has done, Lionel did.”

Those flinty eyes softened, for just a moment, and Lillian did something completely unprecedented: she apologized. And when Lena, rightfully incredulous, scoffed and tried to turn away, Lillian let her. She didn’t grab Lena and force eye contact, maybe even resisting the urge - her fingertips grazed the back of Lena’s wrist briefly before curling away.

Still, she insisted, “I am. When you came to visit me in jail, I honestly wanted to be a better mother to you. But every time I’ve had the opportunity to choose you over something else… I’ve chosen something else.”

“Well, congratulations on saying the first honest thing in your life.”

“I have justified the worst behavior for the best of causes,” Lillian ceded, “but I was right. The threat was real.”

“And I’m part of it.” Lena tried to pretend she was still strong with sunlight, squaring her jaw, but the way she tucked her hands away, making herself smaller - harder to touch - probably sold her out. “You can just -”

“No! What I’m trying to say is, maybe I backed the wrong child to stop it.”

The tiny corner of Lena’s heart that thirsted for that sentiment jerked her head upright, made her meet Lillian’s gaze. She didn’t look like she was lying, or saying something carefully carved of half-truths to reach her ends, and there was no hint of dishonesty in her voice as she continued, urgent and private.

“The transmat portal you created - that was brilliant, Lena. And if you could do that with the portal, maybe you could do something with this.”

Lillian presented her with the device, a small steel box, and Lena eyed it with eager trepidation, both wanting to take it and fix every mistake and wanting never to touch something Lex, something Lillian, something Luthor, ever again.

“Does it work?”

“Well, you’d need to adapt it. But if you could, you would be the Luthor who saved the world.”

The smallest, pettiest regret - the one at the top of Lena’s internal heap - was not taking the box sooner, so it couldn’t look like that was all that motivated her.

Still, Lena took it, setting it down on the table next to her tools and Winn’s fidgety hands. “Unfortunately, this is her on her best behavior,” she quipped dryly.

“Hey,” Winn murmured, “you don’t have to apologize for her.”

Alex, standing across the table, had a hand on the butt of her blaster. “And you’re certain it’ll be safe
“My son designed it to keep humans safe while making the planet uninhabitable for Kryptonians. If Lena can get it to work, it’ll make the atmosphere toxic for the Daxamites, instead. They would be forced to leave, or stay and die.”

Lena picked up her welding gloves, squeezing the tough material in her fists.

“So, you understand my… reservations.” And there was Lillian’s hand, perfectly proportionate to her statuesque frame, long-fingered and heavy on Lena’s shoulder. “Only if you’re sure.”

“It won’t hurt me,” Lena said, “if that’s what you’re angling for. Genes suppressed. I’m functionally human.”

“Good.”

Lena shrugged away and put on her gloves. She didn’t really need them, what with the ones built into her suit, but they helped her focus. If she had to finally feel how heavy things were, the metal plating of her armor dragging her bones down, she could at least choose how she bore it.

“If she tries anything,” Alex murmured, fingers meaningfully meaningless in their drumming on her gun.

As she opened the casing, Lena said nothing, doing her best to block out Lillian’s circling, Alex’s words, the brawl upstairs, audible even without superhearing. She and Winn worked as well as they had every other time they’d faced a problem shoulder to shoulder, and that was a comfort, in and of itself, but after a certain point, when the gloves came off, one question burned too brightly to ignore.

“Did you know - ” Lena stopped, stacking them neatly and pushing them aside, bracing her hands on the edge of the table and, briefly, making herself look up at Alex. “Did you know Mon-El was my brother?”

Alex managed not to look away or radiate shame. “Yeah. Yeah, I did, and I’m - I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine.” Lena flashed a quick smile, waiting until Alex smiled back and let her shoulders loosen before she looked away. “Keeping secrets, right? To make each other happy?”

“Yeah.”

After that, things moved quicker. Lena and Winn passed the remote back and forth to each other in sync with Lillian’s circling, Alex’s words, the brawl upstairs, audible even without superhearing. She and Winn worked as well as they had every other time they’d faced a problem shoulder to shoulder, and that was a comfort, in and of itself, but after a certain point, when the gloves came off, one question burned too brightly to ignore.

It sat just beyond Winn’s elbow, totally innocuous. Lena swallowed around a lump in her throat and gestured vaguely, muttering, “Can I have the, uh, the - ?”

“Yeah.” Winn palmed it and passed it over with his bare hand. Like it was nothing.

Lena swallowed again, peeling one hand free of her suit, and thanked him.

“You know, I’m pretty good in a crisis.”

Up above, something creaked dangerously, and dust and debris rained down on them - misted, really, but it was enough to make Winn yelp, to make Lena try and shield him, shove him aside. He barely moved. The two of them were sturdily built for a pair of nerds, but he was a lot heavier
than an electron microscope, and she couldn’t budge him.

Briefly, Lena recalled when she’d been able to bodily lift him.

The crumbling stopped, and Lillian, who had been far from it thanks to her pacing, said, “We can see that.”

Winn wheeled, pointing a finger, and said, with false bravado, “I don’t like you.”

Lena, bare-handed, couldn’t quite make herself touch the lead. Maybe it was fear - fear she wasn’t strong enough to lift it, fear it might still burn her, fear it wouldn’t do a damn thing but confirm that she was weak again - but her fingers refused to curl closed. She slipped the suit’s glove back on, and her hand worked again, dropped the lead in with ease.

“It’s done.”

Lillian stopped pacing indiscriminately, barging right back over. “Turn it on,” she said, eyes bright. “We can end this.”

Winn, trying to pull it away from Lillian physically, also gave dissuading her his best shot, too. “Hey, no, no, no, wait! No, you can’t do that.”

Lillian was never one to be dissuaded, and she shoved him aside without a hitch. Lena managed to catch him, but it was a strain, and Lillian managed to grab the disperser.

Not before Alex made good on her promise, though, and pointed the blaster straight at her face. “Put. The box. Down.”

“There’s too much at stake to wait,” Lillian hissed, and pushed the lead core’s tower in, closing the box.

To no avail.

“You said it worked.”

“It does.” Lena stood, pulling Winn to his feet. “But not for you.”

“Come on, get out of here.” Winn gave her hand a squeeze before letting go. “Get out of here, both of you. I can handle her.”

The quiet reminder that Winn came as close as anyone could to getting her family drama filled Lena with a steadying rush of gratitude, and she grabbed the dispersal and one baton, pressing it into his hand along with the controls. “Thank you.”

He smiled, nodded, and she and Alex ran for the rooftop.

“I really am sorry,” Alex said, pushing the hatch open.

“And it’s really fine. You had your reasons -”

“I was - you and Kara were so happy. I didn’t want anything to ruin that.” Alex paused, looking down at Lena. “There’s enough in your way without another blood feud.”

“And I appreciate it.” Lena stretched up and pushed with her, finally shifting the lid off so they could climb onto the roof. Before either of them could, there was a cry - Kara’s voice, twisted around pain.
At the same time, with the same horror, Alex and Lena whispered, “No,” and began to scramble.

Rhea had crushed the anti-Kryptonite armor, casting it aside like dirty laundry and swatting Kara to the roof with it like she was a fly, a split in her eyebrow dripping glistening, glowing green.

“Did your blood - ?”

“No.” Lena boosted herself back onto the rooftop. “My tampons were a totally normal color.”

That green shine curled up Kara’s neck and cheek like old vines as she struggled to her knees, and Rhea swung an inelegant punch, blood glowing on her knuckles, that Kara managed to catch. Somehow, she held the fist, strong even in the face of her one weakness, and a desperate glint caught in Rhea’s eyes.

“It won’t stop here,” she promised. “There’s Star City, and Metropolis. I will destroy city after city until your whole world is gone.”

Kara’s face twisted, and she threw Rhea back into the ventilation intake fans, denting them, thankfully, not beyond repair. “This is my home. And I’m going to protect it.”

“It doesn’t matter if I live or die,” laughed Rhea, tossing her head back. “We’ll keep coming.”

Alex touched her earpiece, horror washing over her fine features like high tide. “They’ve got bogies on every school, hospital, and municipal building. They’re going to destroy everything.”

“No, they won’t.”

Fingers light, heart heavy, Lena snatched the remote from Alex’s pocket and threw herself between Kara and the Queen, clutching the disperser to her stomach, shielding it as best she could.

“Enough.”

“L’inah - ”

“No.” Slowly, Lena shook her head, gripping the remote. “You call them off, now, and maybe not every Daxamite dies today.”

“You - ” With a soft grunt, Rhea found her feet, wobbling towards Lena with a steady stride. “You wouldn’t hurt your own people, l’inah, not when you’ve sworn to protect them.”

“This is me, protecting my people.”

Rhea sighed, in the way only a disappointed mother can. “This is why you’re not ready to take control yet. You don’t understand - I’m not doing this to hurt you.”

“You hurt me,” Lena spat, “when you tried to kill the woman I love, when you tried to destroy my home.”

“This is not your home!”

Alex drew her gun, aiming, the whine of the blaster’s charge filling the air.

“Daxam was your home, until her kind destroyed it!”

“Earth is my home. You sent me here, to grow up, to assimilate. This planet is everything I’ve ever known, and it isn’t perfect, but it’s my home, and I promised to protect it.” Her throat clicked as she swallowed around what felt like a lump of hot lead. “How can you not love the people you
“They’re not worthy - *she’s not* - !”

“You can be a casualty, or you can leave this place forever.”

“You don’t want that,” Rhea purred, stepping closer, arms outstretched. “You don’t want to kill me, to banish us, to be alone.”

“She’s not alone.”

Only when Kara spoke, did Lena realize her hands had been steady on her hips, holding her up, the entire time.

“She’s not,” Kara repeated, more vehement, “and she will never be alone again.”

“*L’inah,*” Rhea tried, one last time, “I love you. I’m doing this, all of this, for you!”

“And that’s why you won’t stop. Because you *love* me.” Lena looked down, shifting her grip on the device, turning it over in her hands, glancing up at Rhea.

She was only a foot away, close enough to touch.

Lena continued turning, counting hundredths in her head, until she hit the magic number - 59.04 degrees. Then, she finally looked her mother, the Queen, straight in the face, and said, “You should have run.”

Rhea’s hands closed around her forearms at the exact same moment the lead dispersed, blasting her right in the mouth and nose. The effect was instantaneous and horrible, and when she crumbled to dust, her hands were the last to go, clinging like cigar ash to Lena’s armor.

Kara twisted, shielding Lena and Alex from the blast in her cape. Alex murmured updates from the D.E.O. feed whenever they came, squeezing Lena’s hand, while Lena counted seconds until atmospheric dispersal was complete, and they could breathe easy. Even once the explosion had settled, though, and she knew she could retreat from Kara’s embrace, she didn’t. She burrowed closer, allowing herself to be swallowed up by loving arms and to hold onto someone as tight as possible without worrying about hurting them.

She was tired, so tired, bone tired. Her limbs felt leaden from carrying the weight of her armor, and her head ached from that last brief moment of eye contact, and the burn scar on the back of her neck had grown.

“You made sure it stayed off,” she murmured, resisting the urge to prod at the blistered flesh, “even when I looked at her.”

“Of course.” Kara kissed her temple. “I’m not going to let you get hurt, ever again.”

“C’mon. I gotta patch you up.”

Lena nodded, let Alex and Kara drag her to her feet and cart her inside. “What’s with you pointing guns at my moms today?”

“Privilege of being family, Legs: I get to shoot at your shit parents.”

Lena laughed, the nickname and the promise of family slicking down all the sharp edges of the past - had it really only been a few days?
Drowsily, she felt herself distantly hoping. The world had been saved. The battle for Earth had been won. Maybe things would be alright again.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this was so short; the finale ended up being too dense to have in long-form chapters. The epilogue will probably be up later today or early tomorrow. There's no transcribing, just The Feels.™

As for the question of a Season Three rewrite: yes, it's happening. Not until the season's over and I have a chance to get shit done, but, yeah, it's already brewing, and everything is going to be addressed. To be honest, it was you guys being so supportive and wonderful that really convinced me - that, and the fact that I came up with a better crossover in five minutes while taking a study break before my last final. There are no Nazis, no needless deaths, and Everything Will Be Fine.

In the interim, though, I am going to try and A) take a step back by B) finishing and posting all of the WIPs currently floating around my hard drive, and not starting anything new for a while. I do need to focus a little more on school work, but fandom is also a really nice place to be, and to decompress, because of people like you. I'll put up all the stuff I'm thinking of posting next in the next chapter's end notes, so please, tell me what you want to read.

Just to clarify: I'm still going to write and post, but nothing that's not already in the works.

Thank you so much for reading, and feel free to yell at me in the comments below. Merry Saturday!
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

The beach day we were promised, complete with an adopted puppy, a Supergirl swimsuit, and some explanations.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You ready to go?”

Lena looked up. There stood Kara, fidgeting in her doorway.

Their doorway.

Lena’s apartment, bordering the northernmost edge of the financial district, had been wrecked in the attack. It was as good an excuse as any to move in with Kara; she spent all her time before the invasion there anyway, and it was better than staying in a hotel.

Better than being alone.

When they found out, Kara had pulled her into a hug and said, “I love you, Lena. Anything I can do.”

They did that a lot. Saying they loved each other. It felt good.

“Yeah. Just - one - second.” Lena saved her open code and stood, popping her neck.

“Oh!” Kara zipped over. “Careful!”

“I’m fine. Scar didn’t rupture.” Lena, mid-wave off, draped her arms around Kara’s shoulders and kissed her. “You worry.”

“So do you, Ms. Clean Up Crew.”

The monicker was accurate, if embarrassing. Not much was wrecked by the invasion, but what has been destroyed has been put back together with L Corp money and Lena Luthor’s blood, sweat, and time.

Supergirl had been helping out, too. Part of the territory.

“Yeah, well…” Lena shrugged. “Today’s a worry-free day, right?”

Kara beamed, sunny-warm, and kissed her forehead. “Right. C’mom. Bags are packed, wheels up in three.”

“Three?” Lena wrinkled her nose. “That’s such an arbitrary number.”

“All numbers are arbitrary, i zhor, they’re numbers. That’s, like, seventy percent of the fun.”
“You’re seventy percent of the fun.” Lena closed her laptop and tugged on her sandals. “We’re driving?”

“Alex commandeered a vehicle -”

“- meaning J’onn is pudding since M’gann came back -”

“- so she’s driving.” Kara laughed. “But yeah.”

“I can’t believe we’re going to the beach,” muttered Lena, “in the rain.”

“You love the rain. You’re always saying you miss weather!”

Another accurate statement. Lena was just… leery of that weather, caused by atmospheric disturbances in the vein of spaceship entry and exit, precipitation full of Pb.

Not full enough to hurt her as a human, and she wasn’t Daxamite enough to be harmed at such low levels, but it was the principle of the thing. Anxiety’s a bitch like that.

And so what if Lena’s been a little more anxious since the invasion, and all that it entailed? She’s got people, people who love her and support her. People who will commandeer a vehicle just to drive her to the beach, because a vacation day came highly recommended.

“See, when you said D.E.O.,” Lena began, eyes appreciatively wide as they gobble up the powder blue ’52 Chevy Deluxe, “I pictured… slick black SUV. Creepy truck.”

“Ha! No.” Alex grinned from the driver’s seat of the convertible, draping one arm over the door. Her other hand was in Maggie’s lap, scratching behind the ears of a familiar pit bull puppy. Gigantor - now Gertrude - looked perfectly cozy in her new mom’s lap, licking her nose lazily, tail wagging. “No, this baby is J’onn’s, and if I scratch it, death befall us, so lids on drinks, pants on legs, etcetera, etcetera.”

“And towels on the seat?”

Maggie winked from the passenger side, aiming a truly spectacular finger gun Kara’s way. “Bingo, little Danvers.”

“Hop in. We gotta get rolling.”

Kara hopped in, and Lena followed suit, sliding over the top of the door and crashing, with spectacular clumsiness, into her girlfriend’s lap. Kara helped tug her all the way into the convertible, wrapping her arms around Lena’s waist and burying her face in her hair. “Mm. Road trip.”

“Road trip!” Alex hollered, and they peeled out of park and into the remarkably empty street. The radio crackled to life, an improbable Throwback Thursday on a still-dark Saturday morning, and Lena grinned, ear to ear.

“I love this song,” she laughed.

“You’re not gay if you don’t love the Spice Girls,” Maggie fired back, scraping her hair up into a ponytail. “Yo, tell you what I want, what I really, really want!”

“So tell me what you want, what you really, really want!”

“Alex! Hands on the wheel,” Kara insisted, “we don’t have seat belts in this - zig-a-zig-ah!”
Lena caught a glimpse of her face in the rearview mirror. She was smiling like an idiot, a few strands of shower-wet hair clinging to her ruddy cheeks, driving over smooth pavement with her girlfriend’s arms acting as the best kind of seatbelt.

Yeah, she thought, things are okay.

“If you want my future - ”

“Yes!”

“ - forget my past!”

“If you wanna get with me, better make it fast!”

“So don’t go wastin’ my precious time,” Alex crooned, melody dropping off as the stop light ahead flickered directly to red from green. “Aw, come on! Get your act together, you stupid street light!”

Lena cackled, wondering if it was Livewire or a genuine infrastructure problem. Hopefully, she and Jess were back on vacation; it may have only been a few days since the invasion’s end, but there was no saying whether or not they could afford to stick around.

Still, it was nice to think about. Lena still couldn’t believe that Livewire had been down in the streets, fighting back with everyone else, blowing out Daxamite staves and blasters. For all her villainous claims, she was, at worst, a sort of chaotic anti-hero, and Lena was glad of it.

National City needed all the help it could get.

Kara, as if she could smell the introspection a mile away, kissed her temple, singing, “I'll tell you what I want, what I really, really want! So, tell me what you want, what you really, really want! I wanna, huh, I wanna, huh, I wanna, huh - ”

Lena, giggling, leaned into Kara’s arms, focusing in on that instead of anything else. Sure, she still had shit to do to fix up the city, but the roads were clear and smooth, utilities were still running, and no one was sleeping on the streets. Everyone in the city was taking a day off for the weekend, because everyone in the city had earned it.

“ - really, really, really wanna zig-a-zig-ah!”

“Hey, Kar,” Alex called from the driver’s seat, shit-eating grin plastered across her face. “Kar. Remember when I told you that was an actual word on Earth?”

“Remember when you thought you only had that music video recorded on VHS because you liked the song?” Kara fired back.

Alex stuck out her tongue in the rearview mirror, and Kara heartily responded, jaw flexing against Lena’s temple.

“Ladies, ladies, there’s no need to seduce us,” Maggie drawled. “We’re already running away with you.”

Alex laughed in the goofy, giddy way she always did when Maggie made a joke, like Maggie was the funniest fucking person to ever draw breath, and Kara murmured, “Nyoom,” in Lena’s ear to make her giggle, too.

Through her laughter, Lena said, “Not running. Just - taking a break.”
“No.” Kara’s thumb caressed the curve of Lena’s waist through her borrowed hoodie, spreading goosebumps over her skin like soft butter on hot toast. “Heroes don’t run from anything.”

Lena smiled, a little unsure, down at her knees and sang, “Zig-a-zig-ah.”

☆

The beach was mostly unoccupied, save for a few close friends. Winn and James had driven out in their van, though the lead-lined helmet and headset were safely stowed away, and J’onn and M’gann had flown there together. M’gann shifted immediately into her humanoid skin, and it was actually pretty funny to see her in an athletic one piece and cape before the last vestiges of her true form faded out, but J’onn stayed green a little longer, just staring out at the beach.

“I’ve always liked this,” he said thoughtfully, staring out at the lapping grey waves. “All the water on Mars is frozen. The first time I saw liquid water, I was utterly amazed.”

“It is beautiful,” Maggie agreed. “I grew up smack-dab in the middle of the Midwest, but then I moved to Metropolis. Right on the beach.”

“East Coast beaches,” Lena said with a smile, and Maggie knocked their shoulders together. “California water’s not bad.”

Alex, in her shorts and surf shirt, had finally convinced Kara to launch her into the water. She cleanly speared through the waves without so much as a splash, then bobbed up with a gasp, hair slicked back, water sluicing down around her eyebrows.

“Not bad at all.”

Lena laughed at the atrociously obvious case of heart eyes she was sporting for her girlfriend - fiancée, she reminded herself, glimpsing the ring on Maggie’s finger as it glittered in the muted sun - then waved her off towards the water. “Dive in after your lady.”

“You coming?”

“Can’t.” Lena touched the bandage on the back of her neck, prodding briefly. Still hurt. “Doctor’s orders; can’t risk infection.”

Sympathetic, Maggie nodded, clapping her on the shoulder, then raced off into the surf, launching herself onto Alex and tackling her below the waves with a giddy yelp. Lena found herself grinning, arms crossed low over her belly in a haphazard hug, and thinking It’s nice to see people so happy, after.

“It is,” J’onn said, green face melting into brown. “Like the world is telling you that healing can happen.”

Suddenly conscious of the observation, Lena’s hands curled a little tighter around her waist. “Any sign of - ?”

“No. Everyone is gone. Mon-El sent a message, promising he’d keep them at bay.”

“Good.”

“You can listen to it, if you’d like.”

“It’s the least we can do.”

M’gann shot Lena a look, soft and grateful, after stretching up and kissing J’on’s cheek, face cradled in her hands. “Come on,” she murmured. “Alex promised she would teach us how to surf.”

“I’ve been on this planet three hundred years,” J’onn said, affecting disgruntlement but already following her. “If I wanted to surf, I would have done it by now.”

M’gann was, perhaps, less subtle in her machinations to give Lena some space, but that was part of what made it nice. She wasn’t being left, just respected.

Lena thought her thanks M’gann’s way, then headed back up the beach to where Winn was dangling his legs out the back of the van and James was toeing off his sandals.

“Hey.”

“Hey!”

“Mind if I join?”

“Not at all, Legs.” Winn scooted over, patting the bare metal beside him. “Hop on up!”

Hop up Lena did, feet swinging, tossing James’ shoes back into the vehicle so they didn’t collect any more sand than necessary. “No Lyra today?”

“She and, uh, her little brother needed a family day.” Winn smiled, a little crooked, and ruffled his own hair. “Which I totally get. After… everything.”

“Yeah. I’ve been, um.” Lena ran her fingers through her hair, fingertips skimming over her bandage. “I’ve been thinking. Maybe I should - maybe I should pop by Stryker Island.”

“Yes?” James leaned against the hinge of the back door, smoothing his palm over the top of his head. “If you want some company, I’m always down for a road trip and real pizza.”

“What’s this I hear about real pizza?”

Out from around the van came Lucy Lane, all jean shorts and oversized sunglasses, with Vasquez in tow. James grinned, and they each pulled each other into a hug hello.

“Um.” Lena smiled in greeting. “We might be planning a road trip, is all. Nostalgia tour of the Northeast.”

“Head up in, like, October or something. Get weather, but drivable weather.”

Lena laughed. “How is it that we’re in California, and yet only two of the people here are actually from California?”

Vasquez cackled. “Right! Me and Al are the only ones! The rest of you are, what, Jersey, Jersey, Jersey, Jersey, space, space, space?”

Counted amongst the four, Lena grinned, wider and more genuine. “It may be the Garbage State,” she said proudly, “but it’s my Garbage State.”

“I’ll drink to that!” Lucy whooped, extracting a six-pack from the admittedly impressive oversized tote bag hanging off her shoulder. “And, yes, it is six in the morning, but I have been awake for the past two days, so my internal clock is ringing Happy Hour.”
Lena, equally thus, shrugged and grabbed a Blue Moon, trying to twist the cap off. The fluted metal dug harshly into her palm, and she flinched before tugging her sleeve down over her hand and trying again.

"Wimp," Lucy teased, knocking the cap off against the door.

"Not all of us can digest broken glass, Lane," Vasquez ribbed right back, twisting her cap off with her bare hand.

"I have whiny baby skin," sniffed Lena.

"To Lena’s whiny baby skin, then." Lucy clinked their bottles together with a wink before taking a sip. “Mm. Breakfast of champions.”

"See, you kid, but beer built the pyramids." Winn, the kind of person who kept a bottle opener on his keys, used it for himself and then James, who didn’t even have to ask before his man in the van popped the top for him. “Liquid bread.”

Lena tried very hard to think about how no new pyramids had been built, and how that was a success - a good thing. She took a sip of her beer and tucked her feet up into the van, resting them on her knees lotus-style. Lucy laid out a towel where Lena’s feet had been, then plopped down on it, tugging Vasquez down to sit next to her, leaning up against the hung-ajar door of the van.

“There’s no point, you know. It’s raining. You’ll get all wet and sandy, anyways.”

Lucy flexed her ankles, popping the joints with impressive grotesqueness, and buried her toes in the sand. “Free exfoliation.”

With a snicker, James sat down on Winn’s other side, their knees knocking together, and sipped his beer. Winn blinked like a bug had flown in his face, but after a moment, he settled back down, squinting up at the cloud-cloaked sun.

“Nice, uh.” He took a swig, wiping his mouth on the back of his wrist. “Nice day.”

Overhead, the dark clouds seemed to darken in response, the rain coming down harder.

“You people are weird,” Vasquez muttered, flicking Winn’s kneecap.

“Ah!” drawled James, nudging Winn’s shoulder with his elbow, “we have our charm.”

Lena gazed out at the ocean, at Alex attempting to teach quadricentennial aliens and one stubborn cop to surf while Kara skimmed over the water’s surface like a dragonfly, kicking up a mist in her wake that caught the dull light and cast brief arcs of iridescence.

“Yeah,” she said with a candle flame smile. “We do.”

☆

Kara zoomed over, hovering parallel to the sand just to give Lena a kiss hello. Her hands braced lightly on Lena’s shoulders, more warmth than weight, and her voice sounded like that, too, when she murmured, “Hi,” noses and foreheads knocking together.

“Hi,” Lena replied, raking her fingers through Kara’s curls. “Enjoying yourself?”

“Yeah. You? You’re not lonely up on the sand?”
“Nah.” Shaking her head, Lena draped one hand over Kara’s shoulder, absently stroking the coil of her trapezius. “I’m good up here.”

“Yeah?”

Lena nodded and kissed Kara again. “Promise.”

A goofy sort of look crossed Kara’s face and she floated down into Lena’s lap, straddling her thighs and beaming. “Well, I’m pooped. Mind if I laze around up here for a while?”

Knowing for a fact that there was no way in hell Kara was tired, Lena smiled just as wide and lovestruck and said, “Not at all.”

The sun was about at its peak, still concealed by a thick cloud cover, but when Lena closed her eyes and tilted her face into it, she felt the full extent of its warmth. She didn’t allow herself to wonder whether or not it felt different now, hooking her chin over Kara’s shoulder and clinging to the ropy muscle around her waist.

Kara, for her part, clung back, fists tight in the fabric of Lena’s hoodie, nose tucked into the join of her neck and shoulder. She held on lie she was afloat in unknown waters and Lena was the only driftwood for miles, the only thing holding her up. The way Kara held her made Lena’s heart pound in her chest, and she opened her blurry eyes to look up at the yellow sun above them.

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

After about ten minutes, it became clear that Kara was still floating, because Lena’s legs hadn’t gone numb under her weight. It was thoughtful, considerate, and left a funny sort of weight in Lena’s chest. On wicked impulse, Lena rocked sideways, toppling them over so now it was she who sat square in her girlfriend’s lap, kneeling between her thighs. “You,” she said, tapping the tip of Kara’s nose, “are the absolute best.”

Kara’s face was spectacularly pink, the color of a truly atrocious sunburn, and if not for the fact that she couldn’t burn based off Kryptonian biology and would probably only tan if she were human, Lena would have suspected that’s what it was. Knowing better, though, Lena smiled crookedly and pulled her Oxford hoodie off overhead.

Kara moved to adjust her glasses, only to remember with her fingers on the bridge of her nose that she wasn’t wearing them. Her cheeks were now practically the same burgundy as Lena’s discarded sweatshirt, blue eyes bright and glassy. “You…”

“Number one fan.”

It seemed Kara had already forgotten her glasses were back at their apartment, because there she was, trying to adjust them, staring at - if Lena was to be polite - her Supergirl swimsuit.

“It was why you decided we had to go to the beach,” she drawled, taking Kara’s hand and kissing her fingertips.

“Only a week late.”

It was hard to reconcile, sometimes, that the whole mess had taken less than a week. The city had been under repair for less than a week, the Daxamite fleet had been gone for less than a week, Galaxy Girl had been dead for less than a week, and less than a week ago, Kara had switched the
gene suppressor back on, rendering Lena effectively human.

Lena had been working too hard to have the chance to really miss her powers. Public reconstruction meant, even if she still had them, she couldn’t have used them. And sure, she was tired in a way she hadn’t been since the suppressor failed, and she wasn’t healing as fast, and she wasn’t as strong, but Lena had worked hard not to give that a second thought. There was too much to do to spare a moment for mourning.

Kara had, in her own unsubtle way, tried to signal that Lena could do it, anyway, but Lena preferred being busy to being sad.

“There are worse things to be late for,” Lena said firmly. “And we have the beach all to ourselves.”

Hands settling warm on Lena’s hips, Kara ducked down, eyelids heavy, going in for what would probably have been one hell of a kiss.

Their lips had barely brushed when there was a yelp and a splash, and they both jerked away, peering towards the water.

All was well; a game of chicken comprised of four secret agents, one police officer, and one vigilante CEO with biceps like boulders was never going to end without someone getting wet.

“I’m okay!” Winn hollered.

“That’s what you get for picking the tallest guy here,” Lena yelled down the beach. “Your center of gravity’ll fuck you over every time!”

“Goddamnit, gravity!”

Kara snickered, forehead thudding into Lena’s collarbone, and Lena couldn’t help but laugh, too. Things may have been heavy, but little things like that made them lighter.

*We’re going to get through this just fine,* she said to herself.

Gertrude scampered up the beach, too-big paws and too-long legs kicking up sand in a series clumsy sprays. She launched herself up into the van, scrambling to actually make it in until Kara boosted her up and smooched her forehead.

“Hi, baby!” she crooned.

Gertrude grinned a dumb puppy grin and licked Kara’s chin, and Kara laid back, letting the puppy sprawl out on her chest.

Lena scratched Gert’s back, noticing just how much bigger the littlest of her litter had gotten under Alex and Maggie’s care. As Gert hunkered down on Kara’s sternum, tail practically a blur with how fast it was wagging under four hands’ worth of back scratches, Lena found herself smiling, too, thinking, *Yeah. We’re gonna be fine.*

☆

They hadn’t exactly intended to spend a whole day at the beach, or maybe Lena just hadn’t thought the math through, but soon enough, it was dark out, and Kara was insisting on starting a bonfire.

“I can fly out, grab marshmallows, blast some driftwood, and have us rolling in s’mores in under a minute.”
“No need to fly, Supergirl,” James ribbed, nudging Kara’s shin with the side of his foot. “Winn keeps so much junk food in the van, Willy Wonka cries himself to sleep at night.”

“When Wonka makes kosher marshmallows, he can stop crying.”

“And we can start a fire without superpowers.” Maggie, who had already started collecting driftwood, plonked down in the sand and shot her soon-to-be-sister-in-law a look. “If today is a day off, that means for you, too.”

“Hey!”

Lena, legs draped over Kara’s lap, gave her cheek a pat and a quick kiss before sliding into the sand next to Maggie. “We’re an industrious bunch,” she protested. “I’m certain we can handle this sans heat vision.”

Kara resigned herself to waiting for her industrious companions to light driftwood on fire, hanging back and chattering quietly with M’gann, occasionally poking someone in the shoulder with her toe just to get an indignant giggle out of them.

Eventually, they had a fire pit underway, crackling with pretty purplish flames, and a lazy s’more assembly line had formed. Someone had to roast marshmallows, break graham crackers and chocolate bars, divy up pieces, put things together, and keep Gertrude away from the chocolate. Alex, despite having been the first to protest risking melty marshmallow and sand as a team-up, ended up volunteering for sandwich duty, parking herself next to Lena, who was singularly adept at toasting marshmallows without burning them.

“So,” she said, quietly, smearing marshmallow between two graham cracker halves, “you probably already know this. Probably ran the numbers yourself.”

Lena asked, “What numbers?” with a perfectly neutral curiosity.

“Ten days.” Alex passed the s’more back to Maggie, who kissed her on the cheek before taking a bite. “For particulate lead to leave the atmosphere and be flushed into the topsoil. Probably less time under these circumstances, since all the upper atmo activity basically has us living in Atlantis.”

Saying nothing, Lena speared a new batch of marshmallows and lowered them over the fire.

“But, just to be safe, ten days.” Alex let out a heavy breath. “Until it’s safe to power up again. If you were thinking about it.”

“Thanks, Alex.”

“And we can - we can do it in the med bay, no laser x-ray tag teaming.”

“Thank you, Alex.”

Alex sort of stiffened beside Lena, digging her toes into the sand, and a flare of guilt lit Lena up inside.

“No, it’s - I really do appreciate it. I just - ” Lena shifted her marshmallows into one hand and reached over, giving Alex’s knee a squeeze. “I don’t know if there’s a point. Galaxy Girl is - is ruined, now, for the public, and I don’t exactly have a secret identity anymore. Plus, after everything…”

I don’t know if people will trust someone with Daxamite powers.
“You got Ms. Grant’s email, right?”

There was Kara, charming and guileless even as she eavesdropped, planting a kiss on the crown of Lena’s head and handing over another broken-up chocolate bar.

“About, um, interviewing me.”

“Yeah. She thinks it might help - ”

“Minimize blowback, both personal and professional. Protect everyone employed at L Corp.”

“And protect you.”

“It’s a good idea.” Lena rotated the marshmallows, inspecting for color, and passed them Alex’s way. “I told her I’d do it.”

“Yeah?”

Lena nodded, twisting back to kiss Kara’s cheek. “Yeah. Cat’s - I’ve known her since I was a teenager, you know? She worked at the Planet, Kal-El had ties to the Planet through James and Lois and...” She smirked, arching an eyebrow. “I was actually looking forward to sharing airspace with her again when I moved out here. If anyone besides Kara Danvers is interviewing me, I’m glad it’s her.”

Even with the excuse of firelight, Kara’s face was warm.

“Once reconstruction is finished, she and I will have a chat,” Lena promised. “Thank you for arranging it.”

“Actually, Cat already had the idea when I presented it to her.”

Huh.

“She remembers you the same way you remember her, I guess. She said it was unfortunate that she left right when you arrived.”

“Yeah.”

☆

Everyone starts off home, piece by piece. Gertrude conked out around the second round of s’mores, and Alex and Maggie had to take their poor puppy home. Winn and James were next, saying their goodbyes around ten with familiar full-force hugs, and then M’gann flew off to pick up J’onn’s car and drive her back to the D.E.O.

Vasquez dragged Kara off on recycling duty, and that should have been the first clue. It was just J’onn and Lucy, the two directors, sitting around the dying fire with Lena.

Lucy pulled her phone out of her shorts and passed it to Lena. “You should see this.”

Resigned to her fate, Lena stared down at the screen. A recorded video transmission was waiting to be played.

Mon-El’s face, twisted up in the same expression as is often seen on a child reluctant to go to the dentist but knowing there’s no way around it, stared up at her from beneath the play button.
Lena glanced up at J’onn, at Lucy, fingers resisting the command to press. “Is it - ?”

“Not a threat. But it’s something you should know.”

Not a threat. Not a threat.

Lena pressed play.

“Hello,” Mon-El said. He was in a cockpit, piloting what only took Lena a split second to recognize as Rhea’s ship. “I’m, uh, I’m taking point right now, leading everyone away. There’s an uninhabited planet with a yellow sun, water - everything we need. I thought, um, I thought maybe I could make a fresh start there, but…” He sighed, shifting in his seat. “Kara was right. I have a chance to fix things. My history isn’t just history, and I can - change things. Make things better.”

Lena set the phone down on her knees, which were draped in her sweatshirt like a blanket, so she could watch without touching.

“And, um, she was right, too.” Mon-El scratched the side of his neck, eyes cutting down and to the left. “The Luthor. Was right. So I’m - I’m not running. Or, I am, but they’re all running with me. I’m gonna try - try and change things. No more - no more drugs, no more slaves, no more caste system. I’m going to be the leader they deserve. The kind of leader who can be proud of what he’s done.

“So you don’t - you don’t have to worry about them, about us coming back. Earth earned its freedom, and I’ll make sure no one interferes with that.” He laughed, a little sharp, a little bitter. “No way I’m gonna let them be right. And they’ll probably never see this, so… so I can say that it’s probably a good thing neither of them liked me much. Otherwise they wouldn’t have called me out, and I would have just… run off and let the Earth die. Let my people die.

“I - I think that’s it. Don’t tell them I said anything nice.”

He said something nice?

“Mon-El, King of Daxam until he can install a democratic voting system, out.”

And with that, the transmission ended.

“Naturally, we trust him about as far as I can throw him,” Lucy said, taking her phone back and stretching her legs out, heels digging deep furrows in the sand, “but seeing as he’s thrown himself into a galaxy far, far away…”

“And we have a satellite array in the upper atmosphere that will identify incoming crafts based on design origin, energy source, and prior associations,” J’onn listed, leaning his elbows on his knees, making eye contact with Lena over the fire. “If he reneges, he won’t even make landfall before he gets punted into prison.”

“Oh,” said Lena mildly, “good.” When neither Director’s eyes left her, still scrutinizing, still concerned, she tacked on, “Is that all?”

“Um, yeah. He’s gone for good, we’re safe, and that’s a killer bikini.”

“That wasn’t in the transmission.”

“And thank god.”

Lena cracked a smile at Lucy’s dramatic tone. “Okay. Well, thank you for letting me know.
That’s…” She sighed. “That’s a weight off. Thank you.”

“Of course, Agent Luthor.”

Lena blinked, much the same way Winn had when James had mentioned charm, like something had flown into her face for a split second. “Wait, Agent?”

“Of course.” J’onn smiled, eyes crinkling; the fire popped, spitting sparks into the sky. “Your protective suspension has been lifted.”

“But I’m - I’m not - ”

“You’re smart, you’re skilled, and you’ve been combat trained. No different from any other field agent or analyst on staff.”

“Thank you, J’onn. I won’t let you down.”

“You haven’t yet.”

Kara and Vasquez plodded towards them like an overexcited golden retriever on a strict leash and the person holding it until Lucy yelled, “Hey, hot stuff!” Then Vasquez laughed and unwound her arm from Kara’s, releasing her to zoom across the beach and scoop Lena up with an arm under her knees and another at her back.

“Oh, my god!”

“You sound happy,” Kara said, nodding towards Lena’s sternum. “Good news?”

The sea, glazed in moonlight, blurred by beneath them, and Lena tightened her arms around Kara’s neck. “Yeah. Mon-El is going off to his hideaway planet, and he’s bringing the fleet with him. Turns out nothing fuels a frat boy like girls yelling at him; he’s gonna try and actually fix things.”

“Well, that’s good.”

“And I’m off suspension.”

Kara let out a whoop, barrel-rolling over the surf, and Lena laughed.

“That’s incredible, and I’m so proud of you, and I love you, love you, love you!”

“Khap rrip zhao.”

Kara grinned, wide and slow, and tugged Lena closer, slowly tilting upwards until her feet dangled in the water, but Lena was safely out of the waves’ reach. “You’re the best, you know that?”

Lena’s mouth twisted, bottom lip caught in her teeth.

“I’m serious. You sacrifice so much, and you work so hard, and I’m - in awe of you.”

“Pot, kettle, Supergirl.” Lena swung her legs out of Kara’s grasp, dangling from her shoulders and staring her straight in the face. “I could never have done half the stuff I’ve done this past year without you. We’re a team, and I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Kara scoffed, tightening her arms around Lena’s waist, eyes bright. “I’m - I know Alex told you the timeline - ”
“Yeah. I have about a week until it’s safe to switch my powers back on.”

“Well, whatever decision you make, I’m with you. One hundred percent.”

“Thanks.” Lena curled her fingers into Kara’s hair, running them through the flight-born tangles. “And thank you for turning them off. Alex thought it would be hard for you, and I - I appreciate it.”

“I couldn’t let you die.”

“It all goes back, though, doesn’t it? To that stupid scanner.”

“I guess it does. Same technique, different application.” Kara wrinkled her nose. “Did I ever apologize for frying your scanner?”

“You don’t need to.”

“I want to.”

“Too bad,” Lena said. “You’re not apologizing for anything you did, okay?”

“But - ”

Lena shook her head.

“Fine. No apologizing.” Kara dipped lower, waves lapping at her ankles. “Can I - ?”

“No! You didn’t do anything you need to apologize for. I am fine.”

“You don’t have to be.”

“You’re sweet to be so concerned, but I really am fine.” A plan, half-cocked and foolhardy, formed in Lena’s head, and she grinned before letting go of Kara, dropping into the water up to waist.

Kara’s eyes widened. “Your - ”

“It’s way out of the water,” drawled Lena, resolutely not touching the back of her neck, instead propping her hands on her hips. “You can stop worrying about me.”

“Fat chance.” Grinning, Kara floated down, crossing her legs and hovering just above the surface of the waves. “I like you too much for that.”

“Oh,” Lena teased, cocking her hip, “you like me.”

Kara shrugged coyly, draping her arms around Lena’s neck. “Sure do.”

“Do you like me enough to fly us home?”

“I like you enough to do a whole lot more than that.”

Chapter End Notes

So, yeah. Happy enough, with some hints at future angst and emotional reconciliation? I think so. I sure as shit hope so. But anyways, on to my list of WIPs! We have too
goddamn many. Someone hold me back.

A) The Jess/Livewire companion to this fic
B) Green Lantern!Lena Luthor
C) A coffee shop AU that's slowly spiraling into a really gay Season 1 rewrite
D) Hero Swap (What would happen if Kara and Barry grew up in each other's universe?)
E) Soulmate Swap (What would happen if Lena and Barry grew up in each other's universe?)
F) Astronaut!Lena with sabotage, shenanigans, and Tempest references
G) The next installment of Slow-Burning Laser Eyes, with undercover fake-married shenanigans

There's a whole bunch more, including some one shots that I'm going to post, but I figured it should be up to you guys which long-form story I do next. The s3 rewrite will come after the actual season is finished, but I'm already drafting the crossover special.

Anyways, thank you guys for reading along and supporting this dumb idea of mine. I hope I only get better, and I hope you continue to enjoy what I write!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!