**The Implications of Compulsory Heteronormativity & Its Superhero Backlash**

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/12423075).

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**The Implications of Compulsory Heteronormativity & Its Superhero Backlash**

by **FlyingPigPoet**

**Summary**

This is my fixing-Season-Three-as-It-Happens fic. A few notes.

Although I am a Sanvers-Forever Girl, the things I wrote in my Season-Two fix-it fic, "The Implications of Your Heartbreak," still stand, which means that Agent Vasquez stepped in when Maggie initially rejected Alex. I tried really hard to get Sanvers together but ended up instead with VasVers/Dansquez being unbreakable. (Sorry, not sorry.)

Also, in this piece Mon-Ew will not appear, because there is absolutely no reason to bring him back.

These two things will skew this fic away from the canon stuff we already see coming (like Lames replacing SuperCorp). But you can trust the FlyingPigPoet to give you the gay-ass story you need as opposed to the heteronormative story the CW producers want to give you. As my friend YesBothWays says, I am doing the Lord's work here. You're welcome.

Kudos and comments are ALWAYS welcome!
The dreams were always different, but they all started the same way, in that sunny field in Kansas, with the flowers blooming and a warm breeze ruffling the long grass. Although Kara had never returned there in all of her thirteen years on Earth, the place where her pod had landed remained etched in her memory and came back to her regularly in her dreams.

And even though Supergirl and J’onn had found Mon-El’s pod inside National City at night in early autumn, lately she dreamed that this was where the Daxamite had landed, and when she made the decision to open the pod or pitch it back into space, it was usually a sunny day, and she was always alone.

Some nights, she opened the pod, opened up the Earth’s future to chaos and destruction, as if she didn’t know what her actions would lead to. Some nights she opened it up only to reset the controls and let it take off into space on its way back to the dead planet it came from. Some nights she didn’t even bother using the controls, simply picked it up and flew as high into the atmosphere as she could before hurling it forward and away.

Those nights were the ones she woke from more refreshed and less guilty.

But then there were the other nights, the ones where rather than the Daxamite in the pod it was her aunt Astra or her mother Alura, and she still had to make the same decision: allow the woman to stay on Earth and bring on Myriad or Medusa, or pitch her back into space.

Some nights the one in the pod was Kara Zor-El. Those nights were the worst.

On this night, 180 days since the Battle of National City, Kara Zor-El found herself standing in the field, wearing a white dress, feeling the warm, scented breeze in her hair and feeling momentarily at peace. Then she looked down and could not find the House of El crest that should have been over her heart. How could she have left the house in Midvale without being properly dressed?

And there across the field, also in white, the color of youth and mourning, stood the Daxamite, scruffy and unshaved as always, and he was looking past her in fear. She turned to see her mother, Alura, in the pale blue dress she always favored, with the gold belt. At least her dress had the crest. She looked past Kara at the Daxamite and pointed her finger at him. He hung his head and got back into the pod he had stolen from the Kryptonian ambassador. Kara turned back to her mother as the pod took off into the sky.

“Mom?”

“My daughter. Sometimes everything you do is still not enough.”

Kara woke with a start, gasping for breath, soaked in sweat. The red numbers on her clock declared that it was 3:47 a.m., but she knew that more sleep wasn’t going to happen, so she took a quick lukewarm shower (too impatient to wait for the water to gradually heat up), put on her supersuit and took to the sky.

It was raining. Of course it was. Somehow lately it felt like it was always raining, although she knew objectively that this was impossible.
As she flew through the wet darkness above the city, she felt the rain sting her eyes almost like tears, but she hadn’t cried at all in 180 days, working endlessly as Supergirl to rebuild the city and make amends for letting the Daxamite out of his cage. So many had died because of her one bad call. So many places had been partly or completely destroyed, people’s homes and businesses.

All because she had opened that damned pod.

These days, the dreams bled into her waking life especially on days that forced her to focus on her alter-ego’s career path rather than her greater duty to the city she had so endangered. She tried to write, but fell instead to daydreaming about a sunny field and a chance to rewrite history. She knew from discussions with Barry Allen that changing the timeline pretty much never worked out. But it couldn't stop her from wishing.

And on a night like this, when she couldn't sleep, she took to hanging aloft above the city with all its little lights, all its dear people, the citizens she had sworn to protect, and she listened.

Listened to dogs barking, doors slamming, sirens of ambulances headed to NC General Hospital, the screeching of brakes, gunshots, her sister's wild heartbeat--

In an instant she was flying toward the river, to the wide bridge where three NCPD black-and-whites and Detective Sawyer's unmarked car were racing after a semi. More shots were fired as she dove down and landed on the hood of Maggie's car just in time to set herself as a Kryptonian shield between a machine gun and her sister and Maggie. She blocked several dozen bullets before reaching forward and bending the gun's barrel. The shooter ran to the back of the truck and climbed up the ladder and out onto the truck's roof--as if that would enable him get away from a hero who could fucking fly.

She landed on the roof and immediately the man attacked her with what looked like an electrified ninja sword. She ducked, dodged, grabbed the weapon away from him and hit him so hard he went flying onto the roof of another vehicle, leaving a distinct dent in the roof and falling off. Supergirl had no time to waste on him, as the truck was still racing forward despite the explosion on the bridge having left traffic in its path. The station wagon with the mother and daughter--

Supergirl supersped to in front of the truck and stopped it like a mountain confronting a sandcastle.

The girl in the back seat of the car was elated. "Supergirl! You're the best!"

But she had no time for such things and took off into the sky.

Even so, she could hear Maggie Sawyer saying, "Doesn't even stop for autographs anymore."

No, thought Supergirl, she fucking doesn't. Instead she went back to her post above the city, listening for peril, even though, in the back of her mind was a sunny field and Idina Menzel's voice that had been keeping her sane for 180 days.

I'm standing in the field
My feet lift off the ground
No one here will see me
No one will hurt me now

I'm brushing off the rain
While climbing through the clouds
Nobody can see me
No one can hurt me now
Goodbye, gravity
Goodbye, enemies
I'm going up to a place where the world is small
Where I can fly above it all
If I don't make it, sing my song
From here I'm weightless
No stars are famous
And the world is small
And the world is small

Still rising towards the dark
Don't care what's down below
'Cause no one can see me
And no one has to know

The atmosphere is lonely
And beautiful
I don't miss a thing I used to know
I used to know...

Tomorrow would be 181 days. She could do this. She could.

She had to.

Chapter End Notes

"Small World" Performed by Idina Menzel. Writer(s): Greg Wells, Ross Jacob Golan
Winn finished up the paperwork on the latest fight and printed it out for J'onn to sign. The damage to the bridge wasn't strictly speaking the DEO's fault, since the criminals were the ones who shot the grenade, but when it came to a fight that Supergirl joined, they had learned to cover their butts, legal-wise.

He hit his earpiece. "Supergirl, don't forget that you have to come in to debrief with Vasquez for legal since there was infrastructure damage."

The voice in his ear snapped, "That was NOT my fault!"

"Hey, slow down! I never said it was. But you know the new rules. We have to document everything. Maggie's going to come in later to let us copy her body-cam footage. From what Alex said, we should be fine. Won't take any time at all."

Supergirl grumbled in his ear and a moment later she was landing on the balcony and striding into the DEO headquarters.

Winn grinned to see her. "Cool car chase! Very fast, very furious."

"Any luck IDing the one who got away?"

"Still running facial recognition. So far, nothing."

J'onn strolled in, picked up Winn's clipboard and signed and initialed the paperwork.

"Anything else to go on?"

Supergirl showed her bloodied knuckles. "This is his. Winn, can you send a sample up to Alex's lab? Maybe his DNA is already in the database."

Winn put on the blue surgical gloves and took samples of the man's blood off her hand. "Okay, well, this is new and gross..."

Supergirl sighed her frustration. "I should have cuffed him."

Alex joined them, saying, "You knocked him a hundred yards into that SUV. Not to mention saving Maggie and me."

J'onn said, "This is a big win, Supergirl."

Supergirl shook her head. "It's not a win until they're behind bars." Winn finished and handed her gauze to wipe off the rest of the blood with. "Let's get this guy," she said, stalking back toward the balcony.

Alex rushed after her. "Um, hey. Tomorrow Eliza is coming to give a lecture at National City University, and she asked Vasquez and me to have dinner out with her at that Italian place near the campus that she loves, and I'm pretty sure I have another kind of lecture from her coming and I was really hoping that you could be there to, um, well, stick up for me?"

"Says the woman with the thigh holster."

"No, seriously, Kara, she sounded sort of passive aggressive and pissed off. Called me Sweetie, but
also called me Alexandra. This is not going to go well. Do you want to...

Supergirl seemed preoccupied with getting the blood off her hand. "Yeah, if I'm not busy, sure."

"Well, we're all going to meet at the bar before, so if you want to get a drink..."

"Yeah, I'll try." She walked away.

Winn took his clipboard from J'onn and found the form that Alex needed sign. He handed it to her, frowning. "It was bad enough when she skipped Pizza Night, but skipping a free meal? It's like the beginning of the Dark Days."

J'onn said, "Hey, look. Grief doesn't have a deadline."

"Grief over what?"

"Losing her boyfriend?"

Winn rolled his eyes. "Mon-El was more my boyfriend than he was ever Kara's."

Alex stopped signing the form to stare at him. "Winn, are you bi?"

"Um, maybe? That's not the point. I mean she goes from being Little Miss Sunshine to, well, Alex, basically."

"What? I'm not like that!"

"Come on, Alex," said J'onn. "Your unrelenting seriousness is one of your best qualities." He patted her on the shoulder and walked away.

She stared at him like a fish. "I'm not like that. I'm not!"

Winn quietly took the form from her and followed J'onn out. He murmured, "Yes, Agent Danvers. You just keep telling yourself that."
On the Cutting Edge

Morgan Edge knew how to get things done. He was a man's man, a networking genius, and if he was to be perfectly honest a strategist to rival Machiavelli. If he had gone into politics, he would have been Karl Rove, except much handsomer. If he had gone into entertainment, he would have been the head of a major network. Luckily for National City, he had gone into real estate development instead. Just the man you needed in the months after an Independence Day style alien attack.

Now he had gathered the CEOs of National City's 25 largest companies, a brain trust some might call it. He was hoping to turn it into his cheering section. Some of the men in the room, and one of the two women, were certainly already on his side, saw the world the way he wanted them to see it. Then there was James Olsen and Lena Luthor. Luckily, no one took the ex-photojournalist-turned-temporary-CEO seriously. And if they did, well, Edge had ideas about how to handle that particular micro-problem.

Of greater concern was the Luthor. When she had first taken over LuthorCorp, as it was then known, Edge had assumed that she would be on his side, as Lex had always been. When that turned out not to be true, at least he had assumed that her resume as an engineering genius would keep her from being savvy about the business side of things. But her Harvard MBA had been well earned, and she surprised him at every stride. He had chosen to invite her to the meeting against advice from his directors. Keep your friends close and your enemies closer, as the saying went...

Now Morgan Edge leaned down to gloat over the scaled-down replica of National City: its buildings, private and public spaces, all of which had less to do with people in Edge's mind than with the money they would give him, as his due, as their savior.

"People like to argue that capitalists are only concerned with themselves, but truth is, without big business, this city would still be in ruins from those Daxamites. But look at us now. Bustling! I think we should all give ourselves a pat on the back. And let's not forget to glad-hand the mayor as well. Without him, none of this could have happened."

The mayor jovially shook his head. "It's you, Morgan, it's all of you. In six months, you've done the impossible."

James Olsen and Lena Luthor, from opposite sides of the long conference table, said, "Let's not forget about Supergirl."

James nodded at Lena, who continued. "Supergirl literally did all the heavy lifting."

"Yes, exactly," said the mayor. "Which is why I'm excited about the Girl of Steel statue unveiling at the waterfront."

Edge wandered over the windows overlooking the city. "I'm afraid it's going to take more than a pretty statue to get people to come down that... slum of a waterfront."

"I'm still working on the Zoning Commission, Morgan," said the mayor.

"You'd do better to explain how my development will revitalize that neighborhood, starting with moving out homelessness and crime, moving in opportunity and an expanded... tax base." He rubbed his fingers together in the age-old sign for money.

Quietly, James said, "We've heard your sales pitch, Morgan. We all have."
"Yes, I'm sure everyone here has had a chance to read CatCo's inflammatory articles about that 'sales pitch.' Articles that have become increasingly biased ever since you took over babysitting Cat Grant's company."

Lena looked at the notes in front of her. She was the only one who had the folder open and the paperwork spread out in front of her. She said, "Your development would level that whole area, force people from their homes just to build high rises for the wealthy."

"Lena! Are you spouting the CatCo line? Well, I guess we shouldn't be surprised, given how much good press they've been giving you lately."

James said, "She's earned that good press, by donating millions of dollars to the rebuilding efforts."

"Hm. Funny. I thought it was restitution for what her brother did. Or was it her mother? Or was it Lena, seeing as she's the one who brought the aliens here in the first place. Little bit of advice, Lena. Guilt is not a good business strategy."

"No? Well, neither is exploitation."

"I just want a fair hearing, that's all. I'd hate to think that any of you here were unfair... Hm? Now, my people have put together a great spread. Why don't we all adjourn next door and have a sample of that. Mr. Olsen, you're welcome to join us as well. We can disagree and still break bread together."

Lena stood up. "You know, Edge, you are not as powerful as you think you are."

All the other CEOs hurried out of the room, either very hungry or unwilling to watch a pinstripe version of a World Wildlife Wrestling takedown.

Edge paced toward Lena. "Oh no? Then what are we doing in my office?"

He smiled and followed the others out. Women. What did they even think they could achieve in business? This was a man's game, like football and bull fighting.

He would show her that, in time. He had plans. She wouldn't like his plans.

That made him very happy.
On the One Hand

Cat Grant had little tolerance for fools.

On the one hand, that had always made her brilliant at her job of writing, shaping narratives, and guiding a media empire. On the other hand, it meant that her prescription for LexiPro and her long-term relationship with her therapist had both outlasted all three of her husbands.

Cat Grant was very good with words.

On the one hand, that meant that her carefully worded terminations usually sent hardened adults crying out of her office. On the other hand, lately, it meant she had to set her media empire aside to help her old friend Olivia Marsden deal with a press that had become used to the idiocy of the last, unlamented president of the United States, the Cheeto-in-Chief who had been impeached, imprisoned, replaced by a series of his cronies, who also got impeached, and most recently outvoted by the women, people of color, gays and other disenfranchised souls who took up their power and voted for a sane, brilliant diplomat to make America less embarrassed on the international stage again.

It was Cat's civic duty, really, to become President Marsden's Press Secretary. Too bad for Cat that it meant dealing with people used to dumbed-down fake news and white supremacy in the White House.

Well, not anymore.

"Okay, Carl."

"Does President Marsden believe that climate change is real?"

"Uh, yes! Yes, she does. She also believes that two plus two equals four and that the Earth is round, because the president is not a moron. Any third grader knows that global warming is the biggest threat of our time and I'm happy to say that the intellectual capacity of our president is not inferior to that of a nine-year old. Next. Question."

Cat Grant believed in people's capacity to learn and change and grow.

So, on the one hand, she gritted her teeth and kept answering inane questions, hoping that these reporters would learn. And grow. And fucking stop asking stupid questions and start actually asking real questions.

And on the other hand, when President Marsden asked her--begged, really--to become her Press Secretary, even though it meant putting her assets in a blind trust and giving James Olsen a second chance as the CEO of her company, well, she had done that. Only time would tell whether her faith in humanity was, how shall we put it? Misguided?
This Job Just Got Harder. Again.

The editorial meeting was less hard to handle than Morgan Edge's self-congratulatory fanboy event. At least at CatCo, James had power. He didn't have to look around the room at 23 white men, two white women, and himself, the only person of color at the table. Cat Grant had always built diversity into her hiring practices from the start, arguing that diversity of background made for more complexity of thought. As a photographer, James had never really noticed the difference it made.

That was then.

At least Kara was a little less... odd... than she had been recently. He actually had a good conversation with her about Cat's new job as White House Press Secretary.

She even said, "With Ms. Grant in DC and Snapper on sabbatical, it's going to be oddly congenial around here."

The editorial meeting was not hugely productive. The baseball team was tanking, so nothing much to talk about there. Crime was down 65%, largely due to Supergirl working relentless overtime. And Kara said that "Supergirl has been too busy to do a one-on-one about the Daxamite invasion," giving James a look that said, "Question me on this and I will fry you with my eyeballs."

Not a good day for news.

He did his best. He said, after the other reporters left, "Kara, are you sure you're okay to write this, or is this going to bring up old stuff?"

"I said I would."

"Okay, well, I'm here if you want to talk or grab a drink..."

"You want me to write the article or grab a drink?"

James smiled, because, with Kara, that's what James did. He said, "Okay, I'm on your side. You know, I know more than anybody how much Supergirl's been taking lately..."

"Well, that's my job."

Behind them on the TV screen behind James's desk, Morgan Edge was being his usual ass-hole self. James picked up the remote. "What's this blowhard up to now?"

On the screen Edge said, "I'm here to announce a bold new direction for my company. I'm buying CatCo."

James Olsen's stomach sank, all the way to Atlantis. He could hear in his head Cat Grant fuming, "You had one job, James. ONE. JOB."

To be fair, Kara's face lost all its color and for the first time in six months, she gave him a look that was ripe with emotions: shock, anger, fear, annoyance.

Rage.

Then she went back to the blank look she had worn for the last 180 days. "I need to get to work," she said.
And he was pretty sure it was Supergirl work that she was referring to, not her work as a reporter for CatCo.

Well, shit.
Lena Luthor was used to people using her for her name or money and then disappearing out of her life. She was used to people being nice to her until they actually realized who her relatives were, and then disappearing out of her life. She was used to sexist male chauvinist pigs talking down to her, when they even deigned to notice her at all.

She had never gotten used to Kara Danvers, sunshine personified, bringing her food to remind her to eat, chattering endlessly about the beauties of National City, the inequity of how Snapper Carr treated her, the new pop-up restaurants she wanted to try--particularly the ones with All You Can Eat nights--and Disney movies.

She had never gotten used to the things Kara would do when they were alone together, either the things she did with superspeed, that made Lena come apart at the seams in minutes, or the things she did when they had the red sun lamps that diminished her power and let Lena bite her or--

Well. Yes. Those things.

But what Lena really wasn't used to, although the last six months had taught her new ways of being painfully patient, was Kara Danvers ignoring her, avoiding her.

And Lena Luthor had suffered a lot of being ignored and avoided over the years. It was usually by people who were frankly beneath her notice, men like James Corben or Morgan Edge. Not people she loved. Lex. Kara. The list was short. She should probably add Jess. Just maybe Winn Schott.

So when Kara strode into her office, she was shocked, thrilled, relieved, hopeful. She had just been watching the news about Edge's goal of buying out CatCo to "unbias the media" (as if) so she was ready for Kara's questions.

"Hey," Lena said. "I hate that sentient bottle of cheap cologne. Did you know?"

"No. James was blindsided too. He thinks it's his fault for getting in Edge's face." Kara put down her bag and sat in the chair across from Lena's desk.

"Nobody spends that kind of money on a grudge. Do you think the shareholders will listen to Cat?"

"Well, Cat had to put her shares in a blind trust when she became Press Secretary. But I've been doing some research. Edge has been quietly buying up shares until today, when he put a tender offer to the majority shareholders."

Lena got up and poured them both glasses of water, something she often did when their conversations got uncomfortable.

"Right," she said, "no more free press."

"You've invested in his portfolio, though. I figured if you talked to him, you might be able to be persuasive."

"Edge doesn't respect any opinions that aren't his own, especially not a woman's."

"Lena, you helped Supergirl save the world. How hard can one stubborn sexist be?"

Lena smiled. "Yeah, I'll see what I can do."
"Thanks!" Kara stood and grabbed her bag.

Lena moved to stop her. "Oh, hey, I mean I miss you. Is everything okay? Cuz I keep trying to make plans and you keep ditching."

"I just, I've been busy."

"Okay, so I just, I wanted to say that I'm sorry for the part I played with what happened to Mon-El, and that I'm here for you if you still want that."

Kara looked down. "You did what you had to do. And that was Supergirl's call, not yours. So."

Lena's tablet showed the news of a burglary in Old Town. Kara said, "Anyway, I should get going."

Lena said, "Sure, but brunch? Sometime soon?"

And Kara only nodded as she exited Lena's office, and Lena felt like that inevitable part of every single relationship she had ever had--the other person fleeing her presence--was happening.

Again.
After work, the gang from the DEO rolled into the alien bar, and M'gann served them all their regular drinks, except that she brought J'onn a Moscow mule. There was, they all agreed, a lot to be said for having a psychic bartender. They sat around the table, letting the day's stresses and surprises slide from their shoulders when Winn suddenly shouted, "Oh. My. God! YOU GUYS! Vasquez and Alex are the cutest couple EVER!"

J'onn just rolled his eyes. James, who had just gotten there after dealing with the panic at CatCo about Morgan Edge's threat to buy the company, said, "Wait, what? Did I miss something?"

Vasquez leaned back in her chair. "Keep up, Olsen."

Winn squeed, "But you GUYS! They have matching Claddagh rings! That's so CUTE!"

Vasquez and Alex both rolled their eyes.

James asked, "Wait, does that mean you guys are engaged?"

"No!" said Alex quickly. "It means we care about each other. Like, a lot. And we are each other's. Except not necessarily forever. Just yet."

Winn's face fell. "So they're non-engagement rings???

"Exactly!" said Alex. She glanced around. "Oh, shit!"

Eliza walked in.

Alex saw her mother and swallowed her beer wrong. Eliza joined the gang at the table, put her handbag on the table and declared, "God, I could use a drink. All the academic posers come to every lecture to mansplain my topic to me during the Q&A, and I don't have laser eyes to shut them up with."

J'onn signalled M'gann, who brought her a gin and tonic.

"Oooh, my favorite. Thank you, J'onn. Hi, honey. And Kara?"

"Kara, well, who knows these days. Probably flying around protecting people."

Maggie muttered, "Cuz it's not like the NCPD could be expected to do our jobs without her."

James sighed. "And she is pretty much certainly not writing the article I asked for last week."

Eliza opened her mouth to defend her daughter, but Alex cut in. "Mom, have you had any luck with the alien antidepressant? She's getting worse. No affect most of the time, focusing only on her protective side of her life, not showing up for game night or pizza night or sister night. Just working, practically 24/7."

"Sweetie, one of the reasons I came to give this lecture today was so I could work with the doctors that Lena hired for the new alien hospital. We're meeting tomorrow morning to compare notes."

Winn's phone buzzed. "Oh! Looks like Agent Chen got a lead on the mercenary. Supergirl's going to meet us at the DEO."

They all piled into J'onn's black SUV and "Stop Calling Me Spacedad" drove.
Eliza pushed Alex's hair behind her ear. "This new cut is... interesting, Sweetie."

Winn cut her off. "So, Mrs. Danvers--"

"Eliza."

"Right. Eliza! Did you read about the new smart fabrics research going on at MIT recently?"

Privately, Alex promised to upgrade her little brother's video game library in the near future. They got to the DEO without any matricidal incidents.

Supergirl met them there, as promised, and she was still in Relentlessly Serious Mode. "You were able to track the merc with his blood?" she asked.

"Meet Robert DuBois," said Winn. "He goes by Bloodsport, which is not any sport that I've ever heard of..."

"What do we know about him?" asked J'onn.

"Oh, you remember those bombings at City Hall a few years ago? That was him. And he's been AWOL ever since."

Supergirl stepped forward and took Winn's keyboard, typing in a query. "His file says he's ex-military."

"Where was he stationed?" asked Alex.

"Fort Harrison," said Winn. "Like twenty minutes outside the city."

Supergirl frowned at the monitor. "He worked security detail."

J'onn growled. "Then he would have knowledge of all the ins and outs of the base, sneak on, locate weapons, anything he wanted to."

"Winn," said Supergirl, "Call his CO, see what he knows about him." She turned to march away.

Winn took his keyboard back and started typing but quickly yelled, "Whoa, whoa, the site is down, the signal is scrambled. Somebody hacked this."

Still frowning, Supergirl said, "I've got this," and marched off. Alex looked at Winn, Winn looked at J'onn, and J'onn looked at Alex, who was visibly distressed.

Eliza said, "Sweetie, don't you think--"

But J'onn said, "Eliza, I would like to ask you some questions about Kryptonian neurobiology. If you wouldn't mind."

He led her away from the command center and Alex sank gratefully into a rolling chair next to Winn. "And he thinks he's not our Spacedad."
Priorities, Changing

When Supergirl landed at the army base, she found guards out cold on the ground. So she went to the nearest building, X-rayed it, found it lined with lead, and went in anyway, knowing that it was, most likely, a trap built for her--maybe for her Metropolis-based cousin,--but more realistically, for her.

She strode into the building, trying to pierce the walls with her X-ray vision, but was stalled at every point. Suddenly an orange blast of energy shot at her from one of the walls. She went flying and fell, the pain a stab in her gut, but then a small squad of soldiers scrambled into the space with their M16s and their camos--

But it wasn't enough. The walls spat orange fire. And although Supergirl sidestepped it at first, the last shot, she let hit her and send her flying toward the far wall, where she jumped to her feet and let off a double shot to the wall with her laser eyes, exploding the weapon. She turned to see the villain run toward a door but at the same time, one of the downed soldiers, yelled, "Help! Help me!"

She went to him, saying, "It's okay. I'm here. I've got you." She x-rayed his chest. "You've got no internal injuries. You're going to be okay."

An ominous beeping started in her ear, signaling an emergency. She ran out of the building and shot up into the night sky, hurtling between skyscrapers lit up like Christmas trees, until she reached Cat Grant's balcony at CatCo. In the blink of any eye she changed back into her Kara clothes and strode into James's office, where he stood, hands on hips and decidedly unbesieged by rogue aliens.

"What's wrong? Why'd you use the signal watch?"

Quietly, he said, "It's time to get that article in."

"You beepered me...for a deadline? That watch is for emergencies only."

"I know what the watch is for, but this feels like an emergency. I'm worried about you, Kara. And at a certain point in time, I have to be your boss."

"Oh, do not ever, EVER, do that again."

"What, ask you to do your job?"

"I am doing my job."

"No, Supergirl is doing her job. Kara Danvers isn't. She has been completely off the radar."

"Oh, well, I'm sorry if I've been a little busy. The world isn't going to save itself."

"Yeah, but you still have a job, that makes you you."

"No, what makes me me is Supergirl. That's who I am at my core. And you're one to talk, Guardian."

"Okay, yes, Guardian is important to me, but so is James Olsen, and he runs CatCo, and that job is important."

"You know, if I'm expected to set Supergirl aside just to write this article, then maybe being a reporter is a bad idea. I have important things to do, but not at CatCo and not as Kara Danvers."
"Kara, don’t do this."

"I quit."

In an instant, she was back in her supersuit and back in the sky, rocketing up to the stars, back where her life had started. She couldn’t fly fast enough away from her old life at CatCo. After years of fetching lattes and layouts for Cat Grant, who had been mean but brilliant, followed by never being able to satisfy Snapper Carr, who had mostly just been mean, being bossed around by her friend James Olsen, a brilliant photographer who had, she had long privately thought been promoted to the level of his incompetence, she was absolutely and uncategorically through with it all.

She could bend steel, freeze fire, and throw a megaton alien prison into space. She did not need to deal with this shit. Maybe if she had not been so distracted by her life as a mild mannered reporter last year, she would have considered her actions more carefully when that pod landed in the middle of the city. Maybe she would have acted less rashly.

Maybe she could actually have saved the world rather than counting on Lena Luthor to do it for her. Again.
When All Your Scenarios Go Astray

Susan Vasquez was having a bad day.

This was not by itself unknown or unexpected exactly. But the manner of the badness was very unexpected, and that made it worse.

Agent Vasquez's job was to come up with tactical scenarios. For pretty much everything, every eventuality that the DEO might face in the short and long term, any rogue alien that might be targeting National City's inhabitants or its hometown hero. But these things? Yeah, she hadn't seen any of these things coming.

First, J'onn informed her that General Lane just admitted to having an alien warship in his possession, and that she needed to take a tactical team to his base to repossess it for the DEO. But before she could do that, Winn showed them pictures sent to them by the military contractor that DuBois robbed, pictures of what was taken: not just aluminum rods, but a high pressure regulator.

"What would he use that for, sir?" she asked J'onn, as Alex strode into the room.

Winn said, "Well, he also stole the cloaking device from the Daxamite ship."

Alex blanched. "With the regulator, he could stabilize the internal pressure of an F18 or B52 to withstand the force emitted by a cloaking shield, retrofitting it into a fully cloaked aircraft. Our equipment wouldn't detect that. Even Supergirl's x-ray vision couldn't detect that. He could drop a nuke on the city and we would never even know he was overhead."

"Agent Schott," said J'onn, "I want every flight in and out of National City scanned for munitions, air and space. Agent Danvers, put your team on tactical alert and notify Supergirl. Agent Vasquez, take your team and get the ship from Lane. We may end up needing it sooner than we thought."

"Yes, sir," said Vasquez grimly. Because nothing could possibly go wrong with that idea.
When Lena walked into Morgan Edge's office, he was being a walking cliché, a CEO practicing his
golf putt on company time. He hit the ball toward the door and she stepped forward and stopped it
with her foot.

"Lena! Twice in my office in as many days. People are going to start talking..." He grinned.
"Morgan, you have all the charisma of a Michael Douglas movie from the nineties."
"You didn't come all this way just to flatter me did you?"

Ah, straight white guy. He would think that was a compliment. She said, "I came because I have a
proposition."

"Oooh. I like propositions."

"You know I disagree with you on the waterfront development, but you are the best developer in
National City."

"Let me get you a drink before that compliment leaves a bad taste in your mouth."

"Your work is why I've invested in your portfolio and why I intend to invest more."

"Let me guess. You want me to stay away from CatCo."

"Oh, come on, Morgan. CatCo isn't a good business for you and you know it. There's a city out there
that really needs to be rebuilt. That's what you're good at. Focus on that."

"You know, you can take the Luthor out of the logo, but people still aren't going to trust you. And
that's a really easy sentiment to reinforce once I have CatCo's editorial under my control. People love
to believe what they read."

"Using CatCo to defame your enemies and promote your own agenda. That's despicable."

"No. It's good business."

Lena's face went hard. "I'll see myself out."

She didn't bother calling her driver to get her. She walked the fourteen blocks back to L-Corp,
considering her options. (And if she briefly fantasized about hiring an assassin to take out the rat
bastard, ever so briefly even considered such a horrible idea, well, no one ever had to know.) There
were multiple ways to block a hostile takeover, but it was harder with Cat's shares in a blind trust.

She texted Jess a long list of instructions: files to pull up, people from different departments to sound
out, other people to set up meetings with, and oh yes, probably lunch since Kara was unlikely to just
pop in anytime soon. Then she walked the rest of the way to L-Corp, angry and frustrated and
thoughtful, very thoughtful.
Courting Emptiness

Supergirl stood on a building across from the wharf where the statue was going to be unveiled. The red, blue and gold banner with her family's crest currently hid the statue, which she figured was just as well. She had strongly mixed feelings about anybody praising her after all of the mess with the Daxamites. If they only knew that she was the one to blame for all of it, they would be burning her in effigy, not erecting a statue in her honor.

Her phone buzzed.

LabRat: James says you quit.

Supergirl stared at the text, then typed.

Potsticker: Being a reporter was getting in the way of doing my real job.

LabRat: CatCo is important. You worked for years to get to this point.

Potsticker: Wasn't worth it.

LabRat: Tell that to Cat.

Potsticker: She can move on. Why can't I?

LabRat: I'm worried about you. You're pushing down feelings and making bad decisions.

Potsticker: I made my bad decision a year ago. This is me fixing that. I'm not a human.

LabRat: You're my

Potsticker: I tried to be, but I'm not. Kara Danvers was a mistake.

Potsticker: So if you have an update about work, I'd love to hear it. Otherwise

LabRat: DuBois has tech to cloak a nuke. We think the unveiling is his target.

LabRat: Also, Kara Danvers is my favorite person. She saved me more times than Supergirl ever could.

LabRat: So just think about that while you're trying to get rid of her.

Supergirl stared at her phone, and then slipped it back into her boot and resumed staring at the crowd, the children wearing capes with her crest on the back, the smiling adults. Everyone inexplicably happy.

A flash of red turned into J'onn by her side.

"It's quiet up here. You know I rarely flew on Mars. It was for battle, not for pleasure. But when I first got here, I'd spend hours flying. It was the only way I could feel empty."

"Yeah, well, that's not why I'm up here."

"Forgive me for saying, but you seem to be courting emptiness of late, and that's not you."

"I tried to be Kara Danvers for fifteen years, but I'm not supposed to be her. Not supposed to be
"But you have a human heart now. It aches. It scars. But it keeps on beating. If you try and cut it out, you will lose something essential."

"I can't help people if I'm... broken."

"You are not broken." Space Dad put his arm around her shoulders and pulled her in. "You are the strongest person I know. You saved me, remember. You taught me that my loss made me stronger. That was Kara Danvers, not Supergirl."

"Do you still dream about them?"

"Sometimes."

"These past couple of months, when I dream..." She swallowed. "We should keep our eyes on the sky right now."
Alex ambled through the crowd on the wharf, watching people's eyes and hands, looking out for something different, something dangerous.

In her ear, she heard Vasquez's voice. "Agent Danvers, you there? Got something that needs your attention."

"I'm here. East side. You?"

"West. All clear. About last night."

"What about last night? You mean my mom?"

"Eliza is a subject for a very different day. I was thinking about what you said about the rings."

"This is neither the time nor the place--"

"Do you not want to marry me? I know we put it off, but the way you reacted to Winn and James last night..."

"I just, I didn't want you to feel trapped. With me."

"Trapped? Me trapped? Or you? Trapped with me."

"God, no, Vasquez. I want to be your wife. I want a house, I want a dog, all of it. I just, I keep thinking back to what Maggie said last year about how relationships with baby dykes never last. And I just thought, well..."

"What? Talk to me. Tell me what's going on."

"What if you're only with me because you feel sorry for me? And what if you don't want to marry me, because, duh, baby dyke, and what if you are using the rings to let me down slowly?"

The silence rang loudly in Alex's ear.

Eventually, she heard a long, careful intake of breath. "Alex..."

"I'm right, aren't I?" Alex's words only just managed to not come out on a sob.

"Alex, no. No. No, no, no! You are, I discovered who you are on the mat and in the field and in the command center, and yeah, in your bed, and the only thing I want for my life? Is you. Agent Alex Heart-of-My-Beating-Heart Danvers. I'm going slow because in the past, I've gone too fast. Yeah, I U-Hauled once or twice, not gonna lie. And it was too fast, and it got fucked up and I really cannot bear to have that happen with you. To go too fast and to move before you are absolutely ready. Just like I would never adopt a dog unless I knew it was for life. Okay, that's a bad example, I--"

"It's not. It's not a bad example!" There were tears in Alex's throat. "When Kara first heard about people who moved and gave up their dogs to kill shelters--"

"Honey--"

In both their ears, they heard Winn's voice, "Oh, you guys are my favorite couple!"
"Winn, shut up!"

"Winn, get off the comms!"

Alex shook herself free of that conversation, just as a young girl raced past her, bumping into her as she went, and behind her a dark-haired woman called out, "Rubes! Ruby, come on back here. Apologize to the lady."

The girl came back. "I'm very sorry for bumping into you."

"Totally okay," said Alex. "Thank you for the apology."

"Can I go now, Mom? I want to get up close."

"Just don't get so far ahead I can't see you, okay?"

Alex smiled at the mother. "She's fun."

"Thanks. Just trying to enjoy the microsecond I have left before she's a teenager." She followed her daughter to the front of the crowd gathering in front of the riser for the unveiling.

The microphone squawked. The mayor announced, "People of National City. Please welcome the chairwoman and CEO of L-Corp, Lena Luthor!"

The crowd applauded.

Lena stepped up to the podium, grinning. "Now, I know you didn't come out to see me, so I'll start with the good stuff, and then I'll say just a few very brief words. My fellow citizens of National City: the Girl of Steel."

She waved toward the enormous crest of the House of El and the banner dropped to reveal the statue, shining like silver in the sun, of Supergirl rising into flight.

Alex's heart warmed to see her sister memorialized and honored by the people she had sworn to protect, introduced with such obvious fervor by the woman she had stood by time and time again--against good sense, against her friends' and family's approbation, always, always rightly--finally, Kara getting her due.

"I am so honored to be able to present this statue of our hometown hero," continued Lena. "Some of you must be thinking, I know, it's a cold day in hell, a Luthor praising a Kryptonian, but... ever since I came here, she has been an inspiration to me. She has been a mentor, and, most importantly, she's been a friend."

And then the Earth began to shake.
Chaos Requires Greater Focus

On the roof above the wharf, J'onn gave Supergirl a small smile. "There you are."

Lena was saying, "Ever since I came here, she has been an inspiration to me. She has been a mentor, and, most importantly, she's been a friend."

Supergirl smiled, despite herself.

J'onn said, "Now would be a good time for you to get down there and join the crowd."

And then the Earth began to shake.

Instinctively Lena ducked down behind the podium. (Aw, Luthor, again? Seriously? she thought.)

Alex whipped her gun out and scanned the sky. (A new alien menace? Again?)

Vasquez whipped her gun out and scanned the crowd. (Yup, saw this coming.)

"Agent Schott!" shouted J'onn into the comms. "Did you see where that missile came from?"

"There's no heat signature. There's no atmospheric disruption. There's no electromagnetic trail. Alex, have you seen anything?"

Alex replied, "Negative visual contact. It came out of nowhere."

Vasquez passed Alex, pulling a woman up by her arm and pushing her toward the venue's exit. "Let's go! Keep moving!"

Winn said, "You know what? We are pulling up every security feed within a two-mile radius. There has got to be an origin point for whatever just hit the waterfront."

Supergirl said, "J'onn, can you locate DuBois telepathically?"

"I'll try!" His eyes glowed bright red as the crowd around them scattered in all directions. "I can't sense DuBois's mind!"

Winn said, "I don't get it. The cloaking device should not be able to cloak a missile."

"Then what just hit us?" shouted J'onn. "And where did it come from?"

Supergirl ignored the chaos around her and looked past the wharf, to the start of the seas beyond. She said, "The pressure regulator wasn't meant for high altitudes. It was meant for low altitudes. They're underwater."

And then she leapt into the sky. And then she dove into the sea.

She had never actually ever tried to move a submarine under water.

On the other hand, she had never had to chase a missile fired from underwater toward its above-water target. So having shifted the sub, she raced after the missile, trying desperately not to inhale until they both breached.

And then the thing exploded, still in the water, and Supergirl lost sight of
everythi--
Ruby was lost in the crowd, in the chaos. Sam couldn't find her. She didn't care about which direction might be safest, as the cops were trying to lead everyone to safety: she automatically moved in the opposite direction. She would find her daughter, her tiger cub. Her child.

So right after she was blown to the ground by the force of whatever that was--an earthquake? a missile?--she pushed herself up and immediately scanned the crowd for her cub, her one responsibility.

She pushed people out of her way, violently, screaming, "Ruby? Ruby?"

From the crowd, she heard her girl. "Mom? MOM?"

Cracks swelled across the sidewalk. Sam went flying, fell, pulled herself together again and rose, hysterical, shouting for her daughter.

She saw her several yards away, pinned down by a mini-tower-thing, something that had apparently been used to direct spotlights toward the stage.

Sam leaped forward and grabbed the bars and pulled and screamed and pulled, until they came up off Ruby, until her daughter was safe. And when they were hugging out their terror together.

And just as Sam was thinking, "Well, here we are, together, at the end of all things..."

Supergirl rose from the waters with a submarine in her hands...

(Pretty badass, right?)
Kara felt herself drifting away. She heard pale voices that she vaguely recognized: Alez, begging her to come back, Winn begging her to simply.... what? Mon-el begging her to bring him back to the Earth he damaged.

And then suddenly.

Lena Luthor.

Demanding that she show up for The Meeting. She couldn't honorably avoid The Meeting, right? She had to wake up for Lena, right?

Certainly she had to wake up to shift a nuclear submarine out of the way. And then, to lift it high above the wharf, and she could easily do that.
Lena had watched the drama at the wharf, first from close up, and after the fight, from a distance, at L-Corp, watching the TV coverage, with Jess.

Supergirl lifting a submarine out of the water. That is the sort of thing a dramatic-as-fuck lesbian like Lena Luthor would find sexy as hell. Even Jess made some not-entirely heterosexual noises when they watched Supergirl rising out of the sea with a submarine in her hands above her head.

Lena couldn't blame her.

But Lena knew that such exhausting activities would mean that Kara would be distant for a while, until the superhero rested up. So she waited until Kara texted her about maybe getting dinner before she asked her to swing by L-Corp. She was nervous about it, but the moment Kara walked into her office, she gained courage.

"Hey!"

"I was just about to call you, about the attack at the unveiling."

"Oh no, I'm fine. Supergirl got her man. Now we have to discuss ours. I spoke to Edge..."

"Please tell me you convinced him not to buy CatCo."

"Well, you can't convince a bully of anything--"

"So what, CatCo's gone?"

"No... I... bought it."

"You're kidding. Are you kidding?"

"Pretty badass, right? Just trying in my own small way to be more like Supergirl."

"Wow. Lena..."

"And I was hoping you could break the story."

Kara grimaced. "Oh. Ah. I actually quit."

"Well then unquit. I can't do this without you. I literally know nothing about running a media empire."

"Well, neither do I."

"Well you know more than I do. You've studied under Cat and I mean I trust you... How often do you get to work with your best friend?"

Before Kara could answer, Morgan Edge walked into the room.

He said, "You're more of a lunatic than your brother is."

Kara growled, "Excuse me?"

"I could ruin you."
Lena said, "You are dangerously close to being thrown out by security."

Kara stepped between them. "You know, I'm going to leave and let you... handle.... this."

She marched past Edge, pulling off her glasses.

Edge said, "You are going to regret, so regret the day you screwed me. I sure hope you enjoyed yourself. Because now? You have all of my attention."

Lena said, "Oh well, I couldn't care less."
A blue and red blur landed on Lena's balcony, pulling Lena's and Edge's attention away from each other.

"Ms. Luthor. You finished with him?"

Lena smiled. "He's all yours."

Edge asked, "What do you think you're going to do?"

Supergirl smiled. It was an expression she had not indulged in for a while, and it felt... fitting.

She smiled even more as Edge squealed as she picked him up, threw him over her shoulder and took off into they sky with him. He squealed the whole way to their destination, and she didn't fly fast.

When Supergirl landed with Edge on a container ship, she dropped him to his knees on the topmost red container, he stayed there for a few minutes, still winded.

She said, "The attack on the waterfront. That was you. To clear the way for your development. You're the only person who had anything to gain from it."

"Yeah, well, anything."

"Not yet. But I see you, Edge. National City is my town." She smiled again. "And now you've got all my attention."

She took off into the sky.

"Hey, you can't just leave me here!"

Supergirl smiled, speeding as fast as she could across the Pacific Ocean, back to National City.
Never Satisfied

Alex was spending all of her free time lately in the lab, running computer simulations with the model she and Winn had built of Kryptonian brain chemistry. Some days Eliza was there too, trying to synthesize what they thought was the Kryptonian version of serotonin. So far neither of them was having much luck.

Alex crossed out another possibility in her notebook, or at least she tried to, but her pen seemed to be out of ink.

"Fucking of course," she muttered and snapped the pen in half in her hands--only to find that yes, it had had plenty of ink, all of which was now covering her hands.

Eliza looked up, concerned.

With a wan smile, Alex said, "Well there is a lot to be said for a black uniform..."

"Sweetie, you're too hard on yourself."

"Mom, Kara needed this like yesterday. We've got to find something to get rid of that dark cloud over her head."

"And we will," said Eliza, coming over and wrapping Alex in a hug. "Let's get that ink off your hands."

They moved to the emergency sink and as Eliza took Alex's hands, she stopped short. "Alex--"

"What?"

"This ring. Is that-- Are you and Vasquez engaged? Why didn't you tell me? Oh, sweetie, that's wonderful! But I would have thought you'd have said..."

"No, Mom, we're not engaged. We're just, I don't know, taking another step, giving each other a reminder that we love each other. We're not ready for marriage."

"Alexandra, I know that look. That's the look you get when you are trying to convince yourself of something."

"Mom, this is my first real relationship in my entire life. I can't rush it. We need to go slow, make sure that we're sure of what we're doing."

"Oh, honey, you know when it's right. The two of you were practically made for each other. And they call Kara the Girl of Steel. The two of you, back to back? All frowning and badass? I'm surprised you haven't at least moved in together. What do they call that? U-Hauling?"

"Mom, I'm pretty sure that U-Hauling lesbians is an urban myth. We're keeping our own apartments. Sometimes you need space, especially since we do work together."

"Well, but you are sleeping together at the very least?"

"Mom! I can't. I simply can't. I have to go." She stripped off her labcoat, blue splashes and all, and hurried out of the lab.

Up in the command center, Vasquez was playing with Winn's yoyo while Winn was describing the
newest video game that he was learning. "And I don't usually do first person shooter games, but this is wicked cool and-- Vasquez? Are you paying attention?"

"Nope. Sorry, Winn, I'm not. When I shoot someone, they are going to be real and they are going to be dead and then I clean my weapon and put it away and go grab a drink with my gorgeous girlfriend."

Alex walked in and immediately felt better. "Gorgeous girlfriend, eh? Are you two-timing me, Vasquez? Who is this gorgeous woman of whom you speak? Do I need to have a duel with her?"

Vasquez shook her head. "I am a one-woman agent, ma'am. No worries around me. Ready to knock off?"

"Please. My mom is being, well, Eliza, and I need to get out of here ASAP."

Vasquez winced. "How bad is it?"

"U-Hauling was mentioned. And not, obviously, by me."

Winn looked confused. "Since when is U-Hauling a verb?"

"Never you mind, Little Plaid Shirt. It's not something guys generally do, I'm pretty sure."

"Oh, wait! Is this some kind of sexual innuendo? And yuk, your mother?"

Vasquez stood, rolling her eyes and mussing Winn's hair. "It means moving in with your girlfriend, generally after only knowing her for a few months."

Winn looked relieved. "Well, I have evening shift, so have a beer for me too while you're at it."

As Vasquez drove her Beetle to Dollywood, she asked, "So, your hands. Do I even want to know?"

"I fought the pen and the pen won."

"Well, I always had a thing for inked dykes, but honey, that isn't usually the way that happens."

"You're freaking hysterical, did you know that?"

"I'm pretty sure that no one has EVER said that about me."

"Well, on the one hand, I totally believe that. On the other hand, you are very good at making me giggle. Which... is something else Eliza asked me about."

Luckily, there was a red light, and so when Vasquez hit the brakes and turned to stare at Alex, appalled, they didn't have an accident.

Alex nodded wearily. "I know, right?"

"How on Earth did that conversation even start?"

"I broke the pen. She noticed the ring, thought we'd gone and gotten engaged and not told her."

"Ouch. Does she really think that you would do such a thing?"

"Yeah, apparently. Honestly, I thought coming out would solve our relationship, after she so easily accepted the whole gay thing. But I feel like she's going back to her old habits. When I went to
Stanford, I wasn't smart enough for her. Now, I'm not gay enough for her."

"Well, my love, you are perfectly gay enough for me, and I'm pretty sure that you and I are the only ones entitled to opinions on that matter, and yours is more important than mine."

"I love you, Vasquez."

"As well you should."

Vasquez sounded very serious, but then she said most things with a frown. Alex stared at her as she drove, trying to decide if there were harmonics in Vasquez's voice that she should maybe be paying attention to, like maybe she hadn't been affectionate enough lately, she should love her more?

Vasquez glanced over, gaped and rolled her eyes. "Alex! I'm jokesing with you! I love you too, you idiot!"

"Oh, good. Phew!"

"You know what? Forget Dollywood. We are going straight home--"

"I thought you never did anything straight?"

"--directly home and I am going to show you how much I love you, and after we do the dishes I'm going to make mad and passionate love to you."

"Wait, but--"

"You're a Danvers. Food equals love. Duh."

And as the Beetle made a U-turn to head back to Vasquez's place, Alex smiled happily. Maybe her mom was right. Maybe she and Vasquez had been made for each other.
James walked into CatCo with a shit-eating grin on his face. While he had enjoyed his time training and then working at the DEO, it had been gruelling and a little bit humiliating, and going back to work in journalism, his first love, was a breath of fresh air. Thank God that President Marsden had asked Cat to be her new Press Secretary. James didn't know what other excuse he could have used to get out of the DEO honorably. And maybe he couldn't be Guardian anymore, but in a way that was also a relief. His time at the DEO, with its insistence on the Rules of Engagement that the military used to decide when or if to use force, made him question his brand of vigilante justice.

Back when the DEO (read: Supergirl) had kept Max Lord imprisoned without benefit of trial, James had insisted to Kara that she had to be better than her enemies. The adrenaline rush of being Guardian had blinded him to his own version of a similar Might-Is-Right injustice, and he had learned to be ashamed of himself. He had also learned to appreciate the importance of timely and accurate intelligence for a mission. And what else was journalism, if not that?

So he came to work smiling and optimistic, ready to do justice to the empire that Cat had founded.

Then Cat's elevator dinged, and he turned, almost in slow motion, to see, from the vantage point of Cat's--of his--goldfish bowl office, Lena Luthor, dressed to kill as always, stepping out of his private elevator.

And what the hell was SHE doing here?

He watched as Eve Tessmacher fangirled for Lena, and Lena both recognized her by name and also gave her permission to use HIS elevator simply to get HER coffee. Of all the nerve.

James approached Lena with a smile. "Ms. Luthor, I didn't know you'd be here this morning."

He offered his hand and she shook it with a grin. "Oh, I was able to get things in line over at L-Corp."

"That's good. Thank you so much for saving CatCo. You know, I was thinking about how to get you up to speed, like maybe, weekly meetings?"

"Oh, no, that's okay. I'll be here every day." She turned and strode into his office.

"Uh, every, every day?" He hastened to follow.

"Yeah, I've set things up at L-Corp so that I'll be able to dedicate my energy to learn the ins and outs of how things work at CatCo." She turned back in time to catch him making a face. "You seem surprised by this."

"Yeah. Yeah."

Kara strode in with a leather book with a ribbon on it. "Lena! Welcome to CatCo." She handed it to
Lena, who blushed.

"Oh, you didn't have to do this."

"It's a Danvers family tradition. First day of school you get a planner."

"That's lovely. In the Luthor household, the first day of school, we hired a private investigator to make sure our teachers' credentials were up to par."

They all laughed, but James was pretty sure she had been being serious. He said, "Um, Kara, so you knew Ms. Luthor would be here today?"

"Oh, yeah, she texted me this morning."

At his open-mouthed surprise, Lena looked repentant. "I should have communicated more clearly. I'm sorry, Mr. Olsen. It won't happen again."

"No, that's fine. It's just, we weren't ready for a change in management. In fact, we don't, we haven't even got an office set up for you--"

"Oh, that won't be necessary. I won't be needing an office. It's this new trend in CEOs. We like to roam free, ask questions and hear unfiltered conversations. It's much easier when you don't have a desk. Oh, Kara, do you think you can get me the dossier on the Edge investigation?"

But Kara was distracted by her phone, and the crinkle showed up between her brows. "Oh, uh, there's actually something I have to deal with. Can I get it for you later?"

Lena looked surprised. "Uh, sure, yes. Of course."

Kara hurried off. James stared after her. He knew that Lena knew that Kara was Supergirl, had for a long time before Kara finally told her, but she also looked just a little pissed off.

"I can get that for you, Ms. Luthor," he offered.

"Oh, no, that's okay. It can wait."

And she turned away to, presumably, roam free. In his building. Doing his job. And somehow he knew, he just knew, that she was going to end up doing it much, much better than he had, or than he could, even without the distraction of Guardian.

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When Supergirl landed in the DEO and strode into the command center, Alex and Winn were having their endless argument about Star Wars vs. Star Trek. She interrupted them, growling, "Hey, what was that general alert about?"

Winn said, "Wait, you get general alerts now? That's just for us analysts."

"I had them add me to the list. I want to know everything that is going on in National City."

J'onn hit his tablet, bringing up images from surveillance cameras onto the monitors on the wall above them. "Detective Sawyer brought this to our attention this morning. Mr. Schott?"

"Yeah," said Winn. "And we analysts thought we might be able to see something that the cops missed."
Maggie, standing off to the side, said, "She hit two banks yesterday, back to back."

The feeds showed a black-leather-clad woman walking into a bank with an empty bag, and proceeding unimpeded into the vault.

"Wait," said Alex. "Where are the guards?"

"Unconscious on the floor," said Maggie.

"What could do that?"

Winn said, "At first we thought it might be gas--"

"But toxicology came up negative," finished Maggie.

"According to reports," said J'onn, "she walked in with no weapon of any kind, and they all just got out of her way, let her take whatever she wanted."

Winn jumped. "Whoa! We have a silent alarm tripped at Twenty-First and Cedar."

Supergirl growled, "Looks like that's our new friend." She was out the window before Alex could even say "backup."

She landed at the bank spoiling for a fight, strode across the bank lobby, stepping over apparently unconscious bank customers and security guards. She stepped into the vault with her usual confidence. The blonde thief was casually stuffing her bag with stacks of hundred dollar bills, a small smile on her face.

With her deep Supergirl voice, the hero said, "Got you cornered."

"Do you," said the woman, like it wasn't even a question.

"What did you do to them up there?"

"Well, I wanted to play. And they didn't want to."

"You're not getting away with this." Even as she said it, Supergirl realized what a cheesy hero line it was.

The thief didn't smirk, just zipped her bag closed. "You think you're the cat and I'm the bird. Oh, you got it backwards." She picked up the bag and turned. "You can join me. Then you'll be happy. You see, money equals happiness. More money, more happiness."

"Your priorities are seriously out of whack."

"I know, right?" she chuckled sadly.

"Put the bag down."

The woman's face went serious and disappeared from view. The vault went bendy, like a carnival mirror, with things far away looking close and things to the sides leaning in towards the center. Then for a moment things went black except for a planet exploding.

From light years away, Supergirl heard Maggie Sawyer's voice telling her she was going to be okay, all evidence to the contrary, and she felt her hands support her as she slid to the floor, gasping for breath.
When she next came to, she was in the med bay of the DEO, lying on one of the beds as Winn scanned her. She groaned and pushed herself up to sitting. "What are you doing? I'm fine!"

Winn said, "Well, your scans are all coming up normal."

Maggie said, "None of the humans could remember what happened to them. Can you tell us anything?"

Supergirl said, "I don't know. It felt like the walls of the vault were closing in on me, like I couldn't breathe."

"It sounds like she made you feel claustrophobic," said Alex.

Supergirl frowned. "Claustrophobia is a human problem."

"You used to have episodes like that when you first came to Earth."

"That was a long time ago. We need to find out who she is and how to track her."

"Well," said J'onn, "at the moment, you're our only clue." His eyes went bright red and he stared into Supergirl's eyes.

Winn said, "Wait, I thought you couldn't read Kryptonian minds!"

"I can't, but I can scan her mind for residual psychic activity," said J'onn. "Well, our girl's a psychic, but she's not like me. Her choice of a particular type of psionic interference in your mind is one used only by metahumans." His eyes lost their glow.

Winn said, "All right, I'll start combing through the metahuman database."

"Good, and start monitoring potential target sites for unusual activity."

Supergirl said, "If we locate her, I'll take her down."

"It's not safe," said Alex. Because of course Alex would go there.

Supergirl frowned. "She caught me off guard last time. It's not going to happen again."

She marched through the DEO, nodding curtly to Vasquez at the command center, and pushed off from the balcony to fly over National City, her city. The place she had chosen to protect. As Supergirl, the Girl of Steel.

On her way to the bank, she flew over the waterfront and gave a little wave to her statue, shining in the sun. Wouldn't that be nice, she thought grimly. If I really were made of steel, I wouldn't have all these annoying... feelings.
This was the least fun part of a job that was very often not fun. Being a middle school principal had its ups and downs, like every job. But Principal Coburn hated having to call a parent of a good student to tell them that their son or daughter had gotten into a fight at school.

Mrs. Arias sat across from her desk, looking shocked and confused. "A fight? Ruby? But she's not--She doesn't--"

"No, ma'am, normally Ruby is a good student, a model student. But the two girls got into an argument and Ruby hit her."

"Well, how do you mean hit? Did she shove her?"

"She punched her in the face."

"Oh my god. Is the girl all right?"

"She wasn't injured, no. But Mrs. Arias, sometimes these things are signs of an underlying problem. Is everything all right with Ruby at home?"

"Yes, yes. Nothing out of the ordinary."

"I know you're a single parent. Has there been some sort of shakeup with Ruby's father--"

"No. He's out of the picture. It's just us."

"Okay, well, I don't mean to intrude. I just want to find out what's going on with Ruby, make sure this is an isolated incident."

"Well, I agree."

And Mrs. Arias marched out of the principal's office, gesturing to Ruby, who glumly followed her out of the building. Principal Coburn sighed. She was pretty sure that the mother was wrong on this one. Parents often couldn't see their children clearly at the best of times. She could only hope that the generally open Ruby would communicate her problems to someone, if not to her, to her teachers or her mother.

Lena Luthor was long used to being disappointed by people. By strangers, of course, but also by the people one would expect to always have your back. Family. Friends.

Lena could think of maybe two or three people (Jess first and foremost) who had never, ever disappointed her. But her acquisition of CatCo—a good business choice, a good choice for National City and the country from a purely political standpoint, and okay, let's follow Jess's lead in calling a spade a spade: a favor for a friend, her best friend, Kara Danvers—was starting to look a lot like the rest of the young Luthor's life: rife with disappointment.

First James Olsen, the photographer turned reluctant CEO, was showing squeamishness about Lena's management style. And it was a first for Lena and James that this time his problem seemed to be less that she was a Luthor and more that she was Lena, leading the company her way.

And that would have been fine except that Kara was either a) avoiding her, b) being negligent in her
job, or (most likely) c) prioritizing her Supergirl duties over the job that actually paid her rent. And to some extent Lena could understand that if it were the last. Except...

Except that Lena Luthor had gone out on a very lonely limb, with an exorbitant expenditure of money, to save CatCo.

Except that when Kara had said that she would protect Lena always, Lena had actually believed her.

Except that the two people that she had expected to step up to help her run CatCo were basically abandoning her physically and psychologically.

James said, "Did you think I wouldn't want to know about the meeting with the department heads? Is that why you didn't tell me?"

"No, I thought you would be too busy doing your job to chaperone me."

"I don't see myself as a chaperone. I see myself as someone who ran this company all last year."

And if she were only Lena, she would simply have felt the blows as they came, accepted them as her due for her arrogance in thinking she could actually save the company, shove down her feelings and attempt to do her job.

"All right, Mr. Olsen. I have a meeting with advertising in twenty minutes. I'll see you there."

"I'll see you in nineteen," he said.

But she was a Luthor, and she was going to do a hell of a lot more than that.

"Twenty will be just fine." She turned and left him steaming.
The Feared and the Fearful

Growing up in the Midwest, Psi had watched people. She watched how they walked, how they stood, how they spoke to each other. She listened to the words they said and how they said them. But she never really understood people. They rarely said what they really meant. They acted out of expectation of rewards, when they had time to think about their choices. When they didn't have time, they acted out of fear.

And that had fascinated her. It meant that if you needed someone to do what you wanted to do, and you couldn't reward them and you didn't want to wait around for them to figure out that doing what you wanted was in your, and therefore their, best interest, well, you had to make them afraid.

And then that... thing had happened. Someone had told her it was something in the water or something in the fish oil supplements she took. A lightning storm. Sunspots. Whatever. Didn't matter. One day she couldn't do this, and the next day she could.

So now she did.

//

And now, Supergirl watched Psi strutted across the parking garage of National City Savings Bank, carrying a newly filled bag of money and feeling warm on her insides, glowy, even.

And then she almost burned to a crisp as two laser beams nearly cut her down, but she felt the mind and ducked behind a concrete pillar. "Did you really think you could sneak up on a psychic?"

"Almost worked."

The woman shot her mind at Supergirl, knocking her over. Then she felt an obstacle, a pressure in her head. "Someone else has come to play."

"J'onn!"

"Your friend should be careful." The woman followed the pressure back to its source and turned it on her foe. In seconds, it yielded to her. She turned her attention back to the superhero. "Just us here now."

Supergirl blew her freeze breath at the woman and sent her into a car, but she turned and sent a psychic wave into Supergirl, until she stumbled and fell onto the floor of the garage.

"Mind over matter."

"What are you doing to me?"

"Fear is a powerful tool."

The sky darkened, the garage disappeared, and suddenly she was back on a dying Krypton, sitting in the pod as her mother reached for the button that would close the pod door and send it into space.

"Kara? Kara. I love you. Because of the Earth's yellow sun, you will have great powers on this planet. You will do extraordinary things."

The pod door closed and hissed as it sealed. The equipment lit up. The engine started and Krypton's
gravity gave way to the pod’s propulsion system. It took off before she could have a final look back at her parents, and as the pod zoomed through the atmosphere, she saw her planet coming apart as if it had fiery seams that could no longer hold it together.

Vaguely in the background, she heard a familiar voice yelling, "Supergirl? Supergirl!"

Alex.

Supergirl rolled over onto her back, finding herself once more on the tarmac floor of the parking garage, soaked with sweat and alone.

//

Winn watched the computer monitors and listened to the noises Supergirl was making on the comms. He watched Alex. He could literally watch Alex's blood pressure increase. He heard the same whimpers and screams that Alex heard. And he heard Kara come back from whatever happened, tell them she was fine, that she was flying in and not to worry.

She landed on the balcony, looking as confident as ever and told Alex and J'onn that she was fine, it was the same as before, she could do this next time. But something was off. Luckily, his database scan came through.

"Hey," Winn said. "I've got our girl! Gayle Marsh of Skokie, Illinois, until one day she snapped and went on a bank-robbing spree. Law enforcement calls her Psi after her psychic abilities."

"So what do we do now?"

Winn said, "Well, now that we know a little more, I thought I might try to enhance our psychic-damping technology to stop her."

"Good work, Agent Schott."

"I still love it when he calls me that!"

"But we still need to know how she's infiltrating people's minds, so get started."

Alex said, "I'll head down to the precinct, see if they have any updates on witness reports that might help."

When J'onn and Alex left the command center, Supergirl grabbed Winn by the arm. "I need to talk to you."

She dragged him off to the side and slipped into an electrical closet. He knew his arm was going to bruise, but he was used to having Kara's handprint on his arms. "Oh, very covert ops," he joked. "What's up?"

"I know how she's doing it. I felt it this time. She's targeting people's fear."

"How, how do you know that?"

"I saw my mother. I saw... Krypton... explode. I relived my last moments there. And then... being stuck in my pod in outer space for so long, knowing I could never have my life back. Psi put me back in that pod, completely trapped and alone. It was so quiet. Silence was the worst part. I felt completely cut off from everything and everyone I've ever known. We have to stop her, Winn."

"We have to tell J'onn and Alex."
"No! You can't tell Alex or J'onn. That's why I'm telling you. You're already altering the psychic dampeners. This will help, right?"

"Well, sure, knowing that she's targeting the fear centers of the brain..."

"Great!" Her phone rang. She looked down. "It's Lena. I've gotta go."

"Wait, Kara, I just. I'm really sorry that this is happening to you..."

"I'll be fine." She hurried out.

And Winn had known her for a few years now, known her well for two years, since she came out as Supergirl and had relied on him, and he knew this wasn't good and she had told him that he couldn't tell J'onn or Alex about this. But she hadn't specifically said he couldn't tell someone else, someone who also knew Kara very well from years of study, and cared about her for a lot of simple and complex reasons. He took out his own phone and typed a text message, hit Send.

Then he marched down to his lab to think about the amygdala, Supergirl's in particular, and how he might protect it.

Because that thing that was off about Supergirl? It was her smell. Supergirl, who could walk through fire, hold an exploding rocket, without noticeably getting warmer, had been sweating, and although it wasn't the worst thing he'd ever smelled (having survived boys' gym class and locker rooms in high school), he was pretty sure the world really didn't need to add Kryptonian sweat to its list of alien threats.

Even if he personally kind of thought it was just a little bit sexy.
Sometimes the Worst Doesn't Happen

Sam Arias had done, she allowed, not bad as a single parent. The last twelve years of her life had been hard, sure, but in the normal way that everyone's lives were often hard: bad decisions could have good results. Unrelenting hard work could, sometimes, allow you to get ahead. She was a pretty good person and she was raising an amazing daughter. And finally, finally, someone had seen her value as a manager, as a strategist, as a human being.

Lena Luthor.

So when she had had to quit that job as Vice President for Innovative Technologies at Lord Tech because of that sexual harassment issue that the company had refused to deal with? She had been terrified at the same time as she had been confident. She knew her value. But the mortgage. And the saving for Ruby's college fund. And the bills. It had been a sheer act of faith, and amazingly, it had been rewarded.

Because that was exactly the time that Morgan Edge had started making noises about buying CatCo, and a friend of a friend had suggested that Sam send her resume to Lena Luthor. He hadn't explained why exactly, just that you never knew and what was the worst that could happen?

But instead the best had happened. Suddenly Sam was going to be running L-Corp for Lena fricking Luthor. How cool was that?

Not that Ruby understood what an opportunity this was, or how the financial stability even a year doing this job would give her would set them both up for a future with less fear.

Fewer nightmares.

Sam could finally be the mom she had always wanted to be.

But did Ruby see that? No. Of course not. She was still stuck in a loop, thinking about that tower that Sam had lifted off her. She had apparently claimed to her friend Stephanie that Sam had superpowers and naturally, Stephanie had called her a liar.

So Ruby had hauled off and hit her in the face.

And if it had been a boy bullying her, say, Sam would have been okay with that (whatever she might have had to say to appease the principal). But this was different.

Superpowers. Ridiculous.

Adrenaline, plain and simple.
Out of the Closet, Into the Elevator

Eve Tessmacher had always idolized Kara Danvers. The woman was practically a superhero among personal assistants. Even Jess Huang, president of the Personal Assistant Association of National City, considered her a testament to the iron will and endless adaptability it took to work with finicky CEOs. The fact that she had worked for—with?—Cat Grant for three years, only almost getting fired once, at the beginning of her third year, was a freaking miracle. But Kara was assumed by most PAs as probably having near psychic powers, always knowing when Cat was rising in her personal elevator (cats did that, after all; it probably was pheromones or something), always able to find whatever Cat had lost most recently in the eternal chaos that was Cat's desk, always able to keep Cat safe from the craziness that happened regularly in National City just long enough for Supergirl to arrive and save them all.

So. Eve had always watched and learned. Unlike Siobhan Smythe, Eve had never wanted to usurp Kara's place. She wanted to learn from her, emulate her, become her.

And then the Daxamite invasion. Well, really, there was Mike too, and let's face it, Eve was still just the tiniest bit sore about THAT, although in retrospect, finding out that he was the prince of a slave-holding planet with parents who had genocidal ideas about humans, made Eve feel just a little bit of relief that, because of Kara, she had dodged that particular bullet.

But lately, she was watching a completely different Kara: not the sunny, capable, rambling Queen of Personal Assistants, but an emotionless drone who kept putting off assignments, hurrying away looking upset, and generally getting almost nothing done.

Huh, Eve wondered. What alien had come down from outer space and taken over Kara Danvers' body? Because this? This was not right.

And Eve Tessmacher had known Jess Huang for years, had heard about Lena Luthor, goddess of CEOs and Kara Danvers' best friend. And compared to Kara's rants, Jess sounded just a micron less enthusiastic about Ms. Luthor's good qualities: her beauty, her brains, her perseverance, her philanthropy, her kindness. So yes, Eve was a fan of Lena and had a list from Jess of all Lena's most and least favorite things.

So when Kara Danvers, Lena's most favorite thing, started ignoring her, avoiding her, not doing the job she was being paid by her to do? Eve panicked and called Jess. And Jess said she would handle it. But she had sounded troubled, and she asked Eve to keep an eye on Kara--she had said (rather melodramatically, thought Eve) "for all our sakes."

So when Lena went to Kara's desk, asked if she needed more personal time to get over her (dead?) boyfriend, then took her to task for not doing her job? Eve wanted to cheer.

"I did not spend $750 million dollars on a favor to a friend," said Lena. "I am a businesswoman. This is an investment. I want to get out of it everything I can."

"I will get on that lead at the bank, and interview him," said Kara.

"Thank you."

They moved off in different directions, but Eve watched Lena turn and look longingly after Kara, who was hurrying toward the employees' elevator as her phone was ringing.

Wait, thought Eve. Longingly? But that's--well, um, gay?
And then she remembered something Jess had said once a few years before about Lena and plaid flannel shirts, that Eve had let go completely over her head because Lena Luthor was fashionable enough to be a model, so she would never--

Unless of course the flannel was, what? Metaphorical? Subcultural?

Well, now, that was interesting...

//

Kara answered her phone as she strode toward the employees' elevator. It was Alex.

"Kara, she hit another bank."

"I'm on my way."

Kara entered the elevator, only waiting for the doors to close before she opened her shirt to show the crest of the House of El. She pulled off her glasses and tried to hit the button for the top floor, but her vision blurred and the elevator seemed to be shuddering. Her heart was beating faster than normal, confusion flooded her brain, and just as she had in the parking lot, she stumbled, couldn't keep her balance. She slid down the wall of the elevator, wiped the sweat off her forehead and cheeks, tried to focus on the floor numbers as they rose--

not fast enough! not fast enough!--

And then she was tearing off her Kara clothes and exploding through the roof of the elevator, the roof of CatCo, into the sunny daylight of National City. "I'm okay," she told Alex on her comms. "I'm headed there now."

"She got away," said Alex. "What took you so long?"

Then, Winn: "Supergirl, return to the DEO. I have some things."

And that could have meant anything, but she went anyway.

And when Winn asked her what happened, she was very clear. "She was there. She's getting stronger. She was in that elevator with me. She was in my head again."

"Well," said Winn. "There's no sign of any psychic intrusion."

"Wait. What?" asked Kara.

"I think that you just had a good old human panic attack."

"That's not possible. No. I, I'm stronger than that."

"Look she got in your head. Okay, she's forcing you to relive some serious trauma. Okay, that is going to take a toll on anyone. I don't care if you're the strongest person on the planet, which, okay... Look, it's nothing to be ashamed of."

"I never said I was ashamed!"

"No? Cuz you're kind of acting like it. Look, Kara, I get it. I have trauma too. It's like Vasquez always says, having lived through trauma is practically a prerequisite for being a DEO agent. And you know, she's not wrong. It makes us stronger at the broken places, like calcified broken bones are, or at least more beautiful, like those Japanese sculptures, broken vases put back together with
gold. It makes us more empathetic, more willing to sacrifice for others who are going through trauma, it causes us to--"

Alex walked in. "Hey, Winn, J'onn's looking for you. Oh, hey, what are you guys doing up here?"

"Just talkin'," said Winn unconvincingly. "Just hanging out, being friends. Yup."

Supergirl pushed off the med bed and moved past her sister. "I gotta go."
Alex, dressed to kill as always (literally, Winn thought) in her black tactical gear, with her thigh holster holding that new and nifty laser pistol, turned toward Winn, took one step closer to him.

"I'm good!" he said. "Thanks for asking."

She looked him up and down, the slight mascara on her eyelashes making the look very clear.

"Just a normal day in the DEO, man. Nothing abnormal happening here. Nothing happening..."

She took another step closer, entering his personal space, her hands on her hips, not confrontationally, no, not as if it would only take her right hand a few microseconds to slide the last two inches to the pistol in her holster.

Not at all.

"And Kara, Kara, I mean, she's fine."

Alex took another step closer and Winn found himself taking a step back. Alex followed him, saying nothing, her face a blank, and he stepped back again until he was forced to sit down against the med bay bed.

"Not that she's completely fine, I mean in the normal sense of the word."

Alex took another step forward

"You said J'onn was looking for me? You know, I'm just going to go ahead and tell you everything."

Alex, very sweetly, smiled.

And, Winn thought, you couldn't get much more terrifying than that.

//

Kara had to dig into her old junior high school journals. That's how long it had been. She had spent her junior high years learning English and filling notebooks--first in Kryptonese, then in Krypt-lish, then in English--trying to remember everything, every word, every person, every social custom, every prayer, every taste of every food: all, now, lost, unless she managed to remember it.

Kal-El only knew what the computers at the Fortress of Solitude told him. She, Kara, actually remembered. And that memory was sacred and at risk of being lost forever, unless she could find some way to anchor it in words and pictures. So she wrote in her journals at superspeed and she sketched and painted endlessly, to keep her entire civilization from being lost.

So when Winn had accused her of shame and human weakness, she had dug into the boxes in her little bin in the basement, where she kept the old journals, and she had found the old Kryptonian meditation, with the Kryptonese mantras. And she had repeated them and repeated them, sitting cross-legged (so much less painful after no practice than the old Kryptonian kneeling posture) trying to purge her human/English accent and return to the lilt of her first language, trying to return to her first self.

And she was doing... okay, she guessed... up until Alex let herself into the apartment.
"Hey, what are you doing?" Alex entered and sat on the coffee table in front of Kara sitting on the floor.

"Kryptonian meditation. We say an ancient mantra to strengthen the mind."

"I've never seen you do that before."

"I've never felt the need for it before."

"Winn's still working on the psychic dampening technology..."

Kara shifted so her legs were more comfortable.

Alex continued, "We... had a nice chat..."

"Did you?"

Alex gave a small smile.

"He told you, didn't he?" Kara stood up and walked away.

"He's not very good at keeping a secret."

"He shouldn't have."

Alex said, "We used to talk about this kind of stuff. Why didn't you tell me that you saw Krypton, that you were having panic attacks?"

Kara poured a glass of water and drank it. "I didn't want you to worry."

"You fight the most dangerous and evil people on the planet, so I'm kinda always going to worry."

Kara put down the glass and paced. "I don't know how to fight this one. And I should be able to stop her, but..." She sat down in front of Alex. "But then she makes her way into my mind and forces me to relive the scariest moment of my life. It's... argh! It's torture. How am I supposed to deal with that?"

"Well, by remembering that your fears don't define you." Alex lowered herself to the floor and mirrored Kara's cross-legged position. "You know, who you are as Supergirl, and who you are as Kara, that's what defines you, and she's got nothing on that."

"No. Who I am as Kara feels broken. I lost everything: my planet, my parents, my civilization. I nearly got this planet enslaved because I opened Mon-El's pod. Lena keeps asking me where I'm going, which is new and horrible. I'm pretty sure she knows where I'm going. She knows I have Supergirl duties. Alex, I'm trying to be myself again, but now everything that used to make me feel good has, has disappeared."

"It's not always going to feel like this."

"My life as Supergirl is the one thing I can count on. I can go out there and help people. I can make a difference in the world. I can... feel strong, even when a huge part of me feels so weak. And she's taking that away from me. And if I don't have Supergirl, what do I have?"

Alex shrugged. "You got me."

Kara smiled, even though tears were hanging in her eyes. "Oh, I know that, silly."
Alex grinned and scooted forward toward Kara, who couldn't help but laughing. Alex threw out her arms and embraced her little sister.
When her mom had pulled that tower off of Ruby's chest, Ruby had seen it confirmed: her mom had superpowers. Sure, she scoffed at Ruby when she suggested it at breakfast, and explained it in the car as a mom adrenaline kick, But Ruby knew what she saw. Could adrenaline explain her picking the tower up an inch so that Ruby could have slid out from under it? Maybe.

But she hadn't done that. She had picked it up and thrown it away. And Ruby had seen the dents her mom's beautiful hands had made in the metal legs of the tower, even though her mom had hurried her over to the ambulance before she could take a better look.

And although her mom had looked so disappointed at Ruby for getting into a fight at school on her mom's first day at her new job at L-Corp, still she wouldn't budge. It wasn't powers. It was adrenaline.

And Ruby had thought privately to herself but not said out loud (because her mother would have finally gone through with her threat to wash Ruby's mouth out with soap if she had heard her say such a thing), well, fuck that.

And Ruby had gone to her school's career fair and talked to this cool police lady named Maggie, who showed Ruby her badge and explained the rules of evidence, and the chain of custody and some other stuff she couldn't remember. So Ruby had charged her phone and gotten on a bus to the waterfront to find evidence so she could take pictures of it to prove to her mother that she hadn't been lying.

But the wharf was empty of debris from the accident. The tower was gone. Supergirl's statue glittered in the sun. Ruby stared up at it. What would it be like to have Supergirl as her mother? Or maybe Supergirl and her mom could work together, flying through the sky and beating up bad guys and fighting rogue aliens and generally kicking butt.

What color would her mom's cape be? Ruby looked around the waterfront and found a pizza place with chairs outside. She bought a slice of pizza and a Coke and pulled out her journal and started drawing her mom in a supersuit. She wouldn't have an S on it, since that was Supergirl and Superman's logo. Maybe an A for Arias? No, that wouldn't work. Then people would know who she was, and she would need to keep that a secret. Maybe a lightning bolt? What was a good symbol for strength?

Her phone chirped. She looked at the text.

SuperMom: Where are you??

Ruby ignored the text. Across the street an armored truck pulled up in front of the bank and two guys with guns went inside. She had heard that they were actually allowed to shoot people if anybody tried to take the money, because otherwise they would get robbed everyday. She wondered what it would be like to shoot somebody.

The men came out of the bank, each carrying two big, heavy looking white canvas bags, probably full of money. As they crossed the street, though, they began to twitch weirdly, and one of them dropped his bags to fight off-- What? There was nothing there. But then the other guy did the same thing. They both dropped to the ground, still squirming and trying to fight off some invisible enemy.

A lady with long blonde hair walked up and took their bags. Sirens sounded and she looked at the
police cars and they swerved aside and the cops jumped out of them and a wrecking ball came out of nowhere and smashed through the roof of one of the cop cars. People were screaming and running in all directions. Cops where hiding behind their cars with their guns pointed at the blonde lady.

It was chaos. Ruby looked at her phone, pulled up Google Maps and texted her mother her location.

RubyGoober: Mom come save me.

Kara was on the back of Alex's bike on their way to the DEO when Alex got a text from Winn at a stoplight, and Kara had hung on for dear life once the light turned green. Yes, theoretically, she could have flown them there faster, but Alex loved it when it was her turn to fly Kara somewhere. Metaphorically speaking. So Kara held on tight to her big sister, feeling a moment of someone else being the strong one. But the moment Alex pulled into the DEO parking garage, Kara was in her supersuit and speeding them up to the command center.

The video surveillance showed a small disaster down near the waterfront, a wrecking ball swinging wildly in all directions, and that woman at the center of it all, laughing.

Alex said, "That thing could take out a whole block."

"I'm on it," said Supergirl.

"Not without this you're not," said J'onn, as Winn handed Supergirl a strange-looking device.

"What is it?"

"A psionic inhibitor ray," said Winn with a grin.

"It should protect you from her powers," said J'onn.

Alex said, "We'll set up a perimeter to secure the area."

"Just need to keep her out of my head to get a good shot off."

"You can do it," said Alex.

Supergirl took off.

At times like this, when she was flying as fast as she could, it always felt as if time slowed down, as if she were not flying between two physical places but between one moment in the present and one moment far in the future. As she approached the disaster zone, she saw a police car hit by the wrecking ball and fly across the square. Men and women ran screaming away from the tall crane and its mayhem-dealing equipment, but one girl slowly walked toward it, and a silver car stopped short nearby, the driver jumping from the car and running toward the girl just as the wrecking ball's chain, weakened by the faster than usual swings, broke just above them, and Supergirl dived down and caught the ball and tossed it onto a pile of rubble.

She landed and strode among the wrecked cars and chunks of concrete that littered the street. She saw the black-leather-clad blonde walking away with moneybags and called her out.
"Psi!" The woman turned and Supergirl raised the device, turned it on and shot it at her. It stopped her in her tracks, and she frowned momentarily. Then she focused her eyes hard on Supergirl and the shock wave pushed Supergirl back several feet.

Supergirl still held out the ray, but the woman, looking royally pissed off, recited, "Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home. Your house is on fire and your children, they will burn." Then she shot a blast so hard that Supergirl flew into the air backwards, a whole city block. She crashed into the corner of a building and fell to the roof of the building next door.

She lay there, gasping, and then it all went dark and fiery, and there she was again, in the pod, everything she had known exploding into space and her pod knocked off course and debris tumbling against the pod--

Then Alex was there, holding her tight. "You can do this, Kara."

"It's dead. Krypton-- it's dead and I ran away."

"Yes, Krypton died. But Kara, you were saved for a reason. To keep Earth from going the way of Krypton. To keep people like Psi from raining destruction on National City. To keep your friends and strangers, people you don't even know, from dying the way your friends did. You can do this, Kara. I know you can. Go get her!"

She pushed off into the air and zipped down in front of the woman. "You're not going anywhere!"

The woman grunted, seemingly amused. "What did you see, I wonder. What brought the Girl of Steel to her knees?"

She sent out another pulse, but Supergirl resisted.

"My destiny. And it was, is terrifying. You messed up with me, Psi, Gayle, whatever your name is. All those people the NCPD questioned, they saw spiders and snakes and the deaths of their loved ones. Their greatest fears. But those were lies--"

"Fear is not a lie." She sent a shockwave, but Supergirl shrugged it off. "Fear cripples, annihilates spirits." They kept moving towards each other, step by step. Another shock wave. Supergirl didn't even blink. "Fear is the only weapon that matters. Fear made me stronger than you."

They stood face to face. Psi sent another shock wave, but Supergirl looked into her eyes and saw that she was... afraid.

"No one is safe from it! Why aren't you scared anymore?"

"Mind over matter," intoned Supergirl. And then she headbutted Psi, who dropped to the ground like a stone.
And Most of That I Saw Coming

Vasquez had led the mission so that Alex could be on the ground in civvies in case Supergirl needed her to just be her sister rather than her backup in the usual DEO sense. Because Vasquez had been watching Kara Danvers and Supergirl both for the past few months and she could see where this was going even before Winn texted her, even before Jess Huang had asked her to meet at Dollywood.

Even before Alex had texted her from the hallway of Kara's apartment about the Kryptonian chanting she could hear through Kara's door.

After which she had handed J'onn her scenario analysis and gone to prep for the op that was undoubtedly coming in three, two--

So now as she liased with Detective Sawyer, she caught sight of Alex checking in with that mother/daughter pair, the same one they had seen at the waterfront. They sat wrapped in blankets in the back of the ambulance, both looking shaken and exhausted. When Alex told the girl that rubies were one of the toughest gemstones, the girl had nodded. "Only diamonds are tougher."

"Well, look at that, smart and tough. Deadly combo." She bumped fists with the smiling girl and walked away.

Detective Sawyer watched Alex with her heart on her sleeve.

"What?" Vasquez said protectively.

"I didn't know Danvers had such a way with kids."

"Yeah, she has many skills."

"I guess you'll be glad someday when you two have kids."

Vasquez laughed. "Yeah, no. I've never seen myself being a mom and I'm pretty sure that Alex doesn't either."

"You don't want kids? Who doesn't want kids?"

Vasquez frowned. She was about to mention the sixth extinction, but she had gone there in conversations with women who wanted children before, some of whom were now her exes, and she decided to leave well enough alone. And to talk to Alex about this some time soon.

//

When the crisis was averted, Supergirl had gone back to the DEO and changed her clothes and fixed her hair and found a new pair of glasses to replace the ones she had dropped in the elevator at CatCo--

And Rao, was that going to be hard to explain.

--and then when she arrived at Vasquez's office for the usual debrief, she found Jess Huang sitting in one of the two chairs in front of Vasquez's desk, looking very, very serious.

Vasquez stood up and said, "I'll give you ladies the room. We'll talk tomorrow, Kara."
Jess said, "Ms. Danvers, would you care to take a seat?"

Warily, Kara sat down next to her.

Jess sighed. "First, you should know that I signed the NDAs yesterday. Agent Vasquez was decidedly grumpy about that for some reason. All the other times I've interacted with her she's been quite sweet. Today, too. But not yesterday. I wonder why that is?"

Privately Kara thought, Because she didn't expect you would figure out my secret identity, and that undoubtedly pissed her off. Wait, did Jess just call Agent Susan Kill-You-With-My-Pinkie Vasquez sweet?? "Um, I have no idea, Jess. NDAs?"

"About your identity as Supergirl."

Kara blinked and adjusted her glasses. "I, um. I see." She totally didn't see.

"Here's the thing, Ms. Danvers. Lena Luthor just spent a pretty penny to save CatCo from going the way of Fox News, and she did it to save America, sure, we all know her penchant for saving the world. But she also did it for you, and you fucking know this. I know you do."

Kara hung her head. She had been trying very hard to not think that. "Yes," she admitted. "But I've been a little distracted since it happened..."

"It didn't just fucking happen, Ms. Danvers. Lena made a choice, a business decision, helped by, imagine that, her personal assistant."

"Thank you for--"

"Let me finish. I don't require thanks. Personally, if it weren't for the fake news problem of Edge acquiring CatCo, I would have said Lena was insane, making a huge mistake, taking her eye off the ball at L-Corp. But we live in the world we live in. So."

Kara couldn't meet Jess's eyes.

"Eve Tessmacher and I are old friends, luckily for the world. So I know what is going on at CatCo, probably even better than you do. Once upon a time, I would have said that would never happen, because you always, always had Cat Grant's back."

She studied her polished nails a moment. "Well, except for that one time you threw Cat over the balcony..."

"Yeah, that..."

"Oh, don't you worry, Ms. Danvers. I know all about Red Kryptonite and when I find out how Maxwell Lord got hold of Lex Luthor's notes about it, I will have a job of work in front of me. I will definitely inform the DEO when I do--and I will--as I informed Agent Vasquez just a few minutes ago."

"Er, thank you?"

Jess waved that away. "The man's a menace. My point, Ms. Danvers, is this. Back when you and Lena first started dating, I did not see the need to give you the shovel talk. I assumed at the time that anyone willing and able to face a nuclear explosion to save Lena Luthor would not fear the idea of me ready with a shovel to bury her, nor would she ever do anything that would merit my coming for her with one."
Kara looked up at Jess and saw, what? Weariness, disgust? Disappointment most of all. Worry.

"She needs you, Ms. Danvers. I believe the city is more at risk now than it was even during the Battle of National City. I suspect your Agent Vasquez would agree with me. We appear to be in the same business, anticipating our boss's needs and getting in ahead of the enemy. Or the friend who is falling down on the job."

"Jess, I hear you. I do. I'm going to do better. Lena deserves better."

"Yes, she does, Ms. Danvers. And I know that you have it in you to do better. I should expect nothing less of a--"

"Superhero," Kara sighed dejectedly.

"What? Oh, yes, I suppose so," said Jess with a dismissive wave of her hand. "I was going to say personal assistant."

//

When Kara arrived at CatCo that evening, no surprise, Lena was there working, talking to someone from the magazine side. Her head went up and she turned, catching sight of Kara immediately, as if she were the one with super hearing.

Kara took her courage in her hands and walked up to Lena. "So. I got in touch with your contact at the bank and you were right. He's going to be a great source on Edge."

"Glad to hear it."

Kara had a tough time looking into Lena's lustrous green eyes. "So I have to apologize for my behavior earlier." She picked up the Rubic's Cube from Winn's desk and played with it to give her hands something to do and her eyes somewhere else to be. "You were right. I have a lot more baggage than I previously thought."

Lena's eyes were soft and sad. "Well, I know it can't be easy..."

"You were just trying to be a good friend, and I bit your head off, and I'm--"

"This is new for me too."

"Working with friends?"

"No! Having friends." Lena smiled. "Luthors don't have friends. We have minions. You know? So I think there's going to be a learning curve for both of us."

"Lena, today you were a really good friend and a great boss."

Lena grinned and blushed. "Thank you. She glanced at the few people still hard at work. "I'd really like to give you a hug, but I'm afraid it would show favoritism..."

"Uh, screw that! C'mere! Bring it in!"

They embraced, and for a moment, Kara felt like the world might just possibly regain its axis and go
on spinning without her having to push it every single day. Then Lena pulled away and the feeling was gone.

"Oh, great. There's someone I want you to meet. " To the woman walking toward them, she said, "I'm so glad you could make it."

The woman said, "And thanks once again for being so understanding!"

"Oh please," said Lena. "I am no stranger to family drama. Kara, this is Samantha Arias. She is going to be taking over for me at L-Corp."

"That's... great! It's... lovely to meet you, Ms. Arias!" They shook hands.

"Please. It's just Sam."

"Okay!"

But Kara had recognized the woman instantly. It was the woman with the daughter from the wharf. This could hardly be a coincidence. Could it?
Chapter Summary

The beginning of 3.3 Far from the Tree, beginning to go off canon.

When M'gann sent J'onn a text in the middle of a DEO briefing, he glanced at his phone where it lay on the long table, and then, looking grim, excused himself from the conference room, psychically aware of the confusion he was leaving behind him as he stepped into the hall.

MsMars: Emergency. Can you come to Dollywood? Weapons not necessary but
GreenOne: Can it wait?
MsMars: I wish I could say yes. No.
GreenOne: On my way.

He made his excuses to his subordinates and told Vasquez to finish the meeting. She frowned and nodded, moving to the front of the room and picking up the computer's remote.

J'onn stepped out onto the balcony he normally thought of as Supergirl's. He transformed and flew away.

Landing in the back of Dollywood's, amid the Dumpster and a few cars, he transformed back into his human form, and entered the bar through the back door. The bar was dimmer than usual, and Darla was standing on the pool table replacing lightbulbs in the lighting fixture above, while M'gann was giving her instructions.

"And don't forget to call the distributer to increase our order of Sikarian ale. We're going through it faster than we used to. Also, raise the price by a dollar a glass. Oh, and call the plumber about the sink in the men's room--"

"M'gann, I got this. Take your vacation and have fun. The place will be fine. I'll be fine. I have your to-do list."

M'gann turned away, not looking even to a non-psychic like somebody planning a vacation. She saw J'onn, pulled him a draft beer and nodded to one of the booths. They sat and she passed him the beer, looking worried and smelling terrified.

"M'gann, what is it?"

"I've had news. From Mars. From someone I thought was long dead."

"One of the Whites on the Council again? Should I alert the DEO?"

“No, not a White. Do you remember, when you came into my mind, a little boy, a Green, that I saved? He got off-planet, grew up, found another Green in another solar system. Found more Whites like me. They've gone back to Mars. They're resisting, liberating the last of the camps, the underground camps nobody knew about, the ones where they kept all the most important Greens."
"There are other Greens?" J'onn gaped. "I'm not the only one?"

"There are maybe half a dozen Greens, dozens of Whites who have turned. They're not a big group, but they're changing things. And they need our help. We have to go back."

J'onn took her hand in his larger one, felt the truth of what she was saying. He also could tell that she was keeping things from him, but it's not like they were mates. He respected her privacy.

"We need to go soon, J'onn."

"Just... Let me set things up at the DEO. Chain of command. I'll call you when we're ready. But how are we going to get there? I crash landed. I do not have my space vehicle."

She smiled ironically. "I do."

//

Ale arrived at Kara's apartment with three pizzas: Hawaiian and Meat Lovers for Kara and Veggie Supremo for her. Vasquez had worn off on her; she drank less alcohol and ate less meat this past year. The DEO Dr. Hamilton and given her a literal gold star after her last annual checkup. She stuck it on the apple on her personal computer at home.

"Alex!" squeed Kara. "That smells so goooooood!"

"Well, you are sounding better, Kara. What happened?"

"Oh, nothing. It's just. I talked to Lena. Not about everything. We still have to figure out where my reporting duties end and my Supergirl duties start. Or vice versa, I guess. But I got a hug! Lena's a really good hugger!"

Alex smiled and set the pizza boxes down on Kara's kitchen island. "And the rest of your relationship?"

"What do you mean?"

"Kara. The sex?"

"Oh, that. I, we haven't. Um and now she's my boss, so I'm pretty sure that's over. And anyway, it's not like I, well."

"You know, Kara, low libido is another symptom of depression."

"I'm not depressed."

"Uh huh. And I am perfectly straight."

"Don't tell Vasquez."

Alex just looked at her. Didn't say a word. Didn't have to. (Winn probably thought that Alex learned her interrogation technique from Vasquez or Lucy. Nope.)

"All right! No, I haven't felt, um, like that, in like, a really long while. But now with the boss thing, it would just be weird."

"Uh huh. We'll get to that eventually. Meanwhile, Mom and I are still working on an anti-depressant for you."
Kara opened the top box. "Hawaiian! I love you, Alex. Even though you hate it you always get it for me!"

"Well, you love it. Although, you are an alien after all." She rolled her eyes.

There was a knock on the door.

Alex turned. "Did you invite Mom over?"

"No." Kara opened the door to reveal J'onn dressed in civvies, although, like Alex, he favored black clothing even outside the DEO.

"J'onn," said Kara. "C'mon in. Everything okay?"

"Yeah. Everything's great." He looked distracted as he walked in. "I just wanted to talk to you both. I have to go away for a few days... I'm going to need you to manage the DEO until I get back."

"Where are you going?" asked Kara.

"Mars."

"Wha-- Mars?" said Alex, eyebrows high.

"M'gann got a message. There's a resistance that has formed. They need our help."

"With what?" asked Kara.

"Finding someone. Possibly liberating someone from the Whites. It's urgent."

"What?" said Kara. "No! You are the last Green Martian. The Whites have been trying to kill your kind for centuries. Going back would be a suicide mission!"

"I am not... the last. There aren't many others. A handful. But M'gann's friends, the Whites who are resisting, they came to our aid during the Battle of National City, when we were in need. And they are protecting the last remnants of my kind. I have to go. M'gann and I must go, together, to do whatever we can."

"Well," said Alex. "If you are going to Mars, then Kara is going with you."

"Yeah," said Kara.

"No, I won't have you endangering your life just to fight my battles."

"Your battles are my battles, J'onn," said Kara.

"J'onn," said Alex, "If I thought I could survive Mars, I would be right there fighting at your side."

Kara said, "If Krypton still existed and I had to go back to where my parents were buried under rubble, I know you wouldn't let me do it alone."

J'onn looked at the ceiling, trying to keep the annoying human tear ducts from spilling, but it was a lost battle. Instead, he opened his arms and his two Earth daughters stepped into his grateful embrace.

//

J'onn texted M'gann while Supergirl was changing. M'gann sent them an address, not far from
Dollywood.

Supergirl asked, "So can't we just call Winn and get him to rev up the transmat portal?"

"For a transmatter portal to work, there has to be a portal on the other side." He waved at M'gann, who was standing on the sidewalk outside a small garage. "We'll have to get to Mars the old-fashioned way."

M'gann gave Supergirl a high five and winked at J'onn. "I like that you're okay with doing things old school, J'onn." She pulled up the garage door to show a pale aqua convertible, circa 1950-something.

J'onn's jaw dropped. "Is that a Chevy Bel Air?"

M'gann drifted her hand over the pristine paint job. "Yup." She grinned.

"Cool car." Supergirl wasn't catching up. "So... is this like an elevator that will take us to a secret hanger that will--"

"No, it isn't." M'gann opened up the driver side door and sat down. J'onn jumped into the back.

"Wait," said Supergirl. "This is your ship?"

M'gann said, "Yup."

"We're taking this to Mars?"

"Yes, we are."

From the back seat, J'onn grinned at Supergirl's discomposure.

"Well, okay!" Supergirl scooped up her cape and flopped into the passenger seat.

"Watch out for the leather," said M'gann.

"Sorry!" She looked around. "There are no seatbelts."

"It's from a different era," said M'gann nostalgically.

"And a different planet!" said Supergirl.

"I come from a race of shapeshifters, Kara. Why shouldn't our technology shapeshift too?" She hit buttons on the dash and the engine revved.

"Fair enough," said Supergirl, mentally revising her expectations about the universe.

M'gann pushed one more button and pushed the gas pedal--or whatever its equivalent might be. The "car" rolled out of the garage, went through a number of transformations like, well, one of those transformer movies, and shot through Earth's atmosphere, into outer space.
Alex walked into the command center to see none of the usual suspects manning or womanning the computer feeds. Agent Chen was sitting at Winn's post, looking endlessly bored.

"Chen!"

He jumped. "Ma'am! Agent Danvers, ma'am. What can I do for you?"

"There's action today? Why wasn't I informed?"

"No, ma'am. There are no missions currently in operation. Ma'am."

"Then where is everybody?"

"Agent Schott is updating the simulation for your and Dr. Danvers's experiments. Agent Vasquez is in the armory."

"Oh!" Alex grinned. "I'll just--"

"Ma'am? I, er, I wouldn't."

"Agent?"

"Er, Agent Vasquez said, quote, 'I'll be in the armory and I'll shoot anybody who interrupts me.' Unquote. Ma'am."

Alex frowned. "Well, that's odd. Did something happen?"

"Er, I think you'd know that better than me, ma'am. It seemed, maybe, personal?" He wouldn't meet her eyes.

She pulled out her phone and texted.

AgentHeartEyes: Permission to come down w/o fear of getting shot?

... Agent Kevlar: Better yet. Buy me a beer. Or six.

Agent HeartEyes: Your wish is my command.

//

They sat across from each other at their favorite table at Dollywood, and Vasquez did indeed guzzle her first beer down very quickly. Alex sipped slowly on hers.

"Babe. What is it?"

Vasquez signaled Darla for another.

"Vas, is it me? Did I do something?"

The beer came. Vasquez sipped it slowly. "Never. It's my parents." She stared moodily into her beer. "They're coming to National City. Dad's giving a lecture at NC University and Mom is thinking about going into business with Louise Prevenger. They've worked together before, went to school..."
together, always hang out together at Paris Fashion Week..."

Alex stared. "Am I supposed to recognize that name?"

"All my other girlfriends always have," Vasquez grumbled.

"Oh! Is she some kind of lesbian icon?"

Vasquez spit up her beer. "What? No! She's a fashion designer. High-end. Movie stars get her
dresses for the Oscars. My mother is the same."
"Okay. Do you guys not get along?"

Vasquez stared. "To a woman like that, a butch daughter is an embarrassment. My dad wanted to put
my official Marine photo on the mantel in their living room, but she wouldn't let him. He keeps it at
his office instead."

"Well, that's nice, that he wanted--"

"He was disappointed when I left the Marines as only a Sergeant Major. He's NSA, so he knows
about the DEO, but he thinks I should have Lucy's job, or Hank's, not be a lowly analyst."

Alex gaped. "An analyst with an 86% call rate, which is so far off the charts that it, they, you know
they had to design the charts differently because of you. Make them bigger. Most analysts are about
48%, which isn't even as good as flipping a coin."

"It's 58%, Alex."

"Still. Coin-flip territory." Alex reached out and touched her hand. "How were they when you first
came out?"

Vasquez shrugged. "Dad wasn't too thrilled. Mom was horrified. Surprisingly, it was my
grandmother in Puerto Rico who ripped Dad a new one and told him to support me. And since Mom
is absolutely terrified of her, she shut up and carried on. I think if I'd been her fag son who cared
about women's clothes more, she'd adore me. She's used to that."

She frowned.

Well, Alex thought, Vasquez always frowned, and Alex generally could tell whether it was out of
focus, frustration, anger, irritation, muscle soreness, boredom or embarrassment. She also knew the
frowns and micro-frowns that signaled curiosity, a new idea, a change of strategy, mild pride in a
recruit, satisfaction with a taste while she was cooking, and the sting of hard liquor. Also, the not
quite frown that meant that she was pleased with her own work, or possibly was thinking about sex.

This frown was different. She looked utterly miserable.

"Babe, what is it?"

"My younger siblings have been popping out babies these last few years. I'm going to turn 35 next
week. Mom mailed me some materials on in vitro fertilization."

"Oh. Do you, um. Do you want to have kids?"

"God, no. With the world as it is? Climate change? Sea-level rise? Aliens from outer space trying to
control our minds, enslave us, exterminate us? Why would I want to bring a kid into that?"

Alex's jaw dropped. She knew Vasquez's frowns encyclopedically, but she never, ever thought that
they might hide a pessimism of this depth.

Vasquez looked up and visibly panicked. "Oh-- I-- Unless you do? I never thought to ask. Because you would probably be a great mom!"

Alex had never seen this look on Vasquez's face, eyes popped, hands shaking, face ashen. It almost looked like fear.

Fear. On Vasquez. Yeah, right. She laughed.

"No, Vas. I've been in loco parentis for Kara since I was thirteen. And that's still a full-time job. I mean, at least now I get paid for it, and people don't complain so much about my wearing black all the time..."

Vasquez's face relaxed. "But what about Eliza? Won't she be disappointed?"

"Oh, absolutely. Definitely. Without a doubt. Of course." She shrugged. "When it comes to my mother, my motto is, if I'm going to be a disappointment, let me be a HUGE disappointment. You know? Better grand larceny than petty larceny. Go big or go home."

"You are so not that long-haired hung-over party chick that Hank brought to the DEO a few years ago."

"My spine is. My brain is. The rest, you trained out of me. Have I thanked you for that recently? Thank you for that."

Vasquez looked a little stunned. "Um. You're welcome?"

"So," Alex continued matter-of-factly. "So. When I meet them, should I femme it up or should we be the Bobbsey Twins in matching tactical gear?"

Vasquez laughed finally, but there were tears running down her cheeks. "Wear what makes you comfortable. With any luck, they won't be here long enough for that."

"You don't want me to meet them?"

"I don't want to subject you to the inevitable grilling."

"I hold up remarkably well under torture. What if we bring Eliza? And Kara? Four of the DEO's finest. Your parents won't stand a chance."
M'gann flew with ease, as if it hadn't been decades or centuries since she had last done it. When the Red Planet grew closer and closer in their view screen, a communication in a very foreign language flittered across the screen beneath. M'gann laughed. "The landing coordinates are by the Mars Rover. How fitting."

They entered atmo and Supergirl could see the Earth ship with its American flag hanging limply in the absolute lack of breeze. M'gann flew the spaceship into a cleft between two craggy red hills, and they exited the ship and followed her as she picked up coordinates on a small tablet. "Not far now," she said.

They entered a narrow cave, lit unevenly with red light. A door with strange markings rose to show a series of open caves, similarly lit.

A Green Martian turned and saw them. "M'gann!"

"B'dorr!"

They hurried toward each other and embraced.

"I never thought I'd see you again!"

"You came," said the apparently young Martian. "I wasn't sure that you would!" He looked over her shoulder. "And these are the leaders from the battle on Earth. Welcome."

Supergirl said, "You came when we needed you. Thank you."

A small group of Whites strode into the room. B'dorr's voice fell. "T'gall!"

The Whites took on the appearance of humans, black and white. The young man in the front growled at J'onn. "If he's afraid of White Martians, then he came to the wrong planet!"

B'dorr sighed. "Meet T'gall. One of our best fighters, but his bedside manner could use some work..."

"Enough!" said T'gall. "We've already wasted a day trying to bring them here."

"Wasted?" said Supergirl. "We came as soon as we could to fight alongside you."

"We didn't bring you here to fight!"

"Silence, T'gall!"

M'gann said, "What's going on here, B'dorr?"

The young Martian avoided her eyes. "We recently stormed a White Martian base at the Diori Crater. There was a prison camp there, for Green Martians. It's still in operation after all these centuries."

"How is that possible?" asked J'onn. "Up until today, I thought I was the only Green Martian left."

B'dorr said, "As did I for a long time. I was offworld when the war started. But, even aside from you and I? There is at least one more. I asked M'gann to bring you here because I knew you wouldn't believe me unless you saw this for yourself."
He led J'onn to a computer monitor on the cave wall and nodded to one of his peers. The neutral screen changed to show a Green Martian, male, older, and robed in ceremonial trappings, at prayer.

J'onn stared up at the screen, in shock.

"J'onn," said Supergirl. "Who is it?"

"It's... my father. It's him! He's alive!" He turned, suddenly hopeful. "My wife? My daughters?"

"I'm sorry, J'onn J'onzz. He is the only one. They kept him alive. They tortured him for centuries, but not even the worst of the Whites would kill the servant of Hieronymir."

"No," said J'onn. "Instead they sentenced him to a fate worse than death, leaving him alone, thinking he was the last of his people."

"Soon we'll all be dead," said T'gall. "We're running out of time."

"What does he mean?" asked Supergirl.

B'Dorr said, "We believe that your father knows how to find the staff of Kolar."

J'onn scoffed. "You can't be serious! It's a myth! My father used to tell me stories. Be a good boy or Hieronymir will strike you down. It isn't real."

"It is, and the White Martians have found where it's buried. It's a psychic weapon, which means that if the Whites find us, they can track us down and kill every one of us where we stand. The Whites left the base and left your father behind, not realizing how valuable he'd be to us. He knows where they're planning to dig, but he's closed his mind to us. Our survival is at stake but he won't tell us. Some man of God."

"That man of God was tortured for centuries!"

"Then you know what's at stake. We need you to go to your father, J'onn. Convince him to help us. And then we can save Mars."

//

In the lab at the DEO, Eliza added the chemical to the Petri dish and then slid it under the microscope and watched the two colorless liquids react together, turn a pale pink.

"Eureka," she said quietly.

Behind her at the computer, Alex's head snapped up. "Did you do it?"

"Not exactly. But it's a start. Come look."

Alex came and adjusted the microscope for her younger eyes. "Mom! That's awesome!"

"We're still a long way off, but yeah."

Alex looked at her mother. "Mom, you need to sleep more. Also... um, can I ask you a favor?"

"Of course, sweetie."

"You are literally the world's best party planner."
"Flattery, Alexandra?"

"Absolutely. So Vasquez turns thirty-five in a couple of days and her parents are going to be in town and she's super-stressed because she's such a disappointment to them, and I--"

"A disappointment? Vasquez?" Eliza's eyes went wide. "I know, right? It's insane. So I just--"

"Say no more, sweetie. I have just the thing. At Kara's?"

"Yeah, when she gets back from Mars."

And Alex didn't need to be a mind reader to know that her mother, like herself, was thinking staunchly, when. Not if.

//

J'onn transformed into his true self and went to see his father, who said, "I'm praying. Leave me be."

"I think, this time, Hieronymir will allow you some time. It's me, father, your son. You're angry with me, as you should be, for abandoning you. I know how you must have felt, alone all these years, thinking you'd never see another Green Martian, thinking our entire species had been destroyed."

"You really thought such a trick would work on me? I've survived two centuries of torture, alone. But I will never tell you where the staff of Kolar is. My son would never have fled!"

And J'onn, overcome with emotion, fled.

Back in the central room of the hideout, J'onn tried to figure out what he'd done wrong.

"I don't understand why he couldn't sense me!"

Supergirl said, "He was in prison a long time. He's probably used to tricks."

"Enough of this!" said T'gall. "If your father won't give us the information willingly, and you can't get it, we'll have to invoke the Rite of Tiagar, and take it by force."

"What's the Rite of Tiagar?" asked Supergirl.

"It's a way of forcing through my father's mental block, showing where the staff is," said J'onn.

"Could that hurt him?" asked Supergirl.

"It could kill him," said M'gann.

"We don't have a choice," said T'gall.

Supergirl shook her head. "There's always a choice."

"I swore I would die for this resistance, but I'm not going to die waiting around."

"Do you think you've got what it takes to break my father?" asked J'onn, grabbing the man's shirt. "More powerful Martians than you have tried, boy."

"Enough!" said M'gann. "One thing is clear. If we don't find the staff soon, we're finished. We have to get through to your father, J'onn. Can you?"
"I can. And I will."

He stood, shoulder to shoulder with Supergirl, watching the feed from his father's cell. The memories of this man were seared into his memory. Yes, he had often looked so very serious like this, at prayer, but he also had a sense of humor, a tender love for his granddaughters, a lighter way of being in the world.

Well, torture. That could change a person. And centuries of it. Yes.

"Ever think, Kara, what your parents would say if they could see you now? What they would think of the person you've become?"

"Every day. They'd be proud of me."

"Yeah, I thought that too, until I actually had the chance to ask. My father thinks I'm a coward."

Supergirl frowned. "That's because he doesn't know you. Because the man I know has dedicated his entire life to make sure that what happened on Mars doesn't happen anywhere else. So go in there, J'onn. Show your father who his son really is."
Vasquez paced back and forth in the DEO command center. She had gotten Agent Rodriguez to take her first shift, and Chen to take her second, and she kept digging her phone out of the leg pocket of her cargo pants, glancing at it and sticking back in. She could tell that the other agents noticed and were very clearly Not Noticing, except for Winn.

"Agent Vasquez?" he said quietly. "Could I have a word?"

And she nodded abruptly. He led her to the same electrical closet that Supergirl sometimes used to change in, nicknamed the telephone booth by the other agents.

"What, Schott?" she snapped.

"Okay, so I am not a telepath like J'onn, or prescient like you, and about the only think I really know how to kill with my forefinger like Alex is video games. But I know when something is not right. And something is not right with you, today, Agent Vasquez. And I know that Alex is busy worrying about her sister on a distant, hostile planet, because otherwise she would be all over you, er, I mean, this. This problem you are having. Yes. So here is what I think, free advice, probably worth exactly what you are paying for it. Whatever this is?" He pointed toward the phone in her hand. "Go deal with it."

The phone rang and they both jumped. Vasquez answered, "Mom? Hola. Cómo estás?"

Vasquez listened to the high-pitched voice, the laughter in the background, the underlying passive-aggressive request.

She sighed. Winn gestured for her to go.

"Si, si, Mama. I'll meet you there. Great. Right. You too."

She hung up.

Winn said, "So?"

"Thanks, Winn. Now I have to go buy my mom lunch."

//

J'onn transformed back from his true self to his Hank Henshaw persona. If he was going to do this, he was going to do it in the form he had become most comfortable in—not the form that was the prey of White Martians and humans alike, but the form in which he wielded power and had won the respect and affection of DEO agents and his two Danvers girls.

"Hello, Father."

"I have to give it to you White. You don't take no, for an answer."

"As I told you before, Father. I am not a White Martian."

He glanced back at J'onn. "Not even a Green, apparently. It is our custom to take the shape of our guests, for your comfort if not for my own." He morphed into the likeness of a black human.

"I'm well aware of our Martian customs."
S'marrin ignored him, retelling the story of the staff. "Hieronymir was appalled that his son would choose destruction over knowledge, and so Phobus was banished to the underworld. But his descendants clawed their way back and slaughtered my people."

"Our people!"

"Hieronymir buried the staff for a reason. The Whites disgraces his name by slaughtering my people. I will serve his name by refusing to let you find his staff to destroy more of our people."

The door slid open and Supergirl ran in. "J'onn! We need to get out of here. Now."

The priest sneered. "I'm not going anywhere with you people."

A White ran in and threw a punch at Supergirl, but she blocked it and sent him flying. She said, "Sadly, I don't think you have much of a choice. Where can we go? Where's safe?"

"Home!" said J'onn, and he grabbed his father, and they ran.

//

The National City Four Seasons was upscale to such a degree that Vasquez couldn't even afford to walk past it on the sidewalk and generally crossed the street to avoid being charged for her presence in the same space. Naturally, that was where her mother would choose to stay. It was odd, really. Vasquez could have sworn her dad had said they would be at the Fairmont, but a lot had been going on lately, and Vasquez didn't trust her memory on non-mission-specific details.

Dressed in her "FBI" black pantsuit and pale lavender blouse, and even low heels, she entered the hotel's restaurant and took a place at the bar. "House Sauvignon Blanc, please," she said, and the bartender set down a cocktail napkin and handed her a glass of wine.

Wine was her mother's go-to drink, not hers. Normally, she drank Dos Equis or scotch, but on dangerous ops, it made more sense to blend in. She took a sip. Not bad. She glanced around the restaurant, heard high-pitched laughter and glanced toward the hotel side door. And there was her mother.

She was fifty-eight if she was a day, but no one would have guessed that. The maitre d' probably thought she was forty, with her long black hair trailing down her back, that scarlet dress hugging all her curves, the four-inch stilettos doing their thing...

Vasquez felt like a cow.

The woman said, too loudly, "Oh, there she is. My date!"

Not my daughter, of course not. That would give away her age. Vasquez took a drink and set down her glass in the exact center of the cocktail napkin, then looked up with a neutral expression at the dazzling woman walking toward her.

WWADD? thought Vasquez.

And then she smiled slyly and said, in a loud voice, "MOM! Great to see you! Hey, that little surgical touch-up obviously went well! You look twenty years younger! I hope you tipped your cosmetic surgeon!"

The older woman blanched, and Vasquez thought: Mother 0; Daughter 1.
"Darling, don't call me Mom. People will, you know, talk."

"Sure, Mom. They'll say how much younger you look than you actually are. Why is that bad? It's a compliment."

"Darling, call me Dominique."

"Sorry. Can't do that. Too many years in the Corp and the FBI. We call people by their last names or we call them Sir or Ma'am. So Vasquez it is! So, Vasquez, can I buy you a drink?" Her voice was still fairly loud. People were turning to look.

"No, yes, of course not. Buy me a drink but don't call me--"

Vasquez signaled the waiter, whose eyes told her that he was probably queer as shit and appreciated her predicament. "Right away, Miss," he said.

"So, Ma'am. You're in town for a few days with Dad. That's great. When was the last time you guys actually took a vacation together?"

"We're not taking a vacation. We're here to work."

"Sure. His lecture, your business deal. But still, a change is as good as a rest, isn't that what they say, ma'am?"

"Susan, you are being a little shit."

"Yes, ma'am! This is in my capacity as the oldest sibling. Just because the kiddies aren't here doesn't mean I shouldn't do my job? Right?"

"Susan--"

"Dom. Huh, that is something I never caught before. Seriously, does that mean NSA hotshot Dad is a Sub?"

"Susan Vasquez! You will not--"

Vasquez frowned one of her highest-level frowns and even her mother fell silent.

"So. I'm your 'date,' am I," she purred, reaching out and sliding her palm over her mother's thigh. The woman's dress was slit a bit high for woman her age and Vasquez, although internally gagging, slid her hand close to the slit. "Gosh, I should have worn a necktie."

"Susan! Behave!"

"Sorry, Mom. Never did know how to do that outside of a highly structured hierarchy with known rules..."

The older woman rolled her eyes as she picked up her daughter's hand and returned it to the bar, and then stopped and looked at it. "What. Is. That."

Vasquez looked down and thought of Alex. "It's a Claddagh ring, Mom. From Alex. I gave her one too."

"I see. And is she... like you?"

"Gay? Yup. Often how that works."
“No, not that. Obviously, that. But the other… thing.”

“FBI? Yup. I told you I knew her from work.”

“That’s not what I—“

Her eyes shifted to a space behind Vasquez, who turned much more slowly than she wanted to, wishing she had her thigh holster, but it was simply a heavily made-up blonde woman who looked vaguely familiar in the way people do when you’ve only seen pictures of them and never met them in real life.

Vasquez stood. “Ms. Previnger, I presume?”

She held out her hand and a heavily beringed hand took it. Turning to Vasquez’s mother, she said, “Alors, Dominique. Ta fille. Elle n’est pas aussi bête que vous l’avez suggéré.”

And Vasquez hadn’t had to speak French in the last few years, so it took her a few seconds to remember that bête did not only mean stupid or beast, but could also mean butch, the word her mother never wanted to say out loud.

So Vasquez said, “Oui, c’est vrai. I decided to come in drag today. It makes Mother so much more comfortable.”

The woman took her hand back, eyeing Vasquez speculatively. “So considerate.” Her accent was pure Midwest American.

“I try. So, are you joining us for lunch?”

“Oh, actually, about that. Dom, dear, the lawyer said he could meet us now, if we wanted to move up the appointment, get things rolling.” To Vasquez, she said, “So sorry to interrupt your plans.”

Vasquez smiled sincerely. “I actually prefer to eat lunch at my desk at work. Bye, Mom.”

And she tossed the bartender a twenty and sauntered out of the hotel, beeped her Beetle’s door unlocked, got into the driver’s seat and sat there for ten minutes seething before she was cool enough to go back to work.
Family Means Trying Again. Again.

Eliza had been as good as her word.

Kara's loft was decorated in red and gold, because Alex swore that Vasquez would have totally been put in Gryffindor house, and who didn't love balloons?

And streamers?

And little napkins?

Clearly, the answer to that was "not the DEO agents" that Susan Vasquez had trained, led, and/or become family with. (So pretty much all of them, one way or another.)

Eliza had set up an easel and in her invitation had asked people to bring pictures of themselves with Vasquez, and they ranged from the profound (in uniforms, Marine, DEO) to the ridiculous (Vasquez on a ladder putting up mistletoe in DEO doorways, Vasquez in her DEO uniform surrounded by moonstruck Supergirls (male and female) her arms crossed over her chest looking badass as they simpered around her). And somewhere in between, there were normal selfies from Dollywood (and the Amphipolis), pictures of Alex watching Vasquez with adoration, pictures of Vasquez carving a turkey in the command center of the DEO, pictures of Vasquez hitting a softball out of the park when the DEO agents in Nevada had played the soldiers (and totally kicked their asses).

So after Pam from HR and Jess totally kicked Winn and James's asses at Pin the Tail on the Donkey, the crew from the admin side of the DEO cheered and the crew from the field side (including Riley Finn and Jillian Holtzman) gave the boys shit for being so bad at it.

Alex was thrilled, watching Agent Susan Frowny-Baddass Vasquez blush repeatedly at everyone coming up and telling her how much of a difference she had made in their lives. And Alex thought that she could forgive Eliza for a lot of the crap she had put up with from her mom over the years for this, and she also thought that maybe, her mom knew that and it was probably why the woman had gone all out.

There was a knock on the front door and Alex opened it to see a dark-skinned man with salt-and-pepper hair and an expensive suit without a tie. He looked at the party-goers in jeans and blanched, but she ushered him in and welcomed him.

"Mr. Vasquez?"

"Yes," he smiled nervously and handed her the bottle of scotch. "I didn't know what to bring."

"Oh! Vasquez loves Laphroaig! Did you know this stuff is good with chocolate truffles? Vasquez taught me that. Well. Vasquez has taught me a lot of things: rappelling from a helicopter, close-quarter combat, how to make a killer lasagne—" She stopped short, realizing that she was rambling about her amazing girlfriend (again).

"So you are her? The girlfriend?"

"I, I am. Alex Danvers."

He shook her hand and she said, "Can I get you a drink? Beer?"

"Yes, thank you."
He walked up to the easel and looked at the pictures of his daughter surrounded by smiling people, reverently respectful people, people who looked like their lives had been enhanced by this woman. "These are her friends?"

"Colleagues, trainees, superiors, friends, family. Yes."

"Family? But I don't see pictures of her siblings."

"She never talks about them, so we couldn't invite them..." Alex suddenly realized it had never occurred to her to invite them.

"They might not have been able to come. Her sister's marriage is... complicated. And her brother is overseas. But I am glad that you contacted me."

"Yes, well, she said you and your wife were going to be in town, so..."

"Yes," he gestured self-deprecatingly to his suit. "I have just come from my lecture. A little overdressed, I guess."

"Oh, nobody here cares what anybody is wearing. Half the time we're all wearing black tacticals anyway. You look fine. So is your wife on her way?"

"I don't know what her schedule is."

"Oh, well. I look forward to meeting her."

Vasquez squeezed her way through the crowd to her father and hugged him. "Hola, Papi. Where's Mom?"

He shrugged. "I came straight from my lecture. I'm not sure what her schedule is like."

And Alex thought that was an odd way to say it, but she didn't comment. Instead, she watched as the man picked up Vasquez's left hand and said, "But that's not an engagement ring."

Alex said, "Thank you! Why does everybody just assume--"

The man looked at the easel and said, "But Alexandra, there are only maybe three pictures of you--"

"It's a birthday party, Dad. Didn't Mom tell you?"

"She said it was an engagement party--".

Eliza said, "The invitations I sent out were very clear--"

Vasquez closed her eyes and opened them again. "Well. Mom is. She is not always. She--"

Her father put his arm around her shoulders. "Dominique reads selectively."

Vasquez nodded, looking away as if to hold back tears, but nobody in the room believed that was what she was doing. Couldn't happen. Like the world turning backward.

Eliza said, "Maybe you should come open your presents, Sue? You've got a tower of them waiting for you..."

Alex dragged Vasquez to the couch and handed her one wrapped in pink paper. Vasquez frowned at Alex, but there was a smile there as well. "There is literally only one person on the planet who would
wrap a present to me in pink. Alex?"

"I couldn't help it, given the contents. J'onn always talks about balance, after all."

Vasquez opened the box and pulled out a flash grenade.

"It's the new one that has multiple bursts," said Alex enthusiastically. "Winn only just finished it!"

Vasquez got all mushy again. She said, "Alex, just so you know? This is, this, it's great. But you are the greatest gift I could ever receive."

"I love you," said Alex, and Alex leaned in and kissed her.

There was a gagging noise. Vasquez watched as her father murmured something and hurried out of the apartment. "What did he say?"

Eliza frowned. "He said, 'I just can't.'"

Vasquez was up and out of the door on the double. She jumped over the banister and hurried down the last of the stairs. She caught up with him on the sidewalk outside.

"Dad! Papi, what just happened?"

"Nothing. Nothing happened. I just, I needed some air."

She frowned. "My girlfriend kissed me and you ran out because you needed air?"

"It's not about you."

"Dad, I'm a freaking analyst. I fucking predict the future on a regular basis based on my superior understanding of psychology and behavior, human and alien. And this just stinks of homophobia."

"It's not about you."

"No? Then what is about? What is it about Alex Danvers that has you looking like you want to puke? Because she is beautiful and brilliant and courageous and kind and—"

"It's your mother."

Vasquez stared.

"We've been separated for almost a year now. She wants a divorce."

"Dad," Vasquez groped for words. "Do Pete and Julie know?"

"Julie has enough of her own problems. I talked to Pete a few days ago, after she told me. I asked him not to tell you, so I could do it myself. She didn't tell you when you met for lunch?"

"No, she had a meeting with Louise and a lawyer. About their business thing, I guess."

"Not about that. Or, at least, not only about that. She wants to marry Louise."

Vasquez felt dizzy, like someone had just dropped a cartoon anvil on her head. She reached out and her father steadied her. "But Mom's not— Sure, Louise was her friend since college, but they're not—"

"They were together when I met your mother. But in those days... And her parents wanted
grandchildren, and so did mine. And we both wanted children. And back then there weren’t as many ways to do that. And our parents wouldn’t have let us consider adoption, so…”

He looked exhausted.

Vasquez floundered. “But Dad… Mom’s not gay! She’s so straight and so, well, homophobic. She just looks at me with so much disgust, always has, even before I finally came out.”

He sighed. “She’s bisexual. When you were little, running around playing cowboys and Indians with the boys in the neighborhood and she kept trying to stuff you into dresses, that wasn’t disgust, Spike. It was fear. She lost a lot of her old friends from college to AIDS in those days. I kept telling her you were just a tomboy, that it was a phase, even though I knew it wasn’t. But it made her back off you for a little while. But I remember one time when Julie was playing with her Barbies and you brought out your GI Joe and offered to rescue them from Russian spies, she turned to me and said, ‘What have I done? I’ve passed on my genes to her and now she’s going to suffer like me.’”

Vasquez tried to shut down what she thought of as her Family Brain so that she could use her Work Brain. It took a while. Finally, she said, “Suffer?”

He sighed. “Yeah. I’m just the beard.”

“But she loves you—“

“Yeah, she’s loved me. But I’m not the love of her life. Never was.”

“Dad…”

“I think the term is closet case? Internalized homophobia? All that. So when the Supreme Court ruling about gay marriage came down? Right before the Paris Fashion Week? I should have known. Louise had moved to France not long after you were born, and they only saw each other once a year after that. I turned a blind eye. After all, I’d won. I could afford to be a little generous…”

“Dad, come back to the party. Meet my friends. Have cake.”

“But your mother is coming later, isn’t she?”

“Yeah, but we’ll deal with that when she gets here. Together.”

“Is there scotch at the party?”

“Probably not, but there’s a liquor store down the street. We could—“

“Please.”
Flipping the Script

They ran belowground, through dark tunnels, lit red. When they came out of a conduit, it was nighttime, and they hurried through ravines of blood-red rock until they dove underground again and finally ended in an underground cavern, with wide rooms and torn curtains, worn furniture. Supergirl thought it had probably been airy and warm once. Now it just looked tired, old, a ruin.

Supergirl turned to J'onn. "This was your home?"

"No," said his father. "It was mine. How dare you? How dare you bring me here?"

"Father!"

"The man slapped him. "It was one thing to take my son's form, but to bring me back here. To the place where your people stole our lives from us?"

"I brought you here to prove it. If I wasn't your son, how could I know of this place?"

"Kill me if you will. But until you do, I will spend my final moments praying for the ruins of my slaughtered family!"

He strode away, knelt and closed his eyes.

J'onn walked in the other direction. Supergirl stood, undecided, unclear how she could help. All she had ever wanted to do was help. And here she was with her ersatz Dad and his actual (although cranky and misled) Dad on an alien planet where there were only a handful of people of one species and an entire (evil) civilization of another. And she had nothing to work with to make the situation better this time except her words and her heart. Punching was not going to win the day.

Maybe later, it would help. But not right now. And Lena Luthor always said that she had a way with words, but in fact what she had was a way with revision. With writing you had time to figure out a better, clearer, nicer way to say something. In real time, all you had was your gut.

But she had been told by many people over the years to go with her gut: her fifth grade writing teacher, Jeremiah, Vasquez, Winn, Kal-El, Lena.

Alex.

And they would know, right?

So she walked over to the praying Martian and knelt down in front of him. "Hi. I'm sorry to interrupt your prayers, but I think it's important that you hear me right now."

He didn't even open his eyes. "What is left to say?"

"Look at me. I'm not a White Martian. You can sense that, can't you? So you know it's true?"

Then he did open his eyes, and reached out and touched her face. "You are a Kryptonian."

She nodded. "Yes, that's right. I come from a dead planet. I come from a dead people, just like you."

"Krypton is gone, but Mars remains. And every day for two hundred years, I have been forced to remember the horror of what happened to my people."
"You're right."

"There is no future for Mars."

Kara nodded. "Not for Green Martians, no. But this is bigger than you. It's about your faith."

"What do you know of my god?"

"I heard you, before. Hieronymir tests us. This is a test. You have a chance to save your planet, not for your people maybe, but for another people, who want to do better than the ones who came before. I don't blame you for not wanting to believe that J'onn is actually your son. I don't blame you for not wanting to open your mind, because if it weren't true?"

"It would be like losing him all over again."

"Yes, and whether or not you believe that he is your son, he wants to save Mars. So please, M'rynn, open your mind, just a little bit. Please just give him a chance."

He turned behind him and J'onn asked, "May I?"

His father nodded.

Immediately, they were immersed in the same space, but centuries earlier, without the wear and tear, and with multiple sources of a red-gold light, warm and welcoming.

J'onn looked around. "Do you see it? This is my favorite memory. I haven't thought about this in a long time. Do you see it?"

"I see it. I remember it."

Somehow, even Supergirl could see the scene: two Green Martian girls chasing each other down the stairs, giggling. "They're beautiful, J'onn," said Supergirl.

"They were... excited...about something. They were terrible about keeping secrets."

"What did they know?" asked Supergirl.

J'onn's father said, "That I had left worship early, to surprise J'onn."

They watched a much younger version of J'onn's father greet and horse around with his giggling granddaughters. Then J'onn came in, was completely surprised not only to see his father, but also to realize that his daughters had finally (just) managed to keep a secret. Hugs all around.

Supergirl wiped a tear from her eye, then another one from the other eye, as the illusion of their shared memory disappeared.

Then J'onn's father turned to look at his son. "J'onn! My son!"

"I missed you!"

"I am so sorry, for not believing you. How did you survive? Why did you come back here?"

"The staff, Father. It's urgent. But there is still time."

"No, there isn't." The Green and White Martians of the resistance were marching into the J'onzz' (Supergirl thought to herself) living room.
M'gann said, "I'm sorry, J'onn."

"J'onn, it's okay. The staff isn't far. They're taking it to Hive Delorian Crater."

"Let's go."

//

Deep in a Martian crater, the White Martians were chanting a prayer to Hieronymir: "Make us strong, make us pure, make us prevail." Over and over and over.

The crater, like most places on Mars, was rocky and barren, lit with red light. So when Supergirl drove the 1950s Chrysler convertible, they paused the same way a bunch of Catholics would have if someone drove a classic car into the middle of a mass.

Supergirl said, "I'm sorry to bother you doing... whatever it is you're doing? But I think I took a wrong turn at Albuquerque, and... Can any of you give me directions back to Earth?"

One of Whites roared at her. She got out of the car. "You know, I took that tunnel, but my GPS is all screwed up down here..." She sauntered toward them. "It keeps trying to get me to make a suicidal left turn."

They roared some more. She smirked. "You might want to check your rear view."

Just as the Whites surged toward her, J'onn and M'gann flew in behind them. Punches flew. Martians, Green and White, flew. Supergirl smacked down first one White, then another, then incinerated a third with her heat vision. Another White grabbed her by the throat and picked her up but she kicked him away and ran toward the center of the cavern, where the ancient purple staff stood.

A high-pitched whine filled the space and White and Greens both fell to the ground, covering their ears.

"Supergirl!" J'onn yelled. "It's the staff!"

She ran for it, but a White picked her up tried to tear her apart. But J'onn had reached the car, shifted it back to its spaceship persona and shot the White, giving her time to pick up the staff and shoot its energy at the rest of them. Supergirl turned and handed the staff to M'gann.

"This belongs to the resistance now."

The resistance fighters cheered.
Family Are the Ones Who Have Your Back

When Vasquez had followed her father out of the apartment, Eliza murmured to Winn, “I wish Kara were here. She could use her super hearing to—“

Winn grinned. “Oh, I so got this.” He hurried out the door, leaving Eliza standing there.

James shrugged. “He’s Winn.”

Alex was still sitting on the couch looking stunned, hurt and supremely pissed off. Eliza went and gave her a hug.

Alex murmured, “I kinda expected something like that from her mom, from the stuff she said. But not from him.”

Winn came back into the apartment out of breath and rolling up what looked like flesh colored headphone wires. “Extendable ears,” he said. “Still working on it. Short story: Dad’s not the bad guy.”

A knock on the door surprised them, since Vasquez wouldn’t knock if she were returning. Alex opened the door to reveal two very well preserved older women, one Latina and the other one much, much blonder than God had made her. They were holding hands. Alex greeted them warmly, but Eliza’s eyes narrowed, watching Vasquez’s mother air-kiss her daughter. Next to her, Winn growled low in his throat.

Stepping forward, Eliza extended her hand. “Hello, Mrs. Vasquez. I’m Eliza Danvers.”

The woman shook her hand saying, “It’s Garza, actually. I never took my husband’s name. So. You’re the mother of the bride, are you? Pleasure, I’m sure.” She looked around the room. “Where’s the groom?”

Alex said, through her teeth, “For the last time, we are NOT engaged. This is a birthday party, to celebrate Vas— To celebrate Susan.”

Eliza said, “Can I get you a drink, Ms. Garza? There’s beer.”

“Oh, I don’t drink beer, dear.”

Winn shouted, “Two Pepsis, coming right up!”

Eliza said, “Come on in, your daughter should be right back momentarily.”

“She couldn’t even be bothered to attend her own party? That’s nervy.”

Alex turned to the other woman, smile plastered on her face. “Ms. Previnger? I’m Alex Danvers.”

“Enchanté.”

The woman turned toward the easel that was plastered with pictures of Susan Vasquez in pairs and groups of all the people present. In many of them, she was wearing black tactical gear. In one she was surrounded by women in Marine khaki camos in a desert scene with a tank in the background.

James murmured to the woman, “You know that Agent Vasquez has saved the life of everyone here at one time or another, right? You know that she trained half the people in this room? She even
helped train Supergirl with her hand-to-hand combat.”

Previnger raised a perfectly manicured eyebrow. “Your point?”

But as Winn gave the two women tall glasses full of Pepsi, to their consternation, Vasquez’s mother said, “He is trying to show you that you can’t judge a book by its cover, darling, that they look past Susan’s tomboy sensibility—“

The door opened and Vasquez and her father stepped in, carrying a brown paper bag. Immediately, their faces, which had been smiling, went blank. Vasquez said loudly, “I’m not a tomboy, Mother. I’m a fucking Marine. Dad, the glasses are over the sink.”

Alex came to stand next to her and put her hand on her shoulder. Vasquez’s mother took in Alex’s hair, understated makeup, blouse, black skinny jeans and flats and nodded in mild approval.

“Well, dear, at least you’ve finally found a woman who clearly has two X chromosomes. So Alexandra, are you also an analyst?”

“No, ma’am. Field agent, ma’am.”

“So. A glorified cop.”

“With an MD/PhD,” added Eliza proudly, smiling at the woman’s surprise.

“So. Pretty and smart. So why on Earth are two you dating?”

Vasquez snarled, “Because she is beautiful and brilliant and has dozens of patents for biotechnology and can field strip an M16 almost as fast as I can.”

Previnger laughed. “Well, clearly that’s what we are ALL looking for in a woman!”

Winn and James looked at each other and then looked back at her.

“Yes.”

“Definitely.”

“I know I am!”

“That shit is HOT!”

"Yup!"

Alex said, “Vas, she was talking to me.”

She turned to the two women, and she knew that Winn was thinking "six ways to make you talk with my index finger," which was fine with Alex, because that was exactly the vibe she wanted to give off.

She said, "You want to know why I’m dating your daughter, Ms. Garza? Because she is beautiful and generous and strong, I’ve never known anyone so strong, and so patient and so smart and she brings ALL her agents back home. Because she cares. Underneath the flexible steel that her mind is made of and the scarred skin of her body is a huge heart that wants to protect everybody. So she puts her mind and body and soul into her work so that we all make it back home. Again and again and again.”
Vasquez actually blushed, looking at Alex.

Vasquez's mother stepped into their space. "Well, I suppose if what you want is a man in the shape of a woman--"

But Eliza inserted herself between them. "Are you being transphobic?" She gestured toward Winn and James who were clearly taking videos with their phones. "Because although my daughter is very clearly female, I have colleagues in my lab who are in the process of transitioning. And I don't honestly care about what sex they are or want or any of that, because they are brilliant scientists, they are amazing problem-solvers. And my daughter? My beautiful daughter? She has finally found someone who appreciates her completely: not despite who she is but because of who she is. And if you can't do that for your daughter? You know what? I can. I will. I do. Because Agent Susan Vasquez trained my daughter to be able to stay alive herself and save the lives of others. Because Agent Susan Vasquez, when my daughter came out ashamed and questioning? Affirmed her value and taught her what she needed to know to survive a homophobic society."

Vasquez's mother said, "Well, she's not the only one who is gay!"

"No," said Vasquez. "I'm not. We're not. But it is fucking 2017, Mother. And if you can't come out to your friends? I get that. That takes time. And if you can't come out to your colleagues, well, is that your industry or is that you? Cuz I for sure don't know. But if you can't come out to your family?"

She shook her head. "What do you think that would have made us think of you?"

The woman frowned at her daughter and it brought wrinkles to her face that her plastic surgery couldn't hide. "I couldn't care less what you think of me, Susan. But the world has not been kind to us, not until recently, and even now, we suffer."

"No, ma'am," said Alex. "We who are out suffer. You just coast."

"You know nothing of my life!"

"That's true, I don't. I really don't. But I know a good deal about your daughter's life: the fights she's been in against male homophobes, and, oh, yeah, won. The promotions she was overlooked for because her previous boss considered her sub-normal? Yeah, that? That I know a lot about. And maybe, just maybe, I'm just extrapolating. But I'm pretty sure your fears are based on the kinds of things she's faced that you were rightly afraid to face. And I just came out like five minutes ago, because I was so clueless about my own life, because compulsory heteronormativity is a thing. But you? Why are you coming out now? Because you can? Because society has finally started to change? Well, good for you. Good for all of us here. But if you are going to come out, be supportive of the people who have come out before you, be supportive of the people like your own daughter who took much greater risks coming out earlier, coming out louder and prouder, and yeah, let's face it, way, way butcher than you will ever manage to be."

"Why on Earth would I ever choose--"

Winn murmured to James, "I would totally date Vasquez before I would date that chick, even if she were forty years younger."

James mm-hmmmed, arms crossed over this chest, looking very tall.

Eliza murmured, "Me too, and I'm straight..."

Pam from HR said, "Preach!"

Chen, looking scared, said, "Well, but Vasquez is kind. That makes all the difference, doesn't it?"
Mr. Vasquez poured two glasses of scotch, handed one to his daughter, and said, "A toast to my beautiful daughter, her beautiful girlfriend, and her loyal and beautiful family!"

And everybody raised their glasses and bottles. "Hear, hear!"
T'gall said, "I saw what the staff did back there. It's too powerful of a weapon for either side to have. Take it back to Earth. Bury it. If we are going to win this war, we have to be better than our enemies."

"I underestimated you," said J'onn, offering his hand.

"And I you." T'gall shook it and nodded and turned away.

J'onn looked at M'gann and Supergirl. "Ready to return home."

"Oh yes!" said Supergirl.

"Dollywood's not going to run itself," said M'gann.

"So," said Supergirl. "How about your father?"

//

Vasquez showed up at the hotel's bar wearing black skinny jeans and Doc Marten's, a plaid flannel shirt and a black leather jacket. The bartender saw her and smiled. "Sauvignon Blanc?"

"God, no. Dewers. I've got an Uber coming."

"You got it."

He put down a cocktail napkin and the drink. She sipped appreciatively and passed him her credit card.

Dominique strutted into the room wearing a black pencil skirt and white satin blouse unbuttoned just a bit too far, naturally. And stilettos. Naturally.

She sat on the stool next to Vasquez. "Buy a girl a drink?"

"No, ma'am. I only buy drinks for my friends." She sipped her scotch and smiled at the sting, then frowned.

"You are going to blame me for my fear of our society?"

"No, not really. I've fought too many cis-male straight assholes to think that your fear wasn't real. And you aren't a fighter, Mama. Not the way I am. Not the way Alex is. Hell, not even the way Eliza Danvers is--a straight woman in science with a POW husband? That woman is strong. You could learn a lot from her, I think."

Dominique waved her hand dismissively.

"Mama, I get it, you know. I do. The love that dare not speak its name. You grew up in different times. But you have benefitted hugely from femme invisibility while mocking my butchness at every turn. But I have been honest. I have been myself. And I have an amazing girlfriend and family of choice who value me. And maybe I didn't see that until these last few days. So thank your for coming to my birthday party. You gave me an amazing gift: showing me who are the people who actually really love me for who I am. Not despite what I am. I am happy in my own skin. I am surrounded by people who value and cherish me. And I don't need you to see me or to get me or to
even like me. I don't need anything from you. I'm already good. Goodbye, Mama."

"/

M'gann's Martian ship breached atmo, landed and changed back into a Chevy Bel Air. J'onn, S'marrin and Supergirl got out, and M'gann drove back to the garage.

"So this is Earth," said M'yrrn, as they walked under an overpass.

"This isn't even the nice part," said Supergirl.

"I rather like it." He bent down and picked a weed from the tarmac.

J'onn turned to Supergirl. "You know, I'm not sure I could have done this without you."

She hugged him. "Yes, you could've. You're the strongest man, and Martian, that I've ever known. I was glad I could be there to help you."

"See you tomorrow."

"You've got it, boss." She turned to M'yrrn. "You raised a good one." She leapt into the sky and flew away.

"Can everyone on Earth do that?" asked M'yrrn.

"No, she is special."

"So, what do we do now?"

"We go home, Father. We go home."
Alison really loved this part of her job, reaching out to people, bringing them in to the warmth and light of the community. Todd was the one who researched the new rescues. He was great with combing through the newsfeeds for Supergirl news, and CatCo in particular made it their job to record Supergirl's heroics, including the names and ages of the ones saved. And then it became Alison's job to find them and make contact, like today.

Once upon a time, Alison would have been extremely uncomfortable at a place with all these children. She had always wanted her own child, and she and her husband had tried for years with no luck. On the day that changed her life, Alison had just received a one-two punch. Her doctor had told her that the tests had proved her to be infertile, and when she'd told her husband, he had asked her for a divorce. When the bank robbers had taken her an the other hostages, and then negotiations had gone all day and half the night, she had thought that she was going to die and there would be nothing left of her in the world, no child to carry on her DNA and prove her life had meant something. And maybe it hadn't. Maybe there was no point for her, for Alison, to be in the world anymore.

And then the ceiling exploded. Supergirl saved them. And Alison had walked out of the building into the cool night air, and she was a different person.

She could look at these children playing soccer, laughing and cheering, and not feel empty. She was serene. She could look at the executive/soccer-mom and not feel jealousy. She had purpose now, to help people like this woman and her daughter find theirs.

The girl in question was dressed in a pale blue soccer jersey and black shorts, dexterously keeping control of the ball and moving it down the field, avoiding the players in the red jerseys like she was made of grease.

On the sidelines, a well-dressed woman with a laptop on her lap paused in her work long enough to shake her fist and yell, "Ruby! Go get 'em, baby girl! Yeah!"

And then her phone rang and she answered it, just in time to miss her daughter's score.

Ruby turned in her mother's direction. "Mom! Did you see that!"

And the mother hid her phone and yelled, "Uh, yes! Amazing! Good job, baby!"

Alison smiled and sauntered over, just as the woman hung up her phone, looking annoyed. "Which one's yours?" she asked.

"Oh, the forward. I swear to God, I don't know how she's so coordinated. I struggle even to think and chew at the same time. How about you? Which one's yours?"

"Ruby is special," said Alison.
The woman said, "Yes... she is. Wait, I don't think I told you her name."

"She's chosen. So are you." She pulled one of the pamphlets out of her bag and handed it to the woman.

"I'm sorry, who did you say you are?"

"A follower," Alison said gently. "Please. Bring Ruby to our community, so that she may learn her path."

The woman's smile looked a bit forced. She said, "Thanks..."

And Alison had faith that this woman would not tear up the pamphlet as some did. She had a sense that this one would bear fruit. She smiled and walked away.

//

Lena invited Kara to lunch at Noonan's, a fairly neutral ground. She made sure to order all of Kara's favorite sandwiches in addition to her own kale salad and iced tea. The food was being placed on their table as Kara hurried in, winded.

"What did you do?" asked Lena. "Fly here?"

"Yeah, well, there's been a strange uptick in industrial sabotage. Winn's trying to create an algorithm. But it means I've got two full time jobs now."

"About that... But no, you should eat something first. Start with the Rueben while it's hot. The cold sandwiches can wait."

Kara gave Lena a look so full of love it nearly made Lena cry. But Luthors didn't cry.

Kara dug in. Lena, used to filling the silences with news, said, "So we have a merger in process, something I am hoping will help us increase our market share on alien pharmaceuticals and prosthetics. Sam, I introduced you to Sam?"

"Mmf," said Kara, wolfing down her Rueben.

"Sam has been instrumental in making it happen. She's taken a huge weight off my shoulders."

"Ats gut."

"That gives me more time to get up to speed at CatCo. It's strange not knowing everyone. I worked very hard to know everyone at L-Corp, names, faces, families, hobbies."

Kara stared, then wiped the Thousand Island dressing from the Rueben off her mouth. "How?"

"Jess quizzed me once a week. And I have an eidetic memory, which helps. But at CatCo, I don't have a Jess. I have Eve, who is remarkably pro-Lena for some reason, but she's not Jess, or even Kara Danvers."

Kara swallowed. "People like Jess and me are forged in the fires of hard-to-keep-up-with CEOs."

"True. But it means I've had to ask her to make a booklet of all the employees so I can learn them."

Kara stared. A tiny piece of sauerkraut hung from her lip. Lena reached out and brushed it off with her thumb. Kara blushed.
"Yeah," she said. "About that, well not that exactly, not Eve or the employees, but more you and me and um--"

Lena nodded. "Exactly."

"You're my boss now, or, more specifically, I'm your employee, which means that our relationship just got... sorta complicated."

"Yes. It did."

"And I mean, it's pretty much a given that the sex is off the table, but how are we going to handle our friendship? Because I gave what you said last week about favoritism a lot of thought, and I really don't want to mess up the relationships I have with the CatCo folks who have been my friends for a couple of years now, but I don't want to lose you either."

Lena opened her mouth and then closed it. Finally, she said, "Well, at the very least, we should be professional at work and save our personal relationship for when we are very clearly alone or in private."

"But game night is out."

"Ah, James. Yes. You're right about that." Even to herself, Lena sounded sad. "I was just trying to save CatCo. I never meant to make all our lives more complicated."

"I hear you," murmured Kara. She picked up the roast beef sandwich and took a bite, closing her eyes and groaning quietly in ecstasy. "I freaking adore horseradish, have I mentioned that lately?"

Lena said, "I, er, um, why no. No, I, I don't think you have." How did this woman make her feel damp simply by talking about food?

Luckily, Lena's phone rang.

"Oh, Sam. Yes, of course. I'm just grabbing lunch. I'll be there within the hour."

//

At L-Corp, Lena led Kara into her office, saying, "I just have to sign some papers, and then we can get back to work."

"Yeah, no problem. Although my boss gets mad if I'm late."

Sam hurried in. "Sorry!"

"Hey," said Lena.

"Ruby had a soccer game and the kids really wanted to get ice cream to celebrate their win."

"No worries," said Lena. "You remember Kara."

She handed a folder to Lena. "Yes. Okay, so the JQB merger should be finalized any minute, unless Paul tries to pull something, which I will not allow."

"Please, Paul is one of the things I do not miss." To Kara she said, "Skeezy lawyers."

"Ah. Gotcha."
Lena leaned over and signed the documents. "So," she said. "How are you planning to celebrate your first merger as my new CFO."

Kara said, "We're having a girls' night at my place..."

Sam shook her head dismissively. "No! I couldn't intrude!"

Kara sighed. "You do realize that Lena doesn't take no for an answer..."

Lena laughed. "That's accurate."

"What? Okay. I'll go! What should I bring?"

"Booze!" said Lena. "Just, no tequila, okay? Please."

Kara was distracted. She picked up the pamphlet and opened it. "Where did you get this?"

"Oh. Some weirdo at Ruby's soccer game. She came up and tried to enlist me in some self-help meeting."

"I hate those things," said Lena. "A waste of trees and of our time."

But Kara looked troubled. "Mind if I keep this?"

"Yeah, go ahead."

Lena was already striding out the door. "See you later!"
In the men's room at CatCo, James changed out of his suit and into his civvies, missing the days when he could change instead into his Guardian armor and go kick some righteous ass.

Okay, sure, in retrospect, it looked a lot less righteous and a lot more like testosterone-laced fun. Which was wrong, very wrong, and he wasn't going to do that ever again.

But...

It had been fun.

As he exited the bathroom, he saw Winn exiting the employees' elevator. "Dude." He gave him a high five. "You ever miss our Guardian days?"

"On a day like today? When the DEO has been dealing with industrial sabotage, alien viruses and--do you remember those flying dogs?"

"Yeah, of course I do."

Winn pushed up his sleeves to show dozens of very fine scratches. "Turns out that flying cats are way worse. Who knew?"

"Okay, well, what about bowling?"

"Now you are on!" said Winn, and they high fived.

But as they passed Kara's desk, she was still there, hard at work and frowning at her laptop.

James said, "Kara, what are you still doing here? I thought you already turned in your piece on the alien hospital."

"Oh, I did. This is something personal."

Winn said, "Oh! Hey! Where'd you get this?" He picked up the pamphlet off her desk.

"What's that?" asked James.

"It's the Kryptonian symbol for Rao," said Kara.

"It's the god of Krypton," said Winn.

"Yeah, I know that, but what is it doing on a pamphlet?"

"That's what I have been trying to research all afternoon, but I can't find anything."

"Just a time and address," said Winn. "Kinda ominous."

Kara jumped up and grabbed her coat and bag. "Just how ominous, I am about to find out."

"Wait," said Winn. "You're going to go there?"

James said, "We're coming with you."

"I don't need you to protect me."
"Yeah..."
"Yeah, we know."

They followed her out anyway.

//

The venue was strange. Although the paint was peeling from the walls, there were fancy candelabra hanging from the ceilings, giving the meeting room a warm light. Kara led them forward slowly and cautiously.

"It's like an AA meeting," said James.


A young, familiar-looking woman greeted them and then a man in shirtsleeves came forward to greet the gathered people and to lead them in prayer. And that—

for Kara

that

was the out of body experience.

"Though we go forth alone, our soul reunites under Rao's gladsome rays..."

The words tore Kara violently from this Earth and she found herself in her family's chapel with her mother intoning the words.

"For Rao sees all, feels all. His love is eternal. May Rao protect us so that we can protect others."

Kara fought the dizziness as the man talked about how people don't get second chances, how everyone got lost at times, and some stayed lost, spiritually lost, and needing to find their way back home. The girl who had greeted them came to the front and started speaking, about the fall that led to Supergirl catching her, who said that everything would be okay, and how she realized that she still deserved to be loved.

James turned to Kara. "Do you remember saving her?"

Kara looked around at the faces in the room. "I, I remember all of them."

At the front of the room, the man said, "In the name of Supergirl--"

And the congregation answered, "We give thanks!"

Winn asked, "Who exactly are they praying to?"

Devastated, Kara said, "Me. They're praying to me."
As soon as the meeting ended, James said, "We should go back to the D--"

And neither he nor Winn was prepared for Kara Danvers to pick them both up and fly them back to the DEO, particularly not without changing into her supersuit first. James was able to shake it off faster, because, duh, years with Superman. But Winn recovered relatively quickly, even typing in some code to add to his algorithm to get the identity of their current person of interest.

"We have a name! Thomas Coville, born and raised in National City, so not an alien (no offense)."

"Any red flags, Agent Schott?" asked J'onn. "Criminal record? Any arrests?"

"Well, he was a Boy Scout up until three years ago when his wife filed for divorce and his life fell apart. Uh, let's see. He was disbarred from practicing law after a series of convictions for public drinking and disorderly conduct."

Kara adjusted her glasses. "I don't see how that connects to Supergirl. I don't remember saving him. And trust me, I would."

Winn said, "Yes, you did not save him as an individual. But I looked up all mass emergencies that Supergirl intervened in, you know, burning buildings, colliding trains, the yoozh. And I dug a little deeper. Thomas Coville was on Flight 237."

James said, "What's the significance of Flight 237?"

"It's the flight my sister was on the night I became Supergirl."

J'onn said, "Well, now we know why he's the leader of a religion that worships Supergirl."

"It's not a religion," said Kara. "It's a cult. He's taking the teachings of Rao and twisting them."

"Yeah," said Winn. "And how does he know so much about it? I don't mean just the symbol, but the teachings, the texts?"

Kara said, "Coville is targeting people who have been saved by Supergirl and trying to get them into this cult of Rao. He's gotta have a motive. Winn, can you keep digging?"

"Yeah, I can dig it."

And Kara decided, enough was enough. She desperately needed Girls Night to put her back into balance.

//

When Lena showed up ten minutes early with a bottle of expensive red wine, Alex and Vasquez were already at Kara's place, but the superhero had been delayed at the DEO. Vasquez was sitting at the kitchen island with a swollen wrist laid out, while Alex was rolling an Ace bandage around it, carefully, patiently, testing the tightness and asking for Vasquez's consent at every step. To Lena, it was adorable.
"Oh my, Agent Vasquez. Please tell me you got that injury in the line of fire and not in bed with Agent Danvers here."

Vasquez smirked.

Alex said, "What? No, of course not! Lena, what would make you say such a thing?"

And Vasquez said, "Personal experience would be my guess."

Lena smiled and did not elaborate. "I brought wine?"

"And why do I suspect," said Alex as she set the metal clasp in Vasquez's bandage, "that this bottle is worth more than my annual income?"

"I have absolutely no clue, Agent Danvers. Now a week of your income, maybe." She winked.

Vasquez grinned. "I like this girl, Alex."

"Of course you do. You like all the femmes."

"Nope, no, unh uh. We covered this topic last week, no?"

"Oh, shit, Vas! I wasn't even thinking. I'm sorry!"

Lena looked at them, confused. "Er, did I miss something?"

"No!" said Alex.

"Yeah," drawled Vasquez. "It turns out that my incredibly high-femme mother is actually bi, divorcing my dad, and marrying an equally high-femme fashion designer. Still can't stand little old butch me, but I'm learning to get over it."

"Ouch," said Lena.

"Yeah," said Vasquez easily. "But Dad is being better about all of it than I would ever have expected."

There was a knock on the door and Alex trotted over to let in Sam, who also came armed with a bottle of red wine, perhaps less expensive but equally well meant. "Thank you, welcome, we're all here except Kara, who'd stayed late at work but has texted that she is on her way."

"Um, great."

Lena said, "Sam, this is Alex's girlfriend, Vasquez."

"Um, Sam." She held out her hand. "You don't do first names?"

"Eventually. After you've saved my life once or twice."

Sam laughed.

Alex and Lena looked very serious.

"Um," said Sam.

"No, she's actually means that," said Lena. "As far as I know, her first name is actually Agent."
"Right..."

The door opened and a very tired Kara came in, dropped her bag and went immediately in for a hug with Alex. It was a long hug, and the others could tell that Alex was straining her muscles to hug the woman hard.

"Thanks," said Kara.

She looked at Vasquez's hand. "Someone hurt Vasquez. Do I need to pitch them into space?" She gave her sister a hard look.

"It wasn't me! Geez! It was the Infer-- er, Indian woman. The team shot her full of tranqs but she was still really strong."

Vasquez nodded. "She really was."

Lena sat back, watching this interplay, wondering if Vasquez and Alex had ever experimented with power dynamics... But this was her sort-of girlfriend's sister and the sister's girlfriend. There were some things she probably shouldn't even think about concerning them.

"So," said Alex, pouring wine for everyone. "Sam, how is starting out at L-Corp going?"

"Well, it's a lot of work, trying to fill this one's shoes. And oh, hey, Lena, we have a sexual harassment suit in the works. R&D. I just found out five minutes before I left for the day. You're going to want to come in tomorrow."

Lena groaned. "Everything I do to change the culture: workshops, suspensions and firings. How do I fix this? Why is science and engineering so fucking patriarchal?"

Alex nodded and finished handing out the glasses of wine. "Power structures. The majority, which is often men, will try to, well, fuck with, the minority. And what can the minority do?"

"Fight back," said Sam.

"Amen," said Kara.

"Kick 'em where it hurts," said Vasquez.

Gently, Lena said, "We'll figure it out. We have some very good, feminist lawyers on retainer for just this sort of thing."

"God," said Sam. "Are men ever a good thing?"

"Good?" said Lena. "Um, you're asking the wrong chick. Amusing? Maybe..."

Kara said, "Why do I sense that there is a story behind this statement?"

Lena giggled. "So. A very handsome world leader, whom I shall not name, invites me to dinner at the Baldwin, where he's staying. And we get there and he tells me that he has to ask me an important question, so of course I assume that, okay, he's going to invite me up to his room, so I am thinking about how to handle that problem when he asks me if I've been baptized."

"What?" asks Kara.

"No!" said Sam.
"Are you kidding?" asked Vasquez.

"Yes! Yes! So I just burst out laughing and said no I hadn't, and yeah, apparently, he only sleeps with good Catholic girls."

"That's insane," said Vasquez.

"I know, right? So I said, 'Well, I only sleep with women.' And he pulls back, looking all shocked, and he tells me I'm going to Hell, so I say, 'Well, what about you, Don Juan? Seducing innocent women?' So, yeah. We agreed to disagree."

The women laughed, sipping their wine and marveling at the idiocy of men.

Alex asked, "What about Ruby's father? Is he still in the picture?"

"Nope. It's just Ruby and me."

"Wow," said Alex. "Raising your daughter by yourself. That's incredible. How do you do it?"

"Ah, not very gracefully. Always behind on something. You guys will see when you have kids."

"Yeah, no," said Alex. "We're not having kids."

"Yeah," said Vasquez, "we'll just be the cool aunts."

"Yeah, great!" said Sam. "Ruby would love that! I'm sorry for assuming..."

"No, it's fine. You're good."

"Put me down for another cool aunt," said Lena.

"Yeah, I'm the slightly nerdier cool aunt," said Alex.

"Seriously?" asked Vasquez. "You're nerdier than Lena freaking Luthor?"

Lena laughed.

Alex hastened to apologize.

Kara said, "Ladies, I call this as a 51/49 split in favor of Lena. Sorry, Alex, you just don't care enough about Star Wars to win this."

Sam turned to Kara and asked, "So what about you, Kara? Are you seeing anybody?"

Kara flicked a glance at Lena, who gave a tiny shake of her head. "Not at the moment," said Kara. "I'm focusing on my career right now. And getting back into writing about the restaurants of National City. It's a dirty job, eating all that amazing food, but somebody's gotta do it!"

Everybody laughed. Sam said, "Wow, you guys are amazing. That's very cool."

All of a sudden Kara's attention shifted, and Lena recognized that the sirens outside were probably the source of her distraction. Kara frowned. "Vasquez, your ice is melting. I should go pick up some more ice."

Alex said, "Yes. Yes. You definitely should do that."

Kara grimly walked away. "I'll be right back."
Vasquez said, "So Sam. What are you doing when you're not drinking wine with a bunch of badass ladies?"

"Oh, gosh! Most of my 'free time' is taken up with Ruby's extracurriculars: yearbook, soccer, all that stuff. And of course her regular homework. I don't have much time for a social life."

Lena saw Vasquez give Alex a look.

Lena said, "Did you ever play pool in college?"

"Sure a little. It was a way to meet guys. But it never worked too well. They were always more interested in beating me at the game than getting to know me, so..."

Alex murmured, "Amen, sister. That drove me nuts!"

Vasquez asked, "What school did you go to for undergrad?"

"Middlebury, in Vermont. I was an Economics major and Spanish minor and I took a ton of extra classes in poli-sci."

Vasquez nodded. "And grad school?"

"American University, with internships in DC that totally put me off public service and politics. So then I ended up at MIT Sloan School of Business, which is where I met Lena when I cross-registered for a class at Harvard B School, and that, eventually, brought me to L-Corp."

"So the story has a happy ending," said Alex.

"Well, Agent Danvers, it isn't a happy ending yet," said Lena in a faux-haughty style. "She's not the CEO yet."

Sam groaned. "Sorry, Lena. You are stuck with that job for life, if I have any say about it. CFO is hard enough as it is."

"So what is this new company you're acquiring?" asked Alex.

Lena lit up. "JQB--Jupiter Quest Biologics--it's not a huge firm and it's very undervalued now, but they are doing some amazing things with alien pharmaceuticals."

"Really..." Alex gave Vasquez a look. "Is anybody out there trying to create the equivalent for SSRIs for aliens?"

Lena shrugged, "Not that I know of."

Sam said, "Actually, yes. Sorry, Lena, it's really new and only at the early stages, that and alien beta-blockers."

Lena gave Alex a look. "I will totally look into that. Perhaps your mother would be interested in that as well." She turned to Sam. "Dr. Danvers is in the field of astrobiology, and has been working with some of our doctors at the Luthor Alien Clinic, or what will be the clinic when they get the damned building finished."

"C'mon, Lena," said Vasquez easily. "You know that construction projects almost never finish on time."

"Or on budget," sighed Sam.
The door opened and Kara Danvers returned carrying a big bag of ice and smelling vaguely like smoke.

Sam said, "That's odd, you--" 

"Smell like smoke," grumbled Kara. "I know. There was a huge fire at the... place I like to go for ice... and of course I stopped to watch. The NC Fire Department are so cool, with the big trucks and the ladders..."

Alex jumped up and took the bag of ice into the kitchen area, cutting the bag, putting some ice cubes in a new dry towel and replacing Vasquez's ice pack before putting the bag in the freezer.

Kara was quiet after that, and Alex and Lena shared a look.

Lena said, "Well this has been fun, ladies, but tomorrow is another early day. I should probably get a lot of sleep if I'm going to face a shitstorm at L-Corp tomorrow."

Sam followed her lead. "Thank you so much for inviting me. And for offering to be Ruby's cool aunts. She's going to need them. With all the patriarchal crap out there, she's going to need to learn to be a badass. I can't think of better role models for that than you ladies."

Vasquez smiled. "That is what we're here for. Among other things."

When Lena and Sam had left, Kara told Alex and Vasquez about the young man on the rooftop, of the enormous fire he had set and would have died in if she had been a split second slower.

"And Maggie said that, legally, there's nothing she can do. Freedom of speech, freedom of religion. But there's got to be something!"

Alex hugged her again. Vasquez frowned. "Tomorrow morning, I'll call Lucy and see if the DEO has any legal precedents for handling something like this. We will figure something out, kiddo."

"Thank you."

Chapter End Notes

NOTE: Dear CW, this is what a bunch of women talk about together, especially when most of them are gay: booze, work, education, parents, and overturning the patriarchy. Men rarely come up unless it's to complain about patriarchal bullshit.
So I'm still struggling to add my own take to the less problematic episodes (which are so much easier to fix wholesale). Stick with me: I do much better at this the more the CW writers muck it up. I should be shining very soon, alas.

It had taken Ruby a while to let go of the whole superpowers thing, but she had to admit, if her mother had really had superpowers, she would never have simply sat there with her under that enormous wrecking ball. So, fine. No superpowers. But what about regular Mom Powers?

So she dutifully unpacked her backpack on the floor of her mother's office when the neighbor picked her up at school and dropped her off at L-Corp. She had a ton of homework to do, but she was methodical and generally just sat down and finished one thing after another until everything was done, especially in times like this, when her mother was similarly flooded with work.

She rarely complained about it (well, maybe except for math, but Ms. Foster was mean and not a very good teacher and also she had weird hair), just did it and moved on. After all, although it was an unpopular opinion at school, she really liked learning things--how the world worked, new words in English and French for things she knew, and science, for sure. She was really hoping that the upcoming crossover assignment for her English and Science classes would enable her to interview Lena Luthor, whom her mother assured her was a certified genius. But in the meantime, there was the annual talent show at school, and she really needed to practice her song, and her mom had sung in a choir like a million years ago and knew about stuff like that. So.

So, when she finished her homework, and told her mother it was time, she really, really expected her mother to sit and listen to her sing and give her pointers, not put her off, asking about her extra credit project and her research paper.

And she really hadn't expected somebody to come in announcing another emergency that apparently only her mom could fix and had to fix NOW. And that (she thought very privately and very quietly to herself) really sucked.

//

Thomas Coville considered himself a work in progress. As a young man, he had drunk the Kool-Aid of capitalist America, gone to school, gotten a good job, married a beautiful woman, bought a great house, had an expensive car and considered himself a success.

Then the divorce. Then the disbarring. Then the terrifying night when he was flying to Geneva for a very expensive job interview, and the thought, as people prayed all around him that God had basically told him to go fuck himself.

And then.

The ethereal woman, dressed in dark blue, standing on the wing of the plane, looking as if she, like him, had also just had an epiphany.
And then she flew away.

In the weeks that followed, as Supergirl became a household name, made mistakes and learned, he began to realize that this woman, like her (apparently) cousin, was a god. And he worked to learn all he could about Krypton, studied what he could find, spent the money he made as an overqualified paralegal to buy the artifacts he discovered online. There had been a few duds and scams, for sure, but he got better at being able to tell the difference, and he knew that Rao was guiding him.

So when Supergirl had showed up at the meeting the other night, he had assumed that Rao was testing him, and said nothing. He stayed in the background, letting Eve and some of the others interact with her unknowingly. Let her grace them with her presence, check up on their progress, even if it was incognito.

What he had not expected was for her to seem surprised, concerned, disconcerted, or alarmed. And yet he had seen all those emotions--human emotions--flicker across her face as the meeting went on. And when she left with her two apparently human friends, he had given it much thought. He had spent much time in contemplation of the scriptures and in prayers. He had a feeling that Rao was setting him up for some very important task.

And when the woman entered the room as he was setting up for the next meeting, and introduced herself as Kara Danvers, he had maintained, at first, the illusion that he did not know exactly who, and what, she was. Let her reveal herself to him in her, and Rao's, good time.

"I find it admirable that you want to help people. But it's only logical that Supergirl can't save everyone. There's only one of her."

He smiled. "Is this a test? Did you come here to test my faith? Supergirl?"

The look on her face was surprising, amusing, unexpected. Did she really think it wouldn't be obvious? That someone who had been blessed by Rao's holy light through her acts would somehow manage to NOT recognize her?

"Rao says, 'Let my guide walk among you and shelter her.'"

"I'm not a god. Rao is."

"Rao says even his gods can lose their way. If you're lost? I can help you."

And then he made a choice, and gave her the obelisk. And she took off her glasses and told him to stop doing what he was doing and trust her.

"I trust you," he said, and she walked away, apparently satisfied.

Then he went into the room that housed the betahedron and renewed his commitment to save his god.

//

Lena spent the better part of that day dealing with lawyers, listening to both sides (separately) tell their stories, consulting with the Title IX expert, and missing Kara's ability to just break heads when people made her this frustrated. It was "he said/she said," and her own experience as a woman in general, a woman in science, a woman in engineering, and a woman with an entire Facebook feed using the hashtag #MeToo and telling their stories either on their own pages or on Pantsuit Nation, inclined her to believe the woman and discount the man, but she told her lawyers to gather as much evidence and witness testimony as they could so that justice could be done. Because even a stopped
clock is right twice a day.

So when she went back to her office to Sam's, to find the woman taking off her black blazer and laying it over the sleeping body of Ruby lying, snoring gently, on the old white couch, Lena's heart broke just a little bit for Sam.

Lena was a Luthor. As Lillian had pointed out a few months before, overworking was very much a Luthor trait. And partly that was because either no one was waiting at home for them, or they didn't care if someone was. And suddenly she realized how freeing it was to be single and childless, given her insane work ethic. Poor Sam, though. She obviously had the same work ethic; well, you only got into the big leagues if you did. But that could take a toll.

So she entered and said with a light tone. "Love that couch. So many stress naps happened there." (Other things too, once or twice, but she didn't mention that.)

"The update," said Sam. "Morgan Edge tried to get the FTC to quash the merger, but I got the complaint dismissed. The merger is finally done."

Lena smiled. "Congratulations. You saved the deal and a lot of jobs this week. Really good work."

"Yeah..."

Lena frowned. "Sam?"

The woman closed her eyes, apparently distressed. "I'm sorry. This is so... unprofessional."

They sat, Lena on the other side of the desk for a change. It occurred to her that she was taking what she thought of as Kara's place, not only in terms of furniture, but also her role in the conversation. How many times had Lena described whatever shitstorm she was dealing with--with L-Corp, with Lex, with Lillian, with the general public--and Kara had given her unwavering support. "What's the matter?" she asked gently.

"I'm just... screwing up. Not with work! With Ruby... All she wanted to do was practice her song with me and I kept saying, 'Oh, later! Later!' I just feel like the worst mother."

And Lena had a flash of her mother handing her the key to a bazooka, oh, wait, no, a rocket launcher. It made her smile.

Sam wiped her eyes. "Why are you smiling?"

She smiled wider. "Because I actually had the worst mother. Objectively speaking. So I find your self-appraisal a little funny."

"Objectively? I doubt that."

"Hmm, have you attempted alien genocide recently?"

"What? No, of course not."

"Good answer. Have you set her up for a crime she did not commit? Tried to kill her?"

"I-- What? No!"

"Sam, have you seriously not heard of Lillian Luthor? Of Cadmus?"

"Cadmus, sure. They were making cyborgs or something? I'm sorry. Opal City is a bit of a
backwater."

"Google her. Admittedly, comparing yourself to Lillian is setting the bar outrageously low, but still. You are not the worst mother."

"She fell asleep on my couch at work. That's not good."

Lena frowned. "She may not understand all the ins and outs, but she knows that it's important and that you're the only one who can fix it." She brought out The Eyebrow. "That is how you raise a girl to be a badass."

"Yeah. She's already a badass."

"Yeah, 'cuz she's loved. And she knows it."

Sam smiled.

"Now. Tell me about this song."

//

The past few days had been trying for Kara. Lately, she had thought about her human identity as an anchor weighing her down. All those human weaknesses and fallibilities. As an alien on Earth, she was much more than human: stronger, more powerful, more resilient.

But a god? Omniscient? Omnipotent? Omnipresent? No, no, and no. If she'd been omniscient, she would never have opened the Daxamite's pod. If she'd been omnipotent, the Daxamites would never have ravaged National City. If she had been omnipresent, the mere thought of the latest rescue falling into a fiery inferno would not be haunting her nightmares.

Kara Zor-El, as powerful as she was on Earth, was no god.

So what was she? And how could she stop these people from harming themselves and others? She stood on Cat's balcony, lost in thought, appreciating the little lights of National City at night, the lights that stood for the people she helped every day.

So, superhearing or not, she actually did not hear James coming up behind her, concerned. "Hey," he said. "You okay?"

She ran her hand over the smooth blue crystal of the obelisk. "Our religion was so important on Krypton. Not just spiritually, but it was our community."

"Yeah, that's how I felt every Sunday in my church."

"I didn't realize how much I missed it until I heard those prayers again. And Coville's teachings are so misguided. But he only hears what he wants to hear. Oh, and he knows I'm Supergirl."

"Wait, what?"

"He figured it out. I can fight... so many things. But I don't know how to fight someone's belief. His faith has blinded him..."

"How does faith blind someone? You know how I met Superman?"

"At the Daily Planet."
"That was Clark." He sighed. "So one day I climbed up this bridge spire to get a cool angle on a fire. It was smoky, and I got lightheaded. And I lost my footing, and fell. And I knew for sure I was gonna die. So I prayed, to anybody that might have been listening, to save me. And then out of the smoke there was his hand, catching me. And that was the first time Superman saved me, same as you did Coville."

"My biology absorbs solar radiation at a different rate than humans. What about that is miraculous?"

"In this life, prayer doesn't usually work. Nobody shows up. But Clark did. And you do. Kara, you're something that we can see, something we can touch. How are you not a miracle?"

He picked up the obelisk. "And besides, you got a piece of your culture back. How cool is that?" But something he touched on the device went live an there was the image of a man talking about Krypton. "Wait, what's that?"

Kara stood and grabbed it. "I have to get to the DEO."
When Lena had texted her the night before about the middle school talent show that Ruby was in, Kara had answered with enthusiasm "I'm in!" not realizing how complicated a single day might make her life. But luckily, the shit with Covillle, including the humanitarian cleanup at the prison, had left her evening surprisingly free. So when Alex had texted "U still going??" Kara had texted back "YEP!" and some choice emojis. And when Lena had texted, "Hey, Alex said you were Super busy, so I guess the talent show is off, yes?" Kara had texted back, "Are U kidding me? I am SO there! So is Alex. #CoolAuntsFTW!"

Admittedly, Kara was not nearly as enthusiastic about the whole thing as she pretended to be, but she totally got how Lena was trying very hard to support her new CFO, a strong, cool lady who totally needed the support of other strong women. And what was Supergirl's mission on Earth if not that?

So, because they were all running late, Supergirl had picked up Alex at the DEO and Lena at L-Corp and flown them to the middle school. They were late. At least two groups had performed before the absolutely adorable set of first-grade supergirls did their number, and Kara was grateful that she had gotten there in time to see this, and take pictures of it for Supergirl's Instagram.

Alex scooched down the row to sit next to Sam, then Kara followed, and Lena sat in the aisle seat. Alex murmured to Kara. "They are inspired by Supergirl. They're not worshiping her."

And Kara had thought, "Thank Rao!"

The little girls in the ad-hoc Supergirl outfits hurried offstage and the emcee introduced Ruby Arias.

"Come with me/And you'll be/in a world of pure imagination..."

Sam was rapt, having taken a photo with her camera and completely forgotten what the device in her hands was for.

For a moment, Kara was mesmerized. The girl had a sweet voice. With a little bit of training, she might--

But suddenly, she noticed a slight change in the background noise. Lena's heart had sped up. She turned to see Lena wipe under her eyes, careful not to muss her mascara. Then she stood and hurried out of the auditorium, just as Ruby's song ended. Kara followed.

"Lena? Lena, what's wrong? Talk to me."

"Um, it's just-- I always wanted kids. But then I realized, I'm a lesbian. So I did my research, found out about in vitro fertilization. Except I always figured, well, it couldn't be me doing it because of my crazy Luthor genes. But, I thought, I just thought, well, the woman I fall in love with, she can carry the child. Except the woman I fell in love with is an alien, and the odds that your genes and a human's genes would do anything but crash and burn is really small. So we can't... have... kids."

Lena wiped her eyes and tried very hard to not be emotional.

"Lena, you've never talked about this before. I've always thought your patents were your children, just like the people I save are sort of mine... But you want this?"

"Off and on. After Lex, I didn't think I did. But lately... watching Ruby... I want all the experiences that my mother refused to have with me. You know? I want to take my kid camping, and I want to show her the constellations, and I want to teach her how to read? And how to throw a punch? And
have a cheesy Valentine's? And I want to hold her when she has a bad dream. And I want to tell her
that the world is a better place because she's in it."

"Yeah," said Kara.

"I want all of it! I want to be a mom. What am I going to do?"

Kara gathered her up in her arms and held her close until her tears slowed and then stopped. Finally
Kara pulled a little bit away and stared at her. "Silly. We're both adopted. Why couldn't we just
adopt? I mean, if we got that serious, and started to talk about serious things like that. Eventually?"

And Lena, trying desperately to wipe her tears away without messing with her mascara, said,
"Would that be enough for you? You wouldn't think a child like that was less good?"

And Kara frowned. "Why wouldn't it be? We're both adopted and how often have we saved the
world?"

Lena stared at her, turned a bit away to wipe the tears away, still careful of her makeup.

"Why would you choose that?"

"Duh! Because I love you, silly!"
Standing Before the Lord of Song

Chapter Notes

I've been trying to go off-canon as much as possible lately, but this scene was so beautiful, and I really wanted to see if I could capture the words, music and visuals they gave us (and all the feels) with just words. I think it worked...

And starting with the next episode, we are going so off-canon, you'll think Bizarro was back. If there were Bizarro Alex, Ruby, and Maggie. Because Kara is surprisingly hard to shift from canon these days. But I'm workin' on it!

Kara knelt in the chamber her sister had built for her to connect with the construct of her mother. As always the lights were low, so that the hologram could be seen more easily, but Alura's construct held the construct of a candle as she stood on the blue platform, in her familiar blue dress. Kara knelt below with a real candle burning a real flame.

And Kara Zor-El prayed, for the first time in many years, "Though we go forth alone, our soul unites us under Rao's gladsome rays. We are never lost, never afraid."

so it goes like this,
the fourth, the fifth,
the major fall and the minor lift,
the baffled king composing halleluiah

Several floors down, in the cell that M'yrn had claimed as acceptably monastic, the old priest also knelt in prayer to his god, as his son watched unobtrusively from the doorway, then hesitantly walked over and knelt next his father, to join him in the ancient prayers.

"For we shrink not under the sun of righteousness. Rao binds us to those we love."

halleluiah,
halleluiah,
halleluiah,
halleluiah....

Across the city, in Alex's apartment, Vasquez heard Alex come in from the elementary school talent show, heard her change into her sleeping clothes, pour a glass of water and set on the nightstand with her phone before climbing into bed. Vasquez didn't open her eyes, merely rolled over and threw an arm over this woman, automatically becoming the big spoon while she sent a tiny prayer to a god she had not actively believed in for two decades. A prayer of thanks.

"He gives us strength when we have none. And in the darkest places, he guides us."

i did my best, it wasn't much
i couldn't feel, so I tried to touch
i told the truth, i didn't mean to fool ya

North of the city, in the medium security prison, Thomas Coville lit the candle on his small desk,
knelt before it, and gave thanks to Rao for having saved not only his life two years before, but his soul now, giving him renewal of purpose, both through the graced touch of Supergirl.

"For Rao sees all, feels all. His love is eternal. Rao, protect us so that we might protect others."

and even though it all went wrong
i'll stand before the lord of song
with nothing on my lips but halleluiah

"And we shall rise, a fire in his heart, burning and free."

halleluiah,

halleluiah,

halleluiah....
Alex woke up on Saturday morning to see Vasquez sitting up in bed frowning at her personal tablet. Yawning, she pushed herself up to sit next to her and lean her head on Vasquez’s shoulder. Vasquez was flipping through her email. She opened one that was a Meetup, that lesbian dodgeball group, and it was having a game that night. Vasquez moved to swipe past it.

“Hey,” said Alex. “Those are your friends, right? Why don’t we go? We’ve got tonight off, barring alien shenanigans.”

Vasquez smiled. “Alien shenanigans. I like that. But I thought you wanted just to hang out and Netflix.”

Alex shrugged. “Throwing things at people in a nonlethal way also has its advantages. Besides, I bought those taco socks and I haven’t had a chance to show them off.”

“That’s true…”

“You could wear your hot sauce socks and we could be a pair.”

“Oh, we’re a pair, all right.” Vasquez laughed.

But then Alex sat up. “Oh, wait, I forgot. They’re not supposed to know we’re together.”

“What? Babe, no. That was just the experiment. I wanted to show you how desirable you were, and nobody would have hit on you if they’d thought we were dating. And at that point, we were only sorta-kind dating anyway…”

“So if we went tonight?”

“We could be Mrs. and Mrs. Smith, if you wanted.”

Alex grinned. “Excellent! Then it’s a date!”

Vasquez just smiled as she went back to the email and RSVP’d for two.

By the time they got to the dodgeball court, thirty minutes after the invitation had said the event started, there were already at least twenty women there, standing around talking and stretching. The old school butch who greeted Alex wore a shirt with Mickey Mouse giving the world the finger.

“You remember, Peterson, Alex,” said Vasquez, pulling off her leather jacket to show off a t-shirt with a unicorn vomiting rainbows.

“Of course,” said Alex, shaking the woman’s hand. “The one who called me fresh meat.” She smiled to take the sting out of the comment.
“Yeah, sorry about that. But hey, you’re back. I mean it’s practically a year later, but… Did we scare you that badly?”

“No, it’s just the FBI was a little busy with the alien invasion and all.”

“Oh, yeah. Pesky.”

“Exactly.”

They signed the waiver and paid the fee and then took off their boots and went onto the court to warm up. Vasquez saw Trish, the redheaded bio-engineer that Alex had spent time talking to last time, squinting as if she was trying to remember something. Then Peterson was explaining the rules, they counted off the teams and the game began.

Somehow Vasquez and Alex both ended up on team A, and they were solidly pounded by team B, which had two women who played on a league and a softball pitcher, so their first set of three games was over very quickly.

Sitting to watch the next two teams play, Vasquez caught up on Peterson’s very active lovelife and the difficulties of finding a better-paying job and how much she hated her current job.

“So how about you, Vas? You seeing anybody?”

Vasquez glanced over to where Alex was making new friends.

“Oh, Vas, you didn’t.”

Vasquez shrugged.

“How long?”

“Pretty much since right after that night, that game.”

“Holy shit! So did you move in with her? Or her with you. Yeah, I bet you emptied out your dresser drawers, didn’t you. Smooth.”

“No, we aren’t living together. We work together. You have to have your own space.”

Peterson looked skeptical, but then her team was up and Vasquez watched the woman dance as the music changed from techno-beat to more upbeat ABBA music. Soon her whole team was showing off their moves to “Dancing Queen.” Oddly enough, it didn’t make them any less good at dodging the red balls the other team was trying to throw at them.

Alex sat down next to her. “Hey, um. You see the redhead on the serious team? I’m pretty sure she hates me, but I can’t think why.”

Vasquez looked up to see Trish, looking angry, throw a ball so hard at one of the other woman that it knocked her over. “Huh. Didn’t you flirt with her at the game last year? She gave you her number. Hell, they all gave you their numbers…”

Alex blushed. “I don’t remember, and I threw all of them away except yours anyway.”

“As you would. I’ve always said you were a woman of good taste.”

Then they were up against the redhead’s team and they learned what amateur, entertainment pain was really like. (Because of course they were already very familiar with professional career pain, bullets and the like.)
The redhead was gunning for them. Her balls hit them hard and they were the first two out. Vasquez rubbed her chest. “Man, I hate the boob shots.”

Their team just barely won that game, then they switched sides. Vasquez saw Trish murmur something to a friend, whose gaze hardened.

Peterson, acting as ref, yelled, “One, two, three, DODGE!”

The red balls were flying and they were flying at them. Vasquez caught one ball, which meant the friend was out, and then she stayed in front of Alex, deflecting the rain of balls until Alex could pick one up off the floor and throw it, getting the redhead out.

“Um, babe?” murmured Vasquez. “I’m not sure that was wise.”

Alex bit her lip as she watched the redhead talking to her friends who sat along the wall. She never saw the ball coming at her head and she dropped like lead. Vasquez helped her up, yelling to Peterson, “Hey, that was a headshot! Did you catch that?”

And Peterson pointed to the offending thrower, forcing her off the court. Alex and Vasquez’s team won that game too. Then the teams switched sides.

Alex and Vasquez glanced at each other as the two teams lined up and glared at each other from across the court.

“One, two, three, DODGE!”

When the balls Vasquez’s team threw hit no one, suddenly they realized that the other team had all the balls, one woman, one ball. They huddled, then strode to the middle line.

“We who are about to die salute you,” murmured Alex.

The pain was hard, but at least it was fast. Four women left the field, and the last two quickly followed.

“Oh!” said Vasquez, rubbing her shoulder. “Great game, ladies! Who wants beer?”

None of the other team joined them, and the rest of the women reorganized into another team, while the other dozen women went to quench their thirst and ease their bruises.

The Mexican restaurant was having a slow night. The waitress gave them a look when they walked in asking for a table for twelve. Alex frowned. “The tip will be big. You’d think they’d be happier.”

“We’re a mixed blessing. Big tip, but a lot of work: a bunch of hungry but indecisive dykes with different food allergies.”

They sat next to each other in the middle of the long table the waitress had put together from smaller tables. “What was it all about with the redhead, what’s her name?”

“Trish,” said Vasquez. “All I can think is that she really wanted you to call her last year. Maybe you broke her heart.”

Alex looked upset. Peterson, sitting opposite her said, “Nah, just bruised her ego a little bit. And if she’s going to be that petty about it? A whole year later? Not worth your time for sure.”

The conversation shifted to other things: Chris’s new motorcycle, Terry’s new business organizing writing retreats, the impossibility of getting dates on OKCupid, and, at one point, hippos for some
reason (Vasquez hadn’t been tracking all the conversations that well). Then they were finishing their
drinks, paying, and putting on coats to go.

Peterson and Vasquez left side by side with Alex behind them. As they stepped out the door, Alex yelled, “Agent!” just as an arm tried to pull her down the two steps to the sidewalk, but Vasquez twisted her way out of the hold, jumped down and threw the woman over her shoulder. Punches were thrown but none of them hit Vasquez or Alex, and by the time the other nine of their teammates were crowded behind the door, eyes all a-goggle, Alex and Vasquez had a woman each in a head lock, and Peterson was sucking her knuckles, and looking down at the two women she had knocked out. She grinned at Vasquez. “Semper fi!”

Vasquez just grunted, “Call 911.”

//

Maggie heard all about it the next day. There weren’t all that many LGBT folks in the NCPD at the best of times, and they had lost quite of few of their number, gay and straight, during the Battle of National City. But the informal network that called itself QPD kept each other in the loop across all divisions when a crime against or within the community happened. And they all knew about Alex Danvers, the woman for whom Maggie Sawyer was said to have won the toaster oven.

Perez was a tall older man in charge of Evidence, and apparently a talented pianist. When he called Maggie down and described the fistfight between “a bunch of angry dykes” at first Maggie thought he was making it all up.

“Nope, Sawyer. It’s real. Reynolds called it in and he hasn’t got the imagination God gave dirt, so, yeah, your ex and her girlfriend and another friend against half a dozen crazy lesbians.”

By the time she got upstairs, the story had grown to just Alex alone protecting her girlfriend from twenty enraged and jealous bulldykes with baseball bats. And of course Maggie knew that that just couldn’t possibly be true.

Because number one? Alex’s girlfriend had taught her everything she knew and wouldn’t need to be protected.

And number two? Lesbians used softball bats for that shit. Duh.
Chapter Summary

Episode 3.5 on and way off canon.

The next night, Winn's program using Vasquez's inputs pinged the nighttime prisoner transport as a potential risk factor. Supergirl was high above the city when surveillance cameras a mile from prison caught the bus-jacking and Winn alerted her, so she flew down to stop it.

She stopped the bus the old fashioned way. Talk to the hand.

Then she tore open the doors to the bus, but by that time one of the kidnappers had the bus driver by the neck and the K-bar knife he held to the man's throat looked pretty serious.

"You come closer? Your eyes glow? You even flinch? Then I open up his throat."

Supergirl sounded bored. "No," she said. "You won't."

An explosion at the back of the bus. Punches, grunts, shouts of pain. Supergirl and Alex met at the middle of the bus, the end of the trail of bodies.

Still bored, Supergirl said, "Anyone else?"

The prisoners, one human and one a blue alien, shook their heads, relieved.

Once the NCPD had taken control of the scene, Kara walked away with her sister, back to the DEO van. "Hey, earlier you said you wanted to talk? We can go back to my place if you want. Winn says it's quiet tonight. This seems to be the only game in town."

Alex said, "Let me just debrief and check my weapons and then I'll meet you there. Pick up some pizza. Surprise me. Just, seriously, Kara? No pineapple."

Kara pouted. "Fine. But only because I love you."

She took off and flew to the little Indian-Italian Fusion place in Sunnydale and came back with the tandoori pizza, the butter chicken pizza and the saag pizza. How could Alex possibly complain about that?

By the time Alex returned home in her civvies, looking tired and lost in thought, Kara had changed into loose jeans and her Power to the Girls sweater, pulled her hair back into a loose ponytail and put her glasses back on (her downstairs neighbors were newlyweds and she just couldn't).

Alex kicked off her boots and put her gun on the table next to the door, and went and collapsed on the couch, making grabby hands for the pizza. Kara made her a plate with a piece of each pizza on it, heated it up with her eyes and handed it over with a ceremonial flourish.

"What the heck is that?"

"C'mon, Alex, you love Indian food! And there's Saag Pizza. Spinach! Lena's always saying how I
should eat more spinach! Now the next time she comes over for game night—" Her face fell. "But I guess that's not going to happen anytime soon. Damn that Morgan Edge anyway. I wanted to laser burn him into oblivion, but he's just human..."

"Still, gotta admit, the container ship in the middle of the Pacific? That had style."

Kara sighed, then ate four slices of pizza and seemed to lose the hangry face. "So, what did you want to talk about?"

"Um, well, it's Vasquez."

At that moment, their phones beeped. "DEO," said Alex. "Give me a lift?"

"You got it."

//

When Ruby Arias saw her mother, her superstrong mother (whatever she claimed in contrast), in the bathroom that night, huddled under the sink looking terrified, she genuinely did not know what to do. But Ruby was kind, strong herself, and endlessly practical, so she hurried over and talked to her mother calmly, telling her that everything was going to be all right, and eventually, more or less, it was.

Her mother was still a little incoherent and could not explain what had happened, so Ruby just put her to bed, turned off all the lights, and went to bed herself, though she did not get to sleep for a very long time.

The next day, her mom said nothing about it at breakfast, and since Ruby didn't know what to say either, she let the silence cover the noise of "Did you remember your English essay?" and "Don't put any jelly on my sandwich, Mom!" and scrambling for shoes, coats, keys.

When they pulled up in front of the school, though, Ruby thought her mom was on edge, tapping a finger against the steering wheel and biting her lip. She said, "Mom? Are you okay?"

"What? Yes. Of course, yes, babe, I'm fine. I'm totally fine, it was just a dream."

"You were awake."

"Ruby, I'm fine. It was a migraine. Get your backpack, or you're going to be late. I love you. Don't worry!"

And to be fair, Ruby had only read just that one Shakespeare play in English class, but even she knew the meaning of "methinks the lady doth protest too much."

But then her friend, Luke, was trotting up to her and complaining about not understanding the math homework and asking her to help him with it and then gasping for breath and falling to the ground, and she tried to cushion his fall so he didn't hit his head, and then she was screaming for her mom, who rushed out of the car, ran over and called 911.

//

Twenty-two hours earlier, Supergirl had burned a hole through the floor of the subbasement under the hockey arena, a hole so deep that when the Kryptonian betahedron was pushed down it and it exploded, the explosion barely rocked the building, and scientists clocked the ensuing "quake" at one on the Richter scale—negligible.
Except, of course, it wasn’t.

If it had happened in a different place, perhaps, not on a California fault line near the water, perhaps it would have been negligible, in effect as well as in intent.

If it had not gone quite so deep, perhaps the arena would have sustained some damage, but the ensuing horrors could have been prevented.


If, if, if. In fact, it had happened where it happened. The explosion was deep and strong.

Deep enough and strong enough to shift the alien pod enough to get unstuck from its prison in the seabed, enough for the motion to re-energize its primary power.

And, dear children, that sort of thing is never, never good.

//

Sam’s mind was reeling as she stood in the Luthor Children’s Hospital. Her first thought was horror at all these kids having lead poisoning. Her second was that at least Ruby was okay. Her third was that compared to this, her bizarre hallucination the night before, or whatever it was, was #FirstWorldProblems. At least that’s what she told herself. Then Luke’s Mom was there, hugging her and thanking her and then going to be with her son, as Sam kept going over those three thoughts on repeat, over and over and over.

//

James Olsen was six foot four and his body was solid muscle. He was a Pulitzer Prize winning photojournalist, a karate third degree blackbelt, and now, for better or for worse, the acting CEO of CatCo Worldwide Media, a job that he had expected to love but had for the most part hated, simply for very different reasons this year compared to last. Last year, all he had wanted to do was anything except his job, such as for example beating criminals up as Guardian. This year, all he wanted to do was his job, but suddenly Lena Luthor was doing it for him. Instead of him. Without even asking for his input.

Take this most recent-- Oh. There she was.

"Ms. Luthor, you approved an advertorial on page six."

She kept walking and smiled. "Is there a question coming?"

"Well, I just wish you’d told me is all."

"I had no idea that ads were in your purview, Mr. Olsen."

"Well. They’re not. They’re not in my purview. It’s just that if we’re going to disguise ads as articles, I think that it sends a bad message. People want to know what they’re getting. They expect integrity from us, that they can trust us. It’s just a perception thing."

"Seventy percent."

"What?"

"Seventy percent. That’s the deep discount on our print subscription rate. Seventy percent is what it takes just to get people to read. So I think that an advertorial here and there is a necessary evil."
She kept smiling, and James thought—well, honestly he thought a thousand things in the next three seconds. He thought:

How did I ever think that she was as bad as Lex? She is so much worse. But it's not the Luthor thing. She is so unlike him. And her mother. Admittedly, he had only met Lillian just the once (which was more than enough to realize that she was much, much worse than her son had ever been), but still he could clearly see that Lena had studied her adoptive mother obsessively, learned her tools, ignored her philosophy and become a force to be reckoned with. Here she was, apparently trying to do right by CatCo, which was in her financial interest after all, but doing it by undermining him at every turn.

Honestly, it was almost exactly what Lex had always complained about Superman doing.

And that is when James realized that he had just experienced empathy with Lex Luthor of all people. It made him open his mouth, close it, and gasp with relief when Kara came marching into his office, recommending that they watch Morgan Edge accuse Lena Luthor of poisoning the children of National City.

And what kind of person feels relief when kids are poisoned?

//

Kara went with Lena to the hospital. Of course she did. She had promised to protect her best friend, her lover, the one person aside from Alex on the planet who always made her feel whole and sufficient: just as Kara. And because this wasn't the sort of problem she could punch her way through, she brought her reporter's notebook. Pen, sword: like that.

They hurried to the Epidemiology Ward and were surprised to see Sam Arias turn toward them, arms hugging herself tight, looking worried.

"Sam?" said Lena. "What are you doing here?"

"Ruby's friend, Luke, collapsed at school. Lead poisoning. I came with the paramedics. His mother just got here. I saw Edge's stunt, too. This whole thing is awful!"

Just beyond Sam down the hall, they could hear an annoyingly familiar voice: Morgan Edge.

Lena immediately stormed down the hall toward him. "Edge! How the hell do you get off--"

But he held up a finger and finished what he was saying to the nurse. Then he turned to Lena. "That was me, paying the medical expenses at your hospital."

"So this is what your revenge looks like."

"Have you ever heard of the Cobra Effect? In British Colonial India, there were snakes everywhere. So the British offered a bounty on dead snakes. Didn't help. Then they found out that people had been breeding them for income. The solution only made the problem worse. You understand?"

"You're a toxic predator."

"Unintended consequences. You wanted to be a hero, so you just went in with the first idea, without considering the dangers. And now people are going to die."

Kara cut in. "Even if this were true, Supergirl would be as much to blame. She made the call to use the device."
Edge's voice was lazy with contempt. "Supergirl may have pushed the button, but the tech was all Luthor."

"You're a bottom feeder."

"But I didn't poison children."

Kara snarled, "If that's the best you can say for yourself, then I'm not impressed."
Well, Now, That Wasn't Awkward

Maggie's new captain asked to see her and he looked serious. The man wasn't as bad as her old captain had been afraid he would be, which was great, given all the other shit she had to deal with, but when she heard the words out of his mouth, she had to take a breath before she responded. Because she could read what he had just assigned her to in at least two different ways, one possibly good and one possibly very bad.

"I'm sorry, sir. Last night's robbery kept me up until three, and I'm a little out of it. Could you say that again?"

He sighed, but it didn't sound like he was annoyed with her. "The other night, there was an incident outside a restaurant in Teale Square." He picked a piece of paper out of the folder on his desk and read, "A group of lesbians had been eating dinner late at La Boca Grande, and as the first three exited the building, they were set upon by another four lesbians, apparently known to them. They quickly fought off their assailants and called for police assistance. The assailants are in custody and witness reports from lesbians and straight restaurant customers alike are consistent in the details of the event."

"Right, so why are you telling me this?"

"Because I need you to go to Metropolis to check on one of the women, the initial attacker whom everyone identified as the leader of the attack."

"And... is she... an alien?" Maggie rubbed her eyes. "I'm sorry, sir, but how is this even in Science Division's jurisdiction?"

"It didn't start out looking like one of ours, but as they did some digging, the reporting officers discovered that the woman in question had been working for LordTechMetropolis before Maxwell Lord was kidnapped. Then she transferred to National City about a year ago, working in his, um, yes, his 'K Lab,' which the FBI has informed me is connected to anti-Supergirl technology and some of the anti-alien hate crimes we experienced before the invasion."

"I see."

"Also, the target of the attack is known to you, one Special Agent Alexandra Danvers."

"Ah."

"The FBI is short-staffed, but they want to make sure that this doesn't count as an attack on a federal agent in relation to her duties, which would be a federal crime rather than one of ours. But given that she is one of the victims... And given that the two of you do know each other, and have worked quite well in the past..."

Maggie watched his eyes, trying to read whether he was giving her the gay case because she was gay (and whether that was a good thing--cultural knowledge--or a bad thing--ghettoizing) or because of what he was claiming were the reasons.

"Sawyer? Wake up. I need your A game here. Max Lord is still missing. If this can help us help the FBI crack that case? Holy shit, that will give us the street cred we have sorely been missing since the Daxamite mess."

"And that sounded completely sincere. "Kiss up to the fribbies?" she asked.
Absolutely! When can you leave?"

Alex met Maggie at the airport coffee shop after they had waited endlessly with a few hundred friends in the Homeland Security line. "I saved you a seat."

"Thanks," said Maggie, as she spread butter over her twice-toasted bagel, ignoring Alex's look. "What, not looking forward to our three-day sojourn together in the Big Shiny City?"

Alex snorted. "Anything to do with Max Lord, I do not look forward to." She stopped, thought about it, grinned, and said, "Unless we could do that Klingon Shunning Ceremony? Because that would be fun!"

"We'll invite all our friends," said Maggie and laughed.

Alex relaxed. She had been afraid that it would still be awkward, but it wasn't. It was nice that they could be sort of easy with each other after, well, everything. She said, "You still do the overtoasted bagel thing?"

"Hey, don't judge. One of my cop friends saw me doing this the other day and asked me if I toasted my bagel in the toaster oven I got for turning 'that cute fibby gay.' His words."

"Did you say yes?"

"Pfft. Of course. The boys need to know I got way more game than they do!"

"So. You and Lucy... how's that going?"

"Not gonna lie. It's hard with her being out in the Nevada desert and me here. But we text every night and she comes in when she can. I think J'onn sometimes makes up reasons for her to visit, consulting on less important stuff..."

"He's my Space Dad. I guess, since he's gotten so good at it, he's doing it for all the girls now..."

"And, er, how's Vasquez?"

Alex beamed. "She's great. She's just so great. She made me waffles the other day!"

"Dude, you sound like Kara!"

"Sometimes, not all the time or about all the things--because pineapple on pizza? yuk!--but sometimes Kara is right about something. Waffles? Definitely one of those things. And homemade waffles, not the cardboard ones you buy? Oh yeah."

//

When they got to LordTechMetropolis and asked to speak to Trish's former superior, they met an Asian-American woman who looked exhausted, but she ushered them into her booklined office, and offered them coffee that was surprisingly good.

They explained the situation. Dr. Han looked shocked. "Trish? Starting a fistfight? I mean at a conference just MAYBE if someone questioned her results, but wow."

Alex nodded to Maggie to lead the interview.

Maggie asked, "Why did she transfer to National City? Was she unhappy here?"
"Not that I know of. Most of us thought it was a step up, a way for her to work more closely with Mr. Lord on a project of his that she had made some theoretical contributions to already."

Maggie and Alex shared a look. Maggie asked, "So, working closely with Mr. Lord. As I understand it, that can be... a mixed bag."

Dr. Han rolled her eyes. "Does that mean you've met him?"

They both laughed. Alex said, "He once tried to feed me quail eggs, off his spoon."

"And did he call you 'honey'?"

"Well, no, but to be fair, he also knew that I was armed."

"Yeah, that'd help. Sorry, I don't know of any problems between Trish and Mr. Lord, and I suspect I would have heard."

"How did she come to participate on his project?"

"Oh, one of the women vice presidents makes it a practice to wander around the building once a week and talk to the researchers. Then she brings the best ideas upstairs and sometimes people get to collaborate in ways they otherwise wouldn't have. She noticed an innovation that Trish had come up with and told Mr. Lord."

"Can we talk to her?"

"I'm sorry. She's out of town today. She'll be back tomorrow."

"Can you get us an appointment?"

"Right away."

//

They chased down other leads, talking to Maggie's MPD contacts and Alex's FBI contacts, but got no luck. Finally, around four, Alex's phone pinged. She looked at the message and grinned. "We have a date for dinner."

They met at a Chinese restaurant. Alex introduced Clark to Maggie and asked him about his girlfriend (now fiancée) Lois and they ordered food (Kung Pao Chicken, Sweet and Sour Tofu for Maggie, and endless potstickers). Then Alex said, "Clark, what did you find? Anything?"

"I checked the archives for anything on Max and the other names you gave me, but came up with a blank. The only odd thing was a connection between Lillian Luthor and a man named Daniel Whitehall, a business connection. He had sold her a house in Opal City. It didn't seem to go any farther than that, but Whitehall's name has come up in other circumstances, which frequently were connected to apparent alien abductions. Nobody could make a case, though, so he wasn't indicted. As far as we know, he died in mysterious circumstances in Cuba a few years back. That's all I got."

"Damn."

Their food came and they dug in. Clark ate methodically, much as Kara often did, but without her marked enthusiasm.

"Clark," said Alex. "Are you okay?"
"Yes, of course." Alex gave him the Look. "Okay, no. Lois has cold feet about the wedding. It looks like we're going to postpone it again, until next year."

"Okay, bud, that sounds bad, but the first postponement was because we had been invaded by a species that wanted to enslave the world. Can't blame Lois for that."

"No, but what kind of person looks relieved when an alien species tries to enslave their world?"

Maggie murmured, "Fair point."

Alex nodded with raised eyebrows.

Clark asked, "How are you? How's Kara? Anybody dating anybody?"

Alex swallowed wrong and had to drink lots of water. "Oh, yeah." She coughed, drank more water. "That. She didn't tell you about. Um. That?"

"Well, I know she was madly in love with Lena Luthor, but I haven't been hearing as much about that lately, so I just wondered."

"Well, you heard that Lena saved CatCo by buying it out from under Morgan Edge."

"Of course."

"Lena is not an absentee landlord. So now she is basically Kara's boss."

Clark took that in. "Sounds... complicated."

"Yup."

"And you? Are you still with Susan Vasquez?"

Alex grinned. "Yeah, I am..."

Clark and Maggie shared a look. "So how is that going?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I feel like it's great because she gets me, you know? She understands why I do the things I do--"

"Like jump off of tall buildings trusting Supergirl to save you?" asked Maggie. "Things like that? 'Cause damn, that girl loves you if she's going to put up with shit like that, Alex. Would have given me a fucking heart attack. I only ever dated a fellow first responder once, a fireman, woman, person, fuck, you know what I mean. Lasted a month."

Clark nodded. "Maggie has a point. Lucy hated the amount of faith Jimmy had in me, would scream at him..."

"But you never let him down, and Supergirl won't let me down either."

"But there's a problem from what you said," said Clark. "Why is this relationship not... I don't know, what you want..."

Alex explained about the Claddagh rings and everyone's sudden expectation that they were engagement rings, even though they had barely been together for a year.

"Ah," said Clark. "People want a love story in real life. This is why newspaper tropes work so well."
Cat saves toddler from mean dog. Fireman saves cat from mean fire. Fire destroys mean slumlord's billion-dollar home. We want the love and justice to be true, even if we have to push to make it happen. You don't have to do anything the two of your aren't ready to do. Marriage is a serious commitment."

"I know. But lately people have been talking about us moving in together. Eliza of all people was the first one."

"Oh," said Clark with sympathy. "Well. Eliza. You know how she is..."

"None better. But the dodgeball girls--"

And Maggie started to explain lesbian dodgeball, but Clark suddenly looked out the window, the way Kara sometimes did, then fumbled for his phone, which had not made a noise.

"Darn it. It's Perry. I was supposed to do an interview." He dug into his wallet for a twenty. "Sorry about this. Don't worry, Alex. Just go at your own speed." Then he was out the door.

Maggie turned to Alex, her eyes wide. "SHIT!" she whispered. "Clark Kent is freaking Superman?"

Alex stared, "Pfft. What? No!"

"Alex, seriously? I'm a detective. I detect."

//

That night they shared a hotel room that thankfully had separate full size beds. Both pretended that they had slept just fine.

When they arrived at LordTechMetropolis in the morning, the vice president who had recommended Trish for the project was most unhelpful, acting as if they were not REALLY federal agents but some sort of industrial espionage operatives, there to steal their technology.

As they left the building, Alex said, "Well, that's pretty much it. What else have we got?"

Maggie bit her lip, then pulled out her phone and sent a fairly long text. "It may take a while for the person to answer. Let's find a bar with a pool table and decent nachos. I need to think."

"Seriously, Sawyer? It's 11:15 in the morning."

" Thing about detecting? It requires thinking. Thing about thinking? It requires salt and a game of strategy."

//

Two hours later, Alex had made sixty dollars worth of beer money and Maggie was still swearing that she could beat her. Then a woman walked in with short red hair and a swagger that Alex did not know how to English around. She turned. Maggie was holding her finger under her lip, but finally she said, "Alex Danvers, meet Kate, my ex."

Alex automatically stood straighter, tempted to throw down the glove right there and propose a duel, but Maggie said, "She might be able to help us."

They got a booth in the back and ordered two Everything Hamburgers and a Black Bean Burger, two light beers and a set of tequila shots.
Maggie said, "Kate, it's only 1:45. Tequila?"

Kate picked the first glass up and tossed back. With hoarse voice she said, "Hon, it is two pm somewhere," and snapped the glass down on the table.

"So. Maxwell Lord. Lillian Luthor. Cadmus. Have you got anything?"

"Max has been back, for a given value of 'back,' for a few months."

"What?"

Alex shook her head. "That's not possible. We have scans--"

"Not in National City. Not in Metropolis or Gotham. I think for a while he might have been in Switzerland, then Tanzania for some reason, possibly a few weeks in Japan. Near as I can figure he's back in the States and free as the bird he has been flipping us all."

"Wait," said Alex. "You knew this?"

"Nah, but Mags here just asked me to ask around, so I asked around. Gotham is a bit less... hierarchical than other cities. You learn to queer things up, ask angular questions..."

"So you... figured this out... in the last two hours?"

Maggie gave a small, tired smile. "She's good, Alex. Why do you think I dated her?"

Kate smiled. "So. Alex Danvers. Maggie's Toaster Oven Girl. Nice. So why aren't the two of you dating?"

Maggie looked away. Alex got up and said, "Hey, they have a juke box!"

Kate ordered more drinks. When Alex got back, she said, "Yeah, Mags has issues. Hell, don't we all?"

"We do," said Alex.

Maggie nodded gratefully as she took notes. "And Lillian? Cadmus?"

"On Cadmus, I got nothing, but some of... my boss's surveillance satellites got a few images in Opal City that look like Lillian. It's not much to go on. Sorry, Mags."

"No, that's okay. Opal City. Interesting. Well, it's a place to start. Thanks, Kate." "Anything for you, babe. Well, almost."
The Closet Percentage Rule

Alex was at the DEO when Kara called to change plans for the hastily planned game night: just the sisters, Winn, Maggie and Lucy, who was in town for the weekend. Lena, despite the lead scandal, was giving a lecture in Opal City and James was catching up with Riley Finn and Jillian Holtzmann, so it would just be the five of them. Probably just as well. As Kara had pointed out, “Interpersonal getting-along-ness is at an all-time low these days.”

“Hey, Kara, what’s up?”

“Um, we have a problem. Mrs. Ross upstairs had a bit of a flood and now the ceiling in my bathroom is a mess and the landlord is here with the plumber and plasterer and so we’re going to need to use your place for game night. Is that okay?”

“Yeah, sure, that’s—“

Vasquez who was listening nearby at the command center, was shaking her head furiously, whispering, “The place is a mess!”

“Er, Kara, hang on a minute.” She turned to Vasquez.

“I wasn’t expecting you to get back from Metropolis so soon, and I kind of… spread out. I was going to clean up this evening before you came back, and now J’onn has me on the feeds until midnight. I’m sorry, Alex.’

Alex waved the apology away. “Kar, we can use my place, but you’re going to have to come over and help me clean up before anybody comes over. We might need some superspeed…”

“Sure, I can do that! See ya!”

Alex gave Vasquez the Eyebrow (she had been watching Lena and taking notes) and Vasquez had the good sense to blush. “At least tell me that you ran the dishwasher, Vas.”

“Um. Maybe? I definitely watered the plants.”

Winn stared.

Vasquez frowned at him. “What? I can be domestic.”

Winn hunkered down at his keyboard. Better part of valor and all that.

When she entered Alex’s apartment, Kara realized that her sister had probably been right about the superspeed. It wasn’t that Vasquez was a slob—she absolutely wasn’t—it was more than she simply didn’t live quite the Stoic life that Alex had lived since she joined the DEO. The kitchen was clean, and indeed, the dishwasher was full of clean, dry dishes. It was just that the rest of the open space was littered with… well, stuff. Vasquez’s stuff.

Which seemed weird to Kara because Alex had only been gone two nights. How did this much stuff get this spread around the apartment in only two nights?

When Alex arrived, she sighed as together they picked up the things. “It’s mostly just clothes. You know how it is, Kar. I bet you leave sweatshirts and things at Lena’s sometimes.”

“Yeah, I used to. But this? What is this?”
So Alex explained:

This was Vasquez’s Marine sweatpants and Grumpy the Dwarf t-shirt for bed, several pairs of rainbow socks, an extra pair of black tactical pants, a spare “FBI” black pantsuit for emergencies and a grey men’s style suit for formal-ish occasions, a National City Heroes baseball cap, a blue Supergirl knit hat with the crest and the enormous pompom on top in red, and peeking out of Alex’s hamper in the bathroom, a pair of black underpants with SEMPER FI written in white letters on the back.

But it wasn’t just clothes. It was also her toolbox from fixing the sink, her Wonder Woman nightlight because she hated stumbling to the bathroom in the dark, a big houseplant she’d brought Alex to “brighten the place up a little” which she always watered because there was a reason Alex didn’t do houseplants, two books on risk analysis and an anthology of essays on butchness, her nine-inch santoku knife because “what do you mean you don’t have a butcher’s knife?” and her Captain America coffee mug,

Oh, and, stuck into the potted plant, one of those little rainbow flags that banks gave out during Pride.

And extra ammo for her Glock, on Alex’s bedstand.

And her Maxie pads in the cabinet under the bathroom sink.

And what looked like a really expensive bottle of scotch, not the rotgut that Alex used to drink.

“So,” said Kara slowly. “She practically lives here.”

“No, it’s just, well, we get off late so many nights and it’s easier just to cook and eat together and then if it’s that late, it’s just easier if she stays over. It’s practical.”

Kara looked skeptical. “You know, I think Mom is afraid that if you two haven’t moved in together yet, it’s not going to be a long-term relationship. You should tell her. Then she’ll stop worrying.”

“Ha. Mom is never going to stop worrying. If we moved in together, she would either tell me that I was making a big mistake since it’s going to be a huge disruption if we break up and one of us needs to move out, or she’s going to start pushing us to get married. Probably both.”

“Both wouldn’t make sense.”

“Kar, when it comes to me, Eliza leaves the logic on the lab bench.”

“True…”

By the time Lucy and Maggie showed up with the pizzas, the apartment was back to its pristine state. Lucy even commented on it. “Geez, Alex. I thought you said you and Vasquez were serious. But I don’t see a single piece of Marine gear here…”

Kara blushed and Alex knew she was thinking SEMPER FI!

“Yeah, well, Vasquez isn’t a messy person. And she has a couple of my drawers to keep things in, and my closet…”

“Ooooh,” said Lucy. “What percent?”

“What?”

Maggie explained. “What percent of your storage space does she use? Five? Twenty-five? Fifty?”
“I don’t know,” said Alex, shrugging. “What does it matter?”

Kara jumped up to let in Winn, who was carrying an enormous bag of potstickers from the Chinese place around the corner.

Lucy said, “Once a girl has half your closet, she might as well move in.”

“Why is everybody so fixated on our relationship? First it was the Claddagh rings and now it’s the moving in together. We’re going at our own pace! Back off, fer cryin’ out loud.”

Winn hurried to set down the potstickers and start handing out plates, knives and forks. The gang ate hungrily while arguing about which games to play. But the whole discussion gave Alex a different kind of food: food for thought.
Eve Tessmacher had gone to Yale University, which meant that she knew a whole lot about three things: international business, some of the best collegiate theater in the country, and arguably the best pizza in the United States. No, seriously, Eve had had that argument many, many times. Generally, she won. Admittedly, Jess Huang had lived in Chicago for two years, so she had Opinions about the issue. They agreed to disagree. But since the board of the Personal Assistants Association was meeting at her apartment this month, Eve had ordered clam and garlic white pizza, and the group was swaying in her direction. Jess murmured, "Next month, deep dish. Don't think you've won." And Eve suspected that this particular argument wasn't going to end soon.

Didn't matter. Didn't have to. They had much more urgent issues to handle.

"So," Jess, wiping her greasy hands off and giving the paper towels to the women on the couch. "What happened?"

Eve didn't have the guts or the technical know-how to bug her boss's office like Jess had, but the beauty of glass walls and an open-door policy was that she didn't have to.

Standing up the moment she saw Lena, Kara and Sam hurrying towards James's office, she said, "Ms. Luthor, is there anything I can get for you?"

Lena was very specific. "Call the CDC and get every report they have on the outbreak and I want to see the victims' medical reports and I want to see every bit of data that Morgan Edge can see."

"Understood. And Ms. Luthor, I'm very sorry."

They marched into the office and sat on the couches.

Kara said, "There has to be another reason."

"Agreed," said Sam. "There could be a hundred other explanations for why these kids are getting sick besides your device."

Kara nodded. "He's manipulating you to get revenge for buying CatCo."

"He's ruthless, Lena," said Sam. "You know that."

They looked up at Edge's hated visage on the computer monitors above James's desk.

"But what if it's true?" asked Lena. "I told Supergirl that the lead in the device was safe for humans. She wouldn't have used it if it wasn't safe."

Kara looked so sad.

Sam said, "But using it saved all of us."

James entered, saying, "Ms. Luthor." He was the only person Eve had heard yet who didn't make Luthor sound like Luther. Eve wondered why that was.

"Mr. Olsen."
And Lena was the only one who made it sound like Allson, rather than Ole-son. Maybe her Irish boarding school?

"Come to say I told you so?" snapped Lena. "Another Luthor takes lives, news at eleven?"

"Ms. Luthor, despite our differences, I would hope that by now you would realize that I do see you as more than just an extension of your brother."

Lena softened, or possibly just looked guilty, maybe a little ashamed. Eve thought it wasn't a good look on the proud woman. She had faced so much over the years: the adoption, Lillian, Lex, the backlash, the opportunities, the obstacles, coming out and dealing with the paparazzi dogging her every move in those first years. Then National City. Then Cadmus. Then the fucking Daxamites.

Eve Tessmacher was a polite woman, but she had Opinions about Daxamites in general and in particular. She stood by the adjective.

"However," James continued. "I do think that you should get ahead of this. Which in my opinion... I think you should step down from CatCo."

Eve Tessmacher had taken up Kara Danvers's mantle as PA for Cat Grant. Then she'd been saddled with an absentee boss, who normally was sweet and kind and when he did his job, very, very good. But Lena Luthor was her hero. So her loyalties were very clear. Having worked at CatCo for several years, she heard the logic of what James was saying, especially in these troubled times, in the years since the impeached former president had frequently attacked the integrity of journalists and entire papers and networks.

But.

There was also something else that bothered her. Cui bono? Who profits?

Kara, of course, immediately said, "No! If she does that, it'll look like an admission of guilt!"

"Yes, but then whatever we report, good or bad, will come off as truthful."

"No, Kara, he's right. Whatever is happening and whoever is responsible, this is a public crisis and the public deserves to be able to trust the reporting so that they can prepare themselves. They deserve it and they need it, now more than ever. Mr. Olsen, you will run CatCo until this issue is resolved. And I think I should also step down from L-Corp."

Sam shook her head. "No, we need you to help guide the research."

"No, L-Corp has a braintrust more than capable of handling this. If I'm involved, I could be accused of covering things up or even of profiting from the sick!"

Eve stood a few feet outside the door, pretending to look at the tablet in her hand, but really watching the drama unfolding just twenty feet away. Kara never took her eyes off Lena and she looked just so, so sad.

Flannel, indeed.

Lena continued, "It can't be like Flint, Michigan, where bureaucracy got in the way, okay? Helping people has to be the focus."

Eve was distracted by Kara's "my puppy just was accused of horrific murder and who can I kill?" look, so then a man's voice was saying, "Where is she? Where is Lena Luthor?" And when he said
it, he made it sound more like Eve's boss was related to the hero of the Protestant Reformation. She turned, too slowly, to see a white man in his thirties, wearing a plaid shirt and a black hoodie, moving with determination, saying, "I need to see her. I need--"

"Sir," she said, waving her hands to keep him off. "Please, sir, you have to calm down!"

"I need her to answer for my son!

Lena stepped out of the office, looking pale and distraught and willing to face him. She was flanked on one side by Kara and on the other by the much taller James Olsen, and Eve later found it odd that she was more comforted by the grim look on Kara's face. Sam also had their back. Eve panicked, and then decided to make herself useful. She hurried to a colleague's desk and used the internal phone to call Security.

When she came back, the man was yelling, "My son matters!"

"I'm sorry--" started Lena.

"Sorry? You're going to answer for what you did to my son, to all of them--"

But the rest of it was cut off when the security guard turned him around and strong-armed him toward the elevator.

With tears standing in her eyes, Lena turned to James. "Get your best reporter to write this up. We're not hiding anything. Set a press conference for later today."

And, not knowing what else to do, Eve went down to Security and talked about a newer, better security protocol to keep Lena safe.

//

Eve felt exhausted, having described everything she had seen. Around her the other personal assistants looked thoughtful.

To no one's surprise, Jess Huang spoke first. "I don't like that the guy was allowed to get up to the editorial floor unsupervised. That would never happen at L-Corp. We need to reconsider CatCo's security protocols, you're right about that, Eve."

The others nodded, wide-eyed, probably thinking about what they might do to better protect their own CEOs.

Jess was typing notes to herself on her phone. "L-Corp's specific security measures are proprietary, but they follow principles we got from a security expert who consulted for us, and he gave us a few templates that we combined. I will ask Lena if I can send you those and recommend that she has the L-Corp Security Committee, who is basically me and two other guys, look over and revise CatCo's protocols."

Eve said, "Jess, what should I do? What can I do?"

Jess hummed. "Do you know what defensive driving is? All of L-Corp's drivers take courses in this every year, and there are several levels from suburban/green-alert to the kind of things soldiers in Iraq learn which is way past an American red-alert. Being a PA is a bit like that, and there are people who can teach you those skills." Her eyes flickered over the other women and man in the room. "Pretty sure that you guys don't need to know and Max Lord's PA is a black belt in this stuff. Don't worry, Eve. I'll set it up. CatCo is under L-Corp now and we have line items in the budget for this sort of
thing."
The Lengths to Which She Will Go

Vasquez did not expect the text from Jess Huang and was further surprised to see Eve Tessmacher, Maggie Sawyer and Winn Schott cc'd--or conference-called or whatever the fuck it was called--on the same text.


And on the one hand, Vasquez the Marine did not recognize somebody's secretary as a person with the authority to order her around. But on the other hand, Vasquez had once or twice done security details when Senators and Congresspeople visited the warzones, and she knew the immense value of good intel and tight coordination.

S.Vasquez: Where?

TheTessmacher: Sure, where?

ForTheWinn: If they're in, I'm in.

J.Huang: L-Corp, 41st floor conference room. Have photo ID for security. No weapons.

And Vasquez had secured her Glock in her DEO locker, changed into a black pantsuit with a cranberry blouse and low black heels and headed back to the command center, where she commandeered Winn Schott, with his plaid shirt and knit tie and cardigan, and they drove together to L-Corp.

//

Eve Tessmacher, in a floral print dress and little yellow sweater and flats, stepped into the conference room nervously, but the police detective smiled at her and offered her the chair next to her. Winn and the FBI agent entered together, looking completely comfortable in that environment. Jess entered soon after.

"Okay," said Jess, clicking a remote that turned on the flat computer monitor attached to the far wall. "Here is the layout for today's press conference at one. Podium, lectern and mike at the front, audio marked with x's, places for people to stand in green. NCPD are the blue diamonds around the area. The FBI, no uniforms, are the red dots throughout the green."

"Um," said Tess. "That seems like a lot of security for a fifteen minute press conference..."

Kindly, Winn said, "Sometimes these things can take longer than we planned for..."

Maggie nodded. "The last two press conferences Lena Luthor had ended in blood. Why on Earth does that woman insist on doing these things outside? If we had an indoor venue, we'd have a bottleneck where we could use metal detectors. Is that really too much to ask?"

Jess groaned. "Oh, Detective, you are preaching to the choir here. I've been telling her that for months, if not years."

"Has she got a death wish?" asked Maggie, exasperated.

Vasquez shrugged. "That's actually statistically probable, given her job and her family. A lot of highly successful--"
Eve watched Jess give the Latina FBI agent the stinkeye.

Jess cleared her throat. "That is neither here nor there. The POINT is that we have to deal with what we've been given." She clicked the remote and the computer showed vertical slabs that made up the cityscape, north, east, south, and west of the central area. Most of the slabs were completely grey, but some of the smaller ones had small black boxes on them. Jess explained, "Skyscrapers by law do not have openable windows. Thank the Great Depression for that. Smaller buildings will be the big risk."

Eve said, "How are buildings a risk?"

Vasquez gave her an incredulous look.

Again, Winn kindly explained, "Snipers."

Maggie said, "NCPD has this information. We will have people on the roofs of the buildings opposite with scopes and guns."

"Excellent," said Jess. "There is, however, one more thing that we need... And Winn, I will need your help. Thank you, ladies. I think we are all up to speed..."

//

Over the years, Lena Luthor had had to do some difficult things: learn how to follow her father, then brother, as CEO of LuthorCorp, deal with her adoptive mother a) at all, b) after grammar school parent/teacher nights, c) after she came out, d) after the board of LuthorCorp had chosen Lena over Lillian, etc.

And even just the abbreviation etc. made her think about the difference between bazookas and rocket launchers.

So, yeah, let's just not go there.

Press conferences were on her list of "Things I Hate to Do." There weren't a whole lot of other things on the list, but they did include:

• visiting relatives in prison
• eating cilantro
• skipping steps in an experiment
• scrubbing the toilet in her condo
• replying to Christmas cards from more conventionally successful college friends (women who had husbands, children, and families not currently serving time in maximum security)
• being caught by the paparazzi without her makeup
• flying (unless the pilot was Supergirl)
• falling off a skyscraper

Obviously these were not in order of importance.

So when she stood on the edge of the stage on the green verge outside of L-Corp, with Sam, James, and Eve surrounding her (as well as the tall, muscular Kevlar-vested bodyguards that Eve (and Jess) had insisted on), she ground her teeth.

It did help that out there in the crowd she saw Kara, who sent her a little wave. And a wave from Supergirl was surely at least worth the serious frowns of two human male bodyguards, right? It gave her a tiny modicum of comfort.
But then she had to step in front of the lectern--and that was odd. When they had walked through the procedures virtually, the lectern had been transparent, with the text of her speech running on the lectern, the way it worked with teleprompters. But now there was this L-Corp-green fabric surrounding the lectern, and she felt like if she had a few more seconds it would make sense, but she had to speak--

She approached the lectern, hearing the crowds with their signs chanting, "Lock her up! Lock her up!" even though these were quite likely the same people who had been huddling in fear until the Daxamites suddenly flew away, and then had run out of hiding and cheered.

But Lena knew that didn't matter. They had cheered Lex in Metropolis, too, and then turned on him (as he deserved). They always first cheered and then called for death. Heck, if she understood anything about Christianity and Jesus? That was part of his story too. The difference was that Lex and his sister deserved the derision long-term. Whatever protections from the alien menace they had given people had been short-term, under-thought-through. Harmful.

So this? This was their due. Her due.

"Good afternoon. I'm Lena Luthor. I know that you are angry. I hear you. I would be myself if thought someone had poisoned my children. So my thoughts go out to everyone who is afflicted."

Maybe she should have studied medicine, become a doctor: their first rule: do no harm.

"I heard what Morgan Edge told you this morning. And I wish I was up here to say something different, but--"

But she became an engineer, not entirely unlike the scientists at Los Alamos, who had built Earth's first nuclear bomb.

"But the truth is I don't know if my device hurt children, and until I do, I realize that none of you can have faith in me."

What was it Robert Oppenheimer said when he saw the test blast? "Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds."

Kara's head snapped up and she looked around, slipping her lead-lined glasses down her nose so she could x-ray the crowd, and indeed the man who had sneaked into L-Corp was sliding his hand into his pocket, but only to grasp his phone, not a gun.

"Your faith is something that I have worked harder than you may realize to keep, and the fact that I might have lost it breaks my heart. And so, until the investigation into this poisoning is concluded, I shall be stepping down from--"

Gunshots sent the crowd running in all directions. Kara counted twelve shots. On the stage, Sam leaped onto Lena, bringing her down behind the podium. James leaped into the crowd, directly toward the hooded shooter, despite the fact that he did not have his Guardian armor. But another security guard took the woman down and she was sobbing.

On stage, Lena shouted, "HELP! Somebody help me!" And Kara was there faster than she should have been able to be, pushing Lena away gently and then applying direct pressure to Sam's shoulder wound.

///

Winn looked at Sam as she lay on the bed in the hospital room.
"Who...are you...?" asked Sam, under all the pain meds. "Where...?"

"National City General. You're going to be fine, Ms. Arias. But to be fair, if that bullet had a little more stopping power, your shoulder would be a mess." He handed her the copper jacket.

Sam took the jacket from him, staring at it wonderingly, but then she was a little bit buzzed by the drugs.

Kara Danvers said, "Edge had riled them up. He knew what he was doing."

Winn said, "According to Maggie's NCPD report, the shooter just found out that her son took a turn for the worse. Now I'm not making any excuses, but she just went after who she thought was responsible."

Kara frowned. "Wait. So are you saying that Lena's responsible for what this woman did?"

"I'm not saying that she's responsible, but maybe this happened because of what we did. We jerry-rigged that device to do something it was never intended to do. Now I know you don't want to hear this, but that device was invented by Lex Luthor..."

"Which, which is why we're testing it," said Kara, frowning. "Let's go test it."
Ruby sat in her the guidance counsellor's office, watching the replay of the shooting via YouTube on her phone, with her earphones in so as not to disturb the guidance counsellor, who was on the phone. She played the video over again and again. She saw the look on her mom's face as she dove to protect Lena and she saw the big black man look appalled and turn and leap into the crowd to get at the gunwoman. The news said his name was James Olsen and he was the acting CEO of CatCo, so basically the same sort of job her mom had. And apparently they knew each other and he cared a lot about her, even though her mom had never mentioned him before.

Well, that wasn't too surprising. After that time when she had gotten kind of weird the last time her mom dated some guy she really didn't much care for, her mother hadn't really talked about the guys she was interested in. But that bizarre thing the other night? Ruby knew that her mother was under tremendous stress lately. Maybe she needed to get laid. Luisa's older sister said not having enough sex made people stress out.

This James was kind of hot, and he obviously was brave and cared about Ruby's mom. She dug around on the web and found his email.

Ruby.Arias@gmail.com: Dear Mr. Olsen, Thank you for trying to save my mother's life. I know she would love it if you came by to see her at the hospital to thank you herself. Ruby Arias

She hit send, and went back to playing music videos.

//

Winn and Kara stood outside the windows of the experimentation room. Winn glanced at Kara's Vasquez-Level frowner and got nervous, but he knew his science, and he held onto that as he explained it all to her.

(And the fact that she had been a genius-level scientist in her teenage years before immigrating to this backward planet NEVER crossed his mind).

"Okay, so I sealed off the room to contain the lead cloud. We have some sensors that will analyze the particulate."

"So how will we know if the device is the cause?" asked Kara.

"Okay, so when Lena and I crunched the numbers during the invasion, like 99.6% of the molecules bonded to Daxamite genes, which basically means that since the .4% can't harm humans, if we get the same percentage now, then no harm done. As long as we get the same margin of error today, we're good."

"Okay. Hit it."

Winn pushed the button and the cannon shot out the cloud of lead gas, which swirled in the air and then shot down to the replicated Daxamite genetic material.

"Anything?" asked Kara.

"Uh, that's. Hopefully..."

"Winn, what's the percentage?"
He hit the tablet and watched the numbers slow and then stop. "Ummm." He turned the tablet toward her. It said 89.79%.

"So there's a ten percent chance the device is the cause," said Kara grimly.

"Ten point two one. But to be fair, we also don't have a large enough volume of the Daxamite genetic material. So that might be the problem."

Kara looked devastated.

Winn said, "Kara, I helped Lena adapt the device. If kids are getting sick because of it? Dying because of it? That's on me too. I will figure this out. I will."

Kara turned and just walked away from him, scowling.

//

James had given his statement to the NCPD and then returned to CatCo, feeling depressed and useless. He was Guardian, or he had been. If anyone was going to protect Lena Luthor (who wasn't Supergirl), then it should be him, because frankly, then maybe she would respect him, especially if he could take a (nonlethal) bullet for her.

But no. The universe really didn't want James Olsen saving the day. Instead, the universe chose a woman seven inches shorter and a good sixty pounds lighter than him. He couldn't even nail the shooter.

He looked up at the news feeds above his desk and frowned at the playback of Sam saving Lena, as she tackled her and held her down behind the barrier of Winn and Lena's green quantum fabric, which Jess had said had taken at least six of the bullets.

Great. So Winn and Jess were saving the day, while he just sat around with his--

His phone pinged. He opened his email and frowned. He got up and stuck his head out the office door.

"Can I help you, Mr. Olsen?" asked Eve.

"Yeah, do you know if Sam Arias has a daughter?"

"She does. Lilly? No, Ruby. She's twelve, I believe."

"Okay. And do you know what hospital Sam is at? The room?"

"Do you want to send flowers?"

"I want to bring them."

//

Sam was still a little groggy, but the pain was better, and mainly she was bored and just wanted to get back to work at L-Corp. Not surprisingly, when they had talked on the phone, Ruby had not in fact been mad at her for risking her life to protect Lena Luthor; she still seemed to think that Sam was some kind of hero. So much for proving her wrong.

Nice going, Sam.
She sighed, and rolled the copper jacket between her fingers. They had taken more tests and when she asked when she could go home, they said that they hadn't gotten the results back yet, but if the result were good, she could leave that afternoon. She hoped so. Sam was rarely idle long enough to get bored, but right now she thought her head was going to explode.

She glanced up as she heard a knock on her door. James Olsen stuck his head in.

"Sam? Mind if I visit?"

"Not at all. Save me from the boredom."

He held a small bouquet of autumn flowers and she smiled and gestured to the bedside table. He set them down, awkwardly.

She said, "I understand you jumped the gunwoman. Thanks. I'm sure Lena is grateful, as I am."

"Oh, um, that wasn't actually me. I tried, but the cop got to her first."

"Well, you tried. Most people run away from danger, not toward it. So thank you for trying."

"I could say the same for you. If anything happened to Lena... I know some people who would be devastated."

"Mr. Olsen, do you have a thing for our CEO?"

"No, I really don't. And anyway, she's into women, so it wouldn't matter if I did... Oh, you didn't know?"

"Oh, I knew. She's very open about it. I used to judge her for it, back when we went to Harvard. I was actually Catholic back then. I remember telling her she could be gay, but it would be wrong to act on it. Love the sinner, hate the sin, something like that. But the world has changed and shown me that love isn't a sin, and judging someone for their biochemistry is just nuts."

"I guess we all need to overcome our upbringings and education."

"We do. I am trying to raise my daughter to be more open-minded than I was raised to be."

"I know that Alex and Kara Danvers speak very highly of your daughter."

Sam tried to remember if Lena had ever mentioned James, but couldn't come up with anything. "Oh, er, thank you. Sorry, I'm still a little woozy."

"That's fine, I just wanted to bring you these myself. I should get back to work. Feel better."

"Thanks." Watching him go, Sam wondered why he had come at all.

//

When Ruby got home from school, her mother was already there, having finally been cleared to leave the hospital. And she had brought Lena Luthor with her. She was standing at the kitchen sink, washing the last of her mother's blood off her hands. Ruby approached them quietly and hugged her mother gently, so as not to hurt her shoulder. Then she turned to Lena and said, "Ms. Luthor. I'm sorry they shot at you."

"Well, um, thank you, Ruby. So am I. I never would have put your mother in danger."
"You didn't put her in danger, Ms. Luthor. I saw the video. They weren't shooting at her and she just wanted to protect you. She's like that."

Her mom sighed and ruffled her hair. "Rubes, can you go get the spare sheets and pillows and set up the couch for Ms. Luthor? She's going to stay with us for a few nights."

Ruby hurried to the linen closet, but she could still hear the conversation in the kitchen.

Lena said, "Somebody just tried to kill me. I shouldn't be here, putting you and Ruby in danger."

Sam handed her a glass of water. "That woman is in custody. Nobody knows you're here, so we're safe. So take your Louboutins off, relax and chug this."

"This really isn't necessary."

"Stop it! You're dehydrated."

"You were just shot! You shouldn't be hiding me."

"You gave me a break when I needed it most. Let me return the favor. That's what friends are for."

"Would you still be my friend if Ruby were dead?"

In the living room, Ruby could hear the silence that was the negative answer. She took her courage in her hands and went back to the kitchen.

"Ms. Luthor?"

"Ms. Arias."

"I was hoping to ask you. At school we're doing this project where we have to find somebody who works in science, and interview them and write a feature piece about their work and achievements. The best one will go in the school paper. I wanted to ask if I could interview you."

"Ruby, I still don't know if what I did is causing your friend and all those other children to be sick. And until I do, no one is going to want to read about me."

Ruby nodded seriously. "Maybe not. But Luke has lived in National City his whole life. He told me about the invasion and how scared everybody was. Some of his friends at his old school died when the Daxamites blew up the gymnasium, kids he knew his whole life. So when they all went away and everybody was safe again, he was really happy. Even if your lead bomb did cause this by accident, I don't think he'd blame you."

A tear escaped one of Lena's eyes. "Thank you, honey," said Lena. "But maybe he should."
Past Results Are Not an Indicator of Future Profits or Losses

It had been, what, three weeks since Vasquez had taken a team to confiscate the alien ship that General Lane had in his possession? And the team had deposited it at Lucy's Nevada site, handing off the paperwork to her people, and returning to National City, where events had... eventuated.

Not in ways that Vasquez would have hoped, but most of them had happened in ways that she had in fact predicted, so there was that. At least she wasn't wrong about the vastly important things in her professional life. It was important, crucial even, that she got things right there, given how many lives could be at stake if she fucked up.

But her personal life? Oh, that was a whole 'nuther ballgame, an entirely different set of gummy worms.

Because even after training Alex Danvers to be an elite DEO agent, a badass who could take down aliens three times her size, Vasquez couldn't always predict what the agent would do in the field (jumping off a skyscraper came to mind almost immediately).

And even after working under Alex Danvers in her capacity as Assistant Director of the DEO, Vasquez couldn't always tell how the Danvers elder sister would choose to handle either Kara or Supergirl.

Most importantly, even after taking on Alex Glitter-Baby Danvers, watching the L-Word with her, teaching her the language and the culture of queer girls, Vasquez had known from the start that Alex was in love with Detective Maggie Sawyer, for whom she had come out and figured herself out, and because of whom she had started living her truth.

And lately, Vasquez saw Alex changing, becoming more introspective and quiet when they were together. She saw her drinking even less, talking less, laughing less. And it terrified Vasquez.

She knew the signs of an impending breakup.

She saw Alex at the DEO absently twisting the Claddagh ring on her finger. When they were in bed at either of their apartments, she saw her roll over in bed with a deep sigh, even after a hard mission, the kind that usually left Alex hungry and horny. Vasquez had watched her at the dodgeball game, looking longingly at some of the hot women (before the crazy woman had distracted her attention).

And Susan Vasquez watched people constantly in order to predict the future. It was how she made her living and she was damned good at it. And right now she was beginning to think that her future was going to contain a great deal of pain. Because Susan Vasquez was madly in love with Alex Danvers, had been for years. But Alex didn't seem to be in love with Vasquez anymore, maybe had never been.

And Vasquez hated to admit it, but maybe Maggie Sawyer hadn't been wrong about baby gays being dangerous for one's emotional health.

//

Eve Tessmacher was staying late at CatCo again.

This had never been a necessity when James was in charge, but Jess Huang had warned her that Lena Luthor was a very different type of CEO, one whose whole life was the business, both the science side and the administrative side. Jess had quite rightly predicted that Lena would take the
attitude that if she was going to run a media company, she was going to damn well learn how to run it right, even if that meant a steep learning curve and a lot of overtime.

So Lena asked Eve to gather books, articles from Harvard Business School on CatCo case studies, all the data she could gather more recently on the lead-poisoning outbreak, and other lead-poisoning outbreaks in other places and times for comparison, the CDC reports and--

Eve stopped as she was organizing the CDC information. One report was specifically on National City's water supply before and after the adoption of the L-Corp D1000 Lead Filtration System last May, approximately two weeks after the Daxamites had fled. And what that report showed was that National City's water supply was 11.302% cleaner after the system was put in place than it had been the year before.

Eve looked at the authors of the report: scientists from Metropolis University, MIT, and the National Institute for Health (the last of which had called for and funded the study). It looked legit. Which was strange, since the medical reports of the National City cases looked like the lead had been ingested in water, rather than from air (as several scientists had expected to be the problem), or from chewing on lead-based paint (as toddlers sometimes did).

Eve stared off into space, thinking, WWJD?

Only, by J, Eve didn't mean Jesus. She meant Jess.

Then Eve picked up her phone and called Winn Schott, Jr.

//

Ruby was busy doing her homework in the living room when her mother came by to check up on Ms. Luthor. She gave Lena a hug and asked how she was, but Lena had seemed more than usually subdued, and pretty much answered with monosyllables, mostly saying that she couldn't think about anything but the children and if she had a job, a project she could work on, that would enable her to get her mind off it and on to something useful, where she could make a difference.

And Ruby's mom had looked at her in a way Ruby had never seen her look at anybody before. In fact, she had only once seen somebody look at anybody in quite that way, and that was her friend Luisa's sister Marta, who looked at her girlfriend Eileen that way.

A small sunburst went off in Ruby's head.

This explained everything.

It explained why her mother's relationships with men had never lasted long.

It explained why, after Ruby's dad had gone away, and little Ruby had asked her mother for a new daddy, she had said, "Aren't we enough? Just the two of us?"

It also explained that weird breakdown her mother had had. Luke's older brother had had all kinds of health problems until he went to college and came out as gay. Luke said the doctor had suggested that the stress of staying in the closet might have been at the heart of those illnesses.

Maybe Ruby's mom was a lesbian and she felt like she had to hide that from everybody.

Even from Ruby.

Even from herself.
And her mom had gone back to work, promising to find a project that Lena could work on. "Jess will know," she said, and Lena had smiled wanly and agreed that, yes, Jess would certainly know.

(And Ruby had met Jess several times since her mom started at L-Corp, and got the impression that the woman was very kind, very smart, and very loyal. Basically, a badass Hufflepuff. So she suspected that whatever it was, Jess would indeed know.)

So when the doorbell rang and Ruby ran to answer it, she saw a short Latina woman who showed her an NCPD badge and carried a folder of papers. Lena heard her introduce herself to Ruby as Detective Maggie Sawyer and came striding out to invite her in.

"Detective, this is a surprise. It's okay, Ruby. I know her." A small smile. "She even arrested me once."

"Are you ever going to let me live that down, Luthor?"

"Never!" said Lena, but then the impishness disappeared abruptly. "Is, is that... are those the medical reports I asked Eve for?"

"If they were, do you think it would be me bringing them by? Nope. Police business."

"And if I am responsible for those children, isn't that police business?"

The detective was forthright. "Yup. Probably. But it wouldn't be Science Division. You are not an alien and neither are the kids. Not my jurisdiction." And she got a sad look of her own at that.

"Maggie, I heard about that... jurisdictional... argument..." Lena looked at Ruby. "It's okay, Ruby, Maggie's a friend. You can go back to your homework. Detective, I was just about to make some tea. Would you join me?"

Looking at her watch, Maggie said, "I have maybe twenty minutes... thanks."

Lena filled the kettle as Maggie settled in at the kitchen island. "Seriously, Luthor, you drink loose-leaf? Does anybody still do that?"

"I went to boarding school in Ireland. Tea in bags is heretical, Detective. Now. Show me what you have."

"Jess called me and asked about the evidence we got from the press conference. I couldn't get a sample of the actual material that they protected your podium with, but I did get several hi-res photos of the damage from the bullets. Your material held up remarkably well. I also have photos of the damage it did to the bullets. Jess seemed to think that this information would help you figure out how to make your fabric tougher or something."

Lena hummed as she flipped through the photos. "Hmm, she might be right. I have ideas already. How long can I keep these for?"

"They're copies of copies. They're yours, just don't lose them."

"I understand." Lena closed the folder as the kettle started to whistle. She poured the water into the cups she had prepared.

"Lena... How are you holding up?"

"Let's just say that I wish you could show me photos of the damage to me, so that I could engineer a
Maggie frowned. "Where is Kara? She should be here with you."

And that didn't make any sense to Ruby (who TOTALLY wasn't eavesdropping). Kara was a reporter.

"She's got better things to do."

"I'm pretty sure the things she is doing are going to bring whoever did this to justice."

"Even if it's me? I don't blame her for avoiding me. I wouldn't want to sleep with me either after all of this."

Ruby's pencil snapped. She jumped up awkwardly and ran upstairs to her room for a pencil sharpener, stood in the room thinking, Wait, Lena, sure, but Kara? Holy moly. Taking a deep breath she went back downstairs, held the pencil sharpener over the living room trash basket and sharpened her pencil.

Maggie was saying, "You know her much better than that. And if you don't believe me, ask Lucy. She's known the Danvers girls for a long time, because of Clark. Just last night she was saying that Kara was probably flying all over the city tracking down leads to find the bastard who did this. Kara believes in you, and so do Lucy and I."

Lena sighed. "Thank you. I wish I believed in me. So how is Major Lane, anyway? I heard she just got custody of an alien space ship that her father had tried to--"

Maggie shook her head. "She's fine. She had to talk her dad down when Agent Vasquez got there with her crack troops and Marine'd his sorry Army ass. I would NOT want to face Vasquez when she's angry..."

"Thankfully, I've never seen her angry. Although, now that I think of it, I don't think I've ever seen her not frown, except sometimes when she beats Alex at pool. How are those two doing anyway?"

Maggie looked off in space for a moment. "I'm really not sure. When Alex and I went to Metropolis the other day, she seemed distracted, maybe worried about where things were going between her and Vasquez, but it's really not my place to speculate on their relationship, for oh, so many reasons."

"Maggie, I am so sorry. That was thoughtless of me."

"It's okay. Alex is a fine woman. She deserves the best, not someone... like me."

"Maggie, don't sell yourself short."

"Why not, Lena? You always do."

"I am a Luthor."

"Yeah, well, I am a Sawyer. That wasn't my father's last name. It wasn't my mother's maiden name. It was my aunt's name that she kept when my uncle died in Afghanistan. I took it legally when I turned eighteen, since it had been clear for years that my parents never wanted anything to do with me again. But it reminds me of Tom Sawyer, you know. Somebody who is smart and a survivor, with a kind heart and full of grit. That's who I aim to be. That's who you are."

Lena wiped a tear out of her eye as Maggie finished her tea.
Maggie said, "Listen, chica. I have to get back to work, but if there's danger, call me. If you need a hug, call me. If you need me to give Kara a shovel, talk? I'm your girl."

"Because we're both Tom Sawyer?"

"Because we're both badass dykes with complicated families. Thanks for the tea, Lena." Her phone pinged and she looked down. "Oh, shit. Infernians. I fucking hate Infernians. Gotta run!"

And after that, Lena joined Ruby in the living room, flipping through the folder and murmuring to herself. Ruby went upstairs and got a notebook that had Minions on the front, brought it down and handed it to her along with a pencil. Lena looked surprised.

Matter-of-factly, Ruby said, "Mom gets that look when she has project ideas but she never has paper nearby. I haven't been using this one, but I remember that Mom said something last week about how you really like the Minions. So you can keep it if you want."

"Thank you, Ruby," said Lena looking strangely surprised, and then she blew her nose.

And Ruby went back to her math homework, but even as she worked out the long division, she thought, Wait, are ALL my mom's friends lesbians???
J'onn pinched his nose and stared at the budget papers, seeing nothing. The last week had been harder than usual for the entire DEO, many of whom either

a) knew some of the families whose children were sick,

b) had worked the overtime on the flying cats, the wanna-be aliens who tried to rob that bank the other night, or today's fiasco with the Infernian who was so strung out on some new alien drug that she had not really been able to control her own flame, with disastrous results,

c) worked in the command center with Alex, Vasquez, Supergirl, and Winn, who were apparently more than usually committed to finding out the source of the lead poisoning if they had to kill everyone in National City to do it,

OR

d) were Alex, Vasquez, Supergirl, and Winn (see above).

It made for headaches for him. Most of the DEO scientists were working on the lead problem. Dr. Eliza Danvers was still hard at work trying to wrestle her small biochemical breakthroughs into a sort of SSRI for Supergirl. And when Vasquez came down to give him the debrief from the Infernian mission, he automatically reached into his drawer for the prototype of the psychic dampener Winn had given him and his hand brushed a small Hallmark card with Snoopy wearing an astronaut's helmet. He flipped it open. It was dated May 23. Inside it read, "J'onn-- Thanks for everything, Space Dad. --Lena."

Vasquez threw herself down into the chair in front of his desk without waiting for an invitation as she always did. His hand closed on the dampener and he shut the drawer.

"Sir, it's bad. Five agents down with serious burns, two with minor injuries. Our people went in first, so no NCPD were hurt, but..."

Her mind was a morass of professional and personal worry. "Agent Vasquez," he said gently. "You are thinking very loudly. This might help."

He handed her the dampener. She blushed and put it on, and that quieted the room for him to a considerable extent. "Sorry, sir. It's just, this week has been a bleeder."

"Agreed. Start with your report. Were the injuries avoidable?"

"Not on our side. But whatever drug that chick was on? Holy shit, sir. The guards on her cell say that she is still tripping. I was wondering if we could talk to L-Corp about getting some of that fabric that Winn and Lena created, the quantum stuff like Supergirl's cape? Even if it's only bulletproof and not fireproof, it would help, but sir, if we had fireproof tacticals? Yeah, now that would have decreased the injuries at least by 75%. That's a round number. I'd have to run the statistics to really--"

"Agent? I believe you are rambling. Supergirl rambles. Winn Schott rambles. Under the right circumstances, even Alex rambles. But you, Susan? I have never, never known you to ramble."

She looked mortified, then just weary. "To be fair, though, sir, I have been spending considerable amounts of time with all of them this year."
"Understood. But I suspect there is more to it. Can I help?"

She looked conflicted.

He clarified. "Not as your superior officer, Susan. As your--" He sighed deeply. "I suppose as your Space Dad."

She looked away for a moment and when she looked back there was no tear standing in her eye. She said brrittly, "I am having some doubts about the future solidity of my personal relationship with-- I mean, I-- I think something has changed and I just-- I am afraid that she--"

J'onn said, "Susan, you know that I work very hard to keep from intruding on my agents' minds, and that, when I cannot help but overhear their personal thoughts, I always keep that information strictly to myself."

"Yes, sir." She sounded as if she were drowning in despair, which, from the glimpse he had gotten when she walked in, she probably was.

"Having said that, I think it is fair to say that even the several hundred DEO agents who are not psychic take great comfort in the... what is the human word? D'grnhaaaash't--it just doesn't translate. It's like fidelity, but there are more colors in the word's spectrum. Susan, Alex is devoted to you. That is not opinion. It is fact. You may be having difficulties right now with all the other stressors going on, and communication is the biggest problem most human relationships have, from what I have been able to tell over the last few centuries. But you will get through this."

"Yes, sir. If you say so, sir." She sat up taller, trying to get her dignity back. She gave him the names of the injured agents, suggested that one agent be given a commendation and another be suspended from duty. He signed the requisite forms and she moved toward the door. Just before she closed the door behind her, she murmured, "Thanks, Space Dad."

//

Alex had left work a whole five minutes early to give her time to go shopping and if the clerk at the Star Market was surprised to see her stuff the food she had bought into a large Army rucksack, at least the pimply young man said nothing about it.

She then threw the pack on her back, put on her helmet and rode her bike through the city streets of National City, wishing as she sometimes did that she could fly. Because flying was cool. To be fair, a really good motorcycle was also cool, but still.

She got back to her place and immediately started the prep, sautéing the ground beef, onions and mushrooms, while starting the water for the lasagna noodles. She pulled the jar of spaghetti sauce and the shredded cheese out of the rucksack and set it on the table next to the dry noodles. Then she pulled the cork on the Cab Sauv so that it could breathe while everything else was happening.

By the time Vasquez got home, Alex was putting the baking dish into the oven and pouring the wine.

Vasquez set her gun on the table next to the door, kicked off her boots and handed Alex the bag of premixed salad. "Sorry, love. They were out of the kind you like best. I even asked the woman to check stocks, but she said they were out."

"That's okay. According to Eliza and Lena, green is green. As long as we're getting our veggies, we should be fine."
Vasquez rubbed her eyes tiredly. "I never thought I'd hear you of all people quote those two on the same topic."

"Actually, I suspect they are going to get along very well once they get to know each other better."

Vasquez had been about to throw herself on the couch but found herself pausing. "Why... are they going to... get to know each other... better?"

"Oh, you know. Because of Kara and Lena."

"Is there something you haven't told me? Because the last I looked, that seemed, well, at least temporarily... off the table?"

"Oh, sure, for now it is. But they'll work it out." Alex looked up from the salad she was pouring into a bowl. "You don't think?"

Slowly, Vasquez said, "My... thinking has been... rather compromised today. Watching my team get burned like that--" She shuddered.

Alex stared. "Oh, honey! I didn't realize. I was debriefing the agents from the press conference when the call came through and J'onn said to finish that first. Was it bad?"

She hurried over and gave Vasquez a long hug. When she went to pull away, Vasquez pulled her back in for more. "Don't stop, Al, please. Yeah, it was bad. We've got seven agents in the med bay, five bad, two less so. But burns, Al, burns are just never good."

"Oh, sweetie, I'm so sorry." She pulled her down to the couch, still holding her tightly. "Do you want to talk about it? Or would it be better not to? Because whatever you want is okay!"

"Um, maybe after dinner. Right now, I just want, well, this, if that's okay..."

Vasquez's eyes were closed and if Alex didn't know better, she would have thought the liquid dripping down her cheek was a tear. She held her tightly. "Sue, I'm sorry. I'm so thoughtless! I--"

Without opening her eyes or loosening her grip, Vasquez said, "You cooked. You. Actually cooked. And wine. And had me bring veg." She opened her eyes and pulled back dramatically, "Who are you and what have you done with Glitter-Baby Danvers?!"

Alex giggled. "You haven't called me that in a while."

"Oh, er, well, I guess you're not that baby dyke anymore." She sounded sad.

Alex stared. "But, but that's a good thing isn't it? You don't have to hold my hand and teach me all the things anymore."

"No," Vasquez said sadly. "I don't."

This time Alex could not deny that the water on Vasquez's face was tears. Were tears, whatever. Actual tears. "Vas, what's wrong."

"Nah, it's okay. Long day. Trauma. You know."

"Vas, I've seen you after a twenty-three hour 'day.' I've seen you after I nearly launched myself into space, after I threw myself off a skyscraper (sorry 'bout that, by the way. It made sense at the time...). I've seen you after we fought back to back against impossible odds when aliens were trying to take over our fucking planet. On almost every single one of those occasions, you santed into
Dollywood and threw back a scotch or two and then roundly beat Winn at pool, showing off for me the entire time. This? This is something else."

Vasquez smooshed her face into Alex's neck, saying something like "trplismggie."

"What?"

Vasquez sat up and her face was wet and she couldn't even manage a frown. "You went to Metropolis for two days. With Maggie. Same hotel room. I didn't think about it at the time, but, well, Pam from HR. I mean, you submitted your per diem. And she has orders to let me know if there are any apparent irregularities for agents on assignment in other cities."

"Irregularities? We were on assignment together for the DEO. How is sharing a hotel room an irregularity? I've shared hotel rooms with Winn on assignments. Did she report that to you?"

"No, of course not! That's Winn. This...

"Maggie."

Vasquez just grunted wetly.

Alex felt like all the oxygen had just been sucked out of the room. Finally, she gasped, "Vas, how? I? I'm with you. Maggie, she's with Lucy. I would never. Pretty sure Maggie would never. It was a room with two full-size beds, one agent each. Nothing happened. We did our jobs. We had dinner with Clark until he had to fly off, and yeah, she figured that out instantly, little Miss 'I'm-a-Detective-I Detect.' I had to get the Metropolis office to pull out the NDAs for that one, let me tell you. And then when all our leads went dry, oh, I meant to tell you about this, but I got, well I guess we all got distracted--She called Kate Kane, yeah, her ex, who is some kind of super detective. It turns out that Max Lord has unkidnapped himself and has been having Skype meetings with his LordTech facilities, mostly from abroad. She thinks he is now back in the States but hasn't been able to find him."

Vasquez stared, but she wasn't really tracking what Alex said. "Max? Is back?"

"Yes, exactly. The bastard."

"Kate Kane found this out?"

"In like two hours. Talked about her Gotham network."

"Full-sized beds?"

"What? Yes, like I said. But if Lord is back, does that mean that Cadmus didn't kidnap him? Or that they turned him and now he's working for them?"

"And you didn't sleep together?"

"What, with Kate Kane? Ew."

"No, idiot. With Maggie."

"Why would I sleep with Maggie? I only sleep with you. And well, you know, when Kara falls asleep on a person, she's really hard to shift."

Vasquez smiled weakly. "She really is."
The oven timer buzzed and Alex jumped up to take the lasagna out and let it rest on the counter before cutting into it. Vasquez got plates and cutlery.

Alex asked, "How much do you want? Your usual quarter?"

"I haven't been that hungry lately..."

Alex faltered. "Because of me? Metropolis?"

"A little bit that. A little bit, burnt flesh. You know how that can be..."

Alex nodded, biting her lip, and cut eighth portions for both of them and filled the rest of their plates with the salad. She set them down on the kitchen island and brought over the wine. She raised her glass and said, "Um, to talking about stuff?"

Vasquez sighed. "To talking about stuff."
Physically, on Earth, Kara Zor-El Danvers rarely found herself exhausted. This past week, since burning a hole from the hockey arena's subbasement to the edge of the center of the Earth, she was tired all the time, but luckily, no one was really asking her to do Supergirl things, which was kind of strange. She actually was spending all her time being Kara Danvers, mild-mannered journalist, trying to hunt down the truth about this lead-poisoning scare and deliver Lena from the people (Mr. Misogynist Edge, just for example) who meant to do her harm.

But it was not uncommon, never had been since she arrived on Earth, for her to feel emotionally exhausted, whether due to overstimulation (the glasses helped), too many feelings, or as in this case, all of the above plus the sense that this time, she might not manage to fix whatever had been broken. She was an optimist who could bend steel, but even she had her mental limits.

So when she sorted through the key ring that Sam Arias had given her and opened the front door to Sam's home, her voice when she called, "Lena?" sounded tired, even to her.

Lena was sitting at the kitchen island with two bottles of red wine, one empty, and a glass. She was wearing a National City University sweatshirt, but Kara was pretty sure that hers was in the wash, so whose...?

"Hey!" said Lena. "Hey, look, I made a metaphor." She poured herself another glass.

"Are you here alone?"

"No, Ruby went to bed a few hours ago. Sam checked in, but she's keeping Luthor hours, poor girl. Sam's running my company. Jess took the redeye out to Atlanta to consult with the CDC on... something. What about you? What news from the front?"

Kara took off her coat and put it on the back of one of the chairs. "Nothing yet," she said. Then she realized that there was a broken wine glass on the island. She went to find Sam's dustpan and brush and swept the glass into it and tossed it into the trash.

Lena turned and tried to give her "The Eyebrow™, but it wasn't the same when she was drunk. "You know, you're terrible at hiding things from me."

"I know. But there's nothing to hide now. I can't find anything, but I won't stop looking. Until we figure this thing out, I will turn over every rock and check out every disgusting thing under every rock--"

"Like Morgan Edge?"

"Exactly."

"Just... stop. There's no point."

"Lena, you are the strongest woman I know. Why aren't you fighting?"

"Because I did it! Kara, I did it. You know, all I ever wanted to be was good. My whole life I was a pariah. First because I was rich, then because... my brother. Then, and then finally, I did just one thing, one thing that was good, and hell, I managed to poison children." She grinned sadly. "You know, even Lex Luthor never did that."
"Anyone who knows you, knows that you would never--"

"People are sick. It's my fault."

"There is still a chance it wasn't you."

"I know that you believe that everyone is good and kind and that, that is one of the reasons I love you, but that's not the real world. In the real world, everything I do hurts people. It's in my DNA, okay? So, please, just stop, stop believing in me, okay? I am not... not worth it."

Kara frowned and she knew that the crinkle was happening but she also knew that in this state--depressed, self-loathing and a little drunk--Lena wasn't sharp enough to realize that the crinkle had more truth in it than the wine. Alex might know that In Crinkle Lay More Veritas Than In Vino, but Lena was not there yet.

So she wrapped her arms around her best friend (because even if, for now, they couldn't be lovers, they would always be best friends) and she said, "Lena, You have done so many more good things, not just this. You scrapped the alien detector when you realized the harm it could do, and that was after you worked to turn the company around from its, what was your phrase, 'world domination mission statement'? Oh, and then there was that time you gave me the information to save all those aliens (people that I know you were scared of even as you were helping me save them) from the fight club. And you freaking sent your mother to jail after saving all of us aliens from that alien virus she wanted you to unleash! So, yeah, this? This is not the only good thing you have ever done. This is just one of the many, many things you have done, for aliens, for Earthlings, for me."

Lena reached for the wine bottle, but Kara intercepted her hand, placed it on her own face.

"Lena, don't you understand how you've kept me human, made me human, oh hell, I don't know the verb. But what my family, what Alex started? You made it work. You made me be so much better as Supergirl, as Kara Danvers.... As Kara Zor-El. As me. Than I had ever been. And the aliens and humans on Earth, when they have benefitted from that, well, that was your influence. And when they have suffered because of me? That was Maxwell Lord and Mon-El."

"Kara, I am not good enough to--"

But Kara caught Lena up in a hug. And no one who was hugged by Kara Zor-El Danvers generally managed to keep talking until the hug was over and they could breathe again. "Lena Luthor, I love you. And I will work my super ass off until I prove your innocence not only to National City, the US, and the world? But also, to you. Idiot."

//

Ruby was sitting at the top of the stairs (not eavesdropping at all, just making sure that Mom's houseguest was okay). She had been sitting there since she had heard the glass break right before Kara had come in.

As she padded back to bed, she basically had three thoughts.

1) Yup, all Mom's friends are supergay.
2) Mom is going to be SO disappointed to find out that Ms. Luthor is dating somebody.
3) If Lena had Kara on her side? She was going to be just fine.

//

Sam came home ridiculously late. But Kara was there, working on her laptop, and Lena was dead
asleep on the couch.

"Thanks," said Sam, as she threw her keys and bag on the kitchen island. "Thanks for staying."

"Yeah," said Kara. "She didn't want me to, but I had to."

"I've known Lena a long time, but I've never seen her like this."

"That's odd. No offense, but she's never mentioned you."

"We went to Harvard B School together. Mostly we stayed connected through Christmas cards and social media, but every time I had a job promotion, she was sending me a message saying congratulations, and a few times she threatened to poach me from my job, but I never thought she meant it."

"That's Lena," said Kara. "Heart of gold. She wants everybody to think she's so tough, and I get that. Her brother, her mom, the Board. She has to be the Girl of Steel."

Sam sighed. "Yeah, but she is mush on the inside. Hey, you know, if you want to go home, I can sit with her."

"No, it's totally fine. She's my girlfriend. Well, I mean, it's gotten complicated lately, but still. I need to be here for her. And I've been having trouble sleeping."

"Yeah, me too. Bad dreams."

Sam sat down next to her and looked at Kara's laptop. "Okay, so what's this?"

"I've been looking through public records to locate the families affected and get info on them."

"Yeah, I've been doing the same thing. the medical team at L-Corp was able to secure the addresses of all of the sick children."

"Okay, so what happens when you connect the Xs?"

"Nothing. Usually, when something like this happens, those affected are from the same area. But these kids are from all over the city. Luke lives near us and goes to Ruby's school, but then there's kids who live across the city and go to Bergen Country Day, and another kid who lives all the way out in Edgemont."

Kara frowned. "There's gotta be a way that all these kids are connected. Maybe the school records or bank statements..."

"Bank statements, good idea."

"Yeah, I'll just make a call." Kara picked up her phone but Sam shook her head.

"You don't have to. I'm already on it." She pulled up the bank statement of Luke's family, Kara didn't know how.

"How did you...? Pfft. I can see why Lena likes you."

the bank statements that Sam pulled up immediately highlighted similarities.

"Delaney's Dumpling Truck," said Kara.
"Food truck? What about it?"

"Well, look. Luke's dad and another kid's mom both went there on the same day, a couple weeks ago."

"October 21st."

"Maybe it's just a coincidence."

"Wait," said Sam, "look this is coming up on more of the kids. Octoberfest in Francis Park. So, what? Something in the food?"

//

Kara and Sam strode through the park in the dark, looking around.

"So many vendors," said Kara. "Some kids ate at Delaney's but some ate at the other trucks. So it wasn't the trucks. What else is here that might have drawn them?"

Sam pointed ahead of them. "What about the municipal pool?" They marched up to it and peered through the windows. Sam pushed at the door. "Locked! Well, it is after hours, I guess."

Kara pulled the door open, breaking the lock. "Huh," she said. "Sticky hinge!"

As they entered, Kara said, "Eliza used to bring me to a place like this."

"Who's Eliza?"

"My adoptive mom. Yeah, every Tuesday and Thursday."

"Gosh, you're adopted? So was I. Except with me, it was Mondays and Wednesdays. Gosh, Ruby loves swimming. I guess every kid loves swimming."

Kara lowered her glasses and then raised them again. "I'm going to test the pool." She pulled out a test tube from her jacket and knelt.

"You're going to test it?"

"I have... a friend... at the FBI... who helps me...on stories... with lab work." She stood and sealed the test tube.

"Good friend to have."

Kara dialed her phone. "Winn, I'm going to send you a water sample from a public pool."

"Yes, you are! Ha! When I made that device, J'onn said no one was ever going to use it, but I said, 'J'onn. at some point, someone's going to need a sample on the go... Oh, I got it!"

"What is it? Is it lead?"

"It is an advanced hydromorphic carbon nitrate compound."

"What does that mean?"

"It's a synthetic compound that, when combined with water, exhibits the exact same properties as, you guessed it, lead, and when someone is exposed to it, they experience the exact same symptoms
as lead poisoning."

"So it wasn't the lead bomb," said Kara.

"No. It wasn't."

"Thank you!" Kara hung up. "It wasn't Lena. Someone put a dangerous chemical compound in the pool."

"How?"

Kara stared around the area around the pool and said, "Wait. Come with me?"

They moved around the pool to a closet, which, when Kara pulled the doors open, showed at least two dozen large containers of a chemical. Kara pulled out her phone and dialed Lena.

"Hello?"

"Lena, Sam and I are at this pool, and all the kids who have gotten sick have been here."

"I thought I told you to stop."

"It wasn't you!"

"What?" asked Lena, barely awake.

"There's a synthetic chemical, and when it combines with water, it mimics the effects of lead poisoning, becoming toxic to the body."

"Well, how'd it get in the swimming pool?" asked Lena.

"It's chlorine they've been using. They've been using it instead of chlorine. Sam and I are going to try to track down the manufacturer. Acre Lee Chemical."

"Acre Lee Chemical?" asked Lena.

"Yeah, have you heard of it?"

'I, no. No, I haven't."

"Okay, well, let me know if you think of anything."

"Of course," said Lena. "Of course."
The Damage You Can Heal, The Damage You Can Do

After a few hundred years of torture, M'yrnn thought, a week in a monastic cell, safety and the occasional presence of the son he had long thought dead was the most pleasant of blessings. He could pray without fear, meditate without anxiety, give himself over to the presence and benevolence of his god and simply be grateful.

Then, he smelled k'droth soup. At first he thought it was some sort of olfactory hallucination brought on by nostalgia. Then he saw a woman approach his cell, carrying a container.

"You were there," he said.

"Yes, J'onn needed me, so I came with him."

"You are a White."

"Yes. To my shame."

"Do you bring this to poison me?"

"It's just soup. I know J'onn likes it. I thought maybe you missed the old ways. You don't have to eat it. I just thought..."

"You fought your own kind for us."

M'gann shrugged. "Evil should be fought wherever it abides. And the vulnerable should be protected."

A DEO agent entered, checked M'gann's pass and opened M'yrnn's cell door. She offered the soup tentatively and the old priest took it. "Thank you."

She nodded, embarrassed, and left.

M'yrnn tasted the soup and decades of his life passed before his eyes, years long forgotten, blasted away by pain and despair. Tears fell from his eyes and he offered up a prayer of thanks.

//

Morgan Edge was a self-proclaimed son of a bitch. He knew it. Hell, he reveled in it. Developing land was just one of the many ways he monetized that character trait, but it wasn't his only game. He also loved to torture the people who got in his way.

Take Lena Luthor. He had her number. She felt guilty about her family, even though, to be honest, the Luthors were people who got shit done. Still, world domination and alien genocide weren't popular with the "nice" people, so she put all her effort into being heroic rather than villainous, instead of simply following her strengths, the directions her DNA was screaming for her to follow. And she got away with it because she was rich and very fuckable, so people wanted to believe she could be good.

Edge knew better. Nobody, really, was good, including the Supers. They were simply strong and scared of their own strength. So, yeah, Supergirl had sidelined him for a few hours on a cargo ship in the middle of the Pacific. Boo hoo.

Which is why he was moderately surprised when Lena strolled into his office, looking pale and
ethereal, and so very fuckable. But he knew how women like this poor excuse for a Luthor worried about what everyone else thought about how they looked, especially rich, attractive, powerful men like himself, so he said, "Lena! You look horrible! Those sick kids have really got you tied up into a knot, huh?"

"Acre Lee."

"Acre what now?" He stood up. "Oh, Acre Lee! That's where the coyote gets all the stuff that he uses to try to kill the road runner, right?"

"That's Acme, asshole. No, Acre Lee is a company you own. I remember it from due diligence before I invested in your buildings. Established in 1982, manufactures hydrogen gas and sodium hydroxide, and also, simple chloride used for swimming pools. Acquired by Edge Global seven years ago."

"I, I'd have to check my records..."

"You used it to poison kids in swimming pools in order to drag my name through the mud."

He laughed. "C'mon. That's what you're bringing? That's what you got? I say you did it, you say I did it?"

Lena pulled a pistol and aimed it at his heart.

"Well," he said, "that's a disappointment."

Lena's face didn't change, and her voice contained no emotion. "When that woman aimed at me, I knew she was doing the right thing. Because whoever did this, they deserve to die. No trial. No jury. Just erased from the world."

Edge felt the sweat on his hands, but he faked it. "You need help... Lena. You're not... thinking clearly."

"I'm thinking like a Luthor."

And then Edge relaxed when he saw his minion sneak up behind her and clobber her. She fell unconscious on his carpet. "Fuck it, what took you so long?"

//

Lena woke slowly, trying to piece together why it felt like she was in an airplane. The noise, the cold, the stiffness. Was she on her way back from Tokyo? She should call Kara and catch up. They could get brunch tomorrow. Well, after waking up naked in each other's arms...

She opened her eyes and gasped in shock. Yes, she was indeed apparently on an airplane, but it was no Japan Airways first class seat. She was strapped into the seat of what looked like an old-fashioned plane. She unhooked herself. "Hello? Hello?" and scrambled to look out the circular window. Yes, she was flying through the sky. Holy shit.

She stumbled backwards, tried to think. How did she get here? The last thing she remembered was, oh shit, the gun. Morgan Edge. Pain.

She turned and strode to the back of the plane, where a dozen large yellow metal barrels marked Acre Lee Chemicals sat, looking like lethal toads. She turned again and strode to the front of the plane, climbed the stairs to the cockpit, which was... empty. The lights were on and the moving
pieces were moving, but no one was there to move them.

Automatic pilot? Aimed toward the reservoir.

Shit.

Lena grabbed the headset. "Mayday, mayday, this is Lena Luthor--"

//

Winn was explaining to J'onn about the synthesized chemical when Vasquez hurried into the command center.

"Sir, we have an unauthorized aircraft in our airspace."

"Alien?"

"No, it's a C-130 cargo from the FAA fly list. We have a message fragment, a distress call."

Kara hurried into the room. "A distress call?"

"Play it."

"May--Mayday.... Luthor..."

Kara tore her glasses off. "It's Lena." She pulled open her shirt, revealing the S.

Winn said, "I can send you the coordi--"

"Don't need 'em." And in a bolt of red and blue, she was gone.

Winn turned to J'onn. "How can she not need...?"

J'onn nodded his understanding. "Alex says she memorizes heartbeats. You think she can't recognize Lena Luthor's heartbeat out of a city of 400,000 people?"

Winn said, "How..."

J'onn shook his head, smiling. "I believe that the term Agent Alex Danvers would use is 'Pfft.'"

//

As Winn watched the DEO feeds, he failed to notice the Channel 7 news report that showed L-Corp scientists along with the CDC people down at the water treatment plant where they proved L-Corp's D1000 Lead Filtration System to be working perfectly. The mayor was there too, looking highly relieved--after all, she was the one who had okayed its use for the reservoir.

//

The plane shuddered and Lena held onto the pilot's seat. She heard a noise and felt a shift in the angle of the plane. She ran to the back of the plane, where the cargo door was opening by itself. In a flash, Lena knew. Edge was going to set her up for the ultimate fall: dumping ridiculously toxic chemicals into the reservoir and making it look like Lena did it. She grabbed a metal pole and shoved it into the D-ring of the canvas straps that held the chemical casks in place. She knew she wouldn't be strong enough to keep the whole payload from sliding down the ramp into the reservoir, and she knew she wasn't going to survive this flight, but she was a firm believer in forensic pathology, and
she knew that someone looking at the remains would see that she had clear tried to stop the horror that was about to happen.

And then, because just maybe there was a god out there somewhere, Supergirl flew over the open cargo door, looked around and grabbed the lever that closed the door. Lena felt stupid for not having seen it, but then maybe her throbbing head was evidence of a concussion. Maybe she could give herself just a tiny bit of leeway for not seeing the obvious.

The cargo door closed, but the plane shifted, rumbled.

"Edge is flying us remotely," Lena yelled. "The chemical is treated to dissolve in water. If the plane crashes, it'll poison everyone."

Supergirl flew to the ceiling of the plane and pulled it, straining, off its crash course. She yelled, "Strap in!" and Lena went back to the seat where she had woken and rehooked the canvas straps, watching the love of her life strain her amazing muscles almost to the breaking point--and why wasn't this easy for her? That alien prison had been megatons. In comparison this--

Supergirl looked down at her and yelled, "The chemicals are in sealed casks, right? So all I have to do is land this."

Lena looked a back at the containers of toxin. There was a device attached to the center cask and a red light was flashing. She yelled, "I think it's rigged to blow, maybe on contact or maybe on a timer. Do you want me to try to stop it?"

"No! It's too dangerous! I've got this! Stay where you are! I'm gonna blow the engines." She sent her laser vision to the far engine, and when that blew up, the plane veered and then cracked under her hands.

The plane fell into two pieces, one in each of her hands, but she felt sluggish, weak. In the back half of the plane, all of the casks of chemicals had tumbled against the closed cargo door. In the front half of the plane, Lena clung to the canvas straps that had kept her from flying out of the plane due to inertia.

Supergirl felt the muscles in her arms and shoulders strain. Maybe burning a hole into the center of the Earth hadn't been such a great idea after all... She yelled, "Something's wrong, I can't hold both!" They were losing altitude

Lena yelled, "Save the chemicals! Not me!"

"No!"

"Do it! Let me go!"

"No! I'm not going to drop you! Climb, Lena! Climb!"

And Lena climbed the rigging of canvas straps as Kara cheered her on. "You have to jump! Now!"

And Lena jumped, and Kara let go of her side of the plane and caught her by the wrist. And then she flew back to the wharf.

//

The alarm blared through the DEO. Vasquez glanced up at the monitor and said, “Oh, shit, the Infernian has blasted through her cell again. Winn, lock down the whole sector. We’ve got to get that
Winn typed in commands, then picked up his phone. “Yeah, Jess, it’s Winn with a 911. Can you get me a tarp of our quantum material? As big as you can? We’re trying to contain an Infernian and—Oh, God bless you!” He turned to Vasquez. “They’ve got one they’ve been using for the roof of the alien clinic down by the wharf, with lead edges to hold it down. Jess says they’ll have it out front for you in ten.”

Vasquez had never driven so fast, and when she put on the brakes at the door of the half-finished clinic, she left tire tracks behind. She jumped out and threw open the back of the DEO SUV, in time for a crane to deposit a huge folded tarp inside. The SUV sank half an inch and she slammed the door down.

She jumped back into the driver's seat, her comms crackling in her ear. Winn shouted, “Vasquez, we have a bigger need for that tarp down the waterfront. It’s Supergirl, and J’onn’s on the way to help. Drive to these coordinates yesterday!”

And Vasquez drove like the wind, horn blaring and lights and sirens speeding up her heart rate. She saw a blur of green and she screeched to a halt, jumped out and flipped open the SUV door just as J’onn swooped down, grabbed the enormous heavy tarp and flew toward the flash of red and blue as it landed on the wharf parking lot—

With the back half of a cargo plane and Lena Luthor?

Supergirl pushed Lena in the direction of Vasquez, who pushed her into the SUV with her and pulled the back door down behind them. Lena’s ashen face was streaked with tears and she held on tightly to Vasquez as they watched Supergirl and J’onn hurry to spread the tarp over the plane and then stand on either side as explosion underneath caused the tarp to ripple violently, then settle.

Lena burst into hysterical tears on Vasquez’s shoulder, and Vasquez patted her on the back, never in her wildest imaginings having expected to be squished into the back of an SUV with a weeping Lena Luthor clinging to her.
Preventing Damage, If You Can

Morgan Edge watched the grieving father follow all his commands unquestioningly: take off, fly toward the coordinates, shake the plane to give Lena turbulence, crash the plane.

Take the gun and shoot the computer monitor.

And that was the first time the man thought to ask. "Wait, why--"

Edge took the gun with a handkerchief in his hand. "To get some convenient gun powder residue on your hands." Then he shot the man, put the gun in his right hand, and walked out. There were no surveillance cameras here; that's why he had chosen the place. So no one and nothing saw him get into his SUV and drive away from the scene of the mur-- Suicide.

//

Winn watched Vasquez and Lena Luthor part at the doors to the command center, both wearing fresh tacticals. Their hair was damp. Vasquez came and sat heavily at her station.

Winn said, “Decontamination shower with Lena Luthor? Lucky you.”

Vasquez rolled her eyes.

“I always imagined that—“

“Winn, Stop right there.” She nodded toward the elevator where Kara and Lena were talking. “Lena’s girlfriend has superhearing, remember. If you finish that sentence, she will hurt you and I will not stop her.”

“—that driving offensively like that would, um, raise a sweat?”

“Yeah, I think I offended a lot of people today. And you’re not wrong about sweating. Can you imagine if we hadn’t been able to contain the explosion? Edge would have won.”

“Oh, it wasn’t Edge, it was one of the fathers who—“ He caught her look. “Oh. Of course. Edge. Geez, he’s even worse than Lord was. Lord wasn’t evil, just chaotic neutral.”

“Nerd.” She pulled out her notebook and jotted down some things. “Where’s Alex?”

“Agent Danvers took point on containing the Infernian when we had that little change of plans. She offered the ice breather Netflix if he froze the fire starter. It’s not a perfect plan, but it will work long enough for the transfer truck to get here from Nevada.

“That’s my girl, thinking on her feet.”

But Winn thought she sounded sad. “Vasquez? Are you all right?”


“Okay, if you say so. And J’onn is having Alex do the debrief with Supergirl and Lena, which I suspect will take a while. He said you’ve been doing too much overtime and HR is pissed. Also, Maggie called, said to text her if you were interested in grabbing a drink after work.”

Vasquez picked up her phone and wandered out, murmuring, “God, yes.”
Winn didn’t think much of it, even when Alex, Lena and Kara came into the command center later, all of them looking sort of exhausted, each in different ways. But Lena looked completely wiped out and Winn jumped up and said, “Lena! Congratulations on still being alive! Can I give you a hug?”

Lena’s face broke out into a smile and she opened her arms to him. He hugged her tightly.

“And thank you, Winn, for your quick thinking. I understand that Vasquez, J’onn and Supergirl aren’t the only heroes who helped save me and National City.”

Winn blushed.

Kara put her arm over Lena’s shoulder and they left together.

Alex said, “She’s not wrong, Winn. I’m recommending you and Vasquez for commendations. If that lead bomb had gone off in the bay? Holy shit, that would have been a total environmental disaster and it would have spread far and wide. I really want to kill Edge.”

Behind her a voice said, “We’ll have to prove he was behind it first.”

They turned to see Lucy Lane in civvies.

“Out of uniform, Lu?”

“Yeah, I’m off duty ‘til the truck gets here to pick up your Infernian. Then I have to supervise the transfer. Between then and now I’m free. Grab a drink with me?”

“Yeah,” said Alex, looking around, distracted. “Where’s Vasquez?”

“She’s grabbing a drink with Maggie,” said Winn. "Geez, everybody else gets off at six and I’m stuck here until midnight.”

Alex mussed his hair. “C’mon, Lane. I know just the place.”

//

The Edge Global janitors were busy vacuuming the carpet on the executive floor when the woman marched in, with the red boots and the cape and the... Well, that had never happened before.

And they heard what she said to Edge about poisoning children, but as far as Edge was concerned, they only spoke and understood Spanish, and nothing in the looks on their bored faces gave their easy comprehension away.

"Yeah," said Edge. "I heard they found the guy who did it, some former Marine or Air Force who had a bone to pick with her family. Too bad he killed himself, ‘cause you could have brought him to justice."

"Hm. Too bad."

"He must have really hated her. Did you ever wonder what that felt like, that kind of hate? Because I don't think you're capable of it."

"You have no idea what I'm capable of."

"Is this about me? Because when you got mad at me, you left me on a cargo ship in the middle of the ocean. It cost me a couple of hours and thirty bucks in dry cleaning. I don't know what kind of hippy-dippy justice you practiced on your planet, but out here it's dog-eat-dog. Now, if I had an
enemy, I'd crush her. Say if I were you're enemy? Killing me would be the thing to do. But you capes. You don't have what it takes. Do you."

Supergirl stepped closer but said nothing.

"Yeah. I didn't think so. You can leave the way you came in. I'm sure the cleaning crew enjoyed the show."

//

The Amphipolis was already rocking, but Friday nights were usually pretty crowded. Lucy and Alex found a tiny table in the back and ordered beers.

“Okay, Alex, out with it. Why aren’t we at Dollywood?”

“Because that’s probably where Vasquez and Sawyer are and I want to give them space.”

“Space for what?”

“Lu, you know that Maggie and I had to go to Metropolis, and I’m sure she told you we shared a room, because she thinks of mentioning stuff like that, and I don’t. So Vasquez found out from Pam from HR and was devastated because she actually thought I would, that we would, but I would never!”

Lucy nodded. “I know, Alex. Don’t worry about it. Yeah, she said you had separate beds and neither one of you slept.”

“She slept. Didn’t she?”

“Did she snore?”

“No, of course not.”

Lucy smiled fondly. “Then she didn’t sleep, trust me. I’m always having to push her to roll over to stop it. Then she always rolls back onto her back and snores again.”

“Oh!” said Alex. “I just assumed she was fine. I mean, she has you. Why wouldn’t she be fine?”

“You will always be the one who got away, Danvers. I don’t take it personally. The big question is why weren’t you fine? Are you still coveting my girl’s ass when you have Vasquez’s equally fine one?”

“No! Of course not. And it was never her ass I—I mean, I started out loving Maggie for being such a badass, and then for her mind, and then because she was so bad at pool but so earnest, and then after that I actually noticed how beautiful she was, because, I don’t know, I wasn’t used to looking at women’s bodies, or noticing them at all.”

Lucy sighed and shook her head. “Oh, Alex, was that a walk-in closet you were living in?”

Alex nodded ruefully. “Apparently.”

Lucy watched Alex bite her lip and look away. “Okay, Danvers, out with it. Something has been eating at you for a while. Winn’s mentioned it. Maggie mentioned it. And I may not be a mind reader, but I am pretty sure your Space Dad is worried about you, too.”

“Why would everybody worry about me? Kara’s the one who—“
“Alex! We are elite agents. We can multitask and worry about two of our friends at the same time, thank you very much. Spit it out.”

“I’m thinking of asking Vasquez to move in with me.”

Lucy stared. “O-kay… Why?”

Alex scratched at the label of her Sam Adams. “We spend almost every night together, weekends too, but we’re still paying for two whole apartments.”

“And?”

“And the stuff we need for whatever we are about to do ends up being at the other person’s apartment.”

Lucy nodded slowly. “And?”

“And, I don’t know, it seems like everybody expects this to be the next step.”

“Ah. Everybody. Yeah, I heard about Eliza. But what about Vasquez?”

“I don’t know. I think she’s so caught up in not pushing me too fast, that she’s started to automatically ride the brakes whenever this kind of conversation comes up. So I don’t really know what she wants, and I’m not sure that she would tell me if I asked her.”

“Well, I’ve known her longer than you, but yes, she does tend to be intensely private and go much slower these days than she used to when we first met. I’m sure you know how she got those scars?”

“The aliens in Afghanistan.”

“Yeah, when those scars were fresh and she had some serious PTSD issues, she was pretty much in a ‘live for today cuz tomorrow you might be dead’ kind of mode. But in a life where you continually don’t die tomorrow, that doesn’t always lead to wise choices. And I’m pretty sure that when you asked her to marry you at the end of the Battle of National City, you were in that mode, and she knew it, and that is why she put you off. How did you feel when she suggested the Claddagh rings?”

Alex grinned. “It felt like the perfect compromise.”

“And do you think that moving in together feels perfect?”

Alex opened her mouth and then closed it. “Maybe not.”

“Alex, you can’t make major changes in your relationship because of peer pressure.”

“But isn’t this what lesbians do?”

“It used to be. Dunno if it’s still that common, now that marriage is actually an option.”

“Have you ever done it?”

“Nope, but then I’ve spent most of my adult life on army bases, one way or another.”

“I guess that would be a factor, especially where you are now.”

“Yeah, most chicks wouldn’t be into being bitten by a bat, and a Goth chick who was? That would be way too weird for me!”
Maggie bought them each a glass of scotch and brought them to the table Vasquez had scouted out in the corner. The music was loud.

“Thanks,” said Vasquez. “After the day I’ve had…”

“I’ve heard. That’s why I called. Well, one reason.”

Vasquez watched Maggie take a sip and swallow appreciatively.

“I assume Alex told you about Metropolis.”

Vasquez kept her face guarded. “A bit.”

Maggie visibly relaxed. “Oh, good. I was afraid it wouldn’t occur to her.”

And privately, Vasquez thought that in fact it hadn’t.

“Well, we ended up having lunch with Clark Kent.” She wiggled her eyebrows. “So that was interesting.”

Vasquez gave a tight-lipped smile. “I heard about the NDAs.”

“Yeah, Pam in HR is nicer than that Metropolis dude. Anyway Alex asked for his advice about you.”

“She what? Clark?”

“Yeah, I suspect because he’s been in a good relationship longer than anybody she knows.”

“Oh, that actually makes sense, because I know she has seriously mixed feelings about Clark…”

Maggie hummed and sipped her drink. “Well, here’s the thing. Have you two been talking about moving in together? ‘Cause she is seriously nervous, and I, well, I don’t think she slept at the hotel. She did a lot of sighing for someone who was supposed to be asleep, you know? And I wondered if you’d maybe asked her to give up her apartment and move in with you.”

Vasquez stared at Maggie, opened her mouth and then closed it. Where was this coming from? And then she said, “Give me a minute to think.” And she closed her eyes and thought. She thought:

• Maggie didn’t say what relationship advice Alex had asked for, which would be the usual way to tell the story of their lunch.
• Maggie had in fact chosen to avoid telling the story.
• Maggie was an old-school lesbian and a good cop, both of which would make her cautious about which stories, and whose, she would allow herself to tell.

Vasquez opened her eyes and took a drink, enjoying the burn.

Maggie licked her lips. “Um, can I ask you another, somewhat unrelated question?”

Frowning, Vasquez nodded.

“Why did you want to come here instead of Dollywood?”

“Alex always goes there on Friday nights. I thought that you and I might end up having this
conversation…”

Maggie shook her head and sighed. “Sounds like you two know each other too well.” She nodded across the room.

At first Vasquez didn’t know what she was indicating, but then the song ended and a group of women moved off the dance floor to get drinks. There, on the other side of the room, sat Alex and Lucy Lane, heads bent in deep conversation. Vasquez exhaled heavily. “Man, I am just batting zero today. I couldn’t predict my way out of a mud puddle.” She tossed back her drink, said, “Oh, I so need another one of these. You?”

Maggie shook her head.

Vasquez stood and inched her way through the crowd toward the bar, but just as she was almost close enough to yell her order, a familiar voice in her ear said, “Hey, pretty lady. Wanna dance?”

Vasquez turned her head toward the voice, feeling Alex’s hot breath on her ear. She looked up into the root beer brown eyes. In the boots Alex used for civilian street shoes, Alex was two or three inches taller, which was odd since they were the same height when in uniform. But it was also… sort of nice. But it did make her suddenly forget how to English.

Alex gave her a small smile, took her hand and led her to the dance floor. Vasquez just barely recognized Cyndi Lauper’s voice, so carried away was she by Alex leading her, twirling her, pulling her in and sliding her hands down her back to catch at her hips and pull her in again. It was mesmerizing.

All through the night
I'll be awake and I'll be with you
All through the night
This precious time when time is new

In a small part in the back of her mind, that Gordian knot of clinical thinking that never really shut down, even when her girlfriend was successfully seducing her, Vasquez remembered the woman J’onn had brought to the DEO years before, still with glitter in her long dark hair, still wearing the fuck-me heels. She had never really thought about it before, even when Alex had described going to clubs to hook up with guys and have very inadequate sex. But this dancing? This was how she had attracted them. Holy shit, it was effective. But then, this was Alex. If she was going to do anything, she would do it very, very well.

Oh, all through the night today
Knowing that we feel the same without saying
We have no past, we won't reach back
Keep with me, forward all through the night

Alex pressed their bodies together, singing along to the song. “Mmm,” she murmured into Vasquez’s ear. “All through the night. Vas, come home and fuck me…”

All through the night
Stray cat is crying so stray cat sings back
All through the night
They have forgotten what by day they lack

“Er, I, the, um, please,” said Vasquez helpfully. “But you, you drive.” She pulled her keys out of her pocket and handed them to Alex.
We have no past, we won't reach back
Keep with me forward all through the night
And once we start the meter clicks
And it goes running all through the night...

And Alex took the keys, turned to where Lucy and Maggie were watching them from the bar, waved, and with a very satisfied smirk, pulled Vasquez after her through the crowd and out the door.
James had watched the news that day, even though he knew he should have been the one making it instead. But there they were, Kara and Lena, and an airplane loaded with chemicals. If he had been able to be Guardian, if the DEO would just fucking trust him for a change, if Winn wasn't such a candy-ass when it came to Supergirl...

So he had gone home to eat dinner, but he had no patience, so he went back to CatCo.

As he went to enter "his" office, he saw Lena sitting there frowning at his laptop. She wasn't dressed in her usual CEO attire, but rather looked like all the other lesbians in his life with the skinny jeans and leather jacket.

"Ms. Luthor. You're back here, still working."

"The news never sleeps, Mr. Olsen."

He stepped up to the client chair in front of her desk. "May I?"

She gestured welcome.

He asked, "How are you really? I was worried about you."

"A mild concussion, but Supergirl had my back as always."

"And Sam," he sighed.

"And Sam." She raised an eyebrow. "Sam and I have known each other for a few years now, you know. She's not just some random new employee, Mr. Olsen."

"You know, my friends call me James."

"What, not Jimmy? Isn't that what He calls you?"

"Yes, and when you've saved my life a few dozen times like he has, you can call me that too."

"Fair enough" she said. "James. I know I've stepped on your toes here a bit of late. I will try to avoid doing that from now on. I think that we can figure out our boundaries and our roles here."

"I'd appreciate that. I know last year I was... distracted. But now I'm all in."

"As am I. We owe it to Cat."

"We do."

"Excellent. Well, I have a grinding headache, so I am going home and I promise, you won't see me here tomorrow."

"Unless there is an alien invasion? Or Supergirl needs you?"

She smiled. "Or other extenuating circumstances like that. Yes. So there is at least a twenty percent chance that you won't see me tomorrow!"

He laughed and waved as she picked up her purse and strutted to the general elevator, totally
ignoring the one Cat had always held for her own use.

//

Vasquez rolled over and Alex giggled.

"What?" Vasquez snapped.

"You're not frowning. You almost never don't frown."

"Yeah, well, my girlfriend just fucked me so hard with her fingers that I had two orgasms in a row. What is there to frown about?"

"Vas, I know there has been stuff between us lately... What is it?"

"It just seemed like things were getting weird. Like, maybe, you were getting ready to..."

"What?"

"Well. Break up... with me?"

"Why on Earth would I do that?"

"Dunno."

Alex rolled on top of Vasquez and immediately started kissing her breasts, murmuring things like "Beautiful, and so sexy, and did I mention? Oh maybe I should go down here..."

"No!" yelped Vasquez, pulling Alex up back to her face. "We need to talk, not just fuck."

Alex looked worried. "I'm not doing it right?"

"Honey, of course you do it right. You had the best teacher. Duh. But right now? We need to talk, and I don't even know where to start. You've been... different lately. Kara noticed, Lucy noticed, Maggie noticed, J'onn, even Winn, for crying out loud. What's going on with you, chica?"

Alex looked away. "It was stupid."

"My teachers always used to say that there were no stupid questions except for the ones that three other students had asked and they had already answered. Talk to me."

"It's just that I had been thinking about asking you to move in, but lately I realized that I'm happy as we are. I mean, Lucy helped. She pointed out that maybe I was thinking I had to do this because I have this idea about what lesbians do, and our friends have been maybe expecting us to follow the stereotype..."

"Why would you feel the need to do that?"

"I don't know. A lot of the time, I still feel like the person I always was, and she was straight, and I'm not really butch, or anything really, so how can I be this lesbian if I'm still sort of that straight girl?"

"Wait, this is about performance?"

"I don't know."

"What, you don't feel gay enough?"
"Yeah, not really. I mean, I don't do enough of the things that real lesbians do."

"Like wear leather jackets, be a badass, and fuck a woman, namely me, who is not the sort of woman the vast, vast majority of men would ever consider fucking?"

"Um?"

"Here's the thing, kiddo. That last one is all you need. You are a woman fucking a woman, and thus, ergo, you are a lesbian. I mean unless you are still interested in men, in which case, you are bi."

"Why would I still...?"

"Well, yes, I ask myself that too. Why would anybody? I mean Benedict Cumberbatch aside, why would anyone?"

"And maybe Daniel Craig."

"His eyes are set too close together."

"But his muscles?"

"You've seen my muscles, no?"

"Oh, shit yes. Never mind."

"So," said Vasquez slowly, "are we okay? Can we stay in our own apartments for now, and just do regular sleepovers at each others' places?"

"Yes, please."

"Honey, you have to talk to me, tell me what is going on with you. Our lives are complicated and violent and--"

"Vas? Sue? Just kiss me. Like, a lot?"

"Oh. Well. In that case. If... um, if you insist. Um, have you ever thought about, well, we've used toys before but, um, you know, a harness and..."

Alex's eyes went wide. "That's an option? Would that be any different than, you know, what the guys did?"

Vasquez frowned. "Absolutely different."

"Oh! Well. Um, yeah, let's try that!"

Vasquez grinned and rolled over to "her" side of the bed and opened the drawer in the bedstand, pulling out a small box with the Glock logo on the top. But what she pulled out of the box... wasn't spare ammunition.
Kara and Lena had barely made it down to the DEO garage when Winn called Kara back. Lena's driver was already there, so they agreed to meet back at Sam's to collect Lena's things and take them back to her condo.

Kara changed back into her supergear on her way back up to the command center. "What is it, Winn?"

"Hey, sorry about that, but we had an alarm go off in the armory, but when Security got there, it didn't seem like there was anything missing. But I was thinking, if you could use your x-ray vision? Look for some evidence of who might have been in there?"

"What do the surveillance cameras show?"

"Absolutely nothing."

She groaned but went with him down to the armory, scanned it and said, "Winn there's nothing here. It doesn't even look like anybody's been in here in hours. There's no heat signature. Are you sure it wasn't just a glitch?"

"I'll run diagnostics." He sighed. "I'm going to be here all night, aren't I?"

She clapped him on the back. "With great power comes great responsibility. And I am leaving now. Ciao!"

"Hey! You know we're DC, not Marvel, right?"

//

Lena called Kara on her way back to Sam's. "Hey, I'm picking up wine. What do you think? Merlot? Cab?"

And Kara replied, "Unless it's Aldabaran rum, it won't make much difference to me. Get what you think Sam would like."

And Kara was nervous, because she thought that maybe Lena really did know what Sam liked, and maybe Lena would feel more, well, feelings for Sam taking her in than for Supergirl saving her, because humans doing small things just seemed bigger than aliens doing big things. But she changed back into Kara clothes down the block and returned to Sam's house as a total and complete apparent human.

And when they all got there and were pouring glasses of whatever the red wine was, Kara joined them on the couch.

Sam was talking on the phone, and when she hung up, she said, "Good news. L-Corp's antidote is working. The kids are getting better." She sat down on the other side of Lena on the couch.

Lena said, "You know, I have to thank both of you for not giving up on me, for not letting me give up on myself."

Sam raised her glass. "Well, I think that Kara and I made a pretty good team."

"Uh, more than pretty good," said Kara, as the three tapped their glasses together.
Lena continued, "No, really. I should apologize for the things I said."

Kara shook her head. "When you are family, you can say the things you need to say, and the people who love you, still love you."

"I've never had that," said Lena.

"That's because you've never had a sister," said Kara, stretching her arm out around Lena's shoulders and pulling her in.

"Two!" said Sam as she also leaned in.

"Well," said Lena. "I suppose Sam is my sister, but Kara is my BFF!"

And Kara didn't quite know what to make of that. This woman was pretty much an acquaintance of Lena's, maintained by a decade of social media and meaningless social-status Christmas cards. How could she claim have the same relational status as--

But Sam didn't know that Kara was Supergirl.

Sam thought Kara was just a friend, just an employee.

So Kara decided to purloin Lena, bring her back to her place, remind her why she was dating a woman who could use superspeed with her fingers until Lena totally and completely--

And then Kara's phone rang. "Alex?"

"Kara!"

And that was Alex's very annoyed voice. "I'm pretty sure I didn't do it," said Kara. "Whatever it was."

"Winn just called me. He says the Guardian suit is missing. He thinks maybe the thing you checked out earlier was a diversion."

"Oh, that makes sense. Does he think James took it?"

"That makes the most sense. Vasquez thinks so too. She's been waiting for something like this, apparently. Are you going to after him? Make him stop?" A sigh. "Are you going to need backup?"

Kara looked at Sam and Lena laughing together, and a small pang of jealousy hit her. "You know what? James is an adult. If he gets arrested, that's his problem. If he gets hurt? He made a choice. I am so tired of trying to get him to see reason."

Alex grunted.

"Do you disagree?"

"Um, I, uh, no, I--"

"Alex? Are you all right?"

"Vas, just stop! Yes, pfft. I'm fine. Great. I agree. But I'll report to J'onn in the morning."

"Yeah, where is he anyway?"
"DC, according to Lucy. Positron cannon. Listen, I gotta go. Got something to do here! See you..."

And Kara looked at her phone, confused.

Lena came over. "Problems?"

"Not sure..." She really didn't want to bring up James's possible extracurricular activities with their boss until she was really sure she was right about it.

"Does Alex need help?"

"No, actually, she's doing something else..."

And the little smirk that flickered over Lena's face suggested that Lena suspected that what Alex was doing was Vasquez. But she didn't say anything out loud, just gathered her gear and expressed her gratitude to Sam for letting her stay with them.

And then Lena's phone pinged. "Ah," she said, "Ted's here with the car. Kara, can we give you a lift?"

And that was also strange, because they had already talked about them going back to Lena's condo for the night. "Um, yeah. Sure. Thanks."

They got into the car together, and Lena immediately leaned against Kara. "Mmm. I love that you are so solid and warm. The condo, Ted."

The driver pushed the button and the privacy window rose.

Kara was silent for a while. Usually, she loved driving through National City with Lena, since more often she either walked or flew and those were very different ways of experiencing the city. But now she was distracted. Finally, she said, "Um, Lena, can I ask you a question?"

"Of course, darling."

"You said Sam was a sister to you, but I'm just your BFF."

Lena's head snapped up. "What do you mean just?"

"So she's like related to you, but I'm just a friend?"

"No, Kara, of course not. Best Friend Forever! That's huge!"

"But it's not bigger than sister."

Lena stared at her, then bit her lip. "I was trying...." She brushed away the tear that was sliding down Kara's face. "Oh, fuck it. Sometimes I'm such an idiot Luthor."

"Lena!"

"Okay, so a few years back, when we were at Harvard together, we got very drunk one night, and I may have sort of made a move on Sam? She was cute and I don't know, I had been alone for a while and I was really, really hoping that she was gay or bi or, I don't know, available. And, wow, did that ever go wrong. She is really straight and really Catholic and basically told me that I could want whatever I wanted and I wouldn't go to hell as long as I didn't act on it."

"Shit."
"Well, yes, but then we had a group project for a class, and she was great and innovative and brilliant and we worked really well together, and it was like the whole thing had never happened, she’d put it behind her, and yes, women are a little better about that than men, when they get hit on, but still, when I realized I was going to need a new CFO to take over a lot of my responsibilities at L-Corp, she was the first person I thought of, and I trust her, I do, but I'm a Luthor, Kara, you know I have to be careful..."

Kara frowned. "So you are going back into the closet?"

"No. She knows I'm gay. I just... thought if she didn't have to know about, well..."

"Me."

"No, honey. It's just complicated. I can't afford to give someone that much power over me. If she thinks I'm--"

"Fucking me."

"Well, I just. She could compromise me."

"Lena, when you were such a mess last night? I told her I was your girlfriend. She didn't even blink."

"Why would you--?"

"Because she told me I could go home, that she would take care of you. But that is my job. And she accepted it immediately. So you might be wrong about her."

Lena stared. Then the car stopped and Ted came around to open the door for them. "Ms. Luthor. Ms. Danvers. Have a nice night."

"Thanks, Ted," said Lena distractedly. "See you on Monday."
Who Me, Gay?

Sam watched the car drive away with mixed feelings. She worried that there were still people out there who would blame Lena for the lead poisoning. She had wanted to insist that Lena stay at least one more night, but Kara had been fairly firm that she would take care of Lena from now on. Sam almost got a jealous vibe from her, which was crazy. So Sam had backed off and just reminded them that she would be there for them.

And the warm feeling she got when Lena had acknowledged her as a sister? That was just nice, because moving across the country to take a demanding job, uprooting her daughter and starting a new life in National City, back where she had gone to college, well, the whole thing had been exhausting. So it was nice to be acknowledged in some way. And the fact that Lena had very clearly put Kara in a category way above sister was just a reminder that Kara came first, which made perfect sense if they were dating, and that was something Sam really hadn't picked up on when she had met Kara at CatCo, but then, she supposed, they would have to be working hard to be discreet.

Office romances never worked. Good luck to them. She poured herself another glass of wine. Her head turned when she heard Ruby coming down the stairs in her Supergirl pajamas, rubbing her eyes sleepily.

"Did they leave?" asked Ruby.

"Yeah, kiddo. Now that that guy was found, Lena should be safe enough."

Ruby got a glass and poured cold water into it and drank thirstily. "Um, Mom."

"Yeah, baby girl?"

"You know, I figured it out."

"Figured what now?"

"That you're a lesbian too, like all your friends. It's okay. I have a bunch of friends who are gay. It's cool."

Sam stared, her wine glass halfway to her mouth. "What? Lesbian? No, your father-- and I, um, gay?"

Ruby put down her water glass and hugged her mother tightly. "People figure it out at different ages, apparently."

"Ruby, I'm not gay. I mean, there's nothing wrong with it, and yes, Lena and Kara are apparently together, but all my friends are not gay."

"Yeah, they are. That nice FBI lady, Alex, she's dating one of the other FBI ladies, I think her name is Vasquez. And the cop friend of Lena's, Maggie something, she's dating another lady named Lucy. I'm pretty sure your friend James is straight, but the girls, yeah, no."

"Ruby, where is this coming from? And who's Maggie?"

"She came to give a file to Lena to work on. Something about quantum material? I didn't follow that part. But they were gossiping a little while I was here doing my homework."
"Rubes, okay, maybe my friends are a little gay, but I'm as straight as I've ever been."

Ruby finished her water and hugged her mother again. "It's okay, Mom. I love you anyway. Come out when you're ready."

And she wandered back upstairs to bed, leaving her mother gaping. Her phone rang. Lena.

"Arias."

"Hey, Sam. I was just talking to Kara, and um, she mentioned that you two might have had a talk while I was, um, indisposed last night?"

"Yeah, that's how we figured out the connection to the swimming pool."

"Um, no. Not that. She told you that, um, she's my... girlfriend?"

"Yeah, she mentioned it. That's why she stayed. To take care of you."

"Yeah, that."

"What about it?"

"It's just, when we were at Harvard, you were... um."

"A homophobic piece of shit? Yeah, I remember. Sorry, about that, by the way."

"You, er, what?"

Sam sighed. "Once Ruby got old enough to start asking questions about this stuff, I started realizing all the institutional shit that she'd have to deal with, as a woman, as a Latina? And that made me question myself. And I wondered what would happen if she turned out to be gay. And, Lena, I'm totally a Mama Bear. Anybody comes after my girl, I will rip them to shreds. So, yeah, I have been working through my shit. Kara cares for you and it's pretty clear that she would protect you with her life. And you know I think you are going to personally save us from climate change, so I'm cool with whatever you need to get you there."

"Oh, well. That. That's good to know. I was afraid you, well, wouldn't approve..."

"Even if I didn't, I wouldn't let it get in the way of my job. I hope I would be at least professional enough for that."

"Oh. Well. Excellent."

"And to be fair," Sam said hesitantly. "Kara is really smart and kinda cute. So props to you for having landed a girl like that."

"Yes, she is special. Um, well. Thank you for understanding."

And Sam didn't mention that her daughter, for whom she had taken great pains to be a better person, was now convinced that she was gay, as convinced as she had been that she was a superhero, which also was absurd.

Or at least, she thought so until she was getting ready for bed and as she took off her work clothes, the bandage on her shoulder wound came unstuck and pulled away to show...

Absolutely no sign of the bullet wound that had been there mere hours before.
Holy shit.
Morning Has Woken

Since the Battle of National City, Kara had had many dreams about her mother, dreams in which Alura had taught her to read, taught her about the different species in their galaxy, taught her how to stuff the little pouches of dough and steam them for the Kryptonian holiday feasts. Most of these dreams ended with her mother embracing her, giving her the pendant and closing the hatch on her pod, then disappearing into the distance as Kara sped through the stars toward her uncertain future.

Often, she woke up in a sweat, remembering the endless darkness of space and the feeling that she would never hear her mother’s voice again. But it was twelve years before that happened. Well, twelve years if you didn’t count the time spent in the Phantom Zone.

Talking to the computer construct version of Alura often grounded Kara when things were difficult at CatCo or with the DEO. Her mother’s deep voice, those familiar cheekbones, even the way she phrased her sentences so musically, they gave Kara a sense of home when she was feeling profoundly unhomed and displaced.

So yes, she often dreamed of Alura, often talked to Alura’s image at the DEO. Because Kara could remember her mother and blame her mother for the woman’s own death. But Kara never dreamed of her aunt Astra, because Astra had died at Alex’s hands, and dreaming of Astra’s life would entail dreaming of her death, which would entail dreaming of Alex’s responsibility for Astra’s death.

And Kara needed Alex.

She could not afford to lose trust in the one person she needed most on Earth.

//

Supergirl flew across National City’s morning, enjoying the last of the comfortable weather. Soon humans would start putting on jackets or raincoats and grimacing at the cool, wet skies. But for now the sky was a crisp blue and the cityscape sparkled in the sunshine. At times like these, Supergirl’s heart felt full and warm. But then she had been feeling that way all weekend. She made a pass by L-Corp and could hear Lena Luthor’s heartbeat getting closer as the woman rode the elevator up to her office. It was a slow, calm, confident beat, and Supergirl thanked Rao for that mercy. Seeing Lena as she had been the week before, beleaguered and battered, first emotionally and then physically, it hurt Supergirl physically just to think about it. But they had spent the weekend at Lena’s condo and Lena had let her show just how much she loved her, believed in her, would fight for her. Every. Single. Time.

Also, because Supergirl was Kara, there had been waffles and lots of them.

"Supergirl? Winn? Can you come in? You’re going to want to see this."

Seconds later, she was zooming into the DEO and landing in the command center, striding toward Winn and J’onn, who were looking at the computer feeds. "Got your message," she said.

"Yes, great! I’m not sure what to make of this. There was an incident this morning in the bay. The city sent out an exploratory team to investigate the effects of the submarine attack."

The video showed lines of light in a strange pattern.

"And as you can see, they found something strange in the bedrock, so they went to check it out, and... well, it attacked them."
A bright light shot out of the huge object and the vehicle filming it tumbled off course and shot into reverse to get away, being chased by several more bolts of bright light.

"They got attacked?" said J'onn.

"Yeah, luckily their emergency systems kicked in, and they made it to the surface, but it could have easily gone another way."

"What else can you find out?" asked J'onn.

"Oh, yeah, we can pull the USGS geothermal scans to pinpoint these coordinates." He stared at the map that came up and the numbers that ran down the left side of the screen. Winn stood up, looking ashen. "Okay, well, I can tell you two things, right off the bat. One, the rock layer is at least 12,000 years old, which might give us a way to figure out how long that thing has been there. And two, that thing, the metal it's made of? It is not on the periodic table."

Kara's voice rumbled. "Let's go."

It was strange to realize that the undersea cleft was actually beneath the city, not more than a few blocks from the DEO building, so they walked there, Winn using his tablet to locate the hot zone.

(With a certain pride in the unflappability of National City citizens, Supergirl noted wryly how seeing their caped superhero striding down the street with a man in black tactical gear and a man in a polka dot shirt and knit tie didn't cause them to do any more than smile (the adults) or wave (the children). Of course, she waved back.)

Winn stopped short. "Ah, here! It should be right under us."

Supergirl stepped into the space he indicated, gathered the sides of her cape in each hand and started to wind herself up. "Okay, Stand back. Everyone, stand back! I've got this. I saw Kal do this once!"

But J'onn said, "No! Wait, wait! There's a way of doing this without destroying public property (again). C'mon, let's go."

He led them down an alley, while Supergirl muttered, "Oh, man, I really wanted to try that!"

Winn hurried after them. "And I wanted to see that! Awesome..."

"There is a time and a place," said J'onn. "Here, step close." He pulled them into a two-armed hug, ignoring their confused and awkward looks.

"What? What are you doing?" said Winn.

"This might feel a little weird." J'onn's face glowed red and the world got amorphous...

...and then reformed, somewhere else. Somewhere dark. J'onn let go of them and resumed his Hank Henshaw shape.

"Oh, God, that was horrible!" said Winn. "That was amazing. Can we do it again? Please?"

"No."

"Okay!"

They crept forward through the darkened passageways of what looked an awful lot like a spaceship, but Supergirl did not recognize the design from any of the planets she had once known. They moved
toward a pale orange glow. "Engine rooms?" she murmured.

"Time will tell," growled J'onn. Winn stayed behind them. Then they came to an open chamber, and all around it there were tall orange chambers, maybe fifteen feet tall, and inside each one, behind the weird orange glow, was the shadow of--

"Is that a person?" asked Winn.

Some were potentially human-sized, between five and six feet tall. But others...

Others were much taller.

Eleven were ensconced in their chambers. One... was not. One chamber stood empty. Supergirl murmured, "Um, guys..."

They turned to look where she pointed. "Oh, okay," said Winn. "That's not creepy, not at all."

There was a noise like a hydraulic door opening and Supergirl turned, saw the humanoid shadow, arms raised as if holding some kind of weapon. Her eyes glowed gold and she shot her x-rays just at the same time as a bolt of energy hit her and dissipated against her Kryptonian body. "Don't shoot!"

The creature gasped, "Kess alispo!"

"We're not here to hurt you!"

And the figure staggered forward, the weapon shaking and then dropping.

Supergirl's stomach dropped below her feet.

In front of her, large as life, was a woman in a dark bodysuit. Her hair was dark blonde, except for one white streak down the side. And her eyes were exactly as blue as Kara Zor-el's.

Kara stepped forward to catch her just as Astra In-Ze slumped forward and fell to her knees.
Alex emerged from the weekend spent with Vasquez energized and optimistic, which meant she got to the DEO early, caffeinated and bouncing on her toes, so when the exhausted nightshift caught a bizarre signal, almost like a meteorite shooting down to a granite quarry north of the city, Alex had grabbed Chen and two other agents and took a Blackhawk to assess the situation.

The sun was barely a yellow-blue glow on the east horizon when they reached the coordinates and shone powerful searchlights on the trail of fire that led to a crater 600 yards west of the quarry. The flames had melted the local rock, and the ragged underbrush the area was known for was blazing with fire.

"Chen! Jordan! Get the firefighting equipment and rappel down! Get that fire out and soak it thoroughly. We can't afford it to spread!"

Sorensen assisted with the drop and then took the cables back up. "And us, Ma'am?"

Alex turned the chopper into a high, wide circle. "Eyes on the ground, Sorensen. Use the night vision goggles. Is this an alien drug dropoff? Vasquez suggested a scenario like this after that high-as-a-kite Infernian last week..."

She made progressively wider and then narrower circles, and by the time Chen and Jordan had put out the fires beyond the circumference of the deep, burning crater, she was satisfied that they were alone with... whatever had come to land on Earth. She landed the Blackhawk a safe distance from the crater and kept her laser pistol in front of her as they made their way forward to meet with the other agents. The rising sun had already made their flashlights obsolete. She took off her helmet and gazed at the slowly dulling red glow at the center of the heated dip in the Earth.

It was... it looked like... a space vehicle.

It looked like... it looked... vaguely familiar.

"Agents! Tell me what you see. What planet would you say this apparent vehicle is from?"

Chen said, "Infernus Prime?"

"Is that a question or a statement?"

"Um, a statement?"

"Sorensen?"

"At first I thought Saturn because of the elliptical wing pattern, but they never used halide combustion."

"That is not an answer, Agent."

"No, Ma'am. I'm sorry, Ma'am. I have no idea."

"Jordan?"

"The webbed, I mean interlaced pattern on the back fin suggests Kryptonian, Ma'am. But I've never seen anything this small. I don't know, Ma'am."
"Jordan, you're paying attention to the right details. Good man. You two, on the other hand? You have some things in the near future you will not be looking forward to. Because I, as Assistant Director, have too many important things to think about to worry about how you haven't been keeping up on your AIUs."

They looked confused. Jordan muttered, "Alien Identification Updates."

"But you know who is really going to be... miffed?"

"Director Henshaw?" Agent Chen ventured.

"Pfft," replied Agent Danvers. "He has better things to think about. No, I was thinking about Agent Susan 'Mandatory-Retraining' Vasquez."

Chen and Sorensen swallowed.

Smiling internally, while maintaining her badass exterior, Agent Danvers pushed a button on her pistol's grip and slid the width toggle down to its narrowest point. Raising the pistol and aiming at the pod's door, she shot a beam almost invisible in the light of the sun just rising above the distant trees.

The pod's hatch rose like a jaw opening to release prey.

The sound that emerged was reminiscent of a sleepy... bark?

The three junior agents reached for their weapons, trained them on the pod, but Alex Danvers just put two fingers in her mouth and whistled.

The sun rose overhead and shone directly on the opened pod. There was the sound of straps ripping and joyous barking and then suddenly the junior agents were fighting off a medium-sized white dog that was bouncing back and forth between them, licking their faces and leaving paw-size bruises on their chests, backs, legs.

Agent Danvers whistled again and the alien dog bounded over to her and sat, tail wagging so fast it was a blur in the sunlight.

From the damp ground, the junior agents groaned. Agent Danvers ignored them, and spoke into her comms. "Vasquez? We have a need for a vehicle transport. Doesn't need to be quite as big as, um, the last three times?"

Static cleared. "Roger that, Agent Danvers. How much smaller?"

"Half, repeat, half as big."

"Should I ask?"

"Nope," said Agent Danvers cheerfully. "But we're going to need some super-caloric dogfood."

"Did you say dogfood?"

"You heard right. What is your ETA on that transport?"

//

Just as she was setting the Blackhawk down on the DEO's roof, Alex heard Winn's voice in her ear, and she knew that the harmonics of his voice meant trouble.
"Um, Alex? You're going to want to meet us down in emergency medical ASAP."

And she flew down the three floors of stairs to the emergency bay and ran in to see Supergirl standing, thank God, thank Rao, standing by the bedside of some unseen agent, while Winn and J'onn stood nearby, blocking her view--but it couldn't be Vasquez, she had just talked to Vasquez an hour ago on the comms.

"Vasquez? What happened? Oh my God, it can't be Vasquez!"

Supergirl, who seemed to have been maybe intentionally blocking her view of the med bay bed, took a deliberate step back.

"Oh my God, oh my God, wait--Alura? Holy shit! Astra! It's Astra! Is it Astra? But she's dead! I killed-- Tell me it's Astra!"

She stepped forward and Supergirl stepped back to let her.

"You're back! Wait, how are you alive. I put that sword--"

And Astra's voice was weak but easily recognizable. "Through my heart. To save your commanding officer. Fear not, Alexandra. I hold no enmity against you. I would have done the same." She seemed to struggle for breath.

"How is she still alive?"

Winn said, "We don't know."

J'onn stood with his arms crossed over his chest. "According to the scans we could do, her heart was perforated and then healed. It still shows major cellular damage, but we took blood and tissue samples. It is undoubtedly Astra herself, not a clone or replica."

Supergirl sat down on the stool next to the bed and took the woman's left arm in her hands, hugged it to herself. "It's incredible! Did someone cure you?"

"Yeah," said Winn. "And what was that language you were speaking on the other ship? Because I know enough Kryptonian to know that that was not Kryptonian."

On the bed, Astra gave a faint smile. "Doesn't translate. The planet, we would have called it Rao'venn'a. Earthlings, perhaps, Apollus?"

J'onn asked, "And why did you fire on that submarine?"

"I didn't. I heard the ship's defense system activate, however. Is everyone safe?"

Still hugging her aunt's hand, Supergirl nodded. "Yeah, they got out in time."

J'onn frowned. "That's some ship you got there. I've never seen anything like it."

"Yes, it's... what is the word, Kara? Special? Alien to you."

"Who's in the other chambers?" asked J'onn.

"Other passengers like myself, trying to return home. Or, for me, to the nearest... equivalent..." She coughed, a juicy, rippling cough.

"You sound unwell, Astra," said Kara. "What's wrong?"
"I've spent the last year on a very dry planet. Getting used to this amount of dihydrogen monoxide in the atmosphere will take some time..."

"These passengers," said Alex. "Are they dangerous?"

"No," said Astra. "No, they're like me."

Winn asked, "Why did you wake up when everybody else is still asleep?"

Astra coughed again, shaking her head. "You must forgive me. I was in hypersleep. The details are cloudy for me."

J'onn asked, "So you don't remember anything about the other passengers..."

Supergirl stood and set herself between her aunt and her friends, and Alex. "There will be plenty of time to ask questions later. C'mon. Let her rest."

Winn and Alex ducked out, but J'onn said, "I look forward to our debrief--"

"Enough," said Supergirl. She shooed them out and then sat back down on the stool, stood again to clear her cape out of the way and sat, reaching out to her aunt, her aunt for whom she had said the funeral rites.

"Oh, Aunt Astra..."

"I take it from your tone, darling Kara, that Non is no more?"

"I am so, so sorry, Astra. But he tried to destroy Earth with that blue cyber-woman... I had to... I had to..."

"Yes, she hated me and lusted after him. I am not surprised she brought him to his ruin. I am sorry that it had to be you, Little One."

"And I am so sorry that it was Alex who..." She looked away, reliving the moment when she returned to find Astra dying and J'onn taking responsibility, even as Alex looked more devastated than made sense at the time.

"Your Earth sister is a formidable warrior, my greatest opponent. Greater than your mother. Greater than Non. Greater even than you, Little One. Take no shame in her victory over me. It is a sign of her dedication to her general, your Director Henshaw. It is a sign of her devotion to you. I do not regret my death at her hands, especially if it saved the people you would later need to save your Earth." She coughed again wetly, and Supergirl held a white cloth to her mouth, saw blood spattered on it. "I heard the news of Daxam..." She got caught in a coughing jag and Supergirl held her until it ended.

"Aunt Astra. You're back, beyond belief, beyond hope. Rest now. We can talk about all of it later. Just rest. You can tell me all about what happened. But later."
When First You Woke

The morning after that... awkward... conversation with Ruby, Sam had dropped her daughter off at school and driven into the executive level of the L-Corp parking garage, deep in thought.

She left her car and marched to the elevator that brought her to the lobby, where she showed her very human photo ID to security, who called her "Ms. Arias" with a tremendous amount of respect that she was pretty sure she had not in fact earned, and she entered the general elevator with all of the other L-Corp general personnel, who still didn't recognize her, so their conversations were... enlightening...

"Well, I heard that CatCo was planning on taking down Supergirl and that's why she bought it!"

"Don't be ridiculous. Morgan Edge hates Ms. Luthor. She was trying to get one over on him. And looks like it worked!"

An older woman, maybe one of the senior scientists, shut the younger secretaries and lab techs down.

"Do you know who Edge is? Do you know what it takes to get that close to buying out a multi-billion dollar company? He's a piece of shit, and Ms. Luthor did the city and the country a favor by keeping his hands off a media company that he could use to deny climate change, skew the world against the Supers, and oh, yeah, ratchet up the price of real estate. Hey, Donnie? Weren't you talking about trying to buy a house this year?"

That shut them down, and they exited the 1-25 Floor elevator in haste. Sam and the woman sauntered to the 26-40 Floor elevator together.

"Sam Arias, CFO. I don't think I've met you yet..."

"Dr. McClintock. Kate. Bioengineering. Working on alien skin-grafts and other applications of potential quantum materials."

They shook hands. "Quantum materials... I don't suppose you could meet with me today to get me up to speed on that project...?"

By the time Sam got to Lena's--to Sam's--office, she was feeling more hopeful than usual. Jess was hard at work typing away at her desk when Sam exited the elevator.

"Ms. Arias! I didn't expect you for another five minutes yet. Coffee?"

"God, yes, Jess, thank you. And my schedule. I need to squeeze in--"

"Yes, Ms. Arias. Kate's already emailed me. You should be able to squeeze her in between 11:15 and 11:45. I still need to--no, actually, he just cancelled. You should have until noon."

"That's... excellent."

"Ms. Arias? Are you all right?"

"I, uh, just a little under the weather. I'm fine. But Lena's office doesn't have tissues. If you could...?"

"Yes, ma'am, right away. Also, the Edge sh... situation? Brava!"
"Um, thank you? But it wasn't me, Jess. It was Supergirl."

"Yes, ma'am, of course the big save at the end was. It always is. She recognizes how special Le... Ms. Luthor is. But you kept her going long enough for Supergirl to get there. Usually that's my job. I'm glad I have someone competent to share the job with."

And hours later it occurred to Sam that a, well, basically an overqualified secretary had commended her, the CFO, for being almost as good as, well, the secretary.

And yet she still felt the compliment. She was sure that a male CFO in the same situation would have been insulted. On the other hand, she was pretty sure that a male CFO in the same situation would not even have recognized that the situation had existed and would have done nothing about it. So.

So. Whatever that meant.

A few hours later, Kate from bioengineering entered with a paper folder.

"Dr. McClintock, so glad we could make our schedules work. Now. Please enlighten me on this project. I have read up on the alien applications, but I am curious about the quantum fabric that saved Lena's and my life the other day. How does that work?"

And that was endlessly fascinating.

After that meeting, after lunch with the Board of Directors, after a quick meeting with the lawyers in the LordTech vs. L-Corp intellectual property case, Sam was exhausted, but there was still so much more work to do. Jess came in and stood in front of the white desk calmly, cradling her tablet in one arm, waiting to be noticed for well, Sam didn't know how long before, well, Sam noticed her.

"OH, sh-- Jess! What can I? I mean, what time is it? Do I have another meeting?"

"Yes, ma'am, in about eighteen minutes, with an important stakeholder. Tom is downstairs with the car. This stuff can all wait until tomorrow morning. Let's get you on the elevator, shall we?"

And Jess had personally chaperoned her down the elevator and across the short distance to the limo, where Lena's loyal driver Tom waited to take her to her next meeting.

"Wait, Jess, I don't have notes for this meeting!"

"Don't worry, Ms. Arias. This one is totally pro-L-Corp. Just be yourself and you'll be fine."

//

Kara was itchy. National City was almost crime-free, not unlike that time a while back when Maxwell Lord had injected law-abiding serum into National City's reservoir. It wasn't natural. Would it allow her to spend more time with her resurrected aunt? Well, yes, so great. But it wasn't natural and it made her uneasy.

So she found herself in her Kara clothes at the DEO, just outside of Astra's chamber. Her aunt had fallen into a deep sleep again, but just looking at her long hair, so reminiscent of Kara's mother's except for that long streak of white...

It was a lot to take in after more than a year of mourning.

It was a lot to take in, period.

She turned as a person stepped toward her: James, smiling gently.
"It's a lot to take in," he said. "Hard to believe she's here."

"Yeah. She's, she's been a little distant..."

"Yeah, but, after what she's been through? Dying? I mean..."

"I know."

"Maybe just give her a little time?"

She turned and he hugged her tightly, and she wondered if he were imagining his father come back from the dead to call him pet names and teach him new things. And to express... What? Love? Remembrance? Forgiveness?

What could any of them do but imagine forgiveness and love?

//

Staring at the boiling water in one pan, the slowly cooking tomato sauce in another, and the Mason jar full of tri-color rigatoni, Sam found herself questioning--what?

Well, questioning--if she had to be completely totally honest?--questioning everything she had ever believed in. Left/right. North/south. Female/male.

Human.

Alien.

She stretched her left hand and then, using her body to block Ruby's view of the stove, she reached her hand down toward the boiling water, starting to touch with the tip of her middle finger, but she didn't feel anything. She lowered her hand further, until the pads of all her fingers were immersed, but there was no obvious heat. Then she immersed her whole hand and took it out of the water and it was unscathed. She felt no pain.

Well, not physical pain. Something in the back of her mind ached in a way that it hadn't in years. Not since...

Not since Ruby's birth. She hadn't let it hurt her since then. It had never been safe. Now, though, she was so much more important, significant, respected, well-paid, than anybody who had known her back then would ever have expected...

She knew then what she needed to do, who she needed to talk to, so she told Ruby to get dinner at her best friend's house and she drove faster than the speed limit out into the country, out to the rural county she had sworn she would never return to.

Her adoptive mother's house.

And they had talked.

And Patricia Arias had shown her "daughter" the barn, where she had hidden, years ago, an alien space ship. Sam's origin.

And the crystal rod that rose from the ship when it sensed Sam's hand?

Oh, that was going to complicate Sam's life unimaginably.
J'onn marched toward the command center with Alex and Winn in his wake. "I would prefer not to be dragged from my primary mission by this... politics! Dealing with idiots and fools! Corrupt officials! I did that before the French Revolution, but this time, I just don't see those evil g'rbrukkah of swamp creatures being sent to the guillotine. And if they don't believe climate change, what is going to make them believe in the possibility of alien invasion?"

Alex raced after him. "The damage the Daxamites did?"

"They completely ignore the damage to the North Pole!"

Winn huffed, trying to catch up. "The PowerPoints I made for you?"

J'onn turned. "I should be here. We need to know more about that ship Astra was on. There are eleven more passengers that we know nothing about!"

"They're literally asleep," said Winn.

Alex turned and stopped J'onn. "The ship is secure. Okay, we're running coms on it to identify its origin and monitoring it in case anybody wakes up. I will alert you if anything happens."

"Yes," said Winn. "Just leave the DEO in our hands. And by our hands, I mean Alex's hands, because clearly, nothing should be left in my hands."

And no one disagreed with him.

//

Astra In-Ze woke up clearly, finally, at the late afternoon hour. She could feel it, how outside, among the humans, the gold light of the last of the day and the dawning of night was showering the humans with blessings. She took that as a sign that Rao was looking out for her. She stripped off the blankets and padded barefoot through the DEO, from the medical bay, up to the quartermaster's office, where she avoided the change of the watch in that area and then slipped into the specialized armory, which should have required her to provide a special security code, but for some reason didn't. She was grateful to Rao for providing for her at the same tune that she was annoyed by her niece's lack of care for such dangerous technology.

But, what was the human English phrase? Tramps cannot make choices?

She slipped from the general room of the armory to the tiny room for recent acquisitions: on the shelves on the far wall stood a small gun, a connector, a rapid-fire gun, constraint cuffs, and the energy ring she needed.

She went to reach for the ring, but an agent stepped up behind her, saying, "Ma'am, you shouldn't be in here."

And he reached for her shoulder, but she was taller than him, and it was easy to use his lack of height against him, turn him away while she punched him, so he was out cold long before he hit the floor.

She reached up for the ring and turned, just in time to meet her niece's fist as it made major contact with her jaw.
Supergirl had been stopping a bank robbery when the call came in, and one of the robbers got away simply because she was distracted by being appalled. So when she visited her resurrected aunt in the holding cells at the DEO, she tried to be as honest as possible, so as, hopefully, to understand, and be understood.

"I don't get it. I want to give you the benefit of the doubt, but you attacked two agents." She turned and pushed her glasses up her nose, walked away, came back. "I want to understand. Were you confused by the hypersleep? Is that why you sneaked out past the guards, and almost killed two people?"

"I didn't almost kill anyone."

"This is not you."

Astra said gently, "It's me, dear Kara. If I wanted to kill, those creatures would be dead. I do nothing halfway. Especially combat." She practically spit out the last few syllables.

"Then make me believe it, please!"

Astra had rarely in her life felt... she barely knew the word for it. Embarrassed?

Kara stood there, looking smaller than she had ever looked when she was younger on Krypton. The Earth clothes, the glasses, the stance with the hands behind her hips while the water ran down her face. It was... unfamiliar.

"Do you know," Kara said slowly, "that it was weeks, months, after your death that it took me to sleep again? I kept dreaming that it was a mistake and that you would come back to me. I lay awake at night, just staring at the ceiling realizing that, well, if you could die, then I could lose everyone all over again. And if Alex, Alex!..."

"Darling niece..."

"Oh, don't you 'darling niece' me! So many times, I've dreamed of you dying, disappearing and then Non comes down to ask me, ME, to officiate at your Sending. And I do it. Every time. Because, I think every time, someone should send you off properly to Rao. And there is only me. And we send you off, we send your coffin off into space..."

There was silence for a while, and the laborious taking of breath and letting it out.

Finally, Astra said, "Then I suppose I should thank Non, or his spirit, for calling on you. Because I am only here with you because my body was sent to Rao under this system's yellow sun. They tell me that my coffin pod drifted until it ended up in an orbit around Sol, a dangerous orbit, which could have, at any moment, pulled me in. They incinerate the dead here on Earth, do they not? It would have been, I suppose, great and glorious!"

Kara couldn't help herself. She looked appalled. She gagged.

Astra continued. "But for some reason, I was spared. I'm not sure that is the right phrase for it, but since my... resurrection, and for the last year, I have fought the idea that Earth might be our end goal. It was not where our ship was supposed to navigate to. But your parents always believed in fate. I always thought it was up to the individual. And yet here we are. Here I am."

Tears raced down Kara's face as she gestured with her hands.
"Astra! I always thought--was I wrong?--that I was getting through to you, right before Alex--and I've fought that thought, because it would be easier, it was easier to believe that she did what she needed to do, that you would have killed J'onn--"

"I would have killed him. I am sorry, dear niece, but I would have. She was justified. I died well and for her, it was a good kill. You need not lament for either one of us."

Kara sank to her knees and sobbed.

The door behind her slid open, but she stared at her aunt. "Do you have nothing else to say? It was a good kill? That is what you have to say?"

"Who I was then, darling niece, is not who I would have been had I more choices on Krypton, had I more choices than the prison your mother, my sister, left me with, left Non and me with. And had I been alone, without Non... But what has been, has been. I did what I thought was best. I cannot now go back and change my thought, my action."

Kara stared at her. "You have nothing more to say than that?"

"Kara, when you are older, you will find that there is little to say that can retract the past. Have I anything to say? Yes, my darling niece: I am sorry."

Kara shook her head. "Well, shame on me for having a human heart."

//

After trying desperately, badly, to explain to Ruby about her need to go on a (hero's) journey (if she was going to use the exaggerated language that people sometimes used), Sam simply gassed up and left. She had figured out how the blue crystal worked as a sort of GPS, guiding her to... something...

So she followed it straight for a hundred miles, turned right when the right half of it glowed, and there was, surprisingly enough, a right-hand trail. But another hundred miles on, she was short on water to cool her engine, so she had to stop and let her engine cool.

What kind of fool would go driving into the desert with no clear destination, with no supplies? She had promised Ruby that she would come back with answers. It had never occurred to her that even coming back with none would require better planning.

//

Vasquez sat in the command center, monitoring the feeds and occasionally taking notes in a small notebook. To her right, Winn was at his station, barely awake. Several yards away, at a monitor facing the elevators, Alex was typing away at her computer with her back to Vasquez, doing God knew what, although if she had to guess, Vasquez might have bet on work on the Kryptonian SSRI. She knew Eliza was still using some of her sabbatical time to try to help her younger daughter sort out her brain issues (while, in typical Danvers fashion, also working on her book about astrobiology). Vasquez imagined that Alex was feeling the strain of her mother's, well, not disapproval (that was Vasquez's burden to bear); rather, her over-approval, her continued hyper-expectations for Alex, particularly in relation to and comparison to, Kara Zor-El Danvers.

Vasquez traced Alex's silhouette with her eyes, fondly remembering the way Alex had traced Vasquez with her fingertips on Saturday night.

And Sunday morning.
And Sunday afternoon.

Jumping up, Vasquez said, "Winn! Winn! Little Plaid Shirt, wake up. I have to do an errand. Monitor the feeds and don't fall asleep. I'll be back in twenty or less."

She marched down to Alex's lab, where Eliza Danvers was hard at work. She did what she always did when entering J'onn's presence, and emptied her mind of as much Alex-content as she could. Eliza wasn't psychic, but she was a mother. Better safe than sorry.

Which was why, when she quietly opened the door, she was shocked to see Eliza being pushed up against the wall by one of the senior scientists, a silver fox type with, apparently, an inflated judgment of his own attractiveness.

"I'm a married woman--"

"He's dead! He doesn't matter!"

"He's a POW taken by a terrorist organization!" She pushed at him, but he was easily six inches taller and fifty pounds heavier.

"You've been without affection for too long. I can fix that for you. Here, give me your hand. See how hard I--"

And Vasquez plowed into them, pulling him off Eliza, punching him in the jaw and then tackling him as he stumbled away and throwing him over her shoulder. He fell like a sack of potatoes and mewled like a baby with a toothache. She flipped him over on his stomach, grabbed his arm and held it up backwards behind him, with her knee in his back.

"What are you-- Ow! Aaggh!"

Quietly, she said, "If you don't move, if you don't struggle, your arm will stay firmly attached to your shoulder."

He struggled and screamed.

"If, on the other hand, you struggle, then you will be the one who dislocated your own arm from your own shoulder. It's up to you, really." Vasquez turned to Eliza, whose white lab coat was torn. "Ma'am, are you okay?"

"I-- Yes, I think so. Yes."

"Excellent. Then can you call Security? And Winn. Have Winn call J'onn and then Lucy. Legal is totally going to want in on this."
Alex fought herself for hours.

It wasn't like she didn't have plenty of work to do. It was just that every single task she had on her list was something that could potentially distract her.

She needed to update the duty roster for the following day so that Astra's cell was always guarded by experienced agents, but preferably not agents who had interacted with her while she had been imprisoned at the Nevada site a year and a half ago, in case they had come under her influence.

She needed to read through Vasquez's most recent risk analyses: on Morgan Edge, on meta-humans like Psi, on Astra In-Ze (hastily typed up an hour after Astra returned to consciousness), on the potential danger of the eleven unknown "passengers" on Astra's ship...

She needed to plan for the Christmas trip to Midvale, which pretty much meant buying a much larger flask. Possibly two.

She needed to plan for Barry and Iris's wedding. Actually, that didn't sound so hard, really. It just meant figuring out what dresses to wear for the rehearsal dinner and the wedding itself, putting together a travel kit with toothpaste, deodorant, makeup, extra rounds for her Glock and the chargers for her laser pistol and phone, and oh, yeah, her DEO tacticals, because, duh, alternate Earth. Catastrophe was pretty much going to be inevitable.

And she needed to go over the notes Eliza had written up on the trial formulas for the SSRI for Kara. That at least didn't make her think about either her one blood relative or Kara's, and the problems inherent with both women. Excellent. SSRI it was.

So that worked for a while.

Until it didn't.

Alex fought herself for hours, and then Vasquez jumped up and left the command center, and Alex fought the itch, the curiosity, the deep aching need for forgiveness.

She fought herself for hours and then, suddenly, found herself outside Astra's cell, feeling unmoored but clearly driven, which seemed like opposite forces. She knocked on the outer cell door and Astra glanced in her direction, with no apparent interest either way.

"Okay," said Alex. "You look different."

"How are you?" asked Astra.

"Fine. Better than Kara."

Astra glanced up at her and looked away.

"You know, I didn't trust you, but I respected you," said Alex. "And I knew how much you meant to Kara, because, growing up with her? I heard the stories. How you taught her about the stars. How you taught her calculus when she was, what, eight? nine? How when she got into that accident, learning to fly with her dad and said she was never going to fly again? You. You got her back into the pod. You got her to take the controls. You taught her about making mistakes and coming back stronger for it."
Astra gave her a sad look. "I could not have children of my own."

"I know. And she was the daughter you never had. And you poured everything into her, until her tenth birthday, when you gave her the spy beacon and then... what? Disappeared?"

"Krypton was dying. Non and I, we felt that someone had to do something!"

"And so you did what? You came up with Myriad. A way to harness an entire planet full of people, against their will, to literally build a brain trust that could solve an unsolvable problem."

"We were too late. If our great-grandparents had applied themselves to the problem, it would still have been too late. But we had to try."

"And Myriad was what you came up with. And your sister, she really didn't like that."

"Alura was bound by the laws she believed in, which I had stopped having any faith in, not to save us, long since..."

Alex sighed. She leaned against the transparent wall of the cell and slid down to sit on the floor. "We're in the same pickle here. You weren't wrong about that, you and Non..."

Astra frowned. "I'm sorry. But pickle, isn't that a fermented vegetable?"

"Among other things. One of the few Earth foods Kara doesn't particularly care for, actually. Also an idiom for a problem."

"Oh, I see..." But it was clear that she didn't.

"Climate change. Melting glaciers. Sea-level rise. Island countries going underwater. Climate refugees. Resource wars. All of that? That's just Earth normal. Humans fucking up their planet and racing toward their own extinction. When I was a kid, I saw my scientist parents trying to solve those problems, and me? I decided that I would work to solve those problems too."

Astra moved to the transparent wall and sat on the opposite side of it from Alex. "And?"

"And? Well, as a friend of mine would say, here's the thing. And then my parents told me that they couldn't have other children, 'cuz they knew I'd always, always wanted a sister. But then, then they started suggesting that they might adopt..."

"Kal-El."

"He had found Kara and was trying to keep her in the Fortress of Solitude, because it was clear that with her hypersensitivity to sound and all the other senses, he wasn't going to be able to keep her at his apartment in Metropolis. And, yeah, any time she heard a sudden sound, her eyes burned a hole in something... Can't entirely blame him for that, I suppose."

"But you do. Blame him, I mean."

Alex whipped around to face Astra. "Damn right I do! He was her cousin! Her blood! Her only living relative in the fucking universe! Blood has to mean something!"

Astra bowed her head. "But he grew up as a human. And blood was the only link."

Alex took a deep breath, let it out. "She said once that he spoke Kryptonian so badly that half the time they couldn't understand each other, that the only time they seemed to really understand each other was when they were eating. And one time, after she'd been at the Fortress for a month, he just
happened to bring an enormous order of Chinese food. Potstickers included."

Astra waited, then asked, "Pots ickrz?"

Alex searched her memory. "Gr'nel pah?"

Astra gasped. "You have that here?" Her voice was thick with yearning and nostalgia.

Alex turned to see the older woman wipe a tear out of her eye, pretended not to notice. "I'll see if we can get some for you one of these days... The point is, once aliens entered my parents' life, they shifted from our planetary problems, as huge as they were and are, to extraplanetary or interplanetary problems. And I did too, eventually. And now, Earth is a mess, as you and Non acknowledged in your own way a while back..."

"And by doing so, I think, contributed to the number of brilliant thinkers who started thinking about us rather than the problem in front of you."

"Yes."

"I see."

And Alex supposed she did. Everything that Alex had heard or read about Astra suggested that she was a galaxy-class strategist, a woman who thought not just steps ahead of everyone else but weeks or months ahead.

"Oh, Alexandra. I am sorry. I have often wondered in the last year, since I was returned to my body, what I might have done differently to change the outcome, to change the pain we dealt, that I dealt to my niece. But now I realize that I was thinking too small. I dealt pain to all her friends and family, to Earth itself. And I have no way of taking that back."

"Astra, I don't particularly believe in coincidences. And if you are here, now, at this moment, it is because you have something to do here and now. And since you have told Kara nothing, about your plans? About the ship? About the passengers? Then, probably you have your reasons, and you are definitely not going to tell me." She turned and looked Astra in the eye. "Still, here I am..."

Kara's aunt stood up and stretched like a caged panther.

Alex said, "I know something's going on. Oh, yeah. That alien ship. That's not just any alien ship, is it?"

"It is... complicated."

"Show me one thing, anything, in the galaxy, that isn't complicated." Alex raised an eyebrow.

Astra barked a laugh. "Complicated? Oh, yes. Complexity is knitted into the fabric of the universe. You see that... but simplicity is also knitted in, and the simple answer is that I need your help to get back to that ship, to save lives. Not just the lives of the passengers, but the lives of Earthlings, the lives of your sister and her friends. Because the near future is likely to become extremely... complicated. And the passengers on that ship? They are the Earth's best chance at survival."

"You say that."

"I, Astra In-Ze, say that. And my niece is like her mother, and her father too, to be fair. She is the last daughter of the honorable House of El. And here, beneath this yellow sun, she is strong. But she is practically alone. And she is going to need help. I did not navigate to Earth. I never meant to come
back here. But as you say, things have a way of happening as they are meant to. So help us. Help me. Please."

Alex pushed herself up from the floor and stood for a long time, her brown eyes staring into Astra's blue ones.

//

When Supergirl had finally meditated her way back to a calm enough place to face her aunt again, she strode to the alien brig, only to catch her breath when she saw the outer door unsealed. She looked around, but saw no one in the hallways. She pushed the door open and saw that Astra's cell door was open. The cell was empty. Astra was gone.
Astra waited until Alex had gotten the energy ring and returned to set her free. Together they hurried to the ship. Astra input the security code that let them in, and input Alex's biometrics so that the ship would accept her. Then they raced to the engine room, where the eleven waited in stasis.

Astra strode to the far wall, and inserted the ring, her heart thrilling to hear the pitch of the engines rise until they were clearly at their maximum power. She gasped with relief and stepped back.

Alex stood watching the interface, which showed how the energy was affecting the eleven pods, six on top and five on the bottom. The charge showed a stronger effect on the top pods.

"I think it's working," she said. "Why is it working on the top ones more than the bottom ones?"

Astra swore in a language that did not belong to either Earth or Krypton. "You have a word on Earth, I think, patriarchy? It explains why some things happen more easily for small groups of elite rather than large groups of not-elite?"

"Yes."

"Well, the planet we came from, we escaped from, it has several such words. All of them are at work here. But we had to take the ship we could steal. The fact that it can sense what you would call 'female genetics' and automatically under-provides for those passengers?" The words she gargled were harsh and left her spitting onto the floor. "Krypton had its failings, but we were egalitarian, by Rao!"

Alex stared at the wall. "Are you sure this is safe?"

"Kreif! The ejarian pump is jammed?"

"I don't know what that means."

"Just reset the circuit at the end of the first pod."

Alex turned to do it and faced her sister. Her supersister, to be precise.

"Alex? You okay?"

Alex ran her hand through her hair. "Kara! Pfft. I'm fine!"

Astra stepped forward. "Kara. I forced your sister to help me."

"You kidnapped her."

"She didn't kidnap me. I came willingly. To help the passengers. The engines were dying."

"We don't know anything about them, Alex!"

"We know that they are sentient. And we don't let sentient creatures die, Kara. Not if we can save them."

"Since when did sentience become the deciding factor?" asked Supergirl. "Max Lord is sentient. Non was sentient. The Daxamites were sentient. Psi is sentient. Sentience just means choice. They are attacking us by choice. How does that make them less guilty, less accountable? Shouldn't it make
them more?"

Alex and Astra looked at each other, then looked away.

"Good. I am taking you, and that, back to the DEO."

"I cannot let you," said Astra.

"Get out of my way!" said Supergirl, blocking her aunt.

"Kara..." said Alex, raising her hand to Astra's collarbones, underneath which was, strangely, not the crest of the house of Ze.

Kara stepped closer and looked at the pentagon. "Astra. I know all the Kryptonain houses, and this, this isn't one of them."

"No," said Astra in a quiet voice. "It is not. The houses were always based on the male's family, even though all the ritual work was done by the women: marriages, funerals, adjudicating. When I found myself on another world, I... decided to change things. If, from now on, we would only have families of choice, then our crests should reflect that."

The numbers and the signs on the computer wall, which had been glowing a steady red, suddenly started flashing yellow. Astra hurried to the control panel. "No..."

Alex asked, "Does that mean that everyone else is going to wake up?"

"No!" snapped Astra. "It means they're going to die.... I can redirect the power to all the chambers except..." She hurried to one of the chambers, where the shadow, rather than hanging in stasis like the others, started to jerk spasmodically. Astra ran and tried to smash the pod with her fists, but only ended up bleeding.

Supergirl pushed her back. "You haven't been under our sun long enough." She took one punch and smashed through the diamond-like glass, sending the orange fluid sluicing across the floor while Astra caught the woman from the pod in her arms, listened as she gasped for breath.

"She's alive! She's breathing!"

It didn't take long to get Vasquez to send help, bring the alien woman back to emergency medical, do what tests they did on any alien they came across (into whom they could stick needles).

Alex, Kara, Astra and Winn stood around the med bay bed, looking down on the woman's sleeping form.

Astra asked, "Do you have any updates?"

Alex put away the blood pressure cuff. "She's stable. For now."

"We're still analyzing her genetic makeup," said Winn, "so we can treat her properly. Is there anything you can tell us?"

Astra shook her head. "She's from Titan. Without power to the ship, she may have been off life support longer than we think."

Kara's glasses made her look very serious. She asked, "Who is she?"

"Her name is Imra. Winn, will you let me know if her condition changes?"
"Yeah, of course."

"I would return to my cell."

Winn leaped up and gestured to the two agents who were tasked with guarding Astra. The four of them strode out.

//

Sam knew that wandering off into the desert on foot, without water, was a fool's errand, but she also knew that most fools didn't have an alien GPS device to guide them.

So she went. What did Tolkien say? "Not all who wander are lost"? She had to believe that.

And she walked forward, parched, across the hard desert, questioning her own sanity.

(And part of her was thinking of Ruby, precious Ruby, who had thought she was a superhero, and then thought she was gay, and all of that based on, well, what? The super adrenaline-charged thing she did at the press conference? And the fact that, apparently, the vast majority of her very few new friends were lesbians, who were all, apparently, dating each other? And how likely was that, anyway, in a city as big as National City? Surely they had more options... Not that they weren't all hot, capable ladies. But still.)

The Earth shook under her feet. Well, fine. She had lived in California before. She was used to the occasional earthquake.

She was used to...

She fell to the hard earth, gasping as strange brown cones shot up out of the earth, explosively, shooting sprays of dry dirt in all directions as the cones intertwined to... what? Build? Build what?

But when she finally looked up as the earth stopped shaking, it really did look like some sort of... building?

It was weird, and it made her think of something she had seen before, a movie from the 1980s, maybe? Except hadn't that been ice crystals shooting up and building some kind of ice fortress? This? This was totally different.

Like a porcupine. Or a cactus. Something meant to hurt whatever came against it. And as a building? It was... confusing.

And ugly. And terrifying.

//

Agent Chen was on guard duty. It wasn't something he was thrilled to put on his resume. He was pretty sure that, when the time came, Blackwater wouldn't be too impressed. He was going to have to step it up to get the kind of attention he wanted.

But at least he was guarding superpowered aliens, rather than humans. That had to count for something, right? And Astra In-Ze was Supergirl's aunt. So if Vasquez said that the prisoner was to have supervised time on the balcony (and DO NOT let her jump off the way the Daxamite had last year!), Chen was more than ready to win a medal for keeping her where they wanted her to be.

Except that, well, she seemed to want to be where they wanted her to be.
Alex finished typing up her report on the morning’s mission and submitted it to Vasquez and J’onn for approval. Then she stood and stretched, and turned to see two figures standing on the balcony: Astra, the DEO’s not-exactly prisoner, and Agent Chen, her not-exactly guard. From his station, Winn said, “Yeah, she’s been there for the last hour or so, just looking at the city.”

“Where’s Kara?”

“Debriefing with Vasquez. And after that I think Vasquez intends to tell her about the alien dog, so she probably won’t be up here for a while.”

“Who is tending the dog?”

“Rosie. She wanted to make sure the little guy wasn’t carrying any radiation, but it also turns out that she grew up with lots of dogs, so she volunteered to take care of him while we got all today’s other shenanigans sorted out.”

Alex frowned. “An alien pod with Astra and a dozen people in stasis does not count as shenanigans. Speaking of which, have we heard from Guardian lately?”

“I don’t know, but he rarely took DEO cases, mostly chose to help the NCPD. You could ask Maggie if she’s been receiving any ziptied early Christmas presents.”

Alex made a mental note to do just that. “And has Kara talked to Astra yet?”

Winn shook his head. “If you ask me, she’s avoiding it.”

Straightening her shoulders, Alex marched over to the balcony, dismissing Chen on the way.

“General Astra,” she said formally.

Astra turned. “My planet is gone, my army is gone, pitched into space by my niece, apparently. I am no longer a general.”

“Vasquez says, ‘Once a Marine, always a Marine.’”

“And what is a Marine?”

“My country’s elite fighters.”

Astra nodded thoughtfully, glancing back at the command center. “And Vasquez is the little one who frowns all the time, that your Winn is so afraid of?”

“She’s tougher than she looks.”

“As are you, Alexandra. I woefully underestimated you, as did my late husband. Tell me…” she hesitated.

“Yes?”

“Did he observe the period of mourning for me? Or did he just attack you?”

Alex listened to the nuances of Astra’s voice, nuances that suggested that this question was important to her. “He observed it, after having Kara conduct the rite of sending for you. Then, after that, he attacked us.”
“I see.”

“Astra, I never thought I would say this, but I am sorry.”

“For what?”

“Well, for killing you? I didn’t want to. I respected you, still do, but you were about to kill J’onn and there was no time, and even though Kara said she thought she was getting through to you, there was just not enough time! And I had the kryptonite sword and—“

Astra reached her hand out and caressed Alex’s face. “Alexandra, you are a warrior, and you do what you must. I do not hold my death against you.”

“Kara did. She quit the DEO over it, for quite a while.”

“Because you killed me?”

“Well, no, not exactly. J’onn took the blame for it, so that she and I could still support each other. He let her be furious with him and I got off Scot-free, until finally I just had to tell her… And she sort of forgave me, but you were still gone, the one person who remembered Krypton the way she did, who spoke the language and, well, wasn’t currently trying to kill her…”

Astra frowned. “And you let your commanding officer take the credit for the kill?”

“Blame, Astra. He took the blame.”

“But you proved the better warrior.”

“But Kara loved you.” Alex shook her head and leaned on the balcony. “You know, she stands here sometimes, looking out at all the little lights. I’ve heard her talk about it, how each light means a person out there in the city, someone she might have to save someday, or already has. But there’s no light for you, the one she couldn’t save.”

Astra stepped forward and leaned against the balcony next to Alex. It seemed odd to see the ever-formal woman in such an informal pose. “Even as a child, Kara always wanted to do big things, solve the unsolvable problems, not so unlike my sister and myself. I am glad that she has had more luck with that than we.”

Alex stared out at the lights of National City, then turned back to look at Astra. There were more small lines at her eyes than Alex remembered, and the thinnest of scars along her jawline. Unthinking, Alex reached out for it, then quickly pulled her hand back. "I'm sorry. That's... new?"

Astra touched it self-consciously. “She did not defeat me, but she did mark me.”

“She?”

“Imra.”

Alex blinked and said slowly, “So the others in the pods. They were also gladiators?”

“They were. We escaped.”

“So they are dangerous.”

“Only as dangerous as you, Agent Danvers: they only fight when they have to. You have nothing to fear from us. I did not bring them here to start an army. I am not Non.”
“No, I didn’t think you were. But it sounds like you’re Spartacus, and I am pretty sure that whoever you escaped from is going to want you back.”

//

Sam stared at the horrifying structure in front of her, wanting nothing more than to walk away, or possibly run. But she was here for a reason, to find out who, what, she was. So she walked around the bristling brown monstrosity until she found an opening, an entrance. Slowly, she walked inside.

It was dark, as if the alien environment that had brought it to Earth needed to express its darkness, its foreignness... It was lit with dark orange lights that glowed eerily against the stone walls and stairs. She saw a stone insignia in the shape of the same sort of pentagon that the Supers wore on their chests. She walked around it and came to what looked like a control station, some sort of computer with alien symbols that she did not recognize. But there was also a port, with a circular hole, and she looked at the alien stick in her hand and slowly inserted it into the hole. Immediately, the console lit up and the stick lowered into the console. And then they made beeping noises and a woman appeared out of nowhere.

And not just any woman. The woman from her nightmares.

"You have come," the woman said. "I imagine you have questions."

"I've seen you. What are you?"


But Sam had had many friends in her life, and this woman did not feel like a friend. "What is this place?"

"Your Fortress of Sanctuary. A piece of your dead world, Krypton."

"Oh, my God. Ruby was right. I'm like Supergirl!"

"You are so much more than that. You are the culmination of centuries of work, a being designed for one purpose: to execute justice."

"I'm a hero?"

"They will not call you that. They will call you World Killer. They will try to contain your power, but they will fail. You will show no mercy to those who oppose you. Your justice will burn the world of men."

"No!" said Sam, backing toward the door. "I'm not a world killer!" She turned and ran. She ran out of the building and away across the desert, barely knowing where she was going, just following her own footprints back to her car a mile or more away, running as the sun dropped on the horizon. And with each footfall, she thought, I am not a world killer! I am a good person! I have a life and a job and a daughter! I am not an alien! I am not I am not I am not!

When she reached her car, out of breath and sobbing, she jumped in, turned the key, and miraculously it started. She turned the car around and drove, as fast as she could, away from the alien monstrosity, toward the safety of human civilization.
I Wake, and Take My Waking Slow

Vasquez was in the command center when Rosie's SOS sounded in her ear. "Vasquez, don't kill me! The alien dog got loose. I had him by the scruff and he jumped up like he smelled something and started barking and tore away and I have no idea where he is! I chased him but--"

"Winn," snapped Vasquez. "Do you have that internal DEO scan to find Kryptonians?"

"What? Yeah, the body density is--"

"Just use it!"

"But Supergirl is--"

"Just use it, Agent!"

(And what she had wanted to say was "just fucking use it, idiot," but even in a fast-changing situation, Vasquez knew how to motivate her agents, and Winn just loved being reminded that he was an actual DEO agent, although he would never be as scary as Alex.)

"The corridor leading to J'onn's office!"

Vasquez took off like a shot. She took a shortcut up to that floor and could hear the barking and the yells--J'onn's, M'gann's, Myrrn's--and a loud wet crash. More joyful barking. She ran so fast she practically slid into J'onn's office to see a tureen overturned on the floor and what had to be soup pretty much everywhere: on all three Martians and splashed against J'onn's office walls. The dog was eating the soup off the floor, ecstatically wagging his tail.

Vasquez leaped in to grab him by his scruff, yelling, "No! Bad dog! No! Stop! Get over here!"

And the dog turned and jumped up on her with his soupy paws and licked her face with his soupy dog-breath and covered her in dog-saliva and (apparently) Martian soup.

With his usual quiet understatement, J'onn said, "Agent Vasquez. If you could contain the new... alien visitor somewhere where he cannot get into trouble, I would be eternally grateful."

"Yes, sir! C'mon, boy. No more soup for you! C'mon, let's get you and me cleaned up!"

//

Sam got back to the main road out of the desert and drove and drove and then...

The gas light went on.

Still she drove, mostly on fumes.

Finally, the car just stopped. She managed to pull over to the side of the road first, but only just. She pulled out her phone and realized that she only had two miles to the next town, luckily. That wouldn't be too hard to walk, get gas and get back to the car, or even hire a tow truck... Right?

It took forty minutes to walk to the next town, forty minutes during which her brain buzzed with the possibilities and fears of this new knowledge about her self, her origins, her... what? Purpose?

World Killer? How on Earth did justice lead to killing worlds?
How on Krypton, actually, she supposed.

Still. It made no sense.

She made it to the town, Springfield, and asked a passerby for directions to a gas station, and he said, "Only the one, darlin'. Matt's. Down the road away. Mebbe half a mile, then turn left? Can't miss it."

And her phone was losing power, so she turned it off to save the battery, hoping the fellow was right. Luckily, he was, but only because the town was so small, just a few shops, a hardware store, a pharmacy, some restaurants, a bar and the gas station. It felt a little like those ghost towns from when the gold-miners came and went more than a century before. She got to Matt's and entered the shop.

"I need to buy some gas."

The man, presumably Matt, put his hard-tanned hands through his greasy grey hair. "Don't see a car."

"No, I broke down on the road outside of town. I need to get some gas back to my car so I can get to National City."

"Oh, okay. We can do that. Cash only."

"Cash, wait, what?" Sam dug into her pocket for her wallet but she only had three dollars and change in cash.

"That ain't gonna do it, sweetheart."

"Well, isn't there an ATM around here somewhere?"

He cackled. "An ATM in Springfield? What, you think we're the big city around here? Ha!"

She stared at him. "Please, there has to be some way..."

He winked. "Well, now, I'm sure a pretty girl like you will find a way to earn some cold hard cash right quick, if you catch my drift."

Sam's face grew cold, and for a hard few seconds, she actually considered killing him with her bare hands. But Ruby thought she was a better person than that, so she had to be that person.

Across the street, she saw the bar, Gremlin's (great name, she thought ironically), with its neon signs proclaiming Pabst and Bud and Jack Daniels.

She turned back to the man. "You know, I do have skills I haven't used in quite a while. But you are correct, sir. I can earn some cash, what did you say? Right quick."

//

It felt like they hadn't had a sister night in weeks, and Kara made sure to get Alex's favorite ice cream, because Alex had seemed to be awfully distracted lately. When Alex showed up with the pizza and immediately opened Kara's bottle of red wine, Kara asked, "Hey you. What's going on? You've seemed kinda off all day."

“It’s Astra. I just can’t get over that she’s back. I mean, I’ve done some things in this job that I regretted, but nothing like killing her. And I’ve carried that around now for almost two years, and you forgave me, not that I deserved it—”

“Alex! You don’t forgive people because they deserve it. You forgive them because they need it.
And you needed it. I needed it. You’re the one who read me The Tale of Despereaux, remember?”

“I know, but I never forgave myself. And now, suddenly, I can. In part, because even she doesn’t hold it against me.” Alex’s voice shimmered with her disbelief.

“She understands what a soldier sometimes has to do. Way better than I did then. Now, I’m starting to get it…”

“Yeah, kiddo. I am so sorry you had to learn those lessons…”

“Never mind. We’re here and we’re alive, and National City isn’t currently at war, so we can just figure out what we’re going to wear to the wedding and the rehearsal dinner and--”

"Don't forget your supersuit. You know we're going to need to be prepared for anything."

"Cynical much?"

"Kara, I don't have to be Vasquez to be able to predict Alternate Earth Shenanigans. I'm not complaining. I still want to go. I just think we should be properly prepared, that's all."

//

Winn loved dogs, so he was very happy to keep an eye on the space dog while Vasquez changed into a dry uniform. He got peanut butter crackers from the break room vending machine and watched the dog gobble them with glee, getting orange crumbs on his white muzzle and not caring a bit. He turned his head and gave Winn a look of pure love, then jumped up into Winn’s lap, put his paws on Winn’s shoulders and licked his face with great enthusiasm.

“Mkay. Mrf! Don’t—Whoarrff! Stp, stp, stp!”

A deep woman’s voice said a word sharply and the dog jumped down and sat with his tail quivering. Winn wiped the dog slobber off his face and looked up to see Astra eyeing him with disgust.

“Agent Schott, you do realize that these animals put their tongues in most unsavory places, don’t you? You really should not let it lick your face.”

“Let it? I tried stopping him. He just…”

“This is what was in the Kryptonian pod? Another victim of the Phantom Zone, I suppose. Probably sent by Jor-El for his son…”

“This is Superman’s dog?”

“He would not remember, although the dog, as you call it, probably would remember him by his smell.”

Vasquez entered, carrying an extra black webbed belt and the dog let her give him a makeshift leash. “So he is Kryptonian. Do you think you could write down some Kryptonese commands, like sit and stay and come? But transliterated. I still can’t wrap my head around Kryptonese writing.”

Astra nodded. “I could do that.”

Winn said, “Hey, maybe you could take care of him, since you can talk to him!”
Astra sneered, “I am—“ She fumbled for words and then said a Kryptonese phrase with a shrug.
Vasquez said, “Well, I don’t speak the language, but I’m guessing that means you are a cat person.”
Astra nodded. “Felines are clean.”
Winn stared at Vasquez. “How did you do that?”
Vasquez frowned. “Winn, your phone has a predictive algorithm that can tell you what text you want to send. At the very least, I should be able to predict the dialogue of an alien supervillain—apologies, Astra—reformed supervillain.”
The dog barked. Vasquez handed Astra a pen and one of her ubiquitous small notebooks. “Thanks, Astra.”
Her phone beeped and she looked at it, and Winn thought she looked disappointed.
“What’s wrong?”
“Nothing. Alex and Kara are going to Barry’s wedding tomorrow. Great. Guess I won’t have to cook tomorrow.”
“But Alex says you love to cook.”
“I do.”
Astra handed her back the notebook, and Vasquez practiced the words, with Astra frowning at her pronunciation, but after a while the dog was looking at Vasquez instead of Astra, and after Vasquez took him outside the DEO to do his business on the sidewalk, she brought him back to the women’s barracks, and she lay on the cot on her side and he jumped up and settled in to sleep in the hollow of her belly as they both gradually fell asleep.

//

Luckily for Sam, even a two-horse town that didn’t have a single ATM did have a bar and it was Friday night, so it was packed. She stood watching the beleaguered woman who was tending bar and getting yelled at by the good ol’ boys who wanted their beer faster. When there was a pause in the crowd, she slipped into a space at the bar. The woman looked exhausted. “What are you having?”
“A job for the evening? I used to bartend in graduate school, I’m stuck here without gas and without cash to buy it. I could help you out for a couple of hours…”

The woman looked her up and down. “All right, Beggars and choosers, after all.” She lifted the bar counter so Sam could slide behind it. Sam looked at the setup and started to serve drinks. The woman watched her for a moment, then nodded her approval and took the other side of the bar.

And that was fine for about two hours, when one of the men who had been pounding back beer all night demanded one more and nearly fell down as he said it.

“Sorry, sir. I’m cutting you off. Get a friend to take you home.”

“You’re not cutting me off, city girl! This is my bar and that is my beer!”

One of his friends, who was much taller and much drunker, agreed. “Hey, girlie, stop talking about cutting and give us a kiss!”
That was it. Sam had had a very bad day. She snapped the counter up, came out of the bar, grabbed the men’s arms, one in each hand and said, “OUT!”

The taller man made to grab her, but she pushed him hard. Through the door.

Not out the door, which would have meant the door was open. The door had not been open.

And now the door was on its hinges and the man was lying in a pile on the ground several feet away from the bar. Sam turned on the smaller man, but he just took one look at her and ran to grab his friend.

The woman tending bar came to Sam and handed her a hundred dollars cash, saying, “That was well worth seeing, but you better be out of this town when he wakes up or your life will be short and shitty.”

Sam didn’t need to be told twice.
When You Think You're Over It, But Aren't

Chapter Summary

NOTE: Yeah, I told a questioner that I wasn't planning on covering the crossover, except maybe in small, condensed flashbacks. The laugh is on me. But I did manage to cover 4 hours of episodes in fewer chapters than I usually manage a single episode, so... win?

A few more scars, thought Alex as she and Kara stepped through the blue light of the portal and back into Kara’s living room. Fortunately, most of them were physical. Those would heal.

The skinned knuckles from punching Nazi faces.

The cut on her arm from that soldier’s sword in the church.

Too many bruises to count.

Sore ribs. Stiff shoulders.

All of those would heal, in part because they were only physical and in part because they were honorably earned, fighting for the freedom of a distant Earth.

The portal closed and the blue light disappeared. Kara tossed her suitcase onto the couch and looked at Alex, frowning. “What are you going to do?” she asked.

“What I have to do. The right thing.” But she couldn’t force her body to move, to head toward the door, to head over to Vasquez’s apartment.

Kara enfolded her in a hug. “Maybe it can wait until tomorrow? We’re both exhausted. Stay the night. It’ll be easier after a good night’s sleep, some coffee. I could make pancakes…”

“I don’t deserve pancakes. Pancakes are for good people.”

Kara opened her mouth and closed it again. “Well,” she said, “I’m pretty sure I have some stale Special K and some milk that is probably a bit off. Will that do?”

Alex gave out a laugh that sounded like a sob. “Yeah, that’ll be perfect.”

//

Kara lay there, listening to Alex sigh, watching the pale lights reflected through the window blinds on the ceiling when a car passed by. She thought about Alex’s odd behavior at the wedding, getting so drunk at the rehearsal dinner and disappearing, then lying about going jogging in the middle of the night to avoid admitting to Kara that she had cheated on Vasquez with Sarah Lance.

And Kara had tried to be supportive, first out of sheer surprise at the church, and later because, duh, Nazis, and Alex needed to have her head in the game. And then, when Sara told Kara what Alex had done and said, apologizing for not being able to save her sister when she thought they were all going to die, well, who could fault her for doing her job in the best, most badass way humanly
possible?

Because Alex was human. Often, Kara forgot. Often it seemed to her that she, Kara, was the weak one, and Alex was the superhero.

But this wasn't the behavior of a superhero. And Alex didn't have the excuse of RedK affecting her brain chemistry. Just scotch and a wedding on an alien planet. But how did that combination lead Alex to betray her own values? And betray the woman Kara was pretty sure she loved, and who loved her back? The woman who had taken her on when Maggie had rejected her, who had gradually and gently gotten her to accept herself?

Hell, Vasquez had even taught her to cook!

And Vasquez had been the one, years before, who had trained Alex to be a badass in the first place.

So Kara was baffled. Baffled and disappointed.

And she remembered how Alex had said, when she first came out, that she would not know what to do if Kara was ever disappointed in her.

Kara didn't know what to do either.

She lay there, listening to Alex sniffle and sigh. And she thought, What Would Alex Danvers Do?

And she remembered Alex's response after the RedK incident: "You're my sister, and I will always love you."

So Kara rolled over and pulled Alex into a hug, rubbing her back and humming a Kryptonian lullaby until Alex finally fell asleep.

//

Sam drove for hours until she could barely see the road and had to pull over and sleep. She was hungry and exhausted. She pulled a power bar from the glove compartment and ate it, but it didn't even take the edge off. Finally she crawled into the back seat and curled up uncomfortably.

Sleep was long in coming, but eventually, she found herself walking through the desert, the stars bright overhead, so far away from city lights. She wondered which star was Krypton's sun, her... birthplace, or the closest thing to it that still existed. She was an alien. Ruby had been right about that after all.

But what was a world killer? And what kind of nuts would genetically alter her to kill worlds? From what she could tell from Superman and Supergirl, the death of Krypton was the defining factor in their choice to protect Earth, not kill it.

Ahead of her, she saw the strange porcupine of a building and she tried to stop walking toward it, appalled once more, but her feet refused to obey her. And ahead of her, she saw that woman.

//

Sara Lance hated weddings even more than she hated funerals. At least with a funeral, you knew where you stood. Somebody had died badly or well, and it was over. Weddings, not so much. People said how happy the couple looked, how they would be in love for life, blah, blah, blah. In Sara's experience, most relationships were temporary: some for the better and some for the worse.
Now Nyssa...

But she didn't dwell on that. It didn't help. Instead, she did what she always did: headed straight for the bar.

Well, maybe not straight. Maybe... directly.

And she directly noticed an attractive woman pouring a shot of scotch and swallowing it in one go. She said, "Somebody who drinks like that is looking to make something go away."

"Yeah, no. Not exactly. I just hate weddings."

Sara poured herself a shot and tossed it back. "Hate? Strong word."

"Yeah, when I was a kid I really wanted to get married. But when I started dating, it never worked. Just awkward and obnoxious... and then last year I figured out I was a lesbian!"

"Congratulations." Sara poured them both shots, they toasted and drank.

"Thanks. Yeah, but the woman who got the toaster oven for me-- Wait, does your Earth have Ellen Degeneres?"

"Please. We're not barbarians."

"Yeah, well, she didn't do baby dykes, and I didn't handle it well. And then this woman, this totally amazing woman took me under her wing and well, I guess, under her, and yeah. So that was great. And last May I asked her to marry me. And she basically said no."

Sara poured two more drinks. They tossed them off. "Honey. I'm so sorry."

"Yeah, well. I mean, what was I thinking, right? I'm not, I mean, I've known most of my life, and I, well. So that happened."

The woman poured them both shots and they tossed them off.

"You know," said Sara. "Marriage isn't everything. Most relationships fail. Statistical fact. There's no shame in it. It is very hard to find a perfect match that also stands the test of time."

"Yeah. I know. Theoretically. And I'm a scientist. So I am totally down with theory tested by experimentation over time. But-- But, well, I so desperately want that theory to be wrong. I want what they have." She waved loosely to Barry and Iris. "A fairy tale love with a happily ever after. Is that so wrong?"

Sara poured two more drinks. "Not at all." And she reached around so that her and the other woman's arms were linked while they drank the shots.

The other woman giggled.

Sara felt warm just looking at her big brown eyes. "So let me guess," she said, "Being at the rehearsal dinner for the world's most perfect couple is bringing things up?"

"Yeah. Stings a little."

A few drinks later, Sara was pulling this woman outside to neck and to avoid the over-saccharine speeches of Barry and Iris's close friends, most of whom had partners and love and some kind of
permanence in their lives. But this woman, who looked like Athena and tasted like quality scotch, that was worth ten minutes of her life not thinking about how happy everybody was who was not in fact Sara Lance.

//

Kara had been frantic. It was an alien Earth. How could her sister not answer her damn phone? So when Alex appeared in her dress and huge sunglasses and an apparent killer hangover, Kara had yelled at her. And then Sara Lance had shown up and asked about the state of... Alex's butt?

"Yeah, it's just, I heard you fall out of bed this morning and it sounded like it really hurt."

"Yeah, uh, yeah, little bit."

"Yeah, okay. I'll meet you inside."

And at first Kara had thought it was funny, but then when they took their seats near the front of the church, she had to reconsider. Because she was the one singing the song for Barry and Iris's procession, and she worked hard not to look at her sister.

Can't say how the days will unfold
Can't change what the future may hold
But I want you in it
Every hour
Every minute

And Kara thought about Lena, and wondered what she was doing at right that very minute...

But then just as the song was ending and the priest was starting to give his spiel, Nazis broke into the church and they all had the fight of their lives.

And she had to fly in an actual dress, which would have been embarrassing if it hadn't been so hair-raising. And yeah. So she had gotten a little distracted.

And then they went back to Star Labs to figure out the problem, work the problem. And apparently she herself was the problem.

Well, not Kara herself, but this Overgirl-version-of-herself. Same face, same hair, same voice.

Different outfit.

Much sluttier lipstick.

But otherwise, frighteningly familiar.

And even skeezier than that was the fact that this evil chick was apparently married to an evil version of Oliver.

Oliver? The man she always fought with whenever they talked. Ooog.

But that wasn't the worst thing. The worst thing was that their counterparts from the 53rd Earth, where the Nazis developed the atomic bomb first and won the war, Earth X, had for some reason decided to attack Barry and Iris's Earth. And it was bad enough when Kara and her friends had had to fight L Lillian Luthor and Cadmus, and, oh yeah, the entire Daxamite Diaspora, but Nazis? Surely we were way past that. Surely...
So, later on, when Kara asked Alex if she was okay, and Alex acted as if everyone was asking her that and "Why would you ask that?"

Kara said, "Well, you kinda look like you just killed someone's puppy."

"Yeah. No. I'm okay. It's just this whole thing with Sara was a mistake. More than a mistake. This was all kinds of wrong. Waking up in a strange bed with a strange woman? Vasquez trusts me. I trusted me. I never thought I would, I could-- How could I do... that?"

And Kara pulled her into a hug. What could she possibly say?
Vasquez traded shifts with Chen and Jordan, and spent the day in the training rooms, teaching the Kryptonian dog to sit, stay, come, lie down, leap over obstacles--

And of course, that is where things got... interesting. Because the dog didn't exactly... fly. But like a good martial artist doing an aerial kick, he had hang time, that extra second or two when he was in the air after leaping and before landing.

But increasingly, he was listening to her, despite what she had to think was probably her horrible Kryptonese accent. It was depressing really. She spoke at least five languages, including Russian, which was one of the most impossible languages on the planet, and people always took her for a native. But her Kryptonese was just a disaster. But she gave the dog commands and he obeyed and she gave him the treats that Jordan had gone out and bought (a bit of a kiss-up there, but she wasn't complaining) and slowly the dog seemed to understand her and become willing to obey her. Maybe... maybe even like her.

And that was good. That was great. Because they hadn't heard from the Danvers sisters for twenty-four hours. And Vasquez was starting to sweat.

//

Sara was surprised by Jefferson's ignorance about the badges the concentration camp prisoners were wearing. She could tell that Alex knew exactly what the pink triangles and yellow stars meant. And she could tell that Alex's persistent worry about her sister's well-being was the thing that would keep her going.

And she was thinking about Alex's well-being, and Kara's, right up until the moment when her own father's doppelganger came in and told her that he had had a daughter who looked like her and shared her "compulsions." And that he had killed her.

And that made Sara sick to her stomach and angry, and she had tried to use hand signals with Oliver to get them free, but her erstwhile father figure had set off their collars with an electrical charge, and set them up between a firing squad and a long ditch.

Their mass grave. "Ready."

Beside her, Sara heard Alex say, "I"m sorry, Kara."

And Sara had had a sister once. So that.

"Aim!"

And then a good Leonard Snart had come and saved them and let Ray free and they ran like the blazes and eventually got to the resistance base.

But she still had a bad taste on her tongue and a desire to throw up, that she only, very narrowly, resisted.

//

Kara lay in the surgical bay, fretting over the idea, the mere idea, that anyone, and certainly not someone who looked exactly like herself, could even have the slightest reason to think, to believe,
that she (that they) might be better than everyone else, might be considered gods to be obeyed rather than guardians to be called on in emergencies.

Overgirl said that Supergirl didn't need her heart because she wasn't using it. Why? Because her romantic entanglements had so often gone astray?

But the world needed love, and Supergirl loved the Earth, loved the people she saved, loved the people who saved her: every day, every minute... And that, of course, led her to think of Lena Luthor, her perfect green eyes, her jawline like a balcony you could land on in an emergency...

All I wanna do
Is come runnin' home to you
Come runnin' home to you
And all my life I promise to
Keep runnin' home to you
Keep runnin' home,
Home to you...

//

When Alex saw this Earth's Winn Schott, Jr., now an intransigent general, tell them that they could not go home because he needed to blow up their portal while Overgirl and her evil husband were on their Earth, she wanted to rip him ear from ear, stick her index finger up his nose (and that was the soft option for both of them) and convince him forcefully that his way of looking at the problem, the issue, and the entire world was just wrong. Wrong.

The gay superhero Ray suggested that she talk more to Winn, and that didn't get them very far, but eventually, it did get Winn to agree to wait an additional hour.

It wasn't much. It wasn't barely anything. It was, though, a tiny something.

Like the butterfly who flapped his wings in Singapore and started a hurricane in Tennessee.

And one of the things that Alex had known almost all her life, that she lived by like a motto: you work, you study, you train and train and train, you argue and persuade and exhaust all your possibilities, test all your hypotheses, do all of the god-damned work, and then?

Then you take what you can get.

//

Sara went down to the command center of Star Labs and found Alex Danvers opening and closing cabinets frustratedly.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm looking for a gun. Or a knife. Anything."

Sara shook her head, sighing.

"Look," said Alex. "I don't care how many Sturmtigers those people have. I am going to go save Kara, whether these people help me or not."

"No, you're not."
"I'm a government agent, certified in over thirty military weapons."

"And you're impressive, I'll give you that," said Sara. "But you still can't fight your way through an army of Nazis alone and scared."

"I'm not scared!"

"Not for you. For your sister."

"I should have done more. If only I hadn't gotten so... distracted." Alex gestured at Sara.

"Sorry to be a distraction..."

"You don't understand. I... can't... lose her."

"I understand, better than you'd think. I lost my sister. The anger and guilt I felt for not being able to save her... took me down a dark path."

"I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"How could you? I mean, all we really know about each other is how we look with clothes off... Beautiful, by the way. You also don't know that I protect my team. And you, Danvers, are on my team. And I promise you that we will not let what happened to my sister happen to yours."

"I'm sorry. I just want to save Kara and get back to Vasquez."

"Vasquez is...?"

"Fierce. And beautiful. And complicated."

"Yeah, I had a Vasquez too. And I think about going back to her all the time. But Alex, you seem like a pretty thoughtful person. And if you thought it wasn't going to work out and had to end it, I'm sure that reason was valid."

"But I didn't end it. I love her. And just because she doesn't want to marry me, I don't want to live in a world without her in it. And you and me? That was a huge mistake and I don't know why, and I mean, I'm grateful, because you were amazing, but I had no right--"

"Wait, you didn't break up when she turned you down?"

"What? No! We just sort of kept on... dating, I guess. But she is strong, so strong, and I don't think she's going to forgive me. I don't know how to forgive me. And Kara has been really great about it because she loves me too and doesn't want me distracted while there is so, so much danger--"

"Alex, I am so sorry! If I had realized, I never would have taken advantage--"

"It's not your fault. It's mine. I shouldn't drink when I'm unhappy. I do stupid things. And now I may never see her again and Kara could die and--"

Sara stepped forward and embraced Alex. "Whatever happened between us, I respect you. You are a warrior and I'm proud to have you on my team. And if your Vasquez knows even half of how brave you are--"

"She trained me," Alex sobbed into Sara's neck.

"Then she knows. Sounds like my kinda gal. But if she trained you to be this? Then she must be
pretty special too."

"She is."

Sara stepped back. "We're going to get you back to her. And eventually, if you grovel enough, she'll probably forgive you. But you need to tell her why you're unhappy. Letting your feelings fester is how mistakes like this happen."

"But what can I possibly say?"

"Well, start with 'I'm sorry.' There's a reason it's a classic. Then just follow your instincts. You'll know."
M'gann helped J'onn clean up the soup that the Kryptonian dog had splashed all over his office. It turned out that being a bartender for a few centuries taught a person a few things about cleaning up messes.

"Thank you, M'gann, for all of this. For making the soup for my father. For this--" He gestured to the scrub brushes and white vinegar.

"We have to stick together. Sorry that your carpet is going to smell very... nostalgic for a while."

"It's a good smell."

"The DEO is quiet tonight. Where is everybody?"

"The Danvers are on an alternate Earth at a wedding. Vasquez is dealing with a legal problem, so she's off with Lucy figuring that out. I was just doing paperwork when you called me about dinner."

"Sounds pretty prosaic. You must be glad. Your job always seems like cleaning up one mess after another. And not like this."

"You're not wrong. I'll take a nice quiet weekend with no aliens or metahumans or explosions. And it's nice that the girls can get a break from the violence too. They deserve a vacation."

//

Kara had faced the prospect of death a few times now. It never got easier. Lying in the surgical bay, feeling so weak from the red sun lamps, feeling so helpless, she had to admit that this time, finally, it was probably going to actually happen. Alex wasn't there to save her. She was surrounded by superpowered enemies and she was reduced to being human.

And Overgirl had gloated about how pathetic she acted when she could be a god, but Kara was pretty sure that real gods didn't gloat. Rao was the nourisher of life. The god of her friends and family members commanded humans to protect the widows and orphans and, ha, aliens in their midst.

So if she was going to die as a human, well, maybe there were worse things. Because what if she had died after the RedK incident and had never had a chance to make amends for that? Surely this was better.

So the moment that she saw the glint in Eobard Thawn's eyes and heard the whirr of the surgical saw, she committed herself to Rao's light and closed her eyes. And then the world went dark. She opened her eyes to see that the electricity had been cut. Alex?

Not quite. Iris and Felicity.

//

The thing about combat, Alex often thought, was how fast it seemed at the time and what a blur it was afterward. She wondered if it was like that for Barry too, or if it was just normal human speed that was strange.

She remembered that she and Sara had fought well together, that shooting automatic weapons at
Nazis was just as satisfying as punching them. She remembered seeing Stein, the Legend's elder scientist, crawl to the control panel, leaving smears of his own blood in a trail behind him, but finally pulling the lever that opened the breach back to Earth One. She remembered taking his pulse and advising him and Jefferson to become Firestorm to get him home alive. She remembered marching through the breach.

Other things happened, but they were less clear.

When she finally found Kara, looking pale and exhausted, sitting in the cargo area of the Waverider, everything became distinct again.

"Kara!" She ran and hugged her sister. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"I thought I'd lost you!"

"Yeah, so much for getting away from it all. Of course, fighting evil doppelganger versions of ourselves does put our problems in perspective."

"Way to see the silver lining. And at least I was right about bringing our combat gear."

"It's dating Vasquez all this time. You're learning to predict problems."

"Yeah, Vasquez. Oh, Kara, what am I going to do?"

Kara put her arms around her sister. "You've got work ahead of you. It's not going to be easy. But I'll be there whenever you need me."

"Are you... disappointed in me?"

"I was, at first. I thought, there you go being human, doing the weak human thing." Kara closed her eyes. She said, "But Overgirl. She despised humans for being weak because she thought she was better. She isn't, and neither am I. Anybody can make mistakes because they're weak."

Alex murmured her agreement.

Kara opened her eyes, looking suddenly fierce. "But it's the deliberately hurting people we perceive as weak that is worse. That is the worst weakness of all. I heard Oliver say that it's the strong's duty to protect the weak. We make mistakes. All of us have made mistakes. But then we fix them. And you can fix this. And I'll help you all I can."

"What would I do without you?"

"You will never know because you and our friends will always save me when I can't save myself."

//

At home in her apartment the night after their return to their own Earth, Kara slept badly, holding Alex in her arms and dreaming of the final battle, Nazis marching through a normal American city on a normal Earth, killing people. Her friends fighting their doppelgangers. Herself flying up, up and away with Overgirl and throwing her as far from herself as she could just as the woman went supernova.

Alex's look of terminal relief.

The calm after the storm.

She woke up gasping, sweating.

Remembering.

Not just the fight, but also the carnage in the aftermath. The Nazis they had killed. The civilians the Nazis had killed. It wasn't at the scale of the Daxamite damage to National City on her Earth, but it was bad. Iris and Barry were devastated. Kara was devastated to realize that all of that pain had been caused by her attending their wedding.

And it had hurt Alex, too.

Being both, being a Kryptonian on Earth and a sort of human in a world overrun with alien and metahuman--and let's face it--human villains: all that meant she would always be a target, always be a danger to her friends and family. There was no getting around that.

She looked at the clock on her bedside table. It was 5:31 a.m. Alex wouldn't wake for at least an hour, and when she did, Kara would be here to help her handle what came next. But Kara thought perhaps there was something that she, Kara, Supergirl, needed to do first. She slipped out of Alex's arms and used superspeed to change into her supersuit.

The sun was on the rise when she flew to the park in the center of the city to gather a bouquet of flowers. Then she flew up, up and away, but this time, not to protect or kill.

Just south of National City, there had been an old school, long abandoned and weed-strewn. It sat on a low hill, its parking lot and playground long since turned to rubble even before the war with the aliens. So when the skies had finally cleared of enemy space ships and the rebuilding efforts started, people quickly realized that National City needed a new cemetery, and this was the perfect place.

Supergirl flew over it at least once a week. The manicured green grass was studded with 617 rectangular white granite slabs, each with a name, a set of dates, and a line below about that person’s role in the Battle of National City. At the center of the property was a tall granite spire with all the names listed alphabetically and a piece of poetry commemorating the fallen.

At the foot of the spire there were often flowers. Supergirl landed and laid her orchids down next to plumerias. She was not the only one who came here from time to time to mourn the dead and regret her role in bringing their killers to Earth.

Some humans were kneeling by a nearby stone, but Supergirl ignored them, bending her head and committing the fallen to Rao’s light. And then she took off again into the air.

There was work to be done.
Alex left Kara's loft after several more hugs and a lot more reassurances that it would all work out. She drove to Vasquez's apartment with great trepidation. She parked in the building's full parking lot, not seeing Vasquez's Beetle, but then, sometimes when Vasquez left work late she had to park on the street, so that didn't necessarily mean anything.

Alex let herself into the apartment quietly and tiptoed her way to the bedroom, but the bed was made and didn't look like it had been slept in. And on the one hand, that made Alex relax a tiny bit, but on the other it only meant the reckoning was still in the future.

She stood in the living room, taking in the Art Nouveau posters of women, and she looked around, as she had when Kara had helped her neaten up her own apartment before the last game night. Did she have as much of her stuff here as Vasquez had at her place?

Well, her second favorite leather jacket and her running sneakers, sure. But that was just clothes. And in the kitchen the pair of scotch glasses embossed with the crest of the House of El that she and Vasquez had found when they were supposed to be shopping for a birthday present for Lena (and what the heck did you buy a multi-millionaire?) and they bought one for everybody (and that reminded her that they were going to have to do Christmas shopping soon--but then, maybe that wouldn't be happening now. Fuck.).

In the bedroom lay her Bare Naked Ladies T-shirt and Stanford sweatpants. The plastic water glass Vasquez had gotten her after she had smashed several glass ones answering 4 a.m. emergency phone calls from the DEO. The journal in which she jotted down the recipes that Vasquez taught her.

The living room showed no signs of her. The dining room either. It was like she had barely made a mark on Vasquez's life at all.

And she stood there trying to feel... anything, the way the DEO therapist always insisted. Feel the emotion. Name the emotion. Deal with the emotion.

Surprise? No.

Disappointment? Maybe.

Sadness?

She didn't know, and it worried her.


He didn't have a name for himself, though he could tell that the People had names for each other, and he remembered such things from Before. Even when they were making those meaningless noises to each other, he could tell that they called each other names. But he couldn't make them out, so he simply thought of them in his own way.

There was Whistler who had come with him in the ground pod, murmuring soothing things when he trembled. He hadn't seen her for a while.

There was Drinky, who gave him water, so much cold water and played with him and called him Gooboy! and then chased him when he smelled something nice to eat.
And Growly, who didn't like him eating the nice stuff off the floor. And Salty who brought him
down to the place with the water to clean him off and then gave him to Scruffy, who fed him
wonderful crunchies and when he licked him, his face was rough.

And Astra, who spoke actual language to him, but didn't like him.

But Astra taught Salty language so that Salty could talk to him too. And when he grew tired, he
curl up with Salty and they slept, and he licked her face too when she was sad.

And in the morning, he met Kara, who was perfect and wonderful and tasty to lick and happy to see
him, and she knew language too, and she talked to him about Home and Before, and she told him
she would take him to see Kal-El and he wagged his tail so hard she joked that it might fall off, but
he didn't care.

He was no longer half-asleep in the Dark Place. He had found his pack.

//

Vasquez sat in the command center a few yards from Winn, and they glanced at each other when
Supergirl roared in via the balcony opening and left streak marks on the floor from her red boots.

"Okay, I'm back on Earth 38, my home away from home! What have you got for me, people?"

Winn said, "Well, it might be nothing, but we've had several reports of cats in trees in the Englewood
neighborhood, and it might not be more of those flying cats that we dealt with a while back, but on
the other hand, it might be. So, um, wear long sleeves for sure, as well as all the standard tactical
gear, and bring containment for small creatures."

"Got it!" and she was off so fast the paperwork on Vasquez's desk fluttered all over the command
center. Vasquez swore.

Winn said, "Um, Agent Vasquez. You did tell her about the dog...?"

"Of course. Agent Jordan was going to deliver him back to her apartment now that she's back on our
Earth."

"Um, right. But he was able to smell that Martian soup from fourteen floors down. Supersenses,
increased by increasing exposure to a yellow sun..."

"Aw, shit." Vasquez hit her comms. "Supergirl, you might want to be advised. Your dog might
show up on the scene if he smells those cats..."

Winn said, "Agent Danvers! Alex! We're going to need you to support Supergirl! Check in with us!"

"Wait," said Vasquez. "Alex isn't responding? But if K-- Supergirl is back, surely Agent Danvers is
back!"

But there was no response.

"Winn, what have you got? Do you have Alex on your radar?"

"It's not radar, Agent--"

"YOU KNOW WHAT I FUCKING MEAN!"

"Supergirl," said Winn. "Is Alex Danvers back? You came back together, right?"
"Yes, of course we did. Why?"

"Because she's not responding to our hails!"

There was a pause. Then, "You know you could just call her phone... Okay, I'm on site. I have to go!"

Winn was faster than Vasquez. "Alex! Great, you're here! We need you at the DEO. You need to turn your comms on!"

"My comms are at my apartment. We got back late last night and I crashed at Kara's."

"Well, Kara's off to deal with maybe more of those flying cats, but that Kryptonian dog you rescued? We're thinking he might try to join in..."

Alex's response was unrepeatable.

"Right," said Winn. "So if you could do something with that information? Thanks, Alex."

//

After the Person who smelled like smoke deposited him and hurried away, he had spent the whole morning sniffing Absolutely Every Single Thing in Kara's Nest-Place. And everything smelled like Kara, except for a few things that didn't. Some things smelled like Whistler a lot! A few things smelled like Salty or Scruffy. Some things smelled like the sort of crunchies that Scruffy had given him, but he couldn't get into the strange fat tube in the cold place that held the stuff that told his nose what was in there. Very frustrating.

But then something else had happened. Or, not exactly happened, but odorized?

He could smell... something... interesting?

It wasn't close like the cold place.

But he could also smell Kara moving toward it very fast.

Maybe she was going to get it for him? Or maybe she was going to fight it and she would need his help?

She spoke language to him and told him that the Dark Place was long gone and had given him crunchies.

Surely it was time he helped her out.
Listen to the Pouring Rain

Part of Sam knew she was dreaming, and wondered what on Earth would cause her to dream of this, of all things. Another part of her realized that Earth was not the point.

The strange woman from her nightmares beckoned her back into the strange building with its prickly exterior, and she was helpless to keep herself from following. Even in a dream, even knowing it was a dream, Sam still found the dark, red-lit cavernous building creepy. It was less like a futuristic science fiction lair and more like a medieval cavern, someplace appropriate for arcane rituals and danger.

"I told you before. You are more than some blonde bimbo playing at heroism. You are justice. You are the final arbiter."

"I'm a mom. If I also happen to be from another planet, that doesn't make me some preordained killer."

"World Killer. Yes, in fact it does. This is what you were designed for. From ancient days to now, you are the one preordained to make worlds pure, as they were meant to be."

"No! I'm a good person. I have a daughter!"

"Your offspring was an unfortunate error. Your powers were supposed to manifest when you came of age. She delayed the realization of your destiny."

"She is not an error!"

"You will soon forget her. You will soon forget all mortal trappings."

"No. This can't be right..."

"It is time for you to emerge. It is time for you to reign."

Sam felt like a thousand invisible tiny hands were pulling her in a thousand different directions. She fought it, screaming, but the woman was inexorable.

"Say it. Repeat after me: T'ahp naht es queet."

"NO! You can't make me become what you are! I won't!" And she turned and ran again, back to the car, back to the world of men and women of Earth, back to her daughter's Earth.

She woke, gasping, curled into a ball in the back seat of her car, and lost no time crawling into the front seat and setting the car back on the road to National City as fast as she could.

By the time she would arrive, Ruby would have already gone to school and Sam would pay Mrs. Queller, making up some excuse about where she had been and why.

And then, with any luck, she would sleep for a million years without dreaming about alien planets with plans for her life and body and soul.

And if, in the days to come, she saw things on the news about a strange design that tugged at her memory, she would ignore them. And if she woke exhausted every morning, with no memory of her night, and even if she woke with what certainly could not have been blood on her hands, since she had obviously suffered no injuries, so how could it be? If such things happened, she would put it
down to overwork, and wonder as birds chirped outside her window, how on Earth Lena Luthor had been doing this job and all the others for so long without looking like she was just one step away from breaking into a million pieces.
Facing the Storm

Alex found Vasquez working out in the weight room with Chen for a spotter, and she paused at the door, watching Vasquez in her black tank top and yoga pants and bright purple sneakers bench-pressing half her weight. It was hot, but Alex realized she had given up... no, thrown away... any right she had had to watch the hotness ensue. Taking her courage in her hands, she strode up to the bench, only to see Vasquez pass the weight to Chen to rack for her awkwardly as she leaped up and hugged Alex with almost Kara-level strength, embarrassing Chen.

Alex said, "Hey, you look happy..."

"You're back! Finally! I was afraid you'd been snatched by folks from that Earth you were on to run their alternate Earth DEO!"

"Well, not quite..."

Vasquez kissed her soundly. "You're going to have to help with the decorating. I don't know if you remember, but one of my jobs back at the DEO in Nevada was dressing that place up for the holidays, so it was less grim." She wiggled her eyebrows. "Mistletoe is a major theme..."

"Yeah, I remember. That always surprised me about you..."

"Well, morale is important, so we try to include everybody, decorate for Christmas, Chanukah, and Solstice, because apparently Pam from HR is actually a Druid, did you know that? But I'm going to need help and we'll have to ask Supergirl to handle the high ceilings because I'm pretty sure that Astra isn't going to help—"

And Alex wanted to tell Vasquez about Sara, but she couldn't get a word in edgewise. "Vas, wait a minute. Since when did Agent Susan 'Terse is My Middle Name' Vasquez ever string together more than three short sentences in a row?"

But Vasquez said, "Well, yeah, but I missed you. I thought you'd be gone two days and you were radio silent for a week on Earth One."

"That's because I wasn't on Earth One. We got kidnapped and taken to Earth X."

Vasquez’s face went white and her smile dissolved. "Earth... X? As in... the Nazis won the war? That Earth X?"

"Wait, you've heard about it?"

"I thought it was an alien cautionary tale."

"Yeah, no. Apparently not. And Supergirl and Green Arrow had these evil doppelgangers who were in charge of the Reich and we did end up killing them, but Flash let his doppelganger go... Big mistake if you ask me. And, also, the Legends were there..."

"The time travelers?" asked Agent Chen excitedly. "Did you see the Waverider?"

"Um, I did. It was impressive..."

"Agent Chen," said Vasquez slowly. "Thanks so much for your help, but I think I may need to, um, debrief Agent Danvers..." She picked up her towel and water bottle and she and Alex moved
toward the women’s locker room.

Alex followed behind, absently noticing Vasquez’s muscles with a hitch in her breath, cursing her stupidity. Who on Earth would pick a night with the White Canary over a life with Vasquez?

Then again, on which Earth?

Vasquez sat on one of the benches near the lockers and absently dragged a hand through her damp hair, noticing the effect it had on Alex. “Like what you see?” she purred.

“God, yes! I mean, yes. Um. Yes, of course.”

“Why so flustered?”

“Because you’re going to kill me,” Alex answered in a small voice. “I want to kill me.”

Vasquez frowned and took a long drink from her water bottle. “Because you got kidnapped? Babe, I’m sure if you could have avoided that, you would have.”

“Pfft. That, no, of course. No, it wasn’t… that.”

“Did you… nearly die?”

“That, yeah. By Nazi firing squad no less, only to be saved by a gay superhero, who is basically the living embodiment of glitter, so yeah, I thought you’d like that one…”

“So what am I missing here, Alex? Why should I be mad at you?”

“Well, it’s just, you know all the Legends, right?”

“Sure, Firestorm, that Captain America guy, White Canary—“

“Yeah. Um. Her.”

“Alex, what did you do?”

“Um. Her.”

Vasquez’s face went blank with complete incomprehension.

“Vas, I slept with Sara Lance.”

“Slept with. Like, had sex. With White Canary.”

“Sara. Yeah.”

Vasquez stared at her and Alex forced herself to meet those big brown eyes.

“So, what, was it after the fight? ‘Cause I know how horny you get after a big fight, when your or Kara’s life is endangered and you’re shaking from all the adrenaline…”

Alex opened her mouth, wishing like hell she could say yes, feeling Vasquez begging her silently to say yes. But she had to be honest. She was a traitor, not a liar. “No. It was nothing to do with combat. It was before all the fights.”

“All? How many fights did you have?”
“I don’t know. Um, the one in the church, and then the one at Star Labs, and then that factory, and the concentration camp, and then the Nazi fortress… I don’t know. I lost count.”

“But this happened… before all that.”

“Yeah, the night before everything happened.”

“But… why? I mean, just a few nights before, you and I—“

“I know. I wasn’t just horny. I would never do— I thought I would never… I thought I was better than this.”

“Is she hot?”

“I mean, I guess? We were drinking scotch at the rehearsal dinner thing, bonding over how much we both hate weddings—“

“You hate weddings?”

“God, yes. Don’t you?”

Confused frown. “Well, I’m not a fan of the heteronormativity, or the incessant boy/girl pairing, and the only time I’ve been in one, I wore a tux, but all the bridesmaids were straight and the only two lesbians present were married to each other, so I ended up switching my place so I could sit at the table with the gay boys and—“ She stopped. “But why do you hate weddings?”

Alex shrugged. “I always wanted one, you know? The dress, the party with all my friends, the Prince Charming. But then, yeah, not a lot of them out there. So all my friends from school got married and I could never even find a date for their weddings, much less an actual relationship. And once or twice, that’s one thing. But I’ve been to like fourteen weddings, and alone, every single time. Which is humiliating. And everybody else at the wedding is paired off and normal, and I’m just Alex The-Broken-One Danvers, can’t get a date, nobody wants her. And my mom's always asking me if I’m seeing anyone, telling me I should work less if it’s cutting into my social life that much-- Well, that’s exactly why I worked so much. At least I could be some kind of success in my research, even if I was a failure as a woman or, really, a human being.”

“So, you slept with her to feel like a success as a human being.”

“No! I’m not trying to make excuses. I don’t know why I did it. It’s just that when all the saccharine speeches about love started, she said, ‘Wanna step outside and get some air?’ and I said, ‘God, yes,’ but then, I don’t know, suddenly we were kissing and groping and it was like fire and I’m a little fuzzy about how we ended up at her hotel room…”

Vasquez cast around for words. “Was she… good?”

“Um, apparently?”

“Better than me?”

“Different. Rougher, for one thing.”

“And you liked that?”

“I don’t know? I don’t actually remember that much about it, really…”

“Because of the scotch.”
“Probably. I know the next morning I had the first hangover I’ve had since Maggie dumped me.”

Vasquez nodded. “I’d thought you’d been drinking less.”

“Yeah, I guess that also decreased my tolerance.”

Absently, Vasquez untied her sneakers, took her locker key from her laces, opened her locker, pulled out her tacticals and stared at them blankly. She stripped off her black tank top, and when Alex inhaled, her eyes flickered over her. “Well, that’s something anyway. At least it’s not that my charms are depleted for you.”

“God, no!”

Vasquez nodded again, then pulled on the black shirt over the damp sports bra. She replaced her black yoga pants with the black cargo pants. Alex looked away, unable to look at the inevitable Semper Fi underpants.

Faithful. As a Marine, Vasquez held faithfulness as the first virtue.

“I am so sorry I betrayed you,” whispered Alex. “Betrayed us.”

“And it never occurred to you to tell her you were dating someone else?”

“I thought I had! And then, after all the fights, when we finally talked about it, I realized that she misinterpreted what I’d said.”

“How do you fucking misinterpret ‘I’m dating someone’?” Vasquez snarled.

“That’s not exactly how I mentioned you. I mean, I told her about Maggie and then how this amazing lady took me on and I fell in love with you and then last May…” Alex gestured.

“Last May.”

“You know.”

“I don’t think I do.”

“I asked you and you said no. And she thought that meant that we’d broken up, but since I knew we hadn’t, it didn’t occur to me that she’d think that, so I didn’t explicitly say so.”

“So this is about me not wanting to marry you.”

“No! Maybe. I don’t know. Vas, you know me. When it comes to anything that isn’t related to work or Kara, I have the emotional range of a teaspoon. That’s been changing. Because of you. And over the last week I’ve gone over it in my mind. Over and over. What I should have done differently. Not drinking. Listening to the stupid speeches with a fake smile plastered on my face. Stayed tethered to Kara. Anything. All the things I should have done instead.”

Vasquez pulled her boots out of the locker and slowly put them on and tied them. “Alex, that shouldn’t have been necessary. I mean, the drinking, yeah. But even so. A couple weeks ago when you were in Metropolis with Maggie, you were good. It never occurred to you.”

“Of course it occurred to me. It was Maggie. I was hyper-cautious and so was she, if Lucy is to be believed. But nobody I didn’t know has ever wanted me. Not ever. And I never expected that anyone would. Or could.”
“I’m pretty sure half the gay women at the DEO have wanted you at one time or another.”

“Pfft. That’s just because they think I’m some kind of badass. If they really knew me, they wouldn’t want me.”

“Because you’re not a badass?”

“Not really. I’m just a scientist with a complicated little sister to take care of. At least this time when she went off our Earth, she took me with her, so I could try to protect her.”

Vasquez’s frown was sad. Alex knew all of Vasquez’s frowns, and there were many, but this one she had never seen before and it tore her that it was she who had caused it. She desperately wanted Vasquez to say something and she also desperately wanted her not to, because about the only thing she was likely to say was that she never wanted to see Alex again, and Alex couldn’t bear hearing that.

“I need time to think, Alex.”

“Okay.”

“And you should probably come by and pick up the things you have at my place.”

“It’s pretty much just my running shoes and my sweats, but yeah, of course. I can totally do that.” Alex looked at the ceiling tiles, trying to force the incipient tears back into her tear ducts. Finally, she whispered, "Vas, Susan. I am so sorry.”

Vasquez stared at her and shook her head. “I’ll see you around. We’ll do our jobs. But I’m going to need time. Maybe a lot.”

Alex nodded, still fighting to hold back tears. Vasquez was the one who had the right to cry, not her. She got up and quickly left. When she got home, then she could cry. But right now, she had her job to do, and she would do it.
Gathering Information

Kara had never thought of herself as particularly a cat person or a dog person. Growing up with the Danvers, she had never lived with pets, only met the dogs, cats, gerbils and parakeets of her friends' families. Eliza had always said that humans were enough work for all of them and they didn't need nonhuman animals making things more complicated. And since Kara had always secretly thought that Eliza was afraid that Kara would accidentally hurt a small animal, she had sort of agreed.

And it might have happened; the young Kryptonian without perfect control of her strength and laser eyes might just possibly have hurt a dog or cat, and Kara had never, never wanted that to happen. But she had always, always wanted a pet, and she was pretty sure that Alex had too.

So when Vasquez had told her about the Kryptonian dog and Kara had grabbed Vasquez's arm and dragged her down to the cell where the dog was lying on a big red fuzzy dog bed, with his kibble uneaten and his water bowl still full, she had immediately begged Vasquez to let her sit in his cell with him, and she had talked to him in Kryptonese for two hours, until his tail was wagging and he was wolfing down food and Vasquez had released him into her custody, warning her that he might start showing powers any time now that he had absorbed the yellow sunlight...

But that only made Kara feel more confident. If he was as strong as she was, she couldn't possibly hurt him. And he responded to her talking to him with joyful barks. And she had chosen to walk him home in part to wear him out (good luck with that) and in part because she was terrified that if she tried to fly him, he might get too excited and wiggle loose and she would drop him-- And she couldn't face that. So, yes, they walked/ran/sniffed their way the many blocks home between the DEO and Kara's loft.

And he wasn't worn out when they got there, and luckily, James and Winn had dropped off all the dogfood and treats and toys that they had picked up while she was dealing with Earth X debrief.

But she had not been prepared for him to decide to join her at the park downtown where the flying cats were harassing pedestrians. So it was a really good thing that Alex had shown up with an extra leash and treats and just enough words in Kryptonese that the dog paid enough attention to her to stop paying attention to the cats.

And that mess had taken all day to clean up.

Then Kara and Alex had headed back to Kara's place, exhausted and hungry and trying to teach the dog that just because different people pronounced the commands a little differently, that didn't mean that it was okay to ignore the people who were not... well, fluent.

And while Alex was on her phone ordering pizza and potstickers, Kara texted Kal-El to tease him about his surprise Christmas present. And then Kara and Alex spent the rest of the evening very carefully not talking about Sara Lance or Susan Vasquez.

//

A few hours later, J'onn called Kara out to an L-Corp property, the future location of a research facility for nanofabrication. It was on the edge of town, so city lights were easily a mile distant and the large Klieg lights from the DEO trucks were all that lit up the area.

When J'onn and Kara landed in the field, Agent Vasquez was there, looking very grim.

"What happened?" asked Supergirl in her deep, serious voice.
Vasquez answered, "Looks like someone took a flame thrower to large swaths of the property."

"Any chance it was a brush fire?" asked J'onn.

"I don't think so."

"But why call us for arson after the fact?" asked Supergirl. "Fire's already out."

"There's something you should see," said Vasquez.

"Where?"

"Bird's eye view," said Vasquez, gesturing to the sky.

Supergirl leapt into the air, turned and gasped at what she saw below. She swore in Kryptonese, then landed, stumbling, and retching into the weeds. Vasquez ran up and steadied her. "Ma'am?"

"Thank you, Vasquez. You were right to call us in. Rao help us."

//

Vasquez followed Supergirl into the room that held the construct of her mother, Alura. She knew that Supergirl often got emotionally connected with the construct and sometimes forgot useful strategic details when she talked with the woman who was now more than two decades dead. Vasquez couldn't judge; her relationship with her own mother was, to be fair, complicated at the least. But as the Risk Analyst for the DEO, it was her job to stand in the background and take quick notes.

Except that this time, there wasn't much to note, at least not from anything Alura said.

Supergirl paced back and forth in front of the annoyingly emotionless construct. She was looking at Winn's pad, muttering, "I've seen this before, back when I was a kid, when we took field trips to the ruins of Old Krypton. What does it mean?"

Alura said, "The symbols predate recorded history. The glyphs are known as low-speech and were used in Urica, the Kryptonian continent where life began."

"And the people who used them?" asked Supergirl.

"The Deroo were matriarchal," said Alura, "tribal, polytheistic. Over time, their sun god became known as Rao. The tribes came to worship him alone, and modern Krypton was born."

Supergirl paced back and forth. "So then the Book of Rao should have something that would help."

"There is nothing in the book. The ruling council destroyed much of Krypton's so-called superstitions."

"But if someone is trying to send me a message through this, I have to know what it means! This feels important."

"I represent the total accumulation of knowledge on the twenty-eight known galaxies. If I cannot translate it, a translation may not exist."

And Vasquez noted Supergirl's frustration and buried anger, but when Kara turned off the construct, Vasquez simply said, "You know, Supergirl, back in school, the librarians used to always say that knowledge often starts as information you don't know how to look for. Just because your mom, I
"I know what you mean, Vasquez."

"Well, there are other sources."

"Like what?"

"Like her sister? The construct of Alura is not Alura; you know that. But it is easy to forget that an information construct might not have all the answers, well, not because the answers don't exist but because the people who created the construct didn't really want to... share. Remember Myriad?"

Supergirl swore in Kryptonese. "So you think Astra might be more... forthcoming?"

"Dunno. But if she's not? She's a live person, and I am amazing at interpreting what actual people do to lie or avoid lying. I can't psychologically hack a computer. But Astra is a real live girl. And that? Oh, I am expert at that."
In Sam's dreams every night, the strange woman told her to reign and dispense justice, and she dreamed of lasers cutting the dross out of the earth, and woke gasping, soaked with sweat and exhausted.


"I'm sorry. I just had a bad dream again. Sorry, honey."

"Mom you've been like this since that trip you took."

"What trip?"

"The one you went on last week."

Sam stared at her daughter. "I didn't go on a trip, Ruby. I'm here."

"You said you were going to find things out. Good things."

"I said that? I don't know. I've just been so tired. Come here, honey."

Ruby climbed on the bed and took the hug and went with her to the kitchen to make pancakes and cocoa and pretend like everything was okay.

But Sam was pretty sure that everything was definitely not okay.

//

Channel Seven was all over the strange, alien crop circles.

The six o'clock news showed all the different versions of the symbol as it had been burned into fields, yards, and parks. The voiceover presenter said, "These ominous symbols have appeared around the city overnight, and the NCPD currently has no information on the source, and with the city still reeling from the Daxamite invasion, these mysterious symbols are causing tensions to run high."

//

Kara stared at the computer monitors above Winn's and Vasquez's stations, frowning. "As if my week couldn't get any worse. First Nazis and now precivilization Kryptonian signs being burned onto property owned by Lena's company. Just great."

Vasquez rose with her tablet and left the command center.

Kara's eyes followed her, sadly.

Winn asked, "What's up with Vasquez lately? I mean, she always looks at least a little annoyed, but now I don't even know. She even swore at me yesterday."

"Yeah, she and Alex are having some problems."

"What? No! No, that is not even possible. They are like the best couple ever! I thought it was cute when they got all badass fighting back to back, but anybody who can make Vasquez get all googly-
eyed or make Alex giggle? I would never have thought either were possible. What can I do to help?"

"Honestly, I don't know. I guess, let's just work this problem and hope they can sort it out for themselves."

Astra entered the command center, glancing behind her. "Kara, your Marine friend, something is wrong there."

"Yes, Aunt Astra, that's true. Um, I need to talk to you..."

"About the low-speech symbols. Yes, I just discussed them with my... with the construct of Alura. It amazes me. Even as a computer program she can make me lose my temper."

"I'm with you on that," muttered Kara. "Do you recognize the symbols?"

"They are very old, from what I think you would call a cult. Even as Krypton was ending, they occasionally made themselves known, but no one took them seriously. In comparison to the very real environmental degradation tearing our planet apart, they seemed like a joke, invoking old superstitions. I can't imagine how they could have come to Earth."

"Were any of them imprisoned in Fort Rozz?"

"Hardly. They were fools, not criminals."

//

Pam from HR parked in the DEO parking lot and was gratified to see Winn there waiting for her. "You remembered," she said.

"Of course, I remember. I can't let you carry all the decorations upstairs yourself."
He pulled the largest box out of her car trunk, and she followed him with all the bags to the elevator. "I already got all of the ribbons and things out of storage, so we're ready to start with the command center, the barracks and the workout rooms. Once agents start realizing that we're doing this, they can come get the mistletoe and dreidels for the spaces they volunteered for at the Thanksgiving party."

"A man with a plan. Where's Vasquez?"

"Yeah, Vasquez...."

"That doesn't sound good, Winn..."

"It's not good. Alex and Vasquez are having problems, according to Kara."

"What kind of problems?"

"I don't know. Sudden ones. Vasquez was really excited for Alex to get back from that other Earth, but Alex has looked like she shot someone's puppy (Kara's words not mine, but accurate). And now Vasquez has just been looking like bloody murder since they got back." Pam did the math. "So the kind of problems that mistletoe is going to make more complicated."

"Maybe so."

The elevator got to the command center's floor and they opened up the boxes and bags. "Winn, I think you should take the command center and I'll go down and take the workout rooms. I know our
girls. If they are upset and not actually on a mission, they are going to be killing the bag. Let me see what I can do."

"Maybe we should keep out of it?"

"Winn, you're an analyst. You see problems and interpret them. I am Human Resources. I deal with morale and try to provide resources for humans. We each have our jobs. Don't worry, kiddo. I've known both of those gals for years. I got this."

//

Usually in the weeks before New Year's, the training rooms were full of agents lifting, running, sparring, and generally sweating to prepare for the annual requalification exam. It was serious business. If you didn't pass, you could get a two-month extension and then take it again, but that got put in your record, so most agents worked their asses off to make sure they passed with flying colors.

So when Vasquez went down to the training room and started taping up her hands, she was unsurprised to find the space full of agents. But by the time she started beating on the big bag, the crowd had noticeably thinned.

Strange.

At least it meant that she didn't have to hold back. She could beat on the thing with impunity, punish it for all the things in her life that were broken. She lost track of time and only stopped when she heard someone clapping. She turned to see Pam wearing a slinky purple dress and black heels. They were the only two in the room.

"What's the applause for?" asked Vasquez.

"I just counted fifteen badass agents hurrying away from here. Usually, they only run away from Agent Danvers. Probably it's the threat of her forefinger."

Vasquez frowned and reached for her water bottle, took a long drink. "What's in the box?"

"Mistletoe."

Vasquez carefully set her bottle down and attacked the bag again.

Pam said, "Of course, I imagine that you have a very different relationship with Agent Danvers' fingers."

"Yeah," muttered Vasquez slamming her elbow into the bag. "I'm not the only one."

Pam nodded thoughtfully and sat on one of the lifting benches, smoothing out her skirt. "She cheated on you?"

"With a gorgeous superhero, apparently."

"Wait, on Earth One? But all the heroes are guys! Are you telling me she went back to guys? Because I would never have called that one!"

"White Canary."

"Oh, well. Strictly speaking, I don't think she has superpowers. Isn't she an ex-assassin?"

Vasquez growled and attacked the bag again.
"Vasquez. At some point you are going to hurt yourself on that thing, and that isn't going to help."

"I trusted her."

Pam examined her perfect scarlet nails. "I don't think you did."

"What?"

"Trust isn't the same as not believing that somebody could betray you."

Vasquez stilled the bag and stared. "Um, yes, it is."

"No. Trust is believing that someone won't betray you. Fundamentally different."

"I don't get it."

Pam sighed. "Neither you nor she believed that such an opportunity, if you will, would come up. She is still amazed that anyone could want her. I see the way she looks at you when she thinks nobody's looking, that dazed disbelief. She's pretty sure that you're going to get tired of her and then she'll be truly alone because the world will have righted itself, and gone back to normal, and all the sane people will go back to wanting everybody who is not in fact Alex Danvers. But this time, she'll know what she's missing because she had it with you."

Vasquez sat down beside Pam and started to take the tape off her hands. Pam turned and helped.

Vasquez repeated, "I trusted her."

"No, not really. You've been in love with her since day two. And you never thought you'd have her and then you never believed you could keep her. Maggie or someone else would swoop down and scoop her up and be what she always needed, that you thought you couldn't be. You've just been waiting for it to happen. And now you think it has."

Vasquez wadded all the tape together to have something to do with her hands. "So she was wrong and I was right. Great. Doesn't help us."

"Understanding why you both are reeling from this isn't going to help you stop reeling. Right now you're both in shock. Neither one of you recognizes Alex, because the Alex we all know and love would never do something like that. Well, maybe unless she was drinking..."

"Yeah. That."

"Ah." Pam took the wad of tape from Vasquez, got up and walked over to the trash. "Will your agents simply NEVER learn to recycle? Look at all these water bottles." She tossed the tape in and took four plastic water bottles out and shifted them into the blue bin.

"People do the easy thing," said Vasquez.

"Yeah. And the easy thing in this case is to take offense and be hurt and not forgive. The hard thing would be talking through your issues. And I get that you're not ready to do that just yet. You have a right to your feelings. But you two are good together, Vas. Since you've been dating, both of you smile more. Or, like, at all. And the sight of the two of you badasses giggling together has been a really wonderful sight for those of us who have had to face all the crap this past year."

"She doesn't think she's a badass."

"What?"
"She thinks she's just a scientist with a complicated little sister."

"Vas, I saw the surveillance tapes of her jumping out of the skyscraper, backwards, while shooting the Daxamites as she fell."

"I know. My heart nearly stopped."

Pam shook her head. She took a handful of mistletoe from the box by the door. "I don't suppose you still want to help with this?"

"I can't. I just can't."

"Okay, well. Maybe you can help Winn with the dreidels?"

"Yeah, I can probably just about manage that. Thanks, Pam. You've given me a lot to think about."

"Hey. What are friends for?"
Supergirl paced back and forth across the newly decorated command center at the DEO. Vasquez was sitting at her station, frowning and doodling in one of her ubiquitous notebooks. Supergirl kept opening and closing her mouth, not knowing how to start the conversation that she needed to have with Vasquez. She had told her that if Alex broke her heart, she would help fix it, but now there they were and she had no idea how to do that.

Somewhere in the vicinity of one of her red boots, a phone rang. Supergirl jumped.

"You gonna get that?" asked Vasquez.

Supergirl picked up the phone. "Hello?"

"You have a collect call from the Albatross Prison."

//

Kara changed. Vasquez drove. Neither one of them said a word in the DEO black SUV. Neither one of them said a word as they passed through prison security or strode down the fluorescent-lit hallways that smelled of disinfectant.

The security guards opened the doors and Kara strode inside, with Vasquez holding back, pulling out her notebook and pen but still saying nothing. It was just as well. The moment they entered the room, Thomas Coville started talking.

"They will receive a blasphemous sigil, and in its wake, many cowards and killers and vile men will burn."

Kara said, "That's not from the Book of Rao."

"And every eye will look upon the heretic, and they will call it World Killer. Kara Danvers, there is so much that you still don't know."

"World Killer?" said Kara and she stepped forward to sit across the table from Coville, whose hands were chained to the table.

"It's here," he said, looking distressed. "The End of Days."

"There is no end of days in the Book of Rao."

"The prophecy I speak of predates the Book of Rao. But I suspect you know this if you've tried to find the meaning of the Kryptonian symbol that's all over the news. It is the mark of a dark god. A devil."

"How do you know this?"

"You know that I spent two years on a pilgrimage all over the world collecting artifacts and texts, learning everything I could about Rao and your people. But I didn't just find objects. I met people. The forgotten, from Fort Rozz."
"You know about Fort Rozz?"

"I met a disgraced Kryptonian priestess who told me about the god before Rao: a Lilith, made of darkness and teeth, who ends everything. There are three steps leading to the End of Days. First is the mark of the beast."

"The glyph in the field," whispered Kara.

"They're all over National City now. After that comes the work of the beast, in the form of many deaths. And finally, the reign of the beast, and this is when she comes."

"She? Who is she?"

"World Killer, the one who will bring about the end of times." He grabbed Kara's hands. "This is your purpose: to fight the devil."

Kara pulled her hands away. "There is no such thing as the devil!"

"The lost gods must fall for a new god to rise. And her rise will come at the fall of the righteous. And she will reign!... Unless you stand and smite her."

Kara stood and backed toward the door, looking confused, terrified. Vasquez took her arm and led her out and back through the echoing corridors, through security and back outside to the parking lot, where Kara stood gasping for breath.

"Ma'am," said Vasquez. "Are you all right?"

Kara forced herself to take deep breaths and finally nodded.

Vasquez unlocked the passenger side door and then went around the other side, got in, turned the key. "We will handle this, ma'am. You know we will."

Kara nodded slowly. "I know. And Vasquez, we need to talk. About Alex."

"No, ma'am, we really don't."

"I made a promise to you, that if she ever broke your heart, I would handle it. I keep my promises."

Vasquez drove out of the parking lot and got them on the highway back to the city. "Sorry, ma'am, but I am pretty sure you have bigger things to think about."

"Yes, I do. But if I've learned anything over the last few years, it's that I'm not going to be a good superhero unless I'm also a good friend. The things that seem small are not less important than the things that seem big. You deserve so much better than my sister being less than herself. You made her happy. She has no right to break your heart."

"I'll be fine, ma'am."

"Yes, you will, because you are as strong as I am, just in different ways. That doesn't mean I won't fight for you. You always have my back, and hers, and everybody's at the DEO. Isn't that what she told your mother at your birthday party? You bring us all home, every time. I will do the same for you."

And if a tear trickled out of Vasquez's eye, Kara appeared not to notice and certainly never said a word about it to anyone.
Ruby was getting really tired of Lena Luthor's old office at L-Corp, tired of doing her homework and then falling asleep on the white couch, tired of eating all the chips in the breakroom kitchen while waiting for her mother to remember that they needed to eat an actual meal.

And it was one thing when her mother reminded her about the Christmas when they moved to Central City in the middle of the school year for a new job and they ate pancakes at the truck stop and had a snowball fight in the parking lot. And it was one thing when her mother gave her the necklace she had wanted so long, with the silver pendant with Supergirl's S on it, and told her that it actually meant "stronger together."

But Ruby couldn't help but think about her mother's weird memory lapses, and the way she was sleeping very late on the weekends when they were supposed to spend time together, and she wondered if maybe her mom was drinking too much to manage the stress of the job at L-Corp.

Then, when she was doing her chores at home and taking out the recycling, she found a note that her mother seemed to have written and it was completely illegible and covered with weird geometrical doodles, diamonds and lines and dots and squares. She pocketed the note.

She certainly couldn't talk to any of her teachers about this. But maybe Agent Danvers?

When J'onn and Alex joined them in the command center, Vasquez stayed completely professional, simply got them up to speed.

"So Coville says that this is the mark of the devil, a Kryptonian 666."

"Do you believe him?" Alex asked Kara.

"No. I think Coville calling me is an excuse for him to feel relevant."

J'onn nodded. "It reaffirms the narrative he chooses to believe and gives his life purpose."

"We don't even know if the person burning these symbols is Kryptonian. They might be teenagers who don't even know what it means."

"Or Infernians trying to cause trouble," suggested Alex. "I've got Winn tracing all the Infernians on the index."

Imra joined them. "Do you need fresh eyes? I could look at what you've gathered, see if there is anything you missed? Before I was a gladiator, I was a kip on Saturn."

Vasquez said, "I think you mean cop."

"Right. That."

J'onn shrugged. "At this point, we can take all the help we can get."

Vasquez led the woman to a spare conference room and gave her the files they had gathered.

J'onn glanced at Kara and Alex. "Ladies, I sense a great deal of tension that seems to have nothing to do with our current situation. I trust you will handle your problems in a manner becoming of agents of the DEO."
"Yes, sir," said Alex hurriedly, and Kara nodded and fidgeted with her glasses.

"Right. Good." He shook his head and moved off toward his office.

Kara murmured, "At some point, we need to talk."

"Yes," said Alex. "Absolutely. Just not right now."

Chapter End Notes

A short hiatus while I visit my parents for Christmas, with their horrible wifi. See you on Tuesday. Happy Solstice, Happy Hanuka, Merry Christmas!
God Rest You, Merry Agents

Chapter Notes

This will be my last update until after Christmas. Safe travels and happy holidays to all.

Even with National City's green spaces burning with Kryptonian death-metal album-cover equivalents, Winn and the agents of the DEO, full- and part-time, were pulling out all the stops on their holiday festivities: mistletoe and evergreens framed doorways and windows, dotted here and there with red ribbons and blue and white dreidels, cut-out snowflakes and Stonehenges. Some wit had even put miniature Santa hats on all of Winn's action figures.

Normally, Vasquez led the charge, but this time Winn and Pam took point instead, and it was Pam who sent out the emails with the randomized Secret Santa pairings, grumbling to Winn about all the overwhelmingly Christian practices, but Winn saying, "Yeah, but we get presents!"

In the hallways and other mixed-use rooms, agents tiptoed around Agents Danvers and Vasquez, and generally came to Winn if they needed someone to safely communicate with them. And Winn was doing his best, but it worried him that Vasquez hadn't called him Little Plaid Shirt in days. Winn also had to deal with M'yrnn's confusion about the humans worshipping evergreen plants at the same time as he ran traces to see what National City's Infernians had been up to lately, but none of them had recently gotten so much as a traffic ticket. So Alex had asked him to rewrite his Kryptonian-finding algorithm so it could work citywide, which was not impossible, but was taking him much more time than he's hoped.

And since Lucy had been called in to consult, she and Maggie were included in the Secret Santa shenanigans, as was Lena the "consultant" and James, even though he was, strictly speaking, on a Leave of Absence. And Winn heard Alex ask Maggie about whether she had been getting any ziptied early Christmas presents, but she said no, and that made Winn feel better. So maybe James hadn't stolen the Guardian armor after all. Maybe they had just misplaced it.

But then Chen was freaking out to Winn because he drew J'onn for his Secret Santa and what on Earth do you get a freaking Martian???

//

When it came to confrontations like this, James was extremely happy to be six feet all. It meant that he towered over Snapper Carr, which gave him an advantage.

Snapper said, "You need to be more hard-hitting. This is big. We need to play it up."

"You want to go for sensationalism," said James. "No. We need to keep a lid on the violence, not make people think there is more danger than there is."

Lena stuck her head in the door. "Excuse me, Snapper, but can I have a word with Mr. Olsen?"

Snapper rolled his eyes, but left the office.

"How much of that did you hear?" asked James.
"Enough. I'm on your side, by the way. We need to keep the peace in National City for as long as we can. But honestly, I'm less interested in CatCo's response to this than I am in who is doing this and why. The first appearance of the alien crop circles was on an L-Corp property."

"So you think it's an attack on L-Corp? That it's personal?"

"I think it's Morgan Edge. That man has a vendetta against me and he will go to any extreme to get back at me. He's the only one who has the tech and the resources to pull this off. It's got to be Edge."

"Well, then, I think it's time we paid that Don-Johnson-wanna-be a visit."

"I was going to go on my own..."

"Not a chance."

Lena's driver, Ted, drove them to Edge Corp. James was uncomfortable in the town car. "I could have driven us," he grumbled.

"Yes, but I have a panic button. If I push it inside Edge's building, Ted will immediately alert my security detail, and Jess even has Supergirl's number, although of course I wouldn't use that except in the most dire of emergencies."

And there wasn't much James could say against that.

So when they barged in and Edge didn't admit to burning the crop circles, James wasn't particularly surprised, except that when they all knew that Edge had done something, Edge never actually said he hadn't done it; he always said they couldn't prove it. And that made James wonder if in fact perhaps Edge really did have nothing to do with the Kryptonian signs after all...

//

EveMach5: Jess, we need to talk.

TheJess: What fresh hell?

EveMach5: I think my boss has a crush on our boss.

TheJess: Lames? Ugh. But he knows about Kara. Also, doesn’t he hate her? L, not K.

EveMach5: He always has complained about her. But now that she’s here all the

TheJess: Kara always hated his anti-Luthor rants.

EveMach5: time, he has been exposed to her jawline, and that can have a strong effect.

TheJess: True. But you said before he was annoyed by her.

EveMach5: Well, she did kind of take over his job and make him redundant.

TheJess: All right. Let me think about it. Meanwhile, keep them separate.

EveMach5: Yeah, that. They just went off to confront Edge…

TheJess: Without bodyguards? Are they insane? All right. I’m calling in Kara. This is serious.
We're back. Doing Christmas and getting ready for New Years explosions...

Supergirl spent the day flying from one crop circle the next, putting them out with her freeze breath, and collecting local surveillance from the NCPD officers who called her in via the DEO. It looked to her that Alex must be correct in thinking that an Infernian with heat vision must be the culprit, but so far none of the surveillance videos showed anything other than a dark flying person. Most of the glyphs were being burned in places where surveillance was spotty or completely nonexistent, so that didn’t help.

Winn reported that all of the Infernians on the index were accounted for and generally either not committing crimes or already imprisoned. Maggie asked Supergirl tentatively if there could possibly another Kryptonian on Earth besides her and her cousin, and that of course reminded her about the dog, whom she had been supposed to zip home and walk an hour before, so she made her excuses to Maggie and flew home just in time to find that the dog had climbed out the window to poop on the balcony guiltily. She burned it with her laser vision and then took him on a long walk around the neighborhood, telling him about her day in Kryptonese. It was nice to speak her language again and have someone who clearly understood her. When they got back to the apartment, she called Clark’s number and talked to Lois, who said that he was off world.

“He should be back tomorrow, but you know how these things go…”

And of course, Kara did. “Okay, just tell him he’s going to need to come here to get his Christmas present this year.”

“Will do.”

Kara poured two bowls full of the high-protein kibble and said, “I wonder what he’s going to name you, boy… I would call you Krypto.”

The dog looked up and barked, wagging his tail.

“You like that? Are you starting to learn English?”

But then she realized that there was someone at the door, when she used her x-ray vision, she saw Alex digging in her bag for her keys.

Alex came in, looking exhausted. Kara jumped up and gave her a hug. “You look like you could use a drink.”

“What I could use is nine more hugs like this and twenty-four hours of sleep.”

So Kara pulled her down onto the couch and hugged her carefully. “Did you talk to Vasquez?”

“She said she needs time. Maybe a lot.” Tears streaked Alex’s face and she wiped them away.

“Well, that’s hopeful… Isn’t it?”
“I don’t know. On the one hand, I don’t think she hates me as much as I hate myself, but—“

She was interrupted by Kara’s phone. “It’s Jess. It can wait.”

“Unless she’s calling about Lena.”

Kara picked up. “Jess, what’s up?”

“Lena and James just went off to confront Morgan Edge.”

“Shit.” Kara pulled the phone away from her ear and focused on Lena’s heartbeat, definitely in the vicinity of Edge Corp., but not in any fluster. “I’m sure she’s fine, Jess, but I’ll call her, just in case.”

“She does stupid things when you aren’t around as much. You know that, right?”

Kara groaned. “I’ve been so busy! But I’ll take care of it. Oh, hey, Jess, do you know if Lena likes dogs?”

“Loves them, but Kara, this is serious!”

“Okay, okay. I’m on it!”

She hung up and looked at Alex. “We really need to do something about Morgan Edge or Lena will really get herself killed. Do you think her mother would be willing to kidnap him? That got Max Lord out of our hair…”

“It’s worth a shot,” laughed Alex shakily.

Kara dialed Lena. “Hey, Lena. Jess tells me you’re going to see Morgan Edge.”

“We just left. No luck. I still think he’s behind these glyphs.”

“Lena, regardless of that, and I still think it was an Infernian, please, please, please promise me that you will not go visiting him unless I’m there with you. And preferably all of the DEO.”

“James was with me.”

“You say that as if a photographer was the equivalent of my sister.”

“He was part of the DEO. They trained him.”

“And is he currently carrying any DEO weapons with him?”

“Well, no…”

“I rest my case. Now, promise me.”

“Kara!”

“Promise me! I can’t lose you, Lena.”

“Fine. I promise.”

“And you need to come by to meet the dog.”

“Wait, what? You adopted a dog?”
“Not exactly. He’s my cousin’s dog. I’m just taking care of him for a while, but you will totally love him.”

“Okay, Kara, whatever you say…”

Kara hung up and looked at Alex. “Pizza?”

“God, yes!”

//

Sam looked in on Ruby as she slept and then dragged herself downstairs to do laundry. All week, she had just left her clothes in a pile on the floor of her bedroom and crawled into bed, getting up in the morning, and doing it all over again. So when she picked up her clothes, she was surprised at the smell. It didn’t smell like her. It smelled like smoke and ashes.

And why had she chosen in the week before Christmas, to wear all black every single day?

And why had she woken up every morning from dreams of fields on fire and the city burning?

Sam was beginning to think that she was losing her mind. She Googled "fugue state" and the definition sounded an awful lot what she feared she was doing, losing hours and coming home smelling of fire. Luckily, she was able to hide it from Ruby, convince the girl that she was simply overworking (which was true after all) and exhausted. But she didn't know how much longer she would be able to keep that up.

//

Lucy Lane marched into the command center of the DEO. "All right, Kara, what is this I’m hearing that you are talking about canceling your holiday party?"

Kara turned from the computer monitors and sighed. "Look at this, Lucy. Somebody, possibly an alien, is terrorizing National City, and using ancient Kryptonian glyphs to do it, all the while damaging private and public property. Between me, the fire department and the DEO, we are working overtime to figure out if this is just human high-jinks arson or alien terrorism arson, or hell, I don't know, maybe Cadmus is back, trying to make humans afraid of aliens. We don't have time for a party."

Lucy shook her head adamantly. "This is when we need parties most, Kara. That is why humans have holidays. Didn't you have holidays on Krypton?"

"Well, of course we did, but--"

"Holidays are times to remember the things that are important to us, not just as individuals but as communities. They remind us of hard times we've gotten through, or that our ancestors got through. They remind us that when things are at their worst, we need to build community and celebrate what we believe in."

"What I believe in is Rao, but this, this thing is the opposite of everything Rao is and stands for."

"Yeah, kiddo. I was talking about this with Maggie last night. What we believe in is a light in the darkness. That's what solstice is about, and it's pretty much why the ancient Christians chose to celebrate Christ's birth at Winter Solstice. This thing that is out there? Yeah, it's dark. And for a lot of people, you and your cousin are light. And for your friends? Hey, Sunshine Danvers, we believe in you, but you have to believe in yourself, and that means believing that the darkness can be fought."
"Who are you, Linus Van Pelt, and what have you done with my friend, Lucy Lane?"

"Hey, don't knock it. Did you ever notice that when Linus gets up to give his speech about the true meaning of Christmas, he does two things: He asks for a spotlight on himself and he drops his security blanket. Think about that."

Kara frowned. "I don't know what that means."

"Think on it. You'll figure it out. And you are having that party?"

"Yes, ma'am, Major Lane, ma'am!"

"Damn right."
Solstice Eve Happenings

James' followed Lena away from the towncar as she hurried toward an address on her phone. He groaned inwardly. Both as Guardian and as a DEO rookie agent, he had learned to dread going into the Warehouse District at night. That was where all the criminals just loved to hang out. Didn't matter if they were humans breeding aliens, humans forcing aliens to fight each other, aliens plotting against humans, or for that matter, even humans who never bothered thinking about aliens at all.

Hell, even Brian bought his weed there.

"Where exactly are we going?" asked James.

"I told you, this guy has access to Edge's bank records. If Edge has been buying technology that could make those Kryptonian marks, this could lead us to him."

"No, I mean, literally, where are we going?"

"James Olsen, are you scared? Don't worry. I'll protect you."

They turned a corner only to see a silo with the mark burning on it, and they stopped short, staring. A shot rang out and they both jumped and James yelled, "Move, move, move!"

Together they dodged behind the next building, and James tackled Lena to the ground as more shots flew over their heads, but Lena rolled and pulled out her Glock and just as their shooter showed himself, she squeezed off three bullets in a row and the man fell into a puddle. James pulled out his phone and called the NCPD. He pulled zipties from his jacket pocket--he might no longer be Guardian, but that didn't mean he was unprepared.

"Thank you for saving my life," he said.

"Yeah, thank God I was here. Don't worry, it's just my quarterly assassination attempt."

"Yeah, about that. Who the hell is this guy?"

"Probably works for Lex. Or Lillian. With Luthors the family holiday parties have less of the 'get drunk and have an argument' vibe and more of the 'hired killer is your Secret Santa' vibe. You get used to it."

He stared at her as she pushed herself off the ground, clicked the safety on her gun and stuck it back in her coat pocket.

"What?" she said.

//

After giving their statements to the police, Lena had her driver deliver James back to CatCo and then take her to L-Corp. She had taken to having the company holiday party on the Winter Solstice so as to cover all the possible holidays her employees celebrated, Jewish, Christian, Pagan, African-American, Saturnian and Valerian. The lobby of L-Corp was decorated for all the holidays, from red and green on one side, blue and white on another, and a psychedelic rainbow for the more alien side of the space.

As soon as she walked in, Jess hurried over to greet her, holding her tablet tight to her chest. "Ms.
Luthor! It was just on the news! Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Jess. You know I can take care of myself."

"And Mr. Olsen?"

"Yes, I took care of him too. I'm hardly going to let my newest acquisition's vice-CEO get killed if I can avoid it. Now, we need to meet and greet, and I am a little rusty on names."

"Yes, ma'am. We're all set, come join me at the hot cider bowl."

It had been Jess's idea, a few years back to have the employees line up to receive holiday greetings from Lena, kind of like those lines at weddings. Lena chatted briefly with each employee, calling them by name (this year with Jess at her elbow to prompt names of the new folks she hadn't learned yet) and giving them the holiday greeting of their choice. Lena truly enjoyed this process and her employees could tell, men and women both leaving her presence with a grin on their faces at the recognition of their contributions to the company and their, well, personhood. You could bet jacks to jelly donuts that Apple, Boeing and LordTech executives couldn't do such a thing and sure as hell wouldn't be bothered to try.

Lena knew that it was a little bit of an ego thing, showing off her brain to the very few people in the city who were almost guaranteed to appreciate the effort. But what the hell, she thought, if you got it? Flaunt it.

//

James Olsen spent the rest of his Solstice Eve at CatCo having a very different kind of evening as a CEO. He stood in his office watching the feeds illustrate the range of the strange glyph's presence inside and outside the city, including the Warehouse District silo where he and Lena had just been attacked.

"Okay, people. I know Christmas is just around the corner, but we got some breaking news. We're going to have to pull some people in. We need eyewitness accounts. We need a report on the City Council's press conference. Crime, I need you to talk to NCPD, see if they've initiated any lockdown procedures for government buildings, riot control on city holiday events. Guys, we need information. Get to it!"

As the reporters and editors dispersed, all James could think of was Lena Luthor rolling out of his protective arms and squeezing off three shots at their attacker, pulling herself to her feet, neither flustered nor out of breath. That was, Luthor or no, one damn fine woman.

//

Agent Vasquez hadn't slept since Alex had returned, and she was decidedly cranky. Winn did his best to mollify her, bringing her Noonan's coffee in the morning when they discovered they were out of J'onn's special-ordered Columbian brew in the command breakroom, handling other agents who wanted to get her approval on things without actually having to face her, and generally manning the feeds even when she marched out while still on duty, presumably, he thought, to lose her cool, as Maggie would have said.

It was unlike Vasquez to be this out of control, but from what Winn had been able to figure out from watching Kara and Alex, she had good reason.

To be honest, he was shocked. He had noted that Vasquez's computer search history (which, yes, he hacked, but it was for a good cause) included queries about White Canary, Earth One, Sarah Lance,
and Earth X. He wasn't dumb. He recognized a beautiful woman when he saw one, read up on her history as a certified badass, and could tell that this was the sort of woman (perhaps the only sort) that might have been able to seduce Alex Danvers.

And he had been to difficult weddings before, himself single and depressed, and everybody could make a mistake now and then, even an earth-shattering one, when they were being sad and stupid. Even Alex, who was his hero.

So he kept his head down, and ran point so agents could avoid crossing Vasquez and he listened in while Alex called Clark and left him a message about kryptonite. And Winn remembered the pink kryptonite incident and how he had kissed James. And he told himself that, especially at this festive time of year, it was absolutely better not to judge.

//

Jess Huang handed Lena a bottle of water as the last employee shook her hand, grinning, and wandered off to the open bar.

"This is fun," said Lena. "Too bad I could never pull this off at CatCo. I read the stalkerbook every night and I still barely have a quarter of the staff memorized."

"I think it would be less important there, ma'am. They're used to Cat Grant who never remembered anybody's name right on principle. She called Ms. Danvers Keira for years and generally either called Winn 'Witt,' 'Will,' or 'the hobbit.'"

Lena stared. "Huh. He is a little like that. I mean, very Frodo and capable despite what people tend to think when they look at him. But I know that Kara and James both think the world of him."

"Be careful, Ms. Luthor," Jess warned. "James might just possibly have a crush on you."

"What? That's insane. He knows I'm queer as a three dollar bill!"

"Nevertheless," Jess said staunchly.

"And you know this how? Ah, Eve. Of course. Hmm. Interesting. But seriously, Jess, James has never trusted me because of Lex, and lately I think he kind of hates me because I've been stepping on his toes."

"Lena, I am an expert in straight men. They are inexplicable."

"Well, then I shall bow to your superior knowledge and be guided by your wisdom. Thank you, Jess. For this--" she gestured to the room, "and for everything, especially this fall, with all the changes. Oh! That's right. I have something for you." Lena hugged her and gave her a small box saying, "Open it later, after the party. It's not much, just a tiny token to say thank you, Jess, for, well, being you, and being my friend and the best personal assistant a woman could ever have, and taking care of my baby here."

"What, you mean L-Corp? But I'm not taking care of it. Sam is."

Lena raised The Eyebrow. "Jess, she's the CFO, so yeah, that's not chopped liver. But you are the Admin who pretty much holds the damn company together whether I'm here or not. Don't think I don't know that. And as for James, thank you for letting me know. I will take care of that problem. Meanwhile, well, Merry Christmas, Jess."

"Merry Christmas, Ms. Luthor. And God bless us, every one."
“From your mouth to Rao’s ears,” muttered Lena as she walked away, and thought that Jess didn’t hear.

And later on, when Jess opened the box and found the keys to a Tesla and an address about a block from her condo that she knew was a parking garage, Jess—who knew Lena very well indeed—once again marveled at what the woman thought was a "tiny" token of her esteem.
Growing up with the Luthors, Christmas was always a mixed bag for Lena. On the one hand, she always got dressed up and trotted out to perform for company. On the other hand, she got really good presents, mostly from her father and Lex. The year she was twelve, Lionel gave her ice skates, Lex gave her a chemistry set, and Lillian mostly ignored her. So, basically, it was the best Christmas ever.

After Lex’s breakdown and imprisonment, Lena had spent holidays behind her desk with a glass of wine, largely ignoring the idea of celebration outside of giving her employees a party and time off to be with their loved ones.

Suddenly, this year, for the first time in how long? Lena had loved ones of her own, not just Kara, but the whole superfamily: Alex and Vasquez, Winn and James, J’onn and M’gann, a smattering of DEO agents, Jess, Eve, Maggie, Lucy, even someone named Pam that Lena wasn’t clear about. And Sam. And Ruby.

Also, a little white dog who was happily shedding on Lena’s green dress as she sat on the couch “supervising” while the others decorated Kara’s loft with tinsel and colored lights and cut-out snowflakes. Lena knew that Kara expected Clark to come to the party too, in part to take the dog (who Kara kept referring to as Krypto even though she expected Clark to name him himself) back to Metropolis. Lena knew that Kara didn’t want to give Krypto up, as he had wiggled himself into her heart about as effectively as he had wiggled into Lena’s lap, demanding that she give him an endless belly rub (hence her supervisory role).

The tree was strung with lights but had no decorations, as Kara had asked them each to bring a decoration that would stand for them or their relationship with her. But that ceremony would come later. Meanwhile, Lena sat back and watched them.

She watched Winn explaining Star Wars to M’yrrn. J’onn just shook his head and muttered, “I could use a drink.”

Alex jumped up, said, “Good idea!” and immediately pulled out a dozen mugs and started making cocoa. J’onn frowned at her and shared a look with James, who got him a glass of wine and was rewarded with a nod of thanks. Lena wondered about James, given what Jess had said about him apparently having a crush on her suddenly, after being one of her most vocal opponents for months last year.

The doorbell rang and Kara ran for the door, letting in Vasquez, Chen and a tall woman that Kara introduced to Lena as her aunt, Astra. “Oh,” said Lena. “Are you Eliza’s sister?”

The woman’s eyebrow rose. “No.”

Lena knew all about eyebrows—none better—and this eyebrow was telling her that she was very probably an idiot. “Oh, so, Jeremiah?”

“Hardly.”

Kara said, “Lena, she is my actual aunt. From back home.”

“I thought you died,” said Lena.

“I did,” replied Astra blandly. “It didn’t take.”
Alex called her over to help with the cocoa, and Kara murmured, “Astra doesn’t like dogs.”


James and Winn were arguing about Guardian (again).

“I’m just saying,” said James, “I think vigilante justice is legitimate. Somebody has the capacity to help, it’s good for everybody.”

Winn shook his head. “You do realize that the word legitimate comes from the same word as legal? By definition, vigilantes are extra-legal and unregulated. Vigilante justice, a misnomer by the way, is precisely the reason a lot of criminals have been able to get out of being held. Lena, you agree with me, right?”

Lena glanced at Kara. “It’s about accountability, really. Superman and Supergirl work with their respective police forces, and work very hard to weigh the safety of criminals and citizens. They are not in a lot of danger. But a human vigilante, like that Guardian fellow, he could easily get himself killed.”

James frowned. Holtzmann came over and handed him a cup of eggnog. “Poltergeists are way easier. They don’t have rights, just ectoplasm.”

//

Vasquez stood off to the side of the loft, near the drinks table, counting the moments until she could decently leave. Agent Chen was drunkenly explaining to Astra about the difference between evergreen and mistletoe and Astra was frowning dangerously, but Chen didn’t seem to notice. “Ya see, the mistletoe is the one you kiss under, and it has berries, and for every berry you pluck off another kiss, wait, no, the opposite.”

Lucy said, “Hey, Chen you realize you’re standing under it with Astra, right?”

But Astra grabbed Alex, saying, “I would only kiss a true warrior” and she kissed Alex very thoroughly. Vasquez turned away, so she didn’t actually witness Lucy and Maggie “volunteering” to kiss Astra too, though she knew they were doing it to make the whole thing feel like more of a joke. Holtzy grabbed Eve and asked if she could plant one on her.

Eve giggled nervously. “Um? I’m straight?”


So Eve laughingly agreed and looked thoughtful afterwards. And Pam from HR noticed this and moved in.

Vasquez felt sick. And very, very alone.

J’onn handed Vasquez a beer. “You aren’t wearing the psychic disruptor…”

“No, sir. It’s at the DEO.”

“Step out on the balcony with me?”

She followed him out on the narrow balcony, where the evening breeze was cold.

He said, “I know something happened between you and Alex. I know you are both experiencing considerable distress about it. If there is anything I can do, let me know.”
“Thanks. But some problems don’t have solutions.”

“Well, then, give it time. Sometimes that can help. And this advice comes from three hundred years of experience.”

“Yes, sir. Thank you.”

She stepped gratefully back into the warmth of the apartment to see Clark Kent and Lois Lane hugging the Danvers sisters. Lois handed Kara a large box tied with a red ribbon. Clark handed Alex what looked like a suitcase, except possibly the kind that held ordinance. Odd.

Krypto jumped off Lena's lap and ran to Clark, barking happily and Clark looked confused and uncomfortable. Kara looked unhappy. Alex looked angry. Lena looked unsurprised, as, frankly, was Vasquez. She hadn't had the heart to tell Kara that Clark might not want to take on a puppy he didn't remember, especially not in a cramped Metropolis apartment, and with all of the other... things... going on, it had been impossible for her to give Alex a heads up. On the other hand, Alex didn't really look surprised, just pissed off at Clark. Yes, Alex loved Clark. Yes, she thought he smelled nice (to be fair, he did). But she had never forgiven him for abandoning Kara. It was one of the things Vasquez loved about her.

One of many things.

Vasquez had had plans for their first Christmas together: ice-skating and cocoa and a romantic dinner, a little wine...

And that was when Vasquez noticed that Alex was only drinking cocoa and Sprite, all evening.
Alex and Kara stood in the kitchenette, watching their friends interact. Kara picked up the Kraken dark rum, and Alex took the cookies they had made and they brought them to the desert table, where Jeremiah's mother's punch bowl was serving as an eggnog bowl.

"As parties go," said Kara with the Crinkle, "this one doesn't suck, right?" She added some rum to the eggnog.

Alex set down the cookies. "No, it's great. It is. I mean, I'm, well, you know. But how about you? Have you and Lena talked?"

"Er, not for a while, but I asked her to stay over tonight, and she said yes, so... good?"

There was a knock on the door. Alex strode over and opened the door to see Ruby Arias standing there in her winter coat and earmuffs, alone.

"Hey, is everything okay?"

Then Sam came running down the hall, "Sorry! I'm late, I know! It's been a really long day, but I got the cookies." She held them up as evidence.

"No worries," laughed Alex. "Come on in."

Sam set all her bags down, never stopping for breath, while Ruby took off her coat and took her mother's. "Christmas shopping, conference call with some unpleasant men who were yelling at me in German and then Ruby told me about the cookies which I forgot and then the Italian bakery that I really like was closed, so I, you know, you get these."

Alex laughed again. "Okay, it sounds like somebody needs to take a break, and maybe have a drink. Or two..."

Sam took a breath. "Yeah..."

Alex took Ruby by the arm and led her over to the couch, saying, "Did I ever tell you that I work with Supergirl sometimes?"

Ruby grinned, "Okay, I have four questions."

Over her shoulder, Alex murmured to Sam, "I'm pretty sure Lena opened the good stuff."

Sam mouthed, "Thank you!"

As they settled on the couch, Ruby asked, "Okay, one, has Supergirl ever flown you anywhere, and two, if so, how was it? And three--"

"Yes, yes, she has. She has flown me many times. In fact, last year, she caught me when I jumped out of a skyscraper, during a shootout!"

"Okay, I have more questions!" Her eyes sparkled with excitement.

Alex was used to multi-tasking, so she kept answering Ruby's questions even while she tracked the other conversations taking place in the loft.
Lena sat at the kitchen island, Winn having taking over Krypto-Belly-Rubbing duty while he regaled a real spaceman with a fictional space story. Lena immediately poured Sam two fingers of good scotch, saying, "Are you okay? You look a little pale."

"Thanks. Yeah, I'm just tired. Not enough hours, I guess."

Lena glanced over to James, and Sam noticed, saying, "You know if you wanted, you could just pull James Olsen underneath the mistletoe and plant a big kiss--"

"James? Don't be ridiculous, Sam. Gold star lesbian here, remember? Though Jess has warned me that he seems to have a crush on me, out of nowhere, after slamming me for being a Luthor for the last year and a half. What is it with men?"

"Right, right! Lesbian! I knew that! See, that's exactly how tired I am! Forget my own head next! And yeah, testosterone is a mystery--"

Alex frowned and she realized that Ruby had stopped talking and was watching her mother with worry. "She’s been forgetting a lot of things lately, like how I like my peanut butter sandwich. I mean, I haven't eaten jelly since I was four! I’m worried about her."

And Alex saw that Sam was very clearly trying to cover for her mistake with Lena, who was also clearly too tired to notice, when otherwise the Luthor would surely have noted the unusual behavior. But then the scotch bottle was half empty only a few hours into the party and Alex had not been helping Lena drink it so...

"I don't know, Ruby. Maybe she really is just tired?"

"Well, but isn't that the sort of thing that happens when people drink too much? She sleeps in really late on the weekend and can't remember conversations we've had..."

And Alex thought back to her college days and frowned. "I doubt it's anything that serious, Ruby, but just keep paying attention, and if anything else happens, something more conclusive? You call me." She pulled out her card case and gave Ruby one of her "FBI" cards. "Day or night."

"Thanks, Agent Danvers."

"You bet, kiddo. Hey have you met Winn yet? He's worked with Lena on some pretty cool tech projects. Also, he's a huge Star Wars nerd... And that is my sister's new puppy, Krypto."

"Whoa! A puppy! I've always wanted a puppy, but we always lived in apartments until now, and now Mom is..." She trailed off.

Alex signaled her sister, who grinned and came over.

"You named him Krypto?" gushed Ruby. "Is that like for Krypton? I have a pair of Supergirl pajamas!"

"So do I," laughed Kara. "C'mon. Let me introduce you to him."

And Alex slipped back to check in on Sam and Lena.

//

Krypto recognized Kal-El’s smell, even though there was something different about it. and besides, Kal-El had been only a puppy just days before. Krypto jumped up to lick his master's face, wagging
his tail madly, barking excitedly.

Kal-El said, "Under! Not to stand! Under, small-cat!"

Kara corrected him. "Down, Krypto! Don't jump on Kal!"

How could Kal-El have grown to adulthood and forgotten how to speak Language in only a few days? What were those meaningless noises Kara and Kal-El were speaking to each other? A woman who smelled like Kal-El bent down and scratched him behind the ears when Kal-El pulled away, and petted him in a friendly way, but she was not the one he wanted. Suddenly the two of them were leaving, and Krypto's tail drooped.

Astra came over and growled at him, and he backed away until he backed into Scruffy's legs.

Scruffy, sounding pleased, scooped him up onto his lap, murmuring, "Come with me, small wolf. Who is one good small wolf? Do not let it concern all of you that Kal-El is not has love for small wolf. Kara Zor-El has love for small wolf. Friend of Hills has love for small wolf! Small wolf has a stomach-diminutive to be brushed? Rubbed? Friend of Hills possess memory bad! Kryptonese difficult!"

And this was not exactly Language, at least not the way Kara (good Kara!) and Astra (bad Astra!) spoke it, or even the way Whistler or Warm-Hands-and-Beautiful-Voice spoke it, but Krypto was learning to stretch himself. Still, as he looked around the room from on his back (because of the belly-rubbing), all the people were upside down and half of them smelled very sad.

He sat up in Scruffy's lap and licked his face, which was smoother now for some reason, and he looked around at the upside-up people, sniffing for those smells they made because they didn't have tails to speak with.

Kara and Salty both smelled like they were going to cry again, as did Whistler, and for some reason, Warm-Hands-and-Beautiful-Voice, and the woman who smelled a little bit like Bad Astra! except with a burned smell also. And how was he going to lick everyone’s faces?

But then, just as he thought that, the strange unmelodic sounds that had been pouring into the atmosphere above him changed to what sounded familiar, like an actual Song from home. He raised his head to join in the singing.

//

Throughout the evening, Winn had been in charge of the music, since he had volunteered. And although J'onn had forced him to play "Jingle Bell Rock" until the entire DEO was ready to strangle somebody (and let's face it, Winn would be easier to strangle than the Martian Manhunter), Kara had chosen not to intervene. As long as there were at least three or four other songs in between the repetitions, Supergirl did not need to protect one or threaten the other, which was a good thing, given that it was supposed to be a happy, festive party.

But then the music shifted and Krypto had raised his head and begun to howl... along to the Christmas carol. The room went still. Kara turned back to the kitchenette and picked up the ornament of an open newspaper, raised it above her head, and began to sing as she walked over to the Christmas tree and settled it between two branches.

It came upon a midnight clear
That glorious song of old
When angels bending near the Earth
To touch their harps of gold...

J’onn smiled and pulled a Marvin the Martian ornament from his cargo pocket and hung it from one branch. Holtzy hung a Ghostbuster’s ghost (with a "Do Not" red circle) from another branch.

Peace on the earth, good will to men,
From heaven's all gracious King!
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing.

Sam looked flustered, as if she had forgotten, but Ruby had used red and blue construction paper to create a Kryptonian pentagon with an R in the place of Supergirl’s red S, and she hung it on a branch near the windows. James pulled out a camera ornament and hung it near the couch.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world hath suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong.

Vasquez hung an enamel seal of the Marines eagle, earth and anchor.

And man, at war with man, hears not
The love song which they bring:
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing.

Winn added the last of the blue and white dreidels from the DEO decorations.

O ye beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow:

Alex hung a small red surfboard covered with white snowflakes.

Look now, for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing;
Oh, rest beside the weary road
And hear the angels sing.

Lena hung a small gold sun near the top of the tree.

Oh rest beside the weary road

And hear

the angels

sing.
Chapter Summary

A little bit more angst before we work our way back to something better.

Eventually the party wound down: the boys left, the Martians left, Eve, Pam and Jess shared a Lyft with Jess murmuring something to Lena about paperwork still to fill out. Alex didn't pay much attention as she helped Kara wash the glasses, rinse out bottles for recycling, and empty the trash.

Kara hugged Maggie and Lucy as they left and then protested as Alex pulled the two full trashbags to the door to bring them down to the building's trashbins. Vasquez intervened, saying, "I'll help," and taking one of the bags, to Alex's surprise.

They proceeded to the back stairs in silence, Alex's heart hammering in her chest. Out back, they heaved the bags into the bins and then turned to face each other.

"Maybe you should come get your stuff tonight," said Vasquez. "I'll drive you."

"Pfft. I can take my bike. It's just my running shoes, after all."

Vasquez stared. "It's a lot more than that. I'll drive."

Back in Kara's loft, they helped Kara and Lena encourage Krypto to go to bed in the dog bed Winn had bought, but Krypto curled up in the exact center of Kara's bed instead, ignoring all their commands in Kryptonese.

Alex said, "Lena, I'm pretty sure that your accent is better than mine."

Lena blushed. "I'm good with languages. Once you speak four or five, adding one more isn't all that hard."

Alex frowned at Vasquez, muttering, "I speak five languages!"

"Yeah," said Vasquez, "but Kryptonese is your second, not your fifth."

It didn't really mean anything, but Alex took some comfort in it. She noted the sad look Kara gave them as they left and Lena's confused expression. So at least Kara was keeping Alex's shameful secret from her girlfriend. That was something. She really wanted to keep Lena's respect a little longer, even if she didn't deserve it.

Vasquez drove in silence, frowning, but that didn't really mean much, as her resting bitch face was one of the things that Alex loved about her most.

One of many things.

They entered the apartment and Vasquez dropped her keys in the copper bowl by the door with a clang. She was more careful depositing her Glock in her bedside table, while Alex fetched her pajamas from under the pillow on "her" side of the bed, sticking them in her messenger bag along with her running shoes and leather jacket. She went and stood by the door awkwardly.
Vasquez frowned, perplexed. "What about the rest of your stuff?"

"What stuff?"

Vasquez pulled three paperbacks from her bookshelves and stacked them into a large empty boot box. "And your East of Eli and Indigo Girls CDs. And don't forget John Denver and the Muppets Christmas. And your reading glasses. And your toothbrush and that cinnamon toothpaste. And your Supergirl facecloth. And your Tabasco sauce."

It all went into the box.

Alex stared in surprise.

Vasquez said, "And there's probably more in the bathroom: mascara, earrings, things like that."

"Wow. I didn't think I'd set down any roots here, not like you have at my place!"

Vasquez said nothing for a moment, long enough for Alex to question what her own statement meant. Finally, Vasquez took her by the arm and led her to the couch.

"Alex, listen. I've been giving this a lot of thought. I had assumed when first you came out that you and I would never be a thing, yes, in part because we're colleagues and in part because of what Maggie said."

"But you said you didn't agree!"

"I didn't. I still think I did the right thing, taking you on. If nobody is going to be a baby dyke's first girlfriend, she's never going to have a second either. That's not fair to anybody. But I do have friends who have argued the other side. Peterson from dodgeball told me from the beginning that you were going to break my heart, and she's been around a while."

Absently, Vasquez held Alex's left hand, drawing Alex's attention to both their Claddagh rings.

"See," said Vasquez quietly. "I'm not just your first girlfriend. I'm your first real relationship. You don't know what the rest of the non-Vasquez world is even like."

"I don't want to know," Alex said in a small voice.

"But you found out anyway. White Canary is just one datapoint, to be sure, but still."

"I won't do that again."

"No. I don't think you would," said Vasquez. "But maybe it would be better if you did. Get out there. Meet some other women. See what it's like, what they're like compared to me. What you are like when you're with them."

Tears trickled from Alex's eyes and she wiped them away, smudging her mascara. "But I don't want anyone else. And I wouldn't have the first clue about how to date or attract or even talk to--"

"I've seen you at the Amphipolis. I've seen you be sultry."

"But I don't want to be sultry. I want to be Alex!"

This time it was Vasquez's turn for tears. She shook her head. "Then hand out with the DEO's nerd scientists. Hell, date Holtzy. I bet that would be a wild ride. Or go back to dodgeball. Or all of the above."
"What about you?"

"Well," she sighed. "If you date, I'll date. We'll both be taking chances."

"Is that what you want?"

"Not really. But I do think it would be best."

"I don't know what to do..."

"Let me drive you home. Sleep on it. We can talk again later."

And how Alex managed to hold back the tears as she clung to the box in the car, she never knew. Because once she was home, alone, lying in bed, clinging to Vasquez's Grumpy dwarf t-shirt, she sobbed.
Post-Party Karlena, SuperCorp

Chapter Notes

Refers to my Season One fic about the Red K, Falling Into Fire.

Lena poured herself another glass of scotch, suddenly thoughtful. As a scientist, she was a trained observer, attentive to details. All evening, she had observed the superfriends and family tiptoe around Vasquez and Alex, and Kara crinkling her brow. Something unexpected was clearly wrong.

She watched Alex and Vasquez bring the trash downstairs, a chore they had often done together at the end of game nights, but then it was often with a look like they needed to discuss DEO business in private. Or, possibly, neck. This did not look like that.

After the two left, Kara sat down next to Lena and rested her head on Lena's shoulder.

"So," said Lena. "Something happened between those two and you can't discuss it."

Kara sighed.

"And it's probably Alex, quite likely during your dangerous offworld mission, because that fits the timing."

Kara sighed again.

"And I've been to difficult weddings and made some... dubious... choices."

Kara looked surprised and adjusted her glasses. "You have?"

Lena shrugged. "I was... a little wild when I first came out. Tried being a bad girl after so many years of trying to toe the Luthor family line. I got a little scandalous. There might have been some... pictures. Lionel took care of it, and then Lex talked some sense into me."

"So just youthful indiscretions. Well, yes, Alex did stuff like that too, when she was in the closet and--" Kara stopped short.

Lena finished for her. "And not in a relationship with someone she loves and respects?"

Kara hung her head.

Lena put her hand on Kara's arm. "Here's the thing, Kara. It's one thing if Alex feels guilty. Guild is just acknowledging that what you did is wrong. Just don't let her feel ashamed. Shame is feeling like you are wrong. And nobody should feel like that, but queer folks often do. That's the padlock on the closet door."

"Did you feel ashamed?"

"Of course. Because of Lillian mostly. Luckily, Lex was there for me, and eventually Lionel. And Lex of all people taught me about safe sex and consent. Crazy, in retrospect. Then I eventually figured myself out."
Kara nodded slowly. "Before I met you, I did some things. Max Lord invented red kryptonite, which brought out my worst side, and all the things I had buried. I think I told you about this once..."

"You did."

"And what you said made me feel less ashamed. I mean, I didn't tell you the details, so you couldn't know how bad it really was, but you gave me perspective on it, I guess."

"Kara, I know all the details."

"Well, sure the destruction of property, and O Rao, what I did to Cat Grant--"

"Yes, darling, all that was in the papers. But the other thing? The woman you slept with?"

"Oh, that's right, I did tell--"

"No, you didn't tell me everything. I know because I was there."

Kara stared. "But you couldn't have been. You lived in Metropolis!"

"I was scouting for real estate for L-Corp and a condo for me, a host of details. And one night I went to a bar for a few drinks to unwind. And there I met a woman who transfixed me. And I brought her back to my hotel. And the first night, things got... interesting. And the second night, they got out of hand."

Kara's jaw dropped. "It was you?" she whispered. "But I made you bleed!"

"Yes, dear, you did. But I would say that both you-you and Supergirl-you have made it up to me since. Because the getting out of control was not good. But you, Kara, you are good. So yes, guilt is appropriate. Shame is not."

The moment was broken by the sound of paws on the wooden floor and then the sound of someone lapping water out of a bowl. Krypto looked up and then ran over to them, all sleepy puppy limbs and took three tries to jump up on the couch and into their laps. Kara wished him holiday greetings in Kryptonese and Lena called him an extraordinarily good wolf, whose eyes outshone the lights of the city of Argo.

"Lena!" said Kara, "have you been reading Kryptonese poetry?"

"Um, no? Maybe? Just the short ones..."

"The five-pages long sentence short ones?"

"Um, yes. I might have to make charts to keep track of which nouns are being modified in which ways..."

"Yeah, I did that too in school. When Alex showed me Shakespearian sonnets, I actually laughed."

Krypto nudged their hands with his nose, as the joint belly-rub had slowed to a halt. They resumed.

"You know," said Kara. "I haven't actually looked at my lease, to see whether dogs are allowed... I really thought that Clark would be thrilled..."

"I'm sorry it worked out that way. Well, sort of sorry. I mean, he seems to like me. Probably hasn't figured out what a Luthor is yet..."
"But Lena comes from Helena, doesn't it? Or Elaine? Don't they mean light? Isn't that why you chose a sun to represent you on my tree?"

"Oh! No, I was thinking about our relationship, about you. You are my sunshine, Kara."

Kara fidgeted with her glasses with one hand while continuing to rub Krypto's belly with the other.

Lena laughed. "The great wordsmith is struck dumb! Well, if I'm going to make you speechless, I ought to do it all at once. I am pretty sure that my condo building is okay with dogs, so if yours isn't, he can stay with me."

"But what if it isn't okay?"

Lena shrugged. "If I have to, I'll buy out the other owners."

Krypto jumped up and licked her face quite thoroughly.
Who Decides on Justice?

Maggie Sawyer had always been intuitive. So when, during the holiday parties at the DEO, Alex had pulled her aside and asked if she had been getting any ziptied early Christmas presents lately, she put two and two together and got a six-foot plus tall frustrated CEO-turned vigilante, which surprised her, because the vibe she had been getting from James on the rare times when she saw him lately was very different than it had been the previous year. She didn't get the feeling that he resented CatCo. Much the opposite. If anything, it seemed more like he was throwing himself into CatCo body and soul.

And at first, Maggie had assumed that this behavior had something to do with not letting down Cat Grant twice. But gradually, she noted that the handsome man was starting to look at Lena Luthor the way he used to look at Kara Danvers. Well, to be honest, the way Lena Luthor still looked at Kara Danvers.

And that was not going to end well.

So she kept an ear out, mentioned a few things to friends on the force and a few others who were also first responders who might be likely to hear about more Guardian antics if James was in fact actually acting out again. One of her friends from the NCPD regulars questioned the interest of a Science Division detective, but Maggie just shrugged. "We never did find out who it was. I'm still thinking the guy was an alien. I want to make sure we cover all our bases."

And then the news was increasingly full of the One-Seven Gang, National City's homegrown drug dealers, who were dragging the drug trade from Star City and Opal City. Just the week before, Snapper Carr had personally reported about the problems of National City's high school students getting hooked on drugs in recent months. At least seven overdose deaths had been reported.

Maggie's captain had said, "If it isn't alien, it isn't Science Division," which Maggie knew to be simply good policy, but it irked her just the same. As far as she was concerned, underaged kids ODing on drugs was just self-administered murder, and she was a homicide detective down to her bones. So when there was a call for a portside sweep in support of the Narcotics Division, she convinced her captain to let her on board, just in case, as so often happened, aliens were involved. They never had found the source of the drugs that had left that Infernian raging out of control at the DEO, and from what Alex and Lucy had said, there was a good chance that those arcane symbols were being burned by an Infernian--well, it could also have been a Kryptonian, it wasn't like laser vision was that common, but they were pretty sure all of the last sons and daughters of Krypton were accounted for.

So.

So that was how Maggie and her partner Reynolds found themselves sitting in their unmarked car, swigging coffee out of a thermos and complaining about the sudden cold spell that was taking Californians by surprise.

Reynolds tied his scarf tighter, growling, "The only good thing about the dusting of snow is at least my kids got a sorta white Christmas. But the drivers can't drive fer shit in this. And cancelling school? Shit. I grew up in Metropolis. An inch and a half is nothin'."

Maggie nodded. "I grew up in Nebraska, dude. If I could see over the snowdrifts, we had school."

"Yeah, well. If you could see over the snowdrifts it was probably only six inches anyway!"
"Ha, very ha."

"Sorry, Mags. My wife made me promise to stop ragging you about your height as one of my New Years resolutions."

"I may have to bake Lizzie some cookies..."

"She'd really love--"

There was a loud zapping sound and high above them, a flash of light followed by darkness.

"What's that?" asked Maggie. "A power outage?"

"You think?"

Over the car radio, they heard the Narcs going in hot.

"Should we engage?" asked Reynolds.

"We hold the perimeter. If we see someone slipping through the noose or we see an actual alien, then--"

And someone or something flew above them at superpeed, rocking the car.

"Aw, shit!" said Reynolds.

//

The darkness had been growing gradually, taking shape slowly, the way blood pools beneath a body where no one can see it until it is far too late.

The darkness was like that, warm and damp, the gatherings of a thousand drops from a thousand cuts: slow, gradual death, the kind that judgment demanded.

Mostly it had grown in silence. But from time to time a sound would come quivering through another electronic feed. Television screens showed fields burning and the bodies of children in shooting wars abroad and drug wars at home.

Home. These things were happening here at home. The buzzing started small and quiet, and only when a screen was lit up. But gradually, the noise of a thousand mosquitoes swarmed in and out at any time of day, and especially at night, too loud to ignore, carrying a message, carrying an impulse.

The fires were meant to keep the noise at bay, destroy the insects, bring back peace and quiet, something warm and dry.

For a while, that worked.

But lately, the darkness was growing again, taking shape.

Slowly, it was becoming a body no one could see in the darkness until it was far too late.

And blood was pooling in the light of all of the fires.

//

By the time Maggie and Reynolds got to the part of the dock underneath the electrical outage, four
bodies were already splayed on the ground. On the scaffolding above them Maggie saw a dark figure trading blows with an armored figure. Guardian? But who was he fighting?

And then the dark figure shot Guardian with laser vision and flew away.

Holy shit.
The Gathering Storm

J'onn gathered the folders his agents had prepared for him, including the accountants, and made his way to the teleconference room. Since the Federal Emergency Management Agency had become the Federal Emergency & Alien Management Agency, the money to cover damages caused by extraterrestrials was no longer solely covered on a metropolitan basis—which, naturally, led to the DEO having to request funds from the Senate Appropriations Committee. At least they let him do it from a distance. Flying to and from DC, whether as a Martian or as a cramped passenger in business class, was on his list of least favorite things to do, along with fighting White Martians, listening psychically to his agents fantasize about each other, and singing karaoke.

Somewhere on that list was also Christmas shopping (and at least that was over for another year; he hoped that Holtzman appreciated the Society of Women Engineers annual New Year's joke mug with the suspenders folded up inside: lavender with small pink hippos on them. Obviously, Winn had helped), quitting smoking (which he had done in the 1980s, 90s and 2000s before it finally took), and rounding up flying cats and explaining the sudden need for litter box cleaning in the alien containment space in the budget: aerial repository processing; well, having been a bureaucrat for three centuries had taught him that he was nothing if not creative. (As Vasquez would say, "Yes, sir. Just run with it, sir.")

"Director Henshaw," said the head of the Committee, a Senator Russell. "Glad you could make it. What is this we understand about a new alien villain in your neck of the woods?"

"Yes, Senator, we are still investigating the exact identity and species, but the damage is already extensive."

"But nothing in the news definitively suggests that these glyphs are in fact being perpetrated by aliens. Perhaps you could run through your alleged evidence..."

Yes, thought J'onn while opening the files. I would rather be singing karaoke to White Martians. "Well, Senator, to start with..."

//

M'gann never cared the winter holidays. All the feel-good media focused on love and family tended to make the alien refugees bitter, and when you added alien alcohol to the mix, it often led them to spend their downtime punching each other rather than giving each other less violent gifts, so she always spent the evenings breaking up fights and kicking people out early. Still, even with all of the increase in aliens in National City with the cleanup and restoration of the urban infrastructure, and the increased drinking that that had encouraged, she was still out a pretty penny from damages inflicted on the bar and on her condo across town. So she couldn't exactly turn away custom.

And anyway, it wasn't like she couldn't break some heads if she needed to. But when Maggie Sawyer ambled into the bar, M'gann wasn't above giving the detective a beer on the house. She didn't even need to do anything for it. Simply her presence at the bar was enough to dissuade all but the most bellicose from acting out.

Maggie nodded her understanding and took a small table in the middle of the bar where everyone would see her. M'gann joined her with a club soda. "What's up, detective?"

"Why does something have to be up? Can't a girl-- Ah, right. Psychic."
"Sorry. But you're a little loud tonight, even compared to this riffraff."

"Gotcha. Okay, I'll make this quick. Do you know of any new Infernians in town? Or, as hard as this is to imagine, Kryptonians? Somebody with laser vision?"

M'gann stared. "The only new Kryptonians are an aunt and a dog, from what I've seen. I haven't seen any new Infernians. I'd remember. They can't help but heat up their drinks with their hands."

"So I've heard." She stared off into space, absently nodded to the aliens who grudgingly acknowledged her presence. "But what does that leave us with?"

M'gann traced circles on the tabletop. "You know that J'onn got me into reading Sherlock Holmes?"

"Of course he did. 'Once you have eliminated the impossible, whatever is left must be the answer?' Isn't that how it goes?"

"Something like that. All I'm saying is take another look at Kara's aunt."

"Yeah, thing is, I just watched this person fight off Guardian."

"Um, our... Guardian?"

"Looked like it, as bizarre as that sounds. Now I had just gotten transferred to National City when Non and Astra started their reign of terror. And I wasn't in the Science Division at the time. But since last year, when I... um..."

"Started getting to know the family?"

"Yeah. That. I started watching surveillance videos, news clips. Astra is big. And she doesn't do capes."

M'gann chuckled. "No capes," she said with a Baltic accent.

"Great, so you've seen The Incredibles. The thing is, capes are one of those things when it comes to superheroes especially. The villains don't tend to worry about that. But heroes always want to seem on the side of the angels. This... person? I couldn't tell, male or female. They were wearing black on a dark night, but I'd swear that they were shorter than Guardian."

"So... not Astra, not Superman. Um, is there any chance some of Max Lord's red kryptonite could have...?"

"Aw, fuck," muttered Maggie.

"Okay, so don't answer this even if you can, not out loud to me, because I totally don't need to know. But, um, how close of an eye does the DEO keep on Kara? Can they guarantee that she couldn't have been there?"

Maggie tipped back her beer and swallowed. "I don't know the answers to those questions, but I do know who does. But they are not going to like hearing me ask."

M'gann gave her a rueful half smile. "On the upside? Pretty sure you didn't see the dog in that fight."

//

Ruby gagged down her serving of Mrs. Queller's casserole and then ran to watch the Channel 7 News, an action so unlike her that Mrs. Queller insisted on joining her. The opening story about the
city council's decision to change the zoning laws around the harborside and the port warehouse district led, and at first Ruby was disappointed, until she saw a clip of Morgan Edge arguing that the zoning change was decades overdue.

Ruby didn't like Edge. Hell, even Mrs. Queller referred to him as "that man! such a slimy creature!" That raised her in Ruby's esteem about a quarter inch. But then there was breaking news about the One-Seven drug gang being slaughtered by a pair of vigilantes: Guardian and one that no one in National City had seen before. The few shots of the caped figure were dark and blurry. But there was something about them that ate away at Ruby as she finished her homework and went upstairs to her room, where she texted with her friends without entirely paying much attention to the three simultaneous threads she was following.

When Mrs. Queller came upstairs, Ruby assumed that it was her mother ready to tell her to haul her ass to bed (okay, so not in those terms). But instead, Mrs. Queller was looking at her own phone perplexedly.

"Ruby, did your mother suggest she might be late tonight?"

"No, ma'am."

"And you haven't gotten a text from her?"

"No, ma'am. Maybe it's traffic?"

"Right, yes, of course. You should probably brush your teeth. It's getting late..."

And Ruby brushed her teeth and changed into her Supergirl pajamas and took off the S necklace and laid it carefully on her dresser next to her brush. But then she thought about how her mother had been more and more writing notes to herself and leaving stickies on the refrigerator, on her laptop. Maybe there would be something in her bedroom?

Ruby tiptoed into her mother's room, not really expecting to find anything useful. There was nothing on her bureau, nothing on her bedside table. Ruby looked briefly in her closet, but aside from way more shoes than anyone ever needed, there was nothing there. Then she looked under her bed, and there was something on the other side, so she scrambled over to the far side of the bed near the windows and there was a black suitcase that Ruby had never seen before. Suitcase probably wasn't even the right word. It was way too modern or scifi or... something, but it was unlocked and when Ruby opened it, it was empty.

But, oddly, it reeked of the smell of fire.
Over the Edge

Lena sat at James's desk flipping through her L-Corp emails when her phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Lena? It's Maggie Sawyer. I've got good news and bad news about your shooter. Good news is we don't think he was hired by Lex."

"Really? That's a surprise."

"Yeah, well, the shooter's local. Used to work security for the annual National City Tech Conference. We couldn't find any ties to Lex, and apparently Lex has had a bad case of the flu for the past several weeks--it's a mini-epidemic at his super-max prison, apparently. He's had no outside contacts for weeks."

"The Tech Conference?" said Lena. "Morgan Edge hosts that..."

"Yeah, my friend over in the regulars mentioned that. We're liaising because of the proximity of that Kryptonian glyph at the crime scene... But we're going to need more evidence of a connection with Edge to be able to do anything and this guy isn't talking."

"Well, thanks for letting me know, Maggie. I appreciate it."

"You're welcome, Lena. Stay safe."

Lena hung up as James strolled into the office. "And here I thought you weren't going to need a desk..."

Lena rolled her eyes. "A girl still wants to sit for a minute from time to time. Doesn't mean I'm putting down roots here."

Sam hurried in, out of breath as always. "Lena, the investors' call went long the other day. I'm so sorry I missed the holiday party! Jess says you were amazing as always, remembering all the employees' names!"

James stared. "All the employees' names? You mean like, what, all of the R&D department?"

Lena raised The Eyebrow. "Mr. Olsen, if you are going to run a media empire, you should know the meaning of basic words, such as 'all.'"

"Twelve hundred fourteen," said Sam. James gaped.

Lena shrugged. "It's a talent. Anyway, the NCPD has info on our attacker. Looks like it wasn't Lex after all."

"You seem so blasé about all of this," said James.

Lena shrugged. "You can't live in fear." She brought up the tech conference website on her laptop. "Maggie said they are looking into Edge's connection with the shooter. What are we going to do about Edge?"
"He shouldn't even be alive," grumbled Sam.

James picked up the remote for the TV screen above Lena's head and increased the volume on the reporter talking about the killing of seven members of the One-Seven gang and another three men who were assumed by the NCPD to be buyers from Star City. "The new and terrifying vigilante was seen fighting National City's own Guardian, who has been off the radar now for the past nine months. NCPD thinks that Guardian was trying to protect the drug dealers, which raises the question: just which side is Guardian on?"

The picture on the screen from a security camera seemed to show Guardian falling off the side of a building, while a dark caped figure stood above.

James turned off the sound. "That's not Guardian."

Sam looked at him. "How would you know? Looks like it to me. Ruby was really into that guy last year, kept a scrapbook of pictures. That looks like the suit."

"Yeah, the suit. But the suit isn't the man."

Lena shrugged. "I think the bigger question is who is this new vigilante in town who is mass murdering drug dealers?"

"Whoever it is," said Sam, "they're doing the city a favor."

"But they're killing," said James. "Guardian doesn't kill."

Lena made a mental note to talk to Kara about Guardian. She was pretty sure that Kara had found out the vigilante's true identity, but Lena couldn't imagine that it might have been James. When would he have had time for extracurriculars like that while he was running CatCo?

//

Vasquez stood behind Winn as he put the NCPD's crime lab's report up on the screen above them. Alex and Kara strode in together. Imra stood off to the side, looking nervous.

Vasquez said, "Ma'ams. NCPD Science Division are taking this one over from Narcotics, and Detective Sawyer sent us what they have on the murders."

"Okay," said Winn, pointing to the double burn lines across the brutalized body of one of the drug dealers. "Samples from the remains of the victims confirm that they were killed by heat vision."

"So," said Alex. "Our killer is Infernian."

"Or Kryptonian," said Imra.

They all stared at her.

"Hey, I don't like it any more than you do. Astra is my friend and she saved my life, all our lives, getting us off that gods-forsaken planet. But we have to look at all of the evidence available."

Vasquez frowned. "Winn, do we have surveillance video of Astra? Has she ever been outside the DEO, except for the night of Kara's party?"

"I will double check."

"Meanwhile," said Kara, "Lena just texted that her attacker was probably connected to Edge, not her
brother. Can we assume that these two attacks are unrelated?"

"For the time being," said Alex. "And what about Guardian? How did he get mixed up in all of this?"

Winn pointed to the time stamp on the pictures of the victims. "Well, James was at my place all day on Saturday, playing Call of Duty. We had too much eggnog, and he stayed on my couch overnight. This isn't him. Somebody got hold of his armor."

"Oh, just swell," muttered Alex. "Another loose cannon."

"Yes, ma'am," said Vasquez. "But that's not necessarily a bad thing. The enemy of my enemy might be my friend even if he doesn't necessarily intend to be."

Alex pinched the bridge of her nose. "All right. Hold that hopeful thought."

J'onn came in and slapped a pile of folders down on the circular table. "Those idiot senators are going to be the death of me yet. What are we looking at?"

Vasquez summarized. "One rogue Infernian or Kryptonian who apparently doesn't like the drug trade. One set of Guardian armor, but we don't know who is wearing it. Morgan Edge still has it in for Lena. Oh, and since the murder of these gang members, there have been no sightings of the glyph in the city."

"So whoever was burning them has stepped it up? Gone from arson to mass murder in a single night? Well, Coville did suggest the Beast would escalate."

"But Coville's a fanatic, not a prophet," said Kara.

"The two don't have to be mutually exclusive. He said that the Beast would come, she would mark the city and then take it."

"Well, the moment you start believing in something is the moment you give your power away," said Kara. "I'm not going to give away mine. I beat Kal down when I had to. I will beat this woman down too."

//

Morgan Edge sat at his desk reading the article in the Tribune about the changed zoning status on the harborfront that was going to allow his mixed-use high-end residential building to go up, and he grinned, even though there was an editorial cartoon on the next page portraying him as Ebenezer Scrooge. Edge didn't take it personally. He had always loved A Christmas Carol, and naturally had never seen himself as Scrooge, a man who was heartless needlessly and apparently had no real, specific ambitions for himself.

Edge considered himself Mr. Fezziwig, the jolly merchant who provided a sweet spread for his employees at Christmas and gave everybody the day off. Edge could be heartless when he needed to be, obviously, but he also understood the value of good morale. The key was balance, which is why he made the call to Lena Luthor to let her know in no actionable terms that he was probably the one behind her latest brush with death. She also called him a Scrooge, but he shrugged it off.

"Well, gotta go. Christmas party."

That's when the lights went out. People screamed, and through the frosted glass wall of his office, he saw a pair of lasers coming from eye height. He didn't wait around for more, but ran to his panic
room, and hit the code. The door opened and he pulled it shut behind him, shaking like a leaf.

And the thing about a lead-lined room (which made sense at the time, when they had designed it to withstand a Super's vision, just in case) was that it made it very hard to hear when or even if the screaming had stopped. He crouched down in the corner of the room, wishing he had thought to keep a bottle of good scotch in here along with the iron rations and first aid supplies.

Time crept by. His watch lied to him, telling him only minutes had passed while his whole life swept by him.

When his security men finally opened the door and led him out, the first thing he did was ask about his employees: how many dead and injured. The second thing he did was pour three fingers of scotch and drank it down like it was apple juice.

The third thing he did was call a press conference.
Supergirl paced back and forth across the DEO command center. Vasquez was convinced she was going to wear a path in the shiny floor. Above Vasquez's head, Channel Seven was carrying Morgan Edge's press conference, where he was claiming that he had been attacked by Supergirl.

In the crowd of journalists, Snapper Carr asked the first question. "Did you in fact personally witness Supergirl attacking you, Mr. Edge?"

"I was in my office. But I saw that pair of lasers she shoots out of her eyes. Who else could it have been?"

"Mr. Edge, there are at least 213 Infernians at large in National City. Could it have been one of them?"

"That's not the point--"

Supergirl growled. "Now she's attacking civilians. This has to stop. Now."

"Ma'am," said Vasquez. "We should handle this via our protocol. That's why we have it."

Winn said, "So this lady wants to kill Edge. I feel guilty. Why can't they just take each other out? Would that really be so wrong? That would be wrong. Right? Very wrong."

"It doesn't matter who the victim is. They're just killing whoever they want."

J'onn walked in. "I just talked to Detective Sawyer. She's sending a list of the casualties."

"The fact that there were any casualties at all is because I haven't caught her yet." Supergirl crossed her arms over her chest.

Winn said, "I've gone over all the surveillance video of Astra. She has never left the DEO unsupervised. And I have the Kryptonian search algorithm going, along with one I adjusted that should account for the difference in density between Kryptonians and Infernians. If you just give it time, we should be able to track her down."

"I'll head to Edge's office, see if they left anything behind that we can trace," said Alex.

Kara frowned. "No. No, I'm tired of playing hide and seek. The longer we don't act, the more people are going to die."

"What do you propose?" asked J'onn.

"We do it their way," said Supergirl, and she marched up to the balcony and flew away, leaving a cold wind in her wake.

Alex turned to Vasquez. "Prep a Crime Scene team. FBI suits. NCPD has officially asked us for help, and we are going to help."

Vasquez rounded up the agents and changed into her "FBI" pantsuit as quickly as she could before Alex could come into the women's barracks to do the same. They were all waiting down in the parking garage when Alex came striding out dressed to kill in a less literal fashion than usual, and Vasquez's knees went a little weak to see her rocking the black pantsuit the way she usually rocked the black tactical gear.
"Ma'am?"

"Let's go."

Vasquez let Agent Jordan drive while she studied the list of names on her tablet and sent them through one of Winn's databases. Only two stood out, one highlighted in yellow and the other in blue. "Gotcha," she murmured.

Alex looked over, her face hard. "Good news?"

"I think so, ma'am."

The other agents gave each other the side eye, but Vasquez ignored them. She knew what they were saying, about a fight between their superiors, how they were avoiding her, going through Winn to get things done. Let them. In general, Vasquez would indulge herself to the extent that she would avoid Alex at all costs, snap at the agents who made comments, walk it off in the middle of her shift to avoid breaking someone's nose.

But this was different. This was a mission to clear the smears Edge had attempted to implicate Supergirl with. This was a way to get Edge to stop attacking Lena, which in the end put them all in danger since, on the one hand, Kara would always defend her and that often meant collateral damage, and on the other hand, Lena had single-handedly saved Supergirl, the aliens, the city, and the world at least a few times; they couldn't afford to lose her.

They pulled up in front of Edge's building and headed into the lobby to meet with the uniform that Detective Sawyer had left there to see them up to the top floor where the attack had happened. As they stepped out of the elevator, they saw yellow police tape separating sections of the wide open floor plan. A young man in an immaculate suit strode over importantly.

"I'm sorry, but you can't go into Mr. Edge's office. Surveillance shows that the creature merely walked through it, didn't touch anything or harm anyone there."

Detective Sawyer said, "Mr. Blake, is it? I'd like you to meet my colleagues from the FBI, Special Agents Danvers and Vasquez."

"I'm sorry, agents, but Mr. Edge was very clear."

Vasquez stepped into his personal space, forcing him to look her in the eye. "But certainly Mr. Edge wants us to identify the person who harmed his employees, doesn't he?"

"Of course he does!"

"Then let us do our jobs, sir."

The crime scene techs gathered evidence while Vasquez and Alex questioned the witnesses. A picture emerged that sounded like nothing or no one they had ever encountered before: a woman of average height, dressed like an executioner, or a biker chick, or possibly, a dominatrix. So basically black leather, possibly with a sigil on the front, hard to read, but maybe the same as the one burned into the fields and walls of National City. Her face was covered. Her eyes were probably brown.

They had gotten through almost all of the uninjured witnesses when Morgan Edge strode in, yelling about private property and warrants and a host of legal-sounding phrases that actually had no bearing on their work. Alex and Vasquez shared a look and Vasquez stepped into the line of fire.

"Mr. Edge, is it?"
"Yes, of course I'm Morgan Edge. I own this company and I demand that you--"

"Demand, sir?" asked Vasquez. "You do realize that we have a federal employee among the fatalities at your company, don't you? Also, a Moldovian citizen."

"A what now?"

"From Slaver's Moon. She's worked here for seven months. Oh, I'm sorry, you were referring to the government contractor, Everard Wilson, who was meeting informally with your Chief Financial Officer. Weren't you aware?"

"Of course, I wasn't aware. I don't know all of my employees' schedules."

"Well, the meeting was apparently in regard to some alleged irregularities in the rebuilding of Post Office Square, which as I am sure you do know is the new main headquarters of the FBI in National City."

Edge blanched. "Irregularities? I don't know what you're talking about."

Alex came up behind Vasquez and crossed her arms. "At the very least, we are talking about federal jurisdiction rather than city. Beyond that, there is a real possibility that this attack was in fact aimed at this employee."

"Why on Earth would anyone--"

"Meddle in an ongoing federal investigation? Good question, sir. I promise you we will find out. Meanwhile, the Moldovian citizen--"

"I promise you that we do not hire aliens!"

Alex scribbled on her pad. "Yes, sir. I will take note of that. So do you regularly engage in illegal hiring practices? Because since the President's Alien Registration Act went into effect, refusing to hire aliens is against the law. Federal law. Also our jurisdiction."

Vasquez frowned. And she knew that Alex knew that this frown was one of the ones that, on another person's face, would be a small smile. She looked away.

Alex said, "You are going to want to call your attorney, Mr. Edge."

"Oh, I'll call my attorney all right! I will call a whole slew of attorneys. You will be up to your asses in my attorneys!"

Blake led him back into the rubble of his office still sputtering and complaining about how the broken glass needed to be cleaned up even as Blake tried to explain about crime scene evidence and didn't Mr. Edge have a lunch appointment across town in half an hour?

Vasquez caught Alex's hard look and nodded briefly, muttering, "This guy is even more of a trainwreck than Maxwell Lord, and a lot less smart."

"We should bring in Lucy and her dream team from DC and Metropolis. We're going to need administrative big guns as well as the other kind."

"But we don't have the other kind. The director still hasn't gotten funding for a new positron cannon."

"Not that big," said Alex, smiling. And Vasquez knew that little smile, a smile which, on any other
person's face, would have been a large and very threatening frown.
Supergirl flew through the cold night air over National City, perturbed by this new, elusive villain. It had been one thing when she could still try to convince herself that the old sigil had been burned into the very skin of National City by kids who had no idea of the meaning it carried, of old, dead gods long since forgotten by a dead planet.

Or even Thomas Coville's nonsense about end times, such an un-Kryptonian idea. Krypton had always been about science and philosophy, the enlargening of knowledge, the enriching of lives, the inevitability of progress.

She remembered the beauty of the Science Guild, with its mosaics and statues and holograms of ancient thinkers and inventors of the many houses, always seemingly poised to catapult into a brighter future.

She also remembered when Krypton exploded. That had given off a bright light, too, as if the ever-widening promise had imploded from its own sheer density.

In a way, it had.

The Book of Rao had not predicted the End Times, but that had not kept them from coming for Krypton anyway.

The whole thing made no sense. Even if the prophecies that Coville quoted from had truly been from Old Krypton, how could they apply to Earth?

She flew for hours, looking out for the burned glyph, but all she saw were the lights of National City, like a Christmas tree rolled out flat and twinkling hopefully. Lucy Lane had said that Solstice was a time for hope among humans, a time to remember that light could increase as well as dim, a time for remembering the hardships our ancestors survived, and the survival skills they had passed on to us, one of which was the act of remembering itself.

And she recalled one of her literature professors in college pointing out that re-membering was putting the members back together again, that memory was intrinsic to identity.

She flew for hours, and eventually found herself outside of L-Corp, hanging in the air above Lena's balcony, outside Lena's--now Sam's--dark office. Lena would not be here, of course. Supergirl knew that intellectually. But when she flew on autopilot, she always ended up outside of L-Corp: Lena, her lodestone.

But there was, on Earth, a difference between magnetic North and true North. Supergirl turned and flew to CatCo. She was barely across the city when she heard Lena's heartbeat calling to her, its rhythm steady and calm. For now.

Well, if this was the most valuable place in National City, Supergirl would protect it, even if it meant putting it in danger first. This was her place, the place where she began and ended. She would mark it as her own, and if the dark villain was in fact a Kryptonian, then she would see the mark and know what it meant.

Supergirl flew up to CatCo's helipad and burned the seal of the honorable House of El into the tarmac.

Let her come.
Alex trusted Winn's interpretation of the surveillance video. She truly believed that Astra had not left the DEO unsupervised, that Astra had no reason to burn strange glyphs into the parks and buildings of National City. In fact, if anything, she was pretty sure that Astra considered the whole situation to be an obscenity. She was confident that Astra was one hundred percent devoted to Imra and the still-sleeping former gladiators whom she had saved from their bloody slavery on that alien planet.

So it was not distrust that Alex felt while standing on the hallway balcony that overlooked the training room where Astra and Imra were sparring with each other. Not distrust. Maybe fascination.

When Astra had kissed her under the mistletoe at Kara's party, Alex had been shocked. She noted how quickly Maggie and Lucy had also kissed Astra, mainly to make Vasquez feel less uncomfortable, quite likely. (And possibly to make Agent Chen feel a tad more uncomfortable; Lucy hated drunk agents.)

But it had been a strange moment just the same and reminded Alex of when, not long after Kara came out as Supergirl, that insect-man alien had swooped in and stabbed Alex and flown her away from her convoy and out to the warehouse district, where she had first met Astra.

Alex, lying in a pool of her own blood, had pushed herself up and argued with Astra. And Alex knew that Astra could hear her heart beating frantically, could smell the fear that humans gave off in their sweat, especially when they were also in physical pain.

And Astra had reached down and caressed Alex's face. "So brave," she'd said.

A very Kryptonian thing to say, a compliment from one adversary to the other.

And it was odd, because up until that moment, Alex had not felt particularly brave, being too busy feeling pain and fear and reckless abandon, and the bone-marrow-deep certainty that Kara was going to come and save her, and the terrifying knowledge that she had to stay alive long enough for her to do that. Well, the sisters had had many such moments, before then and since, so Alex didn't know why this one particular moment stayed in her head so clearly.

Maybe it was that Astra had the same ice-blue eyes as Kara, and they were mesmerizing. Maybe it was that the lilt and laziness of Astra's voice, the entire lack of urgency in her tone, had a calming affect on Alex.

Alex pulled out her phone and texted her sister. "Got questions. DEO soon?" Then she counted backwards from thirty. She was down to six when Kara strode in, her red cape streaming behind her.

"What is it? Have you heard from this woman?"

"No," said Alex, gesturing down to Astra and Imra flipping each other with ease. "I'm thinking about Astra. I know she has plans for her gladiators, to bring them back to their home planets or something like that. But we might be able to use her help. Our agents are still not used to dealing with flying aliens. Astra was a brilliant strategist, both on Krypton and here. Do you think she would be willing to put off her plans for a little while to help us do some extra training?"

Kara's brow crinkled. "Is that really what you called me in for? Because I called this woman out, and it is more than time for her to face me."

Alex sighed. "No, I think what I really wanted was a supersized hug. But as a covert agent, I couldn't just say that. And certainly not via text."
Kara cocked her head and then gave Alex a strong but careful hug. Alex’s tense muscles relaxed against the pressure. "Thanks."

"Any time. But Alex--"

"I know, I know. You have a showdown pending. I get it. I just..."

Kara waited.

Alex sighed deeply. "I still feel so guilty for killing her."

Kara said, "Lena gave me this whole talk the other night about the difference between guilt and shame."

"I'm not talking about internalized homophobia or externalized I-am-a-total-shit-for-cheating-on-my-girlfriend. I'm talking about making a mission decision that affected my family, and ultimately the DEO, although, thanks to your sweet nature, only short term. What if I do that again, but it doesn't work out so well?"

"What makes you think you will?"

"I don't know. Maybe because these last few months have been kind of slow and safe. I mean, sure, Psi was a pain, but you handled that. And Morgan Edge is a shit, but we've dealt with worse. Max at least was a brilliant shit. Much more interesting, really, for all his other many faults. And Lillian. That chick was a laugh a minute last year. Okay, admittedly in a bad, genocidal burn-the-world-to-the-ground kind of way. But she was evil and she was consistent. I know how to handle that!" Alex waved her hands around, as if trying to grab onto some kind of truth. She continued, "This year has started out... well, boring. And that never ends well. Not for us."

Kara nodded, then turned to watch her aunt put Imra into a headlock and then laugh when Imra turned it around on her and got her in a headlock. "Yeah. Neither of my families does boring particularly well."

"Yeah, we really don't. Kara, here's the thing. I know you have your own way of doing things. But I am always going to make the call that protects both you and the planet."

"I know that."

"Even if it's a call you wouldn't want me to make."

"Well, like Astra said. You are a soldier, and you do what a soldier has to do, however hard it is to make that call. I trust you."

And then Winn hurried in, yelling, "Kara! The woman responded! She's waiting for you on top of CatCo, right where you left your mark."

Kara strode away. "I have to go."
Winn followed Supergirl to the command center and watched her take off from the balcony. He hurried back to his feeds, and to the computer screen above their heads that Vasquez had switched to the surveillance video on CatCo's roof. They watched the strange dominatrix stand patiently, her black cape flapping in the wind, staring out over the city with apparent calm.

The seal of the House of El was fading to ashes when Supergirl appeared on the other side of the helipad moments later.

"So," said Supergirl, her voice low. "You're supposed to be the devil?"

"The devil isn't real," said the woman, and the multiplicity of her voice reminded Winn of the program he had used to disguise James's voice with the Guardian armor.

"Then who are you?" asked Supergirl.

"I am from the time before fathoming, born to cleanse the scourge and deliver the awakening. I am Reign."

"How did you get here?"

"I survived Krypton's death, sent here upon its destruction."

"If that's true, then where have you been?"

"Awaiting the acceptable time."

"Acceptable for what?"

"Dispensing justice."

"How? By killing people? Terrorizing people? And why Earth? Even if you were made or born for dispensing justice on Krypton, what gives you the right to do it here?"

"This world has sunken into chaos and sin. Too many have eluded judgment. This world will do just as well as Krypton. Justice is universal."

"I'm not going to let you hurt anyone else. Surrender now before I make you surrender."

The other woman smiled.

Back at the DEO, Winn grabbed Vasquez's shoulder. "She's smiling! She should NOT be smiling! Vasquez, what are we going to do?"

"Where did Alex go?"

"What? Oh, she was right behind me. She was there when I told Super--"

"Where's J'onn?"

"Off duty. He said--"

"Winn, I can't believe I'm saying this but number one, call J'onn in. And two, you have command
until he gets here."

She marched off with just as much anger in her steps as Supergirl had had. Winn glanced around at the agents staring at him. He yelled, "Back to your stations." Then he pulled out his phone and texted J'onn: "SOS. You are needed at DEO ASAP. The Beast is fighting K. Repeat: SOS."

//

For a long time, Reign had felt like two people. The stronger one, at least initially, was petty, ordinary, everything that Reign was not. She thought about food and shelter, her weak and stupid daughter, human cares and concerns.

Reign, weak for so very long, thought only about justice. In the beginning, when they had landed on this planet, that had meant that Reign had fought for the other one, to make sure she got fed adequately and on time, to make sure that the other small humans had not gotten away with picking on her. There might have been few bloody noses and some twisted arms, but she had been gaining ground, gaining strength and stature as The Other One matured, became the leader of the cliques in school, won the notice of the strongest of the warriors on the school's playing fields, mated with him and finally reigned supreme.

But that, of course, had also been their downfall. The child. The Other One had chosen to keep the child, even though Reign had made it very clear that this would lead to her downfall. Even the adoptive mother had made that point very clear, abandoning the Other One to teach her a lesson.

Reign did not share such an option. Instead, Reign helped the Other One survive, feed the child and herself, find work, educate herself, and eventually thrive. But it had been exhausting for them both, and drained them both of their potential. The day of judgment should have fallen on the humans thirteen years previous, not now.

Yet here they were.

And this, this, this creature, this human, but not a human--if they had commenced their reign thirteen years previous, this Kryptonian girl would not have been able to stop them.

She would not stop them now.

"Surrender now, before I make you surrender," said the Kryptonian girl.

"So full of hubris," said Reign. "So like the righteous Kryptonians who feared my makers, worshiping false gods as they watched our planet suffocate from shame and burn from memory."
She stepped closer. "Stand down, or I will make you join them in their purgatory."

But the girl stood firm. "I'm not going anywhere."

Reign shrugged. "Then I will dispense my justice on you."

"Take your best shot."

Reign grabbed the girl and flew her off into the night of the human city. They grappled in midair, each one trying to gain dominance and giving no quarter.

//

When it came to most things--corporate holiday parties as much as corporate takeovers or eveningwear--Cat Grant's motto had always been go big or go home, at least, that was what the
media mogul's event planner had told Shareez when she had hired her and her band to cover Christmas favorites for CatCo's annual party.

And that was cool. Shareez was all over it. Admittedly, she had been more all over it after her drummer Dingo rolled her a reefer and got high with her in the stairwell before the party began. Later on, in retrospect, or whatever that was called? She was really, really glad he had. Because otherwise, they might not have survived the gig, or at least, not gotten paid for the whole thing.

And to be fair, it wasn't just Dingo, it was also Mr. Jenkins, her seventh grade band teacher who taught them that The Show Must Go On.

And that was like a work ethic or something, and Shareez totally lived by it. When she started the Brenda Lee tune, she was feeling mellow, actually laughing at the CatCo employees in their Santa hats and ugly Christmas sweaters.

Rockin' around the Christmas tree
At the Christmas party hop

So when the two super/hero/villain chicks totally crashed the party, smashing out the acoustic ceiling tiles and tipping over the huge Christmas tree with all its gaudy decorations, Shareez and the gang just kept singing.

Mistletoe hung where you can see
Every couple tries to stop

The two women, Supergirl and some leather chick, were trading punches. It was like some totally whacked-out catfight. Zane made the most of his opportunity to clean up on his sax solo, and Shareez gave him two thumbs up.

Rockin' around the Christmas tree
Let the Christmas spirit ring
Later we'll have some pumpkin pie
And we'll do some caroling

The two beat on each other so hard that every punch sounded louder than Dingo's drums and when Supergirl aimed for the other chick and missed? And hit the really cool ice sculpture? And it exploded into like a bajillian little pieces?

Cool.

You will get a sentimental feeling when you hear

Supergirl tried to put the other chick into a headlock like that World Wildlife Wrestling shit, but the other chick threw her off and then Supergirl kicked her into next Tuesday, which like in this case meant the other end of the thirty-foot-long hors d'oeuvres table.

Voices singing, let's be jolly
Deck the halls with boughs of holly

Messy, messy, messy, as that magician from the Frosty special always said. But then Supergirl followed and grabbed her around the waist and took her up through the ceiling, and hey, presumably through the roof, leaving the rest of the CatCo employees to have at the eggnog and rum, while Shareez and the Grouchettes finished their set with style.

Rockin' around the Christmas tree
Have a happy holiday
Everyone dancin' merrily
In the new
old-
fashioned
way!
How We Break the World, and How We Break

Eve Tessmacher knew herself fairly well. She knew she had a weakness for dark and mysterious men. She knew she was less convincingly badass because of her blonde hair and high voice. And she knew that although she was a pretty good Personal Assistant, she was no Jess Huang or Kara Danvers.

But she had graduated Yale University, dammit, which meant at the very least that, aside from appreciating very good pizza, she could multitask like nobody's business and she almost never panicked.

She did not panic that night. Instead, she called the Fire Department and reported a fight between Supergirl and some alien villain and when they said to evacuate the building, she went through their evacuation protocol point by point to the letter without ever even referring to the twenty-nine page document.

Floor monitors, even while tipsy, were still CatCo employees, and guided their charges down the emergency stairs calmly and with purpose. The band kept playing, and at first Eve thought it was one of those "dance band on the Titanic" things where the band assumed no one would panic as long as they kept playing, and to an extent, that did seem to be the case. But by the time the top floor was almost empty and the band still kept playing, Eve realized that they would most appreciate a check for the gig and the verbal permission to leave.

And only after all that was done did Eve bother to consider the executive suite, where Lena stood, holding her .38 and looking fierce, and James stood looking at the viewfinder of his digital camera, looking hopefully at the shots he had taken of the fight. Eve rolled her eyes, but she supposed that everybody responded to crises according to their own nature.

"Ms. Luthor! Mr. Olsen! The floor is cleared. It's time we went down!" And she hurried Lena down the forty flights of stairs with James Olsen in their wake. They raced down the endless emergency staircases and finally landed in the lobby, just in time to see broken pavement and cars flipping and exploding.

//

Reign had waited all her life for this. All her life. So when Supergirl grabbed her and flew her a hundred miles west of National City, to a container ship in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, she was neither surprised nor bothered. All that meant was larger and more colorful things to pummel the Kryptonian girl with. And she was fine with that.

They landed badly on the wet deck, falling and rolling in different directions, but Reign recovered first and took off into the sky, reveling in flight as if it had been a million years rather than ten minutes since she last flew.

She paused in the air and then dove down, sending two bright red containers skidding across the wet deck to decimate the Girl of Steel, laughing gleefully all the while.

She stopped laughing when she saw a pair of hands push one of the containers away, and the Kryptonian girl, who looked justifiably angry, take off into the air, barreling into Reign and then leading her on a merry chase back to the mainland.

//
When Eve led Lena and James down to the lobby, Lena paused, watching her employees running out of CatCo not unlike the proverbial rats. She pulled out her phone and called Alex.

"Hey! Lena! Make it quick, I have to help Kara!"

"She's here at CatCo! She was just fighting that, that--"

"Got it. Our ETA is five minutes!"

"Just, make sure you protect her!"

"Yeah, well, make sure you protect yourself so she has something to live for when I finish nearly killing her for doing this!"

Lena hung up, feeling oddly comforted by Alex's lack of logic. James said, "Don't worry, Ms. Luthor. We can get out of here and--"

"Go, James. I assume the team needs you. I need to be here with my employees. Eve and I can take care of this. Go be Guardian, or whatever it is you do for Kara and Alex."

And James, looking bewildered, ran off down a sidestreet.

Eve said, "Um, Guardian?"

"Yeah, long story. Need to know. There will undoubtedly be NDAs in your future!" Lena called Jess, listened to the ring, muttered, "Pick up, pick up!"

Eve stood there, looking confused. "National Baseball Association?"

//

Jess stood in Lena's/Sam's office, watching the live news coverage of the epic fight downtown.

Supergirl and the Leather Chick fell like a comet into the street in front of CatCo. And when Supergirl fell into a street, she really fell into a street. That crater looked three feet deep. But she pulled herself to her feet and tackled the other woman. The two traded blows by the light of the exploding car that their fall had destroyed. A fire hydrant, broken by the car hitting it, was shooting a hard column of icy water into the sky twenty feet up.

Punching. Blocking. Terrified spectators filming the fight on their phones rather than running away. Insanity.

Jess called Winn.

"Jess, there's no time. There's an emergency--"

"Supergirl and somebody are killing each other over at CatCo. I know. Supergirl needs backup, idiot. What is the DEO good for anyway. She needs backup!"

//

Winn stared at his phone and then tossed it onto his computer console. Alex had disappeared. Vasquez had put him in charge. He had texted J'onn, but nothing good was happening there.

What Would Susan Vasquez Do?
Well, first of all, she would have seen this coming months ago and come up with several scenarios for how to fix it or at least help.

So... the Martian Manhunter? Miss Martian?

Winn grabbed his phone and called M'gann.

"Winn, what is it?"

"SOS. Emergency. Supergirl needs a flyer to help her at CatCo. Your deputization should still be in force, right?"

"I think it is, but--"

"Get over to CatCo. I've tried to contact J'onn, but--"

"On my way."

Winn hung up, but he was still thinking about Vasquez’s scenarios. One thing he did know about Vasquez was that she threw out old assessments when they were clearly out of date and started from scratch, especially when SNAFU's happened. So how would she have reacted to Astra's arrival?

Sure, keep her in lock-up until they knew more. Have 24/7 surveillance on her, especially after she tried to steal that energy ring to save her people. But also... keep her in mind as an asset.

Winn sent a communication via the comms link to Astra's security detail. "Can you bring her to the command center? J'onn needs her."

And Winn knew that he was very, very lucky that Astra arrived at the command center with her security detail at the very same moment that J'onn walked in demanding answers.
The Duel

J'onn strode into the command center just as Astra arrived with her security detail of three large men.

"What is this?" he asked.

Winn put away his natural fluster by sheer will power. "Director Henshaw, Supergirl appears to be outmanned, er, personned, by this Kryptinfertonian, um super-powered person. She needs backup and not regular human backup. Real, alien backup for a real, alien threat. She needs you. And Astra. And it's not just me saying it. It's also Vasquez and Alex who I think have already taken a Blackhawk to support Supergirl!"

J'onn growled.

Winn's voice just got higher. "Um? So? Um, well M'gann is already on her way. I am pretty sure her deputization still holds, but seriously. Dude. Supergirl, Kara. She needs our help. And by our, I really mean you. Your. Yours plural. J'onn and Astra--"

Winn was very, very grateful when the Kryptonian and Martian strode to the balcony and took off together, and even more grateful to hear that a Blackhawk team had also taken off and were en route to CatCo Plaza.

//

George had been a sidewalk Santa for a long damn time, but he'd never seen anything like this: Supergirl and some chick straight out of Fifty Shades of Leather were duking it out in the middle of the street while Christmas shoppers took pictures and videos of it on their phones.

The leather chick jumped up and smacked Supergirl to the ground and a half a dozen civilians ran to help her but she pushed herself up and told them to stay back--which was why she didn't see her enemy pick up a piece of concrete and pipe and use it like a baseball bat to hit Supergirl in the head.

And that was something else George had never seen, not in all the TV news coverage of Supergirl.

She was bleeding.

There was a sound like a rush of cold air and then a green person wearing a black cape landed in between the two other women.

"And who are you supposed to be?" asked the masked woman.

"I am M'gann Morzz, the last daughter of Mars. Who are you and what is your purpose here?"

"I am Reign. I am here because criminals walk free and pretenders like this one only support the status quo. That ends today."

She rushed forward and tackled the Martian, who slipped out of her grasp and punched her in the face, following it up with a kick, but then Reign grabbed her leg and flipped her into the air. M'gann landed badly, which allowed Reign to get in two more punches before M'gann kicked her knee out. Reign stumbled, but took M'gann down with her, rolled her over and hit her repeatedly in the face.

George was so taken aback by the shear violence of the attack that at first he didn't notice Supergirl pushing herself to her feet. "M'gann, this is my fight!" She reached down for the masked woman and
pulled her up by the shoulder, hauling back and punching her in the face and then kicking her in the stomach. Reign stumbled back and reached out, laying a hand on the same concrete and pipe as before and swung it at Supergirl, but this time Supergirl stopped it with a backhanded block. Then she grabbed it from Reign, swung it around her and threw it at her so hard that Reign went flying backwards into the burning car.

Supergirl fell to her knees. M'gann pushed herself up and gave Supergirl her arm. Together they rose, just as the burning car door came flying at them, knocking M'gann to the ground and sending Supergirl spinning into the air. Reign shot Supergirl with her laser eyes, and then shot up into the air, tackling Supergirl and flying her out of sight. M'gann limped toward the lobby of CatCo and stood arguing with Lena Luthor, before they turned away and went back into the building.

George looked around at the rubble that was CatCo plaza, and the shoppers putting their phones away and going back inside the mall across the street. He rang his bell and wished people Merry Christmas, but this time his heart really wasn't in it.

//

Vasquez had the Blackhawk in the air in record time while Alex took the ordinance case that Clark had given her and opened it to reveal a dozen bright green darts. She loaded six into the rifle and turned on the laser sights. She was already wearing the harness that would keep her in the chopper when she opened the side door to shoot, and Vasquez knew that it was her own job to keep the vehicle steady so that Alex could take accurate shots.

"Ma'am, there she is! On the roof of the Jefferson Building!"

"Got it! Get me close enough to-- Shit!"

They watched as the dark woman dropped Supergirl off the edge of the building. Alex tore the side door open, aimed and fired: once, twice, three times.

The second and third shot hit her and she fell to her knees on the roof, tearing the darts out of her skin.

Suddenly there was a flash of green and black that zipped past the chopper and landed on the roof with the strange women, who had pulled out the other dart and was fighting off J'onn. Another flash, this one of bright blue, followed Supergirl in her endless fall, and Astra landed beside her niece's body just a second too late to catch her.
The Crater. In the Street. In Our Hearts.

Lena and M'gann stood just inside the lobby of CatC, arguing.

M'gann threw off her her Green Martian persona as she insisted, "But you must have something!"

"I have no kryptonite weapons or any of the rest of Lex's paranoid toys! I won't have that kind of thing in any of my buildings!"

"Then I'm going back to help them fight."

They both exited the building at the same time, only to see a helicopter above the Jefferson building, with a person in black SWAT gear shooting at the two people engaged in a battle: Supergirl and Reign, and Reign dropped Supergirl from the edge of the building and got hit by the shots fired at her. Then M'gann took off into the air, while Lena ran in what felt like slow motion, across the square, with Supergirl falling, falling and finally crashing into the middle of the street.

Lena gasped, but then another figure flew down to stand at Supergirl's feet: Astra. She bent over and picked Supergirl up and flew her away, and Lena only reached the crater a second later. The broken concrete was sprayed with blood. Lena stumbled, and a man in a Santa Claus suit caught her and steadied her. Jess appeared at her side with Ted, her driver, and together they led her to the town car.

Jess said, "The DEO building, Ted, on the double."

"Yes, ma'am."

Lena sat in a nauseous daze, murmuring, "But she doesn't bleed, Jess. She can't bleed."

Jess said, "If she can bleed, she can heal," which made no sense, but Lena was used to grasping for straws, so she took it as the kindness it was meant as.

Ted drove like a madman, swerving to avoid the chunks of concrete littering the streets from the battle. He pulled into the underground garage, showing his visitor's ID to the security guard, who called upstairs and then waved them in.

The elevator took forever. When they reached the command center, Winn was standing under the computer feeds watching as the city's reporters tried to make sense of the battle they had just witnessed, and speculated on whether Supergirl was even still alive. Lena and Jess walked over to him and he said quietly, "She's being prepped for surgery. Dr. Hamilton is there already and Alex is on her way down from the helipad."

They turned as they heard boots on the balcony, and M'gann supported J'onn, the two of them limping together. Lena inhaled at the amount of blood on their clothes. Winn hurried to take J'onn's other side and they headed down to Medical with Lena and Jess trailing behind them.

"Where did that woman go?" asked Winn.

"We beat her pretty badly after Alex shot her with the kryptonite darts," said Jonn. "She pulled them out and flew away from us. I picked up two of them, couldn't find the third." He put a bleeding hand in one of his cargo pockets and handed Winn two bright green darts. "Go put those into containment in the armory."

Winn left, seeming grateful to have something to do. One of the med techs came over to help the
Martians, but J'onn waved him away. "We're fine for now, just a bit dented. Supergirl is the priority. Any word?"

"They just started surgery, sir. Vasquez is getting the portable sunlamps to help. If you want to wait outside here?"

"Thank you." J'onn winced as he sat on the plastic chair. "Where is Astra?"

"She's giving blood. We've put a call in to Superman as well."

J'onn nodded tiredly, and the man left.

Lena sat down next to him, her eyes wide, staring off into space. Jess paced back and forth until Winn returned, helping Vasquez carry the extra sunlamps into the inner sanctum of the medbay. When they came out again, Winn looked at Jess and said in a wavering voice, "Anybody want coffee?"

"Good idea," said M'gann. "I'll help you." The three of them left.

Lena looked up at Vasquez. "How is she?"

"It's bad. But Alex and Dr. Hamilton and the team have pulled off miracles before. They're working very hard in there."

Vasquez's phone rang. "Hello? Eliza? I'm so sorry, yes, you should definitely come. I can send a chopper for you--"

J'onn pushed himself to his feet and transformed into his Green self. "I'll go get her. It'll be faster."

"Right, Eliza, J'onn's coming to get you. Pack a small bag. Twenty minutes. Actually, make it thirty."

J'onn left. Vasquez hung up. Lena looked at her hands, which were shaking.

"Vasquez. Sit down before you fall down." Her voice was flat. "Should I assume that you were flying that helicopter and Alex was shooting at this person? And what are we calling her, anyway?"

"She calls herself Reign. And yes, that was us. Too little, too late."

"Or just enough, just in time."

Vasquez looked at her. "Somehow I never pegged you as an optimist."

"I'm a realist, normally. But now I have to cling to hope. The love of my life is in there fighting for hers. And there is nothing I can do to help. I've saved her before, brought her back from another world, saved her people, hell, I helped save the whole planet. But now there nothing I can do."

"Do you believe in God?"

"Rarely. You?"

"More than I used to. I got torn apart by some aliens while I was a Marine, and I had multiple surgeries for them to put me back together again. When I was in recovery, a chaplain told me that God was queer. Not gay, necessarily, but definitely queer, upending power structures, telling people over and over again in the Bible to take care of the poor and widows and the orphans and the aliens--well, strangers, I guess is the better word, although as we now know..."
"I get it," said Lena. "But why does that make you believe in God?"

"Because it is just so damned unlikely that humans would tell themselves that. I can believe that humans would tell themselves that God is on their side and that they are a chosen people, and money is God's way of telling you that you're doing it right. Humans aren't going to say take care of the orphans and love your neighbor. But God just might."

"Sorry, Vasquez. I'm an engineer and a scientist at heart. I believe what I see."

"And you've seen Supergirl, a woman from another planet with the power to do whatever she wants on this planet, and she uses it to fight for us. And you don't think that's miraculous? Because I do."

Lena stared at the door into the surgery bay. Her eyes were dry. Finally, she said, "I can't pray, Agent Vasquez. I don't know how. But if you do, would you, would you put in a good word for me? For us?"

"Of course, Lena."

"Thank you. And when Winn comes back with the coffee, I want to go down to his lab and build a stronger prototype of that yellow sun grenade. If I can't cry and I can't pray, I might as well work."
The Triage

The moment Astra had dived after Supergirl, Vasquez had turned the copter around and rushed them back to the DEO helipad, taking Alex’s weapon and pushing her out the door. Alex knew the drill and didn’t protest. By the time she had scrubbed in, Astra had brought Supergirl to the surgical bay and Dr. Hamilton was prepping her for surgery. Alex set her emotions aside and waded in on autopilot: the intubation, the IV, cutting, swabbing, sewing. Astra had donated blood, so that was an advantage they had never had before.

Never needed before.

Vasquez and Winn brought in the sunlamps and quickly left. Winn looked like he was going to pass out. Vasquez was frowning.

Don’t think about Vasquez.

Most of the damage was to soft tissue, internal organs. They didn’t have to set any bones, just stop bleeding and tie up the loose ends, as it were. And get enough yellow sunlight falling on Kara to let her heal on her own.

Alex didn’t let herself consider the alternative.

When she and the surgical team left the operating room, they were all bloody up to their elbows and bone tired. How many hours had they been in there? Alex turned on the shower and scrubbed the blood off her hands. Her sister’s blood. Then she pulled on her tactical gear and dragged herself out to the room where everyone was waiting, holding vigil for Supergirl, keeping her alive by their sheer willpower, just as Alex had kept her alive with clamps and stitches.

Eliza immediately stepped forward and embraced Alex. “How is she?”

“Alive. Now it’s a waiting game.”

There was a collective sigh of relief. J’onn pulled her into a one-armed hug, wincing as he did. Alex could see a wound across his shoulder. “You should get that looked at.”

Teary-eyed, Winn was sitting next to Lena, holding her hand. She didn’t look like she even knew he was there. At her feet was a notebook with a series of pencil sketches that looked like the yellow sun grenade, and a pencil that had been broken in half.

Jess looked cried out and M’gann was sitting with her arm around Jess’s shoulders. Astra stood with her arms crossed, looking grimmer than usual.

Finally, Alex asked, “Where is Vasquez?”

The others wouldn’t meet her eyes. Eliza answered, “Up in the command center, keeping an eye out for Reign.”

“Of course she is. What time is it?”

“Two-thirty.”

“Morning or afternoon?”

“Morning.”
Alex ran her hand through her hair. “I’ll be in the women’s barracks if anything happens. The med techs know to call me, but I also want to know about Reign. J’onn, for God’s sake, get that stitched up. We can’t have you out of action too. And M’gann.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said J’onn, but Alex didn’t hear the irony in his voice.

She just dragged herself down to the barracks and lay on the cot in the dark, mentally going over the surgery in her mind, wondering if she could have missed anything. She fell into an uneasy dream, in which she was on the ground as Supergirl crashed into the street and threw up her hands as a thousand red crystalline shards flew out into the air and rained on the heads of the pedestrians standing by, gawking.

Alex dropped to her knees and pulled her forceps out of her pocket and started gathering the shards and running to put them inside Supergirl’s empty chest cavity, building a 3D puzzle of her heart with tiny crystals.

“Don’t just stand there!” she yelled at the onlookers. “Get out here and help me!”

And Winn and Jess and Vasquez crawled across the tarmac picking up crystals, but then a dark wind blew them away and Alex was left alone looking down into her broken sister’s heart. Ice was forming over Supergirl’s usually overwarm body and Alex beat against the shards, scraping them off with her fingers, but she was cold, so cold, and the ice was beginning to cover her too. She could barely move her limbs, but she inched her way closer, so that she could share her warmth with her sister.

//

Vasquez couldn’t watch Alex and Dr. Hamilton work on Supergirl and she couldn’t sit still in the waiting room, so she returned to the command center and joined Agents Jordan and Chen in keeping watch over the city. But it looked like the criminals, human and alien, had all run for safety after the most recent super battle raged back and forth across the city, leaving plenty of damaged roads and cars and buildings in its wake.

Time passed slowly. Vasquez’s mind, busy constructing horrifying scenarios at the best of times, was so overloaded not just with pictures of Supergirl dying but of Reign doing as much damage alone as the Daxamites had done with their army. And that made no sense. If she was truly from Krypton as she claimed, how could she be stronger than Supergirl? How could she take on not only the Girl of Steel but also J’onn and M’gann? The kryptonite darts had slowed her down, but not fast enough. She still pulled them out and kept fighting.

And if Supergirl and two Martians couldn’t take this woman down, how could a bunch of humans? Although…

They still had the Daxamite weapons that they had gathered at the end of the Battle of National City. And Supergirl had said that Kryptonian soldiers sometimes used such halberd/blaster weapons. And Astra was a Kryptonian soldier…

Vasquez pulled one of her ubiquitous notebooks from her cargo pocket and started scribbling.

An hour later, Winn came up to pass on the word that Supergirl was out of surgery and J’onn was calling in fresh agents to take the watch, so that the agents who had been on duty for eighteen hours could go down to the barracks and catch some sleep.

When she got down to the women’s barracks, Vasquez found Alex curled into a ball on her cot,
twitching in her sleep. Vasquez pulled the blankets from off her own cot and lay down next to her, covering them both up, and pulling Alex into her arms, murmuring soothing words until the woman fell into a quieter sleep. And she lay there, holding her, until morning came.
James left Lena at CatCo and hurried to the DEO and went to the "Special Collections" part of the armory where Guardian's armor was being kept. With this weird leather chick on the loose, National City needed all the heroes it could get.

But he couldn't find it. He opened a dozen cases of the approximate size, but all he found were rifles, ordinance, Daxamite weapons, and a number of alien-looking devices he couldn't recognize. He ran to the command center, where Winn was watching the feeds show theMartians chase Reign off and turn back toward the DEO.

"Wait," said James. "Where's Kara?"

"Here, going into surgery. It's bad, James. And what are you of all people doing here anyway? Don't you have a company to run?" Winn sounded bitter, but James put it down to the danger Supergirl was in.

"Lena said I should come help, but I went to look for Guardian's armor and it wasn't there."

"Yeah, about that. It disappeared about a month ago. Just a few days ago, somebody who looked like Guardian attacked Reign. You do the math."

"I saw that, but I assumed it was armor made to look like me, not actually my armor."

"Yeah, well."

Vasquez marched in and frowned at them. "Mr. Olsen, what are you doing here? I thought you were on a leave of absence."

"I was looking for Guardian's armor."

"Well, it's not here anymore, and quite frankly, if Supergirl, J'onn and M'gann together couldn't stop Reign, you are just going to get yourself killed in a spectacularly splashy way if you try. So just, don't. CatCo needs you. That's where your duty lies right now: with a few hundred terrified employees and Lena Luthor's extremely expensive early Valentine's Day gift for Kara."

James looked confused. "I can help---"

"Yes, you can. Look at the way the stations are covering this. They're telling people that Supergirl is dead or dying. You can give them hope, tell them she's injured but healing."

"And is that true?" asked James.

"Well, if it's not, we're all in for a very rough ride."

//

After Alex came out of the operating room and gave them the not entirely good news, Lena sat staring into space for a while before Jess said, "Um, Ms. Luthor?"

Lena shook herself out of her thoughts. "Yes, Jess. What?"

"Isn't Krypto at Kara's apartment?"
"Oh, shit. He probably hasn't been walked in forever. Okay, I am, oh let me think. I can get Ted to take me there, then I'll stay the night there and bring him back to L-Corp in the morning."

"Ted?"

"No, Krypto. After lunch, I'll go to CatCo." She picked up the notebook and broken pencil at her feet. "I want to talk to Kate in R&D about rapidly prototyping the new grenade. It might help Kara heal faster. Then I'll have to work with James on how to frame the Supergirl story. God, I wish Cat Grant were here."

"I can call her, if you'd like."

Lena thought about that. "Yes, do. I think she would want to know about Kara's situation."

"Um, do you think she knows..."

"Kara worked for Cat Grant for what? Three years? Two years before she came out as a superhero and one after? Cat knows. But be discreet on the phone, in case there are extra listeners."

"Got it. Anything else?"

"Make sure Winn understands that I want to know absolutely any change on Kara immediately. Order an early lunch for me and Kate and you. Anything will do, just make sure there are potstickers."

"Of course, ma'am. You know, um, Lena, it's not as if the DEO is expecting her to do all the work here. She has J'onn and M'gann and Astra to help her, and I'm pretty sure that Vasquez and Alex together pretty much constitute a minor superhero themselves, as do you and Winn."

Lena gave her a tired smile. "And you, Jess. Maybe it's time we all pitched in to help her save the day. Or just to save her."

Jess adjusted her glasses. "Well, ma'am, it's not like we haven't done it before."
Krypto was miserable. He had listened with some incredulity when Kara had explained that on Earth, dogs pooped in boxes indoors like cats, but he loved Kara, so he obeyed. But he didn’t like it. And then she was gone all day, and that was bad too. But it was nothing like the frenzy he went into when he heard the fight, heard her heart beating wildly, smelled her blood. And worse than that was the silence that came after. He whined. He chewed one of Kara’s shoes to pieces. At last he fell into an exhausted sleep, only waking when Soft Hands and Beautiful Voice came in. She immediately put on his leash and took him for a long walk, with him pulling the entire way. He smelled everything: poles and walls and trees and vehicles, and he was pretty sure that a lot of dogs in the neighborhood hadn’t been told about poop boxes, but maybe they were still learning. The few Earth dogs he had met on walks with Kara didn’t seem too bright.

When they got back home, Soft Hands and Beautiful Voice curled up in Kara’s bed, hugging her pillow, and Krypto curled up next to her belly, keeping them both warm. In the morning, she put on Kara’s clothes, walked him, fed him, and then a vehicle arrived and they got in back as a man drove them to a new place.

When they got out, Soft Hands told him to behave courteously and refrain from jumping upon people, but it was very hard, especially when they got up to a big white room that smelled like her, and he saw Very Serious, whom he had met that night when all the new people came and sang with him.

Soft Hands told him that she was going to be preoccupied and that he should attend to Very Serious, and if he was courteous, there might be… sweet cakes?

Soft Hands talked funny, but she was kind and very good at giving belly rubs, so he didn’t mind. In contrast Very Serious didn’t seem to know Language at all, except for “good,” “down,” “sit” and “walk,” but she had a box of biscuits on her desk and was generous with them, so he sat on her feet as she worked.

Finally Soft Hands came back with a large box, telling him that they were going to go meet friends and have a feasting, but it meant he got to go back on his leash and sniff poles and pee on things first, so he didn’t mind that either. It got even better when, on the way there, he got Soft Hands to give him a belly rub. She told him how well behaved and handsome he was and how proud of him Kara would be. And then she smelled like she was about to cry, so he licked her face to make her feel better.

When they got to the place Kara called “DEO,” he did see his new friends, but they were all upset, so he had to lick a lot of faces, and Scruffy was even scruffier, and Salty still tasted of salt, and Whistler wasn’t whistling. And he couldn’t find Kara, who was his favoritest of all his favorite people and that made him sad, but Soft Hands and Scruffy took him down to a laboratory where there was a bed for him in the corner and bowls of food and water and a squeaky bone and a blue teddy bear. And even though Scruffy called him Small Wolf, Krypto wasn’t used to all this excitement, so he curled up around the teddy bear and took a really long nap.
And this is the last chapter I've got before the next episode drops, as I am just plumb out of ideas. Thanks for getting through this first hiatus with me!
Lena brought the box of pieces of tech from her L-Corp lab and showed it to Winn, while Krypto dropped into a tired bundle of sleepy fur in his corner bed.

“I got this idea last night, staying over at Kara’s place, because of those lamps you made for us.”

“Lamps? Oh, the red sunlight, for you two to, um…”

“Have sex. Yes. So I was thinking, we’ve got the idea for the new prototype of the yellow sun grenade to help Kara. Why not adapt it as a weapon to attack Reign?”

Winn grinned. “Lena! You are such a genius!” He kissed her loudly on the cheek. “Whoops, I wasn’t supposed to do that, so inappropriate. I’m sorry?”

“Winn, still gay here, okay? Also, consent is good…”

“I’m sorry. So if it’s just a matter of changing the frequency of the light, decreasing it, and then that might take less energy, which could mean that we could increase the size—“

“Exactly! And that would give us more space to have a second striker and primer for a double detonation.”

Lena’s phone rang. She looked down.

JHuang: L. Sam never came in yesterday or today. Hasn’t answered her phone. I called police and hospitals. Nobody has seen her.

LLBoss: Keep holding things together at LC and ask Eve to go check her house. Heard anything from Ruby?

JHuang: Not yet.

LLBoss: That might be a good thing. Could be Ruby is sick.

JHuang: We’ll check. I’ll keep you posted.

Lena hung up and looked at the pieces of metal and glass. “All right, Winn. Working under some time pressure here.”

“I wouldn’t have it any other way,” said Winn.

//

Eve Tessmacher was in a good mood in the days after Christmas, when the temperature in National City went back to being a balmy 50 degrees, and she celebrated by wearing a blue off-the-shoulder blouse that matched her eyes. She knew it might be slightly over the line of inappropriate for work,
but she didn't care. She felt pretty, dammit, even though she would never go so far as singing about it at her desk.

So when she was standing talking to James in his office about the (most recent) wreckage of National City, and he put his hand on her bare shoulder, she pulled away. "Mr. Olsen, you really shouldn't touch a woman without her consent. Or anybody, for that matter."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize--"

Suddenly there was a loud crash. They went running to see a bloodied man in black clothes on the floor, and window glass everywhere.

And Reign striding toward them with her black cape flowing behind her.

Eve asked, "Why did you come here?"

"To deliver a message," said Reign.

"We are not your messengers."

"Actually, you are." Reign turned to a cameraman. "You. Turn your camera on me."

With wide eyes, the man obliged.

Reign gestured at the man on the floor. "This man was a thief, condemned by his own actions. You have allowed sin to take root and fester like a weed. And worst of all, you have looked away.

Apathy is the greatest sin of all. From now on, it will be punished in kind. There will be no more mercy. There will only be justice. I'm here to help."

Then she turned and flew out of the window, leaving the CatCo employees stunned.

Eve's phone rang. With a shaky hand, Eve answered, "Hello?"

"Eve, it's Jess. We haven't seen or heard from Sam. Can you go over to her house and see if she and/or Ruby are there?"

"On my way."

//

Usually when Kara was lying in the sunbed, she had dreamless sleep, but not this time. Maybe it was her Kryptonian brain trying to comprehend and process the enormous amount of physical pain she had just experienced, but she dreamed that she was alone, waking up in her apartment, with bright yellow sunshine streaming through the windows.

She walked around the loft, looking at her things: the paintings of Krypton and Midvale in the corner, her desk and laptop, pictures of Eliza and Jeremiah, pictures of Alex, of Winn and James, of Lena.

She picked up a picture of Lena from that gala last year, looking stunning as always in that slinky black dress with the exposed shoulders, the dress that made Kara’s knees go weak, made her think of running her hands over those shoulders, those collarbones, that ivory skin, made her think of tracing Lena in kisses, of looking into those luminescent green eyes and ask her if Kara could take it off her…

There was a knock on the door. Kara put down the picture, went and opened the door, only to see
Lena standing there, wearing The Dress under her khaki trench coat.

“Lena, what are you doing me? I mean here. What are you doing here?”

“Flustered already and I haven’t even said anything.” Lena gave her a sly grin. “But you already know why I’m here, thanks to your own Freudian slip.”

“No, that’s just what I want, not what you want. Did you come here to give me soup?”

“Soup?” Lena was taken aback. “Why would I bring you soup?”

“Because I am home in the middle of the day, so I’m probably sick, right? And when I’m sick you bring me chicken soup.”

“No, Kara. I’m not here to bring you soup.” She shrugged off the trench coat, giving Kara a better view of that cleavage and those breathtaking shoulders. “I just thought that after that horrible fight with that horrible person, you might want a little loving. Or a lot.”

“The fight! I forgot about the fight. I should get back to the DEO. They’re going to need me—“

Lena leaned in and whispered, “Not like I need you.”

Kara adjusted her glasses.

“I mean,” Lena murmured, “if you’d rather go back to the boring old DEO rather than make hot, wild, passionate love to me all day, sliding your hand between my—“

Kara jumped as her phone rang. It was Alex.

“Kara, you’ve got to come back in. We need you here—“

Guiltily, Kara said, “I think I have the flu.” She gave an unconvincing cough. “I’ll see you later, love you, bye!” Then she took Lena’s hand and dragged the laughing woman to her bed.
At the DEO, Alex was pacing around the yellow sunlamps.

She had woken up alone that morning, but covered with two blankets that she didn’t remember finding for herself. She had folded them carefully, ignoring the scent of Vasquez’s perfume that she told herself could not be on them. She was obviously imagining things. Up in the command center, she and Winn and J’onn had watched Reign’s declaration of war at CatCo.

Vasquez had come up behind her and said, “Those kryptonite darts and that one weapon won’t be enough. We have to get the rest of Operation Sundown from Superman. I can take a Blackhawk to Metropolis, sir.”

J’onn nodded. “Do that.”

She left.

Winn asked, “What’s Operation Sundown?”

Alex answered. “A plan J’onn and Vasquez came up with before Supergirl came out, to contain Superman if he ever went rogue. Kryptonite versions of M16s, kryptonite chains, all that.”

“What’s Operation Sundown?”

Alex answered. “A plan J’onn and Vasquez came up with before Supergirl came out, to contain Superman if he ever went rogue. Kryptonite versions of M16s, kryptonite chains, all that.”

“Sweet! Although, I suppose, not from Superman’s point of view…”

Once they had sketched out a plan, Alex returned to the medical bay to check on Supergirl.

Dr. Hamilton said, “Sorry, Agent Danvers. No change. The headpiece is monitoring her brainwaves, and they seem fine. I don’t think she sustained any neurological damage from the head wound, amazingly. Now her body simply needs to rest.”

“Okay. Well, I can watch her now. Thank you, Doctor.”

Alex paced around the bed, feeling warm from all of the yellow sunlamps surrounding her super sister. “Kara, you have to wake up. We’re going to hold the line with this crazy woman, but we need you. I need you. I’m so sorry that I didn’t protect you well enough, that I wasn’t fast enough. Or good enough. Or, just, I don’t know, enough. You can’t die. If you die, Eliza will kill me. And Winn will kill me. And Lena? Holy shit, Lena will totally kill me. You’ve got to wake up.”

She turned around to see Vasquez standing in the doorway, watching her, and fell silent.

Vasquez asked, “What can I do?”

“Get Lena Luthor to come in. Winn needs help with that yellow sun grenade for Kara.”

“She’s already here, down in the lab. She said she had an idea about a red sun grenade for us to use against that woman.”

“That’s genius. We should have thought of that.” Alex ran her hand through her hair tiredly. “Was it you who put blankets over me last night? I was so tired, I didn’t even think of blankets.”

“You were shivering when I came in.”

“Thank you.” Alex hung her head. “And I’m surprised you’re even talking to me.”
Vasquez sighed. “Your sister is in a coma, there is a supervillain flying around killing people, and we are preparing to weaponize kryptonite, a technology that could be very dangerous for your sister if it ever got into the wrong hands. So yes, I am helping you with that.”

“It’s just that, last night, I thought I woke up, or half woke up, and it felt like you were there too, holding me, but then I fell asleep again, so it was probably just a dream. Or wishful thinking.”

“Alex Weight-of-the-World Danvers. I do know how hard this is for you. And I do still love you. I haven’t forgiven you yet, but I do still love you. So I want to keep you safe and protected and warm. But for now, let’s just keep it professional. I still need to work through some things.”

“Things?”


“Right. Those things. Things I caused you to feel. I know it doesn’t make a difference, but I am so sorry.”

“It makes… a small difference. I believe you. It’s just… I want to trust you. I need to know that I can trust you.”

“I know,” said Alex in a small voice.

“So we’ll do the job and work the mission and save the city, and then we’ll take it from there.”

“So I don’t have to date someone else? I can maybe go back to dating you?”

“One thing at a time, Alex. Let’s take care of Reign first.”

//

On Christmas morning, Sam found herself standing in her living room, staring out the window. Ruby came downstairs, wishing her a Merry Christmas. They exchanged gifts and played laser tag, until Ruby’s friend arrived to take her with a group of girls from her school to an ice skating party.

As Sam held the door for Ruby to leave, she looked down at the morning paper and brought it inside to read. The headline shouted, "ROGUE KRYPTONIAN STILL AT LARGE." There was a picture of the masked villain grimacing as she attacked Supergirl. There was... something about that face, something familiar. It made her feel decidedly odd.

She murmured, "Justice..."
Deceiving Appearances

Agents at the DEO ran around all the time. Emergencies by their very nature happened at the double. But nobody ever accidentally ran into J’onn and he never ran into them, because he could always hear them mentally before he heard them physically and he dodged their minds as well as their bodies. So he could hear the turmoil in the minds of Agents Danvers and Vasquez before he rounded the corner, followed by Astra.

“All right, Agents, fill me in.”

“Superman got ahead of us and brought over the K-weapons, but then he left because he didn’t want to be here when we used them,” said Vasquez.

Astra crossed her arms over her chest. “Gutless.”

Alex shook her head. “Hardly. This stuff can kill you, as you well know.”

Vasquez led them to the armory where the teams were already in their tactical gear, readying their weapons. "All right, people," she said. "No Supergirl, no cavalry, and Reign is strong, but she doesn't know what we're capable of. Let's show her."

Alex threw her a gun. "You ready?"

Vasquez snorted. "I once fought off feral flying cats with my bare hands. This'll be a Sunday picnic."

In the lab at the DEO, Lena sat alone. She had given Winn the prototype red sun grenade and watched him trot off to join the mission to take down Reign. Lena knew she should be thinking about how to strengthen the grenade, since she really didn't believe that the DEO could take down Reign without Supergirl, but that only made her think about Supergirl, and that was distracting her.

Finally, she gave up and went to the medical bay where Supergirl lay under the yellow sun lamps. Lena knew that people in comas could sometimes hear what people said to them, and she imagined that super-hearing would help with that as well, so she pulled up one of the uncomfortable plastic chairs, sat down and took Supergirl's hand.

"Kara, you have to wake up. Winn told me that your numbers were looking better every hour, but that your brain was working overtime. What is it? Are you trying to think of a way to defeat Reign? We can do that better together. Remember? You told me about El Mayarah, and it's true. You and I are always better together. Your sister and the DEO are all working hard to create new weapons to use against Reign, and I have been helping them, with Winn, building tech for you to use."

Supergirl's chest with the crest rose and fell, but otherwise, there was no response.

"I wish I could climb in there with you, hold you. I wish I could protect you from all the evil in the world, like you do for me, for the people of this city, over and over again. But I don't want to block any of that light from getting into your cells, and anyway, we both know I'm a Luthor and not a Super..."

For a moment, she let herself picture Kara in her argyle sweater and penny loafers getting down on one knee, offering her a ring, or whatever Kryptonians used. Lena thought she remembered Lex talking about a bracelet. It didn't matter. That was a pipe dream, especially if Kara never...
No. Lena wouldn't think like that.

"Come on, Kara. You have to wake up..."

//

National City's banks were used to being attacked by aliens, but not by humans with army-grade weaponry, intent on doing as much damage as they could—which was odd, thought Stan the security guard when the band of thugs raced into the bank shooting their automatic weapons. Usually bank robbers tried to get tellers to give them all the money quietly; they didn't shoot out ceiling tiles.

So when the two thieves came in shooting, Stan dove to the floor. But as often happened in times like that, everything seemed to slow down. And he noticed things.

Thing 1: One of the thieves was tall and muscular and his hands on the gun were black. His companion was considerably taller and thinner, maybe female? Her hands were white.

Thing 2: What kind of idiots would commit a splashy, loud crime right after one of the strongest alien supervillains in Earth's history had just come out on TV to say criminals would be punished? I mean, counterfeiting or fraud, sure. Those kinds of crimes were quiet, much easier to hide. But this?

Thing 3: That rogue Kryptonian crashed through the ceiling and landed on the floor in front of the thieves looking every bit as dangerous as he had heard she was, just hours after killing or nearly killing Supergirl. (The newspapers differed on how that battle had ended.) Sure enough, she said calmly, "You were warned."

And the thieves shared a look and took off their Balaclava masks, nodded to each other, and raised their guns to shoot the woman. But the white woman pulled something from her belt, hit a button, and said, without any fear in her voice, "Catch."

As it flew into the air, it looked sort of like a hand grenade, but it was red and when it exploded, the world went red in a flash of red light that sent the woman flying backward and just as she landed on the floor, it exploded again and sent a second burst of red light that left her lying limp.

Stan thought to himself, Gotcha!

But then she started to struggle to her feet. "Stage Two!" yelled the woman, and from behind her, the men in black raised automatic weapons, but instead of a rain of bullets, something straight out of Ghostbusters came out: some kind of barely visible plasma charge, like that thing that happened in the desert, where the world suddenly shimmered weirdly in front of you, except this time it pushed at the woman, making it hard for her to rise to her feet.

The man shouted, "Now!"

From above on the balcony overlooking the bank lobby, two figures in black jumped down with a heavy cable between them that they brought down over Reign's shoulders, yanking her back down to the floor.

The woman who was not a bank thief reached back and picked up a set of heavy-looking chains with a lock that glowed green, and slung them over Reign's head, and at first Reign fell to her knees on the floor, but then she pushed herself back up, sneering, and tugged the chains off and threw them away from her.

Reign grabbed the black cable and threw off the man on either end, whipped it out and around the other woman's legs, pulling her off her feet to the floor. Reign came to finish the woman off, but the
black man pulled her off and punched her in the stomach so hard she slid across the floor. With a scowl she took off into the air and flew through the broken window and away.

On the floor, the woman was gasping and holding on to her lower leg where the cable had hit her.

The black man bent down. "Agent, are you okay?"

"Yes. And. No, sir. And. It's. It's time. For plan B. Sir."

And Stan thought, Holy Mackerel, the SWAT team in this town is tough!
The Plan

Winn stood in the medical bay with his pad, typing furiously while waiting for Dr. Hamilton's assessment of Alex's leg injury. J'onn, Astra and Imra came in looking concerned, and Vasquez joined them a few moments later, probably having been delayed by returning the kryptonite weapons to special storage in the armory. Everyone looked characteristically grim except for Alex, who simply looked vaguely concerned. Winn wondered how much of that had been due to painkillers.

Dr. Hamilton brought over a mechanical leg splint and fitted it to Alex's leg.

"Are you all right, Alexandra?" asked Astra.

Alex shrugged. "Considering my tibia's been snapped in half?"

"And what about Reign?" asked Imra.

J'onn said, "She shrugged off that kryptonite like it was nothing."

Alex said, "The same amount incapacitated Kara."

"Maybe she's resistant," suggested J'onn. "Maybe she's more than just Kryptonian."

Alex shook her head. "The soil did hurt her, just not enough..."

J'onn asked, "You have a plan?"

"Concentrate it, put it straight in her bloodstream. Jugular should work."

"Um," said Winn. "Just one small hiccup. Who would be strong enough to hit her with the syringe."

Astra frowned at him. "You are looking at her."

//

Lena was down in the lab at the DEO when Winn came down to tell her the news, and when she heard it, she faltered and had to sit down.

"Concentrated kryptonite? Winn, tell me this is a joke."

"Sorry, Lena. It's no joke."

"Was this J'on's idea? Because he's a Martian, he doesn't understand what it's like to have an element on this planet that can kill him!"

"It was Alex's idea, Lena. She knows exactly what kryptonite can do. She's seen what it's done to Kara from time to time. She killed Astra with a kryptonite sword. And Astra... Astra has asked me to take the sword out of storage. Astra has volunteered to... um... deliver the dose, but she wants Alex there with the sword as backup in case, in case..."

Lena stood up, pacing angrily. "In case the kryptonite in the syringe hurts Astra? Or is turned against her? Or just doesn't work?"

"Um, yes, that..."
"Winn, this is, this is unacceptable!"

"Lena, I hate to say it, but... and I know you know this, but... sometimes, to protect the Earth, we have to take extreme measures, we have to do..."

"Unspeakable things? Oh, I know. Hope that you've made a virus inert? Hope that irradiating the planet's atmosphere with lead doesn't kill the humans as well as the Daxamites? Oh, I know all about taking extreme measures. Extreme Measures is practically every Luthor's middle name!"

Winn could no more stand up to Lena Luthor in a hot rage than he could stand up to questioning by a coldly smiling and silent Alex Danvers. "Um, I'm sure J'onn would be willing to listen to... other options?"

Lena stopped pacing and stared off into space for a long time. Finally she said, "Some chess games, you simply lose. You look six or eight steps into the future, but your opponent..."

She carefully wiped under her eyes, where a little of her mascara had gone runny. "I don't have another option to offer. But I can try to make the horrible option we have a little less horrible, or at least, a little safer."

"Tell me what to do," said Winn.

//

Back in the command center of the DEO, J'onn gathered his troops. "Reign is finding bigger targets. She's trying to teach us an object lesson."

"She's going to cleanse the city of sinners we locked away," said Alex. "People she feels were granted mercy. She's going to hit Albatross Bay."

Winn's algorithm beeped and the screen showed the prison's blueprint.

Winn said, "She's already there."

Alex said, "She's going to kill everyone. Prisoners, guards, it won't matter. They're all complicit, to her."

"They'll all be fish in a barrel. I'll go now, hold her off, while you finish preparing the kryptonite."

"No," said Alex. "You can't go alone. We can't let her pick us off one by one. She's too strong. We go together or not at all. Astra, are you sure you want to be the one to deliver the serum?"

"Of course," said Astra in her usual unconcerned drawl. "And will you be there too, Alexandra, in the suit and with the sword that killed me?"

Imra said, "I can help, with my telekinetic--"

J'onn said, "Yes. Yes, she will, Astra. But you will keep to the back, Imra. You will not engage while we are shooting and you will only act as a MedEvac if one of us goes down."

"General J'onzz, I strongly protest this order."

"Noted. But the possibility of friendly fire is just too great. Vasquez, you and Winn will run this op from here, watching on the screens and giving us big picture instructions."

"Sir, I would be more useful in the field," said Vasquez, frowning.
“No,” said Alex quickly. “I can’t lose you. I can’t lose every…”

J’onn growled, “Agreed. My order stands. M’gann has agreed to join us, so she and I will take point from above, followed by Alex and the agents with the ordinance we used at the bank--it’ll slow her down at least. Then Astra with the serum. That will give us the best chance. All right, people. Suit up.”
Reign was just so sick of it. Three decades of watching the decadence and being unable to stop it or even slow its progress. Three decades of this, this rage burning in her, burning hotter and brighter against the encroaching darkness she felt night and day.

Until tonight.

Tonight she blazed a trail of fire with her eyes, blew a jagged hole through the roof of the prison, blowing all the locks on all the doors wide open.

Striding in.

Watching dispassionately as murderers, thieves and rapists made misguided--and brief--attempts to stop her. All but one. One stayed in his open cell, kneeling, arms raised, praying?

"For Rao is the light for he was born of fire--"

Reign stepped into his cell, hearing his heart beating strongly, but not wildly like the others. She asked, "How do you know those words?"

Slowly he turned. "I was awoken to them."

"People are quick to claim salvation when they are about to die. Do you think that is enough for me to spare you?"

"No, I don't deserve to be spared. But Rao is my light--"

She looked around her. "Odd. It is very dark tonight."

"You are her, aren't you? The Beast that will reign?"

"I am Reign. You know my name."

"I did not want to believe the older prophecies. The Book of Rao--"

"What we are predates the Book of Rao."

"We?"

"The Worldkillers. The ones foretold. I ask again. Why should I spare you?"

The man's mouth worked. Finally, he said, "You don't have to spare me. Just let me serve you."

And that's when she heard the helicopters and... that other sound. People. Flying. Her enemies, trying to prevent the holy work of handing down justice. She turned, burned a hole in the wall with her eyes, and stepped out into the courtyard.

Two streaks of green and black landed before her. Green Martians. The smaller of the two said, "I think we've got her attention."

Reign growled, "You will not interfere with my mission."

The taller said, "Interfering is our specialty."
"I have come to cleanse the sin of this world."

"Do you feel like starting with yourself then?"

"I'm not of this world."

"Neither are we."

Vasquez watched the comms at the DEO's command center and she hated it. Beside her, Winn was clearly refraining from making copious Star Wars references out of sheer terror that she would pummel him, and she hated herself a little for it, but she knew he was right.

When Reign came striding through the hole in the prison wall, the helicopters flew low, with agents in black tactical gear shooting kryptonite darts, sending out explosions of green. and Reign, cape bursting out behind her, went flying into the side wall of the prison's recreation yard.

Imra dropped down, just as Reign was pulling herself to her feet. Reign shot at Imra with her laser vision, and Imra sent the freeweights at Reign but she exploded them all with her eyes.

M'gann ran at her but Reign used her freeze breath, turning M'gann into a ball of ice. J'onn ran up and grabbed Reign around the middle, growling, "It's time to put you back into the hole you came from."

She shook him off and sent him sprawling, but then Alex rappelled down in the kryptonite suit swinging the bright green sword and, Vasquez could swear, smiling.

Usually when Kara dreamed, she could wake herself, lucid dreaming having been part of her schooling on Krypton, but this time was different.

Having spent the afternoon in bed with Lena had been very satisfying, but she kept having the strange feeling that she needed to be somewhere else, not in her loft, and her phone kept ringing because Alex kept texting her to come into the DEO and help out with the next emergency. Part of her knew that this was her brain’s way of telling her to wake up, but another part of her wanted the dream to continue, so at first she just ignored it.

But Lena finally picked up the phone. “Hello? Oh, Alex. Yes, she’s right here. Um, we were, well, never mind that. What is going on there? Again? All right, I’ll send her in.”

She hung up and turned to Kara, who was already pulling on her supersuit.

“Babe, they need you to save the world. Again.”

Kara grumbled something, then kissed Lena, opened her window and flew out into the yellow sunlight—

--and opened her eyes to find herself in the sun bed, wearing a small white computer monitor on her forehead. Vasquez was standing by her bed, holding her tablet and looking grim.

“Good,” said Vasquez. “They’re at Albatross Bay and they need you to deliver a syringe to Reign’s neck. Go.”

Supergirl went.
Loose Ends

Winn watched the feeds from the DEO command center. He sat at his post while Vasquez paced behind him. He was surprised that he couldn't actually hear her teeth grinding.

"I should be there," she growled.

Winn said, "if anything bad ever happened to you, Supergirl would become a full-on supervillain, so no, Agent Vasquez, respectfully, we are all better off with you here."

She stared at him, but he focused on the feeds and turned up the volume of the mics.

Reign walks toward her victims, where they struggled to get to their feet, J'onn and Imra, while Alex battered at the giant ball of ice with the hilt of the kryptonite sword to free M'gann.

"You defend a sinner, you must be a sinner. I will wipe away the sin of this world."

Then, again, that flying sound. Reign looked up in shock.

There, hovering above her, was Supergirl.

"I thought you were dead!"

"I got better," Supergirl growled. Then, she shouted, "NOW!"

And as she sot down towards Reign, the Blackhawks let loose with the kryptonite darts and the plasma rifles, even as Supergirl tackled Reign from the air. They both crashed to the tarmac, and Reign pushed herself up first, dragging herself toward Supergirl, whose face glowed with streaks of green.

"Now," said Reign, "I will cleanse you of your sin."

But as she reached down for Supergirl's throat, Supergirl flung out her arm and stuck a syringe in Reign's throat, until both of them were glowing green. With a grunt, Reign took off into the air, leaving the tarmac littered with broken concrete, green darts and the bodies of the fallen.

At the DEO, Winn breathed a sigh of relief, as Vasquez threw herself into her own seat, pulled a notebook and pen out of her cargo pocket and started to methodically write.

//

After the debrief, Kara got Alex back to her apartment in a Lyft, and settled her in with pizza and potstickers.

"You know," said Alex, "you don't need to babysit me."

"I'm not. The potstickers are for me. They're like the anti-kryptonite. The pizza is for you. It has lots of cheese, because you need calcium for your leg."

"So, it's medicinal junk food," said Alex. "Is that what you're saying?"

"Exactly." Kara pulled out a marker, pulled Alex's leg cast into her lap and drew a cartoon Alex with a thigh holster. "My masterpiece."
Alex sipped at her red wine. "I hate not being able to have your back. I'm just glad you're okay."

"You knew I'd come back."

"I was really worried about this one. Genuinely. What was it like in that coma?"

"Well, Lena was there, so that was great. It made me realize how little time I've been spending with her lately. And she's the one who told me that I had to go. You called on my phone and told me to come in, but she is the one who kicked me out of my apartment, well, my mind, I guess."

"So your sister has less clout than your girlfriend?"

"I figured out how to share clout with Vasquez back when you were in that tank of water. It's not about who has more clout, as long as we always get each other back."

"While I am grateful for your newfound wisdom, maybe you could avoid comas for a while?"

"Deal."

//

Reign didn't know how she got back to the fortress in the desert, to collapse inside it while the kryptonite all too slowly wore off. She lay there, groaning in agony on the rough floor, feeling nauseated down to her toes, vaguely aware that even vomiting wouldn't help, since the poison was in her blood.

After a long grey haze, she found herself waking gradually and feeling marginally less awful. Slowly and shakily, she pulled herself to her feet. She looked at the syringe where she had thrown it away from her, but just then the computer construct appeared before her, and she bowed her respect.

"What happened? Why did you fail?"

"Supergirl stopped me. She had friends I did not expect."

"You also have friends."

"What do you mean?"

"There are others like you," said the construct.

"Why didn't you tell me?" asked Reign.

"You hadn't proven yourself. But now you have. You just need to know how to find them."

From behind Reign there was a man's voice. "I can help you."

Reign turned to see the prisoner who had been praying to Rao. She did not remember bringing him back with her.

"El Mayarah," said the construct.

"Stronger together," said Thomas Coville.
When Ruby's mom said that they were going to visit Alex Danvers and bring her a casserole or something, since she was going to have a hard time cooking with a broken leg, Ruby immediately volunteered to make her tater tot casserole, because who didn't love tater tots?

They got to the apartment just at the same time as Alex's sister, Kara, did, and they all came in to overwhelm Alex with appreciation for her being such a badass. Nobody had said precisely how Alex had broken her leg, but Ruby assumed that she had rappelled out of a helicopter or something, because that seemed like the sort of thing Alex would do.

Ruby immediately made for the couch where Alex had her casted leg propped up and she started reading the signatures. "Who's Wine?"

"That's Winn. You want to sign?"

"Of course."

From the kitchen, Sam groaned at her phone. "I'm going on a trip and Mrs. Queller just cancelled."

Ruby's heart leapt. Mrs. Queller wasn't a bad person, just boring and a bad cook. So when Alex volunteered to have Ruby stay with her, Ruby's heart leapt even further. At the Christmas party, Alex had promised to show her how to punch without breaking her thumb, but it had been weeks and they hadn't had the chance to do it yet.

"You're a life saver!" said Sam. "Thanks!"

Then Sam went off in one direction and Kara in another.

Alex said, "Now, the key to a strong punch is a square fist, a straight wrist, and the thumb on the outside of your fingers..."

//

The diner sucked. "Roseanne" watched her supervisor, Anne talk to a young, probably homeless couple, who poured out their change on the table and asked what the paltry amount of money would get them. The girl wanted cake. The young man said that cake wasn't healthy and could they have pie?

"Roseanne" picked up the coffee pot and started giving people refills. It wasn't even 10:30 in the morning and already she wanted to start wringing necks. One guy wanted a refill, a woman complained that her toast was wet, and the lumberjack who had ridden in on a Harley asked if they had a gluten-free option for breakfast.

"Yes," she said. "It's called eat somewhere else. I'm going to go on break, and when I get back, you better order something that doesn't make me want to punch you in the face."

She left him with the coffee pot and walked out, taking a Sam Adams with her to the space out back where everybody smoked on their breaks. Cigarettes were for losers. Admittedly, beer in the morning was lame, but if it kept her from killing someone and drawing attention to herself, she'd take it.

The last thing she expected to see was Supergirl, cape and all, striding across the parking lot.
"What?" said the superhero. "Are you drinking on the job, Livewire? Or should I say Roseanne?"

Livewire brushed crumbs off the name embroidered on her chest. God, how she hated the pink waitress uniform, but it was camouflage, after all. No one would expect Leslie Willis or her alter-ego to be wearing pink.

"How'd you find me?" asked Livewire.

"I've been keeping tabs on you ever since I let you go."

"I'm making an honest living now, so if you want to go a few rounds, come back after the breakfast rush."

"I'm not here to fight. I need your help."

"Mine? I loathe you."

"You're here because of Reign. She's been killing criminals--"

"People I knew."

"Who didn't deserve to die. So help me get Reign."

"I saw your beatdown at Christmas on the news. You think I'm up for that? You haven't been reading my psych evals correctly."

"I'm not asking you to fight her. I need help getting intel on her, but we have to go someplace where I won't have my powers. So I need someone I know... to have my back."

Livewire laughed. And laughed. She laughed so hard, she couldn't breathe.

Supergirl sighed deeply. "She's going to come after you sooner or later, so are you going to help me or not?"

Once Livewire got her hysterical laughter under control, wiped the tears out of her eyes, got Anne to cover for her since she "felt under the weather" and changed back into human clothes (all black, naturally), she went back with Supergirl to the DEO, a highrise super secret organization right smack in the middle of National City. Damn, Spanky, she thought, the feds could get away with all kinds of shit these days.

As they walked in, Supergirl murmured, "Just FYI, not everybody is on board with you helping me..."

"Screw 'em," said Livewire, feeling herself for the first time in weeks.

A guy who looked like Cat Grant's hobbit smiled when he saw her. "Hey, Leslie, remember me? I used to fix your computer at CatCo?"

"Yeah, no. Sorry."

She turned to see two heavily armed guards leading in a blonde wearing some techy headpiece, and she noticed that Supergirl tensed upon seeing her. "Oh, wait. Her I remember. Psycho Gal, isn't it?"

The woman growled at her. "Reign is coming after all of us. You got a problem?"

"Ninety-nine, but you ain't one," said Livewire, unconsciously mimicking Supergirl's arms crossed
over her chest.

Imra marched in, with Astra striding behind her.

"The ship is ready," said Imra.

Astra said, "Remember, the light drive can get a little finicky--"

"I know, Astra. I've captained the ship more times than you."

"I should come with you--"

Imra shook her head. "The blue sun will deplete your powers too. They need you here to fill in while Supergirl's gone, you and the injured Martian woman."

"All right," said Supergirl. "Let's move."
Ruby was impressed. She knew Alex Danvers was tough, but she hadn't realized that she was also smart. They were neck and neck at Trivial Pursuit. Ruby was better at history and literature, but Alex kicked her ass at Science and Popular Culture—well, she was a scientist and, like, way older, so that sort of made sense. But Ruby managed to beat her anyway. (Okay, just barely. But still.)

"How did you know that?" asked Alex.

"I'm super smart."

"Okay. Whatever. I'm super hungry. Where is that tater tot masterpiece you made me?"

"Your leg— I can get it."

Alex just got up on her crutches and moved toward the kitchen.

Ruby said, "You're like the toughest person I've ever met."

"That is the nicest thing anybody's ever said to me." She set her crutches against the counter and opened the refrigerator, turning when she heard her phone ping.

"You got a text," said Ruby.

"From who?"

"Vasquez."

Alex's face went blank.

//

The ship reached the blue star in some kind of record time, and they looked at the schematics of Fort Rozz on the computer screen, and compared that with the battered space prison hanging in orbit just beyond them.

"Time to go," said Supergirl.

Psi just pointed to the headband that was the psychic dampener. Frowning, Supergirl unlocked it and Psi took it off, looking relieved. They made their way to the airlock and Supergirl struggled to open it.

"Promising start," drawled Livewire.

Imra used her telekinetic powers to open the airlock and they stepped into Fort Rozz.

"Space is creepy as fuck," said Livewire.

"Guys," said Supergirl, and Imra's flashlight played over a reptilian body on the floor.

"He must have been poisoned by the blue star," said Supergirl.

"The lesser sex."

The doors of all the cells hung open, and the cells were empty and dusty.
"Fort Rozz has been floating so long with limited power, the cells must have opened," said Supergirl.

They kept moving through the dimly lit corridors.

"This place is like the Mall of America," said Livewire. "We could wander around for days and not find a thing."

"Do you smell something?" asked Imra.

"Probably more bodies of incompetent dead guys."

But then a woman jumped down in front of them and snarled at Supergirl. "You wear the crest of the House of El! How dare you show your face here!" She lashed out with a metal pipe, hitting first Psi and then aiming at Livewire, but Livewire's electricity made her back off for a moment. Livewire made the mistake of stepping forward, but the other woman was faster and knocked her into next Sunday, or more realistically, the floor.

The next few seconds were a blur, but Livewire pushed herself up when she saw Supergirl take on Pipe Woman in hand to hand combat, even without her powers. Without thinking, she wrapped the woman in electrical energy until finally she dropped.

Supergirl was gasping for breath. "Yeah. Thanks."

Livewire shrugged. "She's down, but your tame psychopath has done a number on your friend there..."

//

Ruby didn't know how to finesse her way out of this one. At the mere mention of her ex-girlfriend, Alex had changed, lost her sparkle. They found the hand brace that Vasquez had asked about, but Ruby didn't know how to get the easy-going feeling of the afternoon back.

Finally Alex said, "You know, I thought I was moving on, but... I still feel so sad."

Ruby offered her hand and Alex took it, saying, "It's like this is my life now and I can't do anything about it."

"I know what you mean," said Ruby.

"Oh yeah?"

Ruby nodded. "There's this girl at my school, Erica Morrison. I wouldn't let her cheat off my test and she got mad. Now she's been texting and posting all kinds of mean stuff about me."

"Can you show me?"

Ruby handed Alex her phone.

Alex scrolled through, looking grim. "Who died and made her Queen of the World?" She reached for her crutches. "Come on."

"What?"

"Oh, this we can do something about!"

//
They went back to the ship and the first thing Supergirl did was pick up the psionic inhibitor, put it on Psi's head and screw the key in to turn it on.

"Is that really necessary?" asked Psi.

"Look," said Supergirl. "Either we can't trust you or you lost control of your powers. Bottom line? You aren't safe."

Livewire hated to admit it, but Supergirl was starting to grow on her.

Psi grimaced. "So you brought me out to space for nothing."

Livewire said, "Maybe if you hadn't got all loosey-goosey on poor Matilda over there..."

Imra said, "I'm fine."

They made their way back to their prisoner, who fought her restraints and tried to lunge at them.

Supergirl said, "We're looking for Jinda Kal Rozz. She has information we need."

"You're a bunch of fools," the alien woman growled.

"She's not wrong," murmured Livewire.

The woman told them about the last person who looked for Jinda and died loudly, over a period of days. She told them about the Dark Corridor and smirked when she told them good luck. Livewire was happy to leave her behind.

When turbulence hit the ship, they hurried back to the ship's bridge. Imra looked at the ship's computer feeds. "It's a solar flare. The blue star looks unstable. If we stay too long, it's going to pull us in."

"Fan-fucking-tastic," muttered Livewire.

"Can you do anything about it?" asked Supergirl.

"I can try to put the brakes on."

"How much time do we have?"

"One hour, maybe two."

"Do what you can. Psi will stay with you. Livewire will come with me to find Jinda."

Psi hated that idea, and Imra didn't look happy, but Livewire felt the electricity crackling under her skin and she was happy to be moving toward a fight. Spending what might be the last two hours of her life with a powerless Supergirl sure as hell beat spending it with Matilda and Psycho Chick.

They made their way quickly but quietly down the dim corridors.

"So," said Livewire, "when we get this information about Reign, it'll allow us to kill her?"

"What?" said Supergirl. "No! I'm hoping the priestess will have information that I can use to get through to her.

"What? You and your Polyanna BS! You think you're going to get through to Reign?"
"I got through to you. There must be something good in you that convinced you to come with me."

"No way. I came with you because there is a maniac on the loose and I want to take her down. If you think I wouldn't fry you right now--"

"Then do it." Supergirl got right into her face. "Do it."

Livewire looked into the pure blue eyes and shook her head. "All I'm saying is, anyone as evil as Reign is deserves to die."

"And anyone who disagrees is just a sucker?"

"Now you're catching on." She turned away and swallowed. At the end of the corridor a dark fog blocked the lights. They stepped into it and felt a distinct chill. Dark figures whooshed past them and when Livewire looked around, Supergirl was gone.
Ruby watched Agent Alex Danvers threaten Erica "Troll" Morrison with jail time for cyberbullying, and couldn't stop grinning. Alex was now officially her favorite badass cool aunt.

//

When Livewire lost Supergirl in the dark fog, her first thought was literally panic, then annoyance that the woman she most loved to hate a) really needed her help and b) had left her alone in one scary sci fi house of horrors.

Dark smoky figures flew out of the dark right at her, like some kind of ghost-slash-ringwraiths. Livewire was not a fan of this, so she shot electricity at them and shot them out of the prison into space. Then, seriously pissed off, she went to find Supergirl.

She heard their voices before she saw them, and when she saw Reign striding through the prison--Reign out here in outer space--when she saw Reign shoot the scary priestess with her laser eyes and saw Supergirl do that idiot thing she always did, talking to homicidal maniacs as if they could be her friend, when she saw Reign's eyes begin to glow red again, that's when Livewire shot out the pale blue ropes of electricity.

Damn, it felt good to fight back.

"Watch out!" she said.

"Coming to Supergirl's rescue?" asked Reign.

"I'm coming to take you down."

The battle was epic: blue electricity against red laser eyes. Livewire was no fool; she knew that blue was the color of the good side of the Force. Just because it also happened to be Supergirl's color too didn't mean she had to be ashamed of her power. It helped that Livewire could turn herself into electricity and surround Reign with a storm while she simply looked lost, unable to know where to aim her eyes.

Livewire rematerialized. "That all you got?"

"You're a nuisance."

Red lasers came back at her, and as she sent out the electricity, she stepped closer, assuming that she could overwhelm Reign faster that way, but Reign caoght her by the throat and choked her with one hand, one very strong hand.

They had both forgotten Supergirl. "Get your hands off her!"

She pushed Reign away.

Frickin' powerless-near-a-blue-star Supergirl got into a shoving match with one of the few people who had ever made her bleed.

To protect Livewire.

"You. Need. To stop attacking. MY FRIENDS." She blew Reign up and they both went flying in opposite directions. Livewire went flying into the ceiling and she fell hard, feeling something break.
"Stop!" yelled Supergirl. "Don't attack her. She came here because of me!"

"Then she can watch you die first."

Once again Supergirl dove in front of Livewire and Reign's eyes lit up, but in the split second between light and total ignition of the superhero, Livewire managed to launch herself between them. The pain was intense.

At least it didn't last long.

//

Winn stood with Supergirl in the Med Bay, watching through the glass as Alex and Dr. Hamilton did what they could to stabilize Livewire and hold together her shattered leg long enough for them figure out a plan.

When Alex came out several hours later, she looked exhausted.

Winn asked, "Are you going to have to amputate?"

Alex shook her head. "Not if I can help it. She saved Supergirl. I am going to find a way to save that leg. I know an expert who can do phenomenal things. I'm going to go call her now. Winn, can you tell Pam to prepare NDAs and a medical consultancy form? Thanks."

She dragged herself out to change and make the call. Supergirl turned to Winn. "Livewire saved my life. And Psi saved both our lives. She messed with Reign's head, made her back off. We're going to do everything we can for Livewire. Do you think we could at least transfer Psi to a cell with a window?"

//

Sam showed up to pick up Ruby, Alex told her what a nightmare of a kid Ruby was. "Just horrible, entitled spoiled, and no sense of humor to speak of."

"Yeah, I know," said Sam as she hugged her daughter. "My biggest disappointment."

Ruby went to hug Alex and then went to wait for her mother in the elevator.

"So how did it go?" asked Alex. "The trip? Your work trip? Wow, that must have been really bad if you've already blocked it out."

"I said I had a work trip?" A weight of icy fear shot into Sam's stomach as she dug through her purse for her phone and saw two dozen texts from Lena. "How did I miss this? I didn't go anywhere. I never got on a plane."

"Are you all right?"

"Ruby said this the other day. That I said I was going somewhere, but then I didn't and I don't know where I went. This keeps happening. I keep losing time. Alex, I think something is wrong with me."

"Okay, Sam. Calm down. Before I was an FBI agent, I was a doctor. We can run some tests, help you figure this out."

"I'm so scared. Not just for me. For Ruby."

Alex gave her a hug. "We're going to figure this out."
The world was burning. It wasn't Krypton, tearing itself apart and breaking outerspace into hot flaming shards. Worse. It was Earth.

And hanging above a devastation National City had never experienced even when the Daxamites were dropping liquid death down from their space ships, Reign hovered, dressed in black, her black cape whipping out behind her. And behind her a black woman with white eyes. And behind her--

Kara woke gasping, her flannel pajamas soaked in sweat.

Winn stared at his computer screens, frustrated. His algorithm for heat signatures and body density told him where Kara and Superman were at all times, but the Worldkillers weren't showing up.

Kara, dressed for work at CatCo, had come in early to report on her dream to J'onn. She said, "Shouldn't they read like me?"

J'onn shook his head. "Not if they're not like you. Just because they were created on Krypton doesn't mean they're really Kryptonian. Nothing about them follows a pattern we recognize. Reign didn't need a yellow sun or Fort Rozz to retain her powers."

Winn nodded. "Yeah, and the way she shrugged off the Kryptonite? Maybe they were genetically modified. But they must have left Krypton the same time you did. And when Krypton exploded, pods weren't the only thing that rained down on Earth. What if I do a search for the time Kal-El arrived, see if we can find other things with the pods' nuclear signature?"

"Make it so, Agent Schott."

"Yes, sir, Captain Picard, sir."

Alex met Sam at LCorp, and Sam led her down to the medical testing area. Alex looked over the equipment with a happy little smile on her face and then she told Sam to put on the gown and come back.

Grateful not to have to be walking around in an inadequate medical gown in front of actual hospital personnel, Sam came and lay down in the MRI bed. "So," she said, "you were a doctor before you joined the FBI?"

"Yeah, I was going to be a researcher, so I had a job up in Seattle for a while, and then as it turned out, but surgery turned out not to be my thing." She set the foam headrest on the bed.

"Well, thank you very much for doing this."

"Now you're sure that it's okay that we're using the LCorp lab?"

"I am. Don't worry. No one will be here for a while. I just don't like hospitals. I don't like being sick."

Alex spread a blanket over her body. "MRIs don't hurt."
"So headaches and memory loss. Are we thinking brain tumor? ALS?"

"Could be. Could also be caffeine withdrawal. That's why we're taking pictures. Whatever it is, we'll deal with it."

//

Jess parked her Tesla and got out.

Lena grinned. "So. You like?"

"Very much. And Merry Christmas to you, Santa Luthor."

Lena laughed. "C'mon. I'm buying. Veronique's has the most overpriced eggs Benedict in National City, but you will thank me later."

"I did not think you even knew what the word breakfast even meant!"

"Well, Kara Danvers is a fan of brunch, so now I am as well. There's also a little dive diner on the other side of town called the Waffle House, and you will thank me when I take you there, too."

"No doubt," said Jess. "But seriously, Ms. Luthor, what's this about?"

"I'm concerned about Sam, Jess. I know you would tell me if--"

"I really don't know what is going on there, Ms. Luthor. I don't know her well enough to--"

She was interrupted by Morgan Edge coming down the stairs from the restaurant.

"Well, well," he said. "I thought Veronique's had a hard No Liberals policy."

"But apparently," said Lena, "they're fine with murderers."

"My lawyers will bury you alive for defamation of character," said Edge.

"Don't you have to have a character to defame?" asked Lena.

"You're just wasting away in that ivory tower, posing as Cat Grant, hoping that the gleam of liberal media will magically rub off on you. Enjoy the eggs, kids. They're mediocre. You'll fit right in."

"Burn in hell, Edge," said Lena.

Edge just laughed as he got into his car without tipping the valet, and drove away.

Lena turned to Jess. "Jess--"

"You lost your appetite, too, Ms. Luthor? Yeah, let's just go to work. I'll drive you to CatCo."

//

James was having a really bad day. He had been sleeping badly since finding out that his Guardian armor had gone missing and then not long after he showed up at CatCo, Lena had arrived more than an hour earlier than she had said she would and she had gotten in his way at the editorial meeting, insisting that someone should cover the Parks and Rec fundraising gala that night, which meant pulling a reporter off what he considered to be a more important story.

And that was before Morgan Edge had showed up throwing things and shouting that Lena had tried
to kill him with his own car.

//

It was strange for Alex to be looking at a regular medical scan, now after all these years. She had become accustomed to reading the DEO devices, half of them built specifically to handle alien medical issues, Kryptonian and otherwise. Going back to regular human medicine was... disconcerting.

Partly, that was because of the call she had made the day before, to the hospital in New York, leaving a message that she had a one of a kind case that required the expertise of the country's top, most innovative orthopedic surgeon, the kind of case that would write itself up and publish itself in JAMA without the surgeon having to pass Go or collect $200. To be fair, it had been a strange message to leave, but she knew how to make her case, and if it also brought back other memories, of another life a million years ago, well, Alex Danvers had spent years pushing down memories one way or another and she was very damn good at it.

Behind her, sitting in the pale blue hospital gown, Sam Arias looked vulnerable and scared, so Alex womanned up and studied the scans.

"What do you see?" asked Sam.

"Nothing," said Alex.

"Is that... a good thing?"

"Well, it's neither good nor bad. It only means that whatever is causing the blackouts isn't showing up on the images. There's nothing obvious, no masses or signs of bleeding."

"So not a tumor."

"Probably not. Probably not an aneurysm. There's a lot of probably-nots. Unfortunately, there is nothing here that suggests what it might be."

"Okay, so... where do we go from here?"

"We send the images off to an expert, along with some bloodwork."

Sam looked overwhelmed. As Alex prepared a needle and tied a tourniquet around Sam's arm, she asked, "Are you okay? What are you thinking?"

"Yeah, I'm just tired of all the lying, lies to Lena about my whereabouts, lies about press conferences and board meetings and earnings calls."

"So maybe it's time for some truth."

"The truth is that I'm becoming a burden. To Lena, to L-Corp, to you, to my friends. To my daughter. And I'm afraid of needles."

"It's really not that bad. I'm going to make it painless. There. See? Painless. Your being sick isn't a burden to anyone. Illness happens. It's unfortunate and scary and people almost never see it coming. But I went to medical school. I did my internship and my residency, and I saw some horrible traumas. A lot of them we turned around, we salvaged the leg, we chipped the young man out of concrete, we pulled the tree limb from the man's intestines. We delivered the baby and then we managed to keep her mother alive, and not only alive, but we rehabilitated her after her brain damage
so that she could go back to being a world-class surgeon."

Alex pulled the needle out and put cotton over it. "Hold on to that. Lena may be your boss, but she's also your friend. So maybe you should try letting her in."

"Alex, I've handled everything on my own since I was sixteen. Ruby, college, work, everything. I've been white-knuckling my whole life. And now I've pulled you in."

Alex said, "I know what it's like to be afraid of letting other people in. I always handled things alone. But what I learned as a surgical resident and what I know from being on the FBI? Nobody succeeds at the really big stuff alone. You are always part of a team. Somebody cuts and somebody has the suction and somebody has the lap pads and over there is the anesthetist, without whom nobody could do anything at all. And the scrub nurses and the technicians who make sure that the tools and electronics are in perfect condition. And the emergency generator in the basement in case the power goes out. Somebody has to make sure that that is working too. It's the same thing on a field op. Somebody flies the Blackhawk and I have my automatic weapon, but I am relying on our air mechanics to keep the helo in the sky so that I can grab or shoot the bad guy and get my people home alive and well."

"Well, that's dramatic."

"It's the truth. And I'm only saying it to let you know that you have me on your team, Sam. And I am very used to being on teams who work together to save lives. Catastrophes happen every day, and they happen suddenly. But miracles happen too. And miracles happen because teams work together. And Lena has saved this city, and frankly the world, more than once. But she never did it alone. Her brother, Lex, endangered the world numerous times, usually acting alone. But when we save it, we do it together. Lena knows that, better than almost anybody I know."

Sam's eyes were wet. "Okay. I'll talk to her."

"And if you want, I'll go with you when you do. I can talk to her, scientist to scientist."

"Yes, okay. I'll do it."

"Now that is a good choice," said Alex, handing Sam a lollipop.

"I get a lollipop?" Sam smiled. "Orange. My favorite."
Lena woke up at the DEO, disoriented. She recognized the med bay and Dr. Hamilton from Kara's coma, but she couldn't figure out why she was lying there under the lights and why she really wanted to vigorously spit.

"Lena!" shouted Kara. "You're all right!"

"How did I get here?"

"I flew you."

"In your cardigan and glasses?"

"Um, yes? I was in a hurry. You were dying!"

"And it never occurred to you that someone might see you?"

"Um, no?"

Dr. Hamilton shook her head. Alex walked in with a tablet. "Lena, you are one resilient woman. Your numbers are already back to normal."

Lena shivered. "Well, I'd say it's good genes, but we all know that's not true."

"It's your good heart," said Kara staunchly, making Lena smile.

"Speaking of, do we thing this was Lex again?" Lena's voice sounded nonchalant even to herself.

"Edge, actually," growled Alex. "But somebody shot the poisoner."

"Wait, poison? I was drinking coffee--"

"And when James went to question the coffee cart person, it was somebody different. Somebody guilty, who ran. And got shot from a distance, a sniper," said Alex.

"Okay, so balistics--"

Alex shook her head. "The bullet disintegrated."

"Well, that's diabolical," said Kara. "Why would Edge shoot his own hitman?"

"Maybe he didn't," murmured Lena. She turned to Dr. Hamilton. "Doctor, how is your other patient doing, Livewire?"

"We put her back together as best we could, but her right leg is a mess."

Alex said, "I've called in an expert, who should get here tomorrow. Lena, we should be focusing on you right now."

"Oh, yeah? Are you going to go arrest Edge and throw him in the brig? Or better yet just shoot him? Reign was right about one thing. That man doesn't deserve to live."

"Lena," said Kara. "We don't kill if we can avoid it."
"You don't. I'm not making any promises. If he comes after me again..."

Alex said, "Lena, let the DEO and Supergirl handle this. We'll work the problem and come up with a plan."

"Fine," said Lena. "Now I need to get back to LCorp. And could somebody lend me a jacket? I'm freezing for some reason."

//

Lillian Luthor was nothing if not resourceful and resilient. She knew that Lionel had been attracted to her for her beauty, but he had married her for her brain, for the cutting intelligence that she had passed on genetically to her son and more indirectly to her daughter. That tie of blood had blinded her all those years ago to a possibly even stronger bond, that between a scientist and her first mentor.

So when her spies at Edge's company dug up the plan to poison Lena, Lillian laid a few plans of her own. The disintegrating bullet was a brilliant little ploy. It brought Lena to walk into the warehouse at ThunderCorp just six hours after it had been fired.

Lillian smiled. "You followed my bread crumbs. More quickly, I expect, than your brother would have. I'm impressed. Now come give your mother a hug."

"Mother," drawled Lena. "What are you up to now?"

"Okay, so no hug. Probably too much to ask. The disintegrating bullets were an inspired bread crumb, don't you think?"

"What are you doing here, Mother?"

"A man has been trying to assassinate my daughter. I came back to kill him."

"Oh, how sweet! No, what are you really doing here?"

"You still doubt my love for you, after everything. Do you know another mother who would kill for her daughter?"

"No, I don't. It's probably a good thing for society. And if I wanted him gone, I would do it myself."

"I have no doubt. Though of late you seem to have gone soft. Buying a vanity business rather than focusing on changing the world at LCorp? You disappoint me, Lena."

Lena shrugged. "I've never done anything but disappoint you. It doesn't bother me anymore."

Lillian shook her head and took Lena's hands. "Why would you want to be Cat Grant when you could be Lena Luthor? Let me do this. You loathe this man and want to kill him as much as I do."

Lena looked uncertain, but she said, "Even if that were true, I would never act on it."

"That's why you need your mother. It'll be done by the end of the night. Then maybe we can finally work together."

"Okay," said Lena quietly.

"Good girl," said Lillian, not believing it for a second. She went and picked up the press passes, making sure that Lena followed her with her eyes and saw the drone, waiting to do its job.
When Lena got back to LCorp, Alex and Kara were with Sam in her office, looking grim. When they told her about Sam losing time and the inconclusive tests that Alex had done, Lena promised Sam her unwavering support.

"Ruby has the fiercest mom on the planet," said Lena, but even as she said it, she was pretty sure that it wasn't true.

Kara watched Lena when Alex offered Sam a ride home. She seemed preoccupied, and it didn't seem to have anything to do with Sam. She stood on the balcony with a glass of red wine staring out at the lights of National City.

"Lena, what is it? It's not Sam."

"My mother's back. She manufactured the disintegrating bullets. I just saw her. And as darkly twisted as Lillian is, she made me realize two things about myself. One, I very well may be a killer."

"You're not a killer."

"No, not as yet, but I do have the emotional range of Medea."

Kara smiled, shaking her head. "What's two?"

"I'm smart, cunning. I think several steps ahead of most people. My mother's going to try to kill Edge tonight. I think I know how she's going to do it, but I don't have the full picture. If I'm going to stop both of them I'm going to need my wit and your help. Both of you."

Kara smiled and took off her glasses. "You've got it."

They watched Edge on the TV brag about the Parks & Rec gala and Kara watched Lena's smile harden. "Bingo."
A Mother of a Fight

The security guard at the Center for the Arts never saw it coming. The little blonde in the little black dress and the glasses tried to get past him, and when he grabbed her to pull her back behind the rope, she resisted and punched him in the chest, dropping him like a stone.

Lena smiled as she circumvented the mess, heading toward Edge and his floozy of the evening. She took the recorder out of her purse as he watched with a sneer.

"What is that?" he asked, uncaring. "A bomb, to kill me?"

"I'm here to save you actually. From my mother."

"Lillian Luthor, the world's most wanted terrorist coming out of hiding to kill me? Why?"

"Because you screwed with her daughter."

On the roof of the DEO, Vasquez finished the pre-flight checks as Alex stepped in with her gun and Agent Jordan helped her with the combat harness. Across the city, lights like fireworks lit up the sky.

"We're up," said Vasquez, and they took off toward the display.

As they flew closer, the white lights redistributed themselves and changed colors, turning into a red and blue Ferris wheel, turning then into the white outlines of a ship on the water. From the top of the ship a bright red light slid down.

Vasquez shouted, "Harness check!"

"Harness tight!"

"Release door!"

The door slid open and the cold night wind pummeled them. Alex aimed at the red light that was the armed drone.

Then the drone shot down toward the arena's verandah where National City's elite were standing and very overdressed ducks.

Alex fired. The drone fired. People dove in all directions. Alex swore and sighted again. And fired. And missed.

And then the drone dropped down and -- changed. Like some kind of Terminator toy, it unfolded itself and reformed around a person who Alex could not see clearly through her sights. The suit glowed green.

In her ear, Alex heard Winn fangirling about the LexoSuit. She groaned. Supergirl leapt up into the sky to attack Lillian, just as three more drones flew out of the fireworks display. Alex yelled, "Winn, can you hack the drones? Slow them down, get them to stay away from the people and from Supergirl?"

"I'm on it!"
Lillian shot kryptonite flares at Supergirl, who blocked them with her laser eyes. They flew circles around each other, in a dogfight without aerial vehicles. Vasquez kept their helo hovering above the fireworks and when Winn yelled, "East!" she veered in that direction and set Alex up for her shot.

Alex fired. One drone exploded.

She fired again and winged the second drone so that it wobbled in its flight. Her next shot blew it to pieces.

"Where's the third drone? Winn, where's the third drone?"

"Southwest!"

Again Vasquez turned to set Alex up. Her fourth shot hit home with a satisfying explosion.

But Supergirl and Lillian were still locked in battle above the gala, green Kryptonite against red lasers. Alex yelled, "Winn, are those the last of the drones?" But even she could see the firework show sputtering out. 'VAS, get us down there. We have to take out Edge!'

And the beautiful thing about the Center for the Arts was that it had a long sweeping swatch of grass out front. And the beautiful thing about Susan Vasquez was that she could land a Blackhawk bloody anywhere. "Nice landing, Vas!"

"Walk in the park! Go get him!"

Alex unhooked her harness and jumped out of the helo, running at top speed toward the verandah where small fires were being stamped out by security guards. She leaped over a low wall just in time to see Morgan Edge running from Lena Luthor.

--And Alex Badass-with-a-Scalpel-and-Automatic-Rifle Danvers had a microsecond of awe at Lena Luthor running in four-inch heels and catching up with a man in, well, man shoes. Pure. Awe.--

And then Edge got turned around and ran straight into Agent Danvers. He looked like had just shit his pants. She hit him with the butt of her rifle and he flew backwards across the floor, dropping something that Lena bent down to pick up before she kicked him in the head with one very pointy high heel.

"Ass," she said.

"Now that is the understatement of the century," said Alex.

//

Lillian was having fun. For the vast majority of her life, she had been the power behind the throne, with Lionel, with Lex, with Cadmus. She had other people do her dirty work: Jeremiah, John Corbin, Metallo.

This was better.

Again and again she shot the bright green bolts at Supergirl. She said, "Please, keep on doing this. The last time you did, you bled."

Supergirl remembered chasing army rockets in the desert to impress Hank Henshaw. She turned and shot up into the sky, as fast as she could and when Lillian turned to follow, she turned back and bolted down tackling the other woman in the air and crashing to Earth with her.
Bits of the suit broke off in the concussion. Supergirl rolled off, ready to continue the fight, but Lillian lay in the ruins of the suit, looking bloody and pissed off, but not ready to stand up anytime soon.

Supergirl quickly trotted into the ladies room, and trotted out wearing Kara's dress and glasses, finishing putting her hair up into the bun she had come with Lena wearing. She heard Edge threatening Lena.

Lena said, "You know where to find me. My name's on the building."

Kara said, "Are you all right?"

"Better than I have been in weeks. Turns out you were right about me not being a killer. Thanks for your help."

"That's what friends are for," said Kara, feeling like she was Westley, saying, "As you wish." Maybe Lena heard it, because she blushed lightly.

"Excuse me, would you?" said Lena.

//

Lena watched the EMTs extricate Lillian from the remains of the LexoSuit and put her on an ambulance gurney.

Her mother actually smiled as Lena approached. "I'd hoped this time would be different between us."

"It was different, Mother. For the first time I was able to own the parts that are similar to you without resorting to evil. You did make me wake up, though. There's so much I want to do. And I'm going to need my Luthor smarts to do them."

"Well, at least it wasn't a total waste." And again the smile, an apparently sincere smile. "But you should have let me kill him."

Lena smiled back. "You know, one day you'll understand that there's another way of doing things."

"Well, you can enlighten me when you visit me in prison. If I'm still there." She winked.

Lillian Luthor actually winked at her daughter. Lena had seen an alien invasion, but she had never in her life thought she would ever see that.

//

Once the feeds showed the police taking Lillian Luthor off to jail (again), Winn sat back in the DEO command center with a sigh of relief, flicked on his iPod to “shuffle” and started typing up his mission debrief. He had not expected Lena to be able to make Morgan Edge bend, much less break, but then he supposed that he might have lower expectations for Lena when she was doing a low-tech task.

I thank God every day 
That I woke up feelin' this way

Eventually, the two teams came in, all black tactical gear and black-slapping as they made their way to the armory to rack their weapons and write their debrief memos. Winn smiled, perfectly satisfied for a change not to be among them. Hacking the drone from a distance was easily just as badass as
shooting them from close up.

And I can't help lovin' myself
And I don't need nobody else,
If I was you, I'd wanna be me too

So he was feeling slightly smug when Alex and Vasquez came striding in with big grins on their faces.

I'd wanna be me too
I'd wanna be me too

He watched them as they stripped off their helmets and Vasquez pulled Alex in for a kiss, telling her, “You were a rock star today, Danvers!”

Alex looked shocked and Winn didn’t notice the song in his iPod change because he was also surprised. Those two hadn’t been affectionate with each other since Barry Allen got married on that other Earth.

Wait
Wait for the dawn, my dear
Wait for the sky to clear

They laughed together as they made their way to the armory. He turned his head and saw an unknown woman with a visitor’s tag, a tall, beautiful Latina with long dark hair, follow them out of the elevator and look around. She caught sight of the kiss with an amused look on her face.

“Wait,” she said. “What was that? Are you telling me that little Lexie is into kissing girls now?”

Winn’s jaw dropped. “Little Lexie?”

“Oh, hi. I’m Dr. Torres. Lexie Danvers called me in to rebuild somebody’s leg. Who are you?”

Winn hesitantly offered her his hand. “Winn Schott, Jr. Agent Schott. Lexie Danvers?”

Her handshake was strong and firm, but she was staring down the hall after Alex. “Yeah,” she said. “I didn’t see that one coming!”

And you will wait too long
He will be gone

Winn had a sinking feeling that things were about get… interesting.

Oh, he will be gone
He will be gone…
Visitors Hours

Alex strode back to the command center feeling so much lighter, and it wasn’t just because she had stripped off her bullet-proof vest and racked her M16. Vasquez had actually kissed her—and in public no less—for the first time in months. Butterflies were flying around in her stomach, and they were huge, threatening to lift her off her feet as she moved purposefully through the halls of the DEO, grinning at the other agents, and wondering why they all looked a little disconcerted as they hurried in the other direction.

She reached the command center and saw the back of a woman with long dark hair, standing next to Winn as he pointed to different computer screens and explained his search algorithms. An almost electric shock passed through Alex and she stumbled to a stop. She knew that hair. She knew that woman. She had called that woman, explained the problem, and asked her to come. There was no reason she should feel shocked to see Callie Torres, but she did.

“Callie!” she said warmly. “You got here earlier than you had said.”

Torres turned and gave Alex a steamy once-over look that sent more shockwaves through her body. “Yeah, I got the red-eye. I was wait-listed, last person onboard. And look at you with the thigh holster! Very hot, little Lexie.”

“I, actually, um, I go by Alex now.”

“Alex.” The surgeon’s voice was a low purr. More shock waves.

From behind Alex, Vasquez said, “I don’t think I’ve had the pleasure.” It sounded like a threat.

Alex stepped back. “Agent Susan Vasquez, Dr. Callie Torres. From Seattle. For Livewire. She’s ortho. I called her to rebuild Livewire’s leg.”

The two Latinas eyed each other. Torres in heels was easily four or five inches taller than Vasquez.

Winn asked, “Why would you need to bring in a specialist? Couldn’t you and Dr. Hamilton—“

“Winn,” said Alex, “could you take Dr. Torres down to Pam in HR? She needs a consultant’s ID badge and she’ll have to fill out all the NDAs.”

Winn stood up hurriedly. In her heels, Torres was easily two inches taller than him, and her eyes slid to him, taking in the plaid shirt and the knit tie.

She said to Alex, “Why do I get the feeling that this is your O’Malley?”


The moment they left the room, Alex felt the oxygen return.

Vasquez said, “So. Seattle. Where you had multiple boyfriends. Should I be concerned?”

“What? Why would you be concerned? I was straight back then.”

“So you don’t have any history with this woman?”

“Well, I did sleep with the father of her child, I mean, before they had their daughter.”
“So that is a yes?”

“What? Pfft. No! Of course not. Besides, if you had seen Mark Sloane, you might reconsider giving up men.”

“I didn’t give up men. You did. I’m a lifelong dyke, Danvers. And I just got the impression that your Dr. Torres was too. So she’s straight?”

“Yeah, no. She’s bi. She had the baby with her wife, and Mark, obviously. It was a little complicated.”

“Complicated.”

“Yeah. There was an accident and she nearly died and we had to deliver her daughter at six months and she was in NICU for a few months—the baby, not Callie—and she had some brain damage—Callie, not the baby—and then her family was so not okay with her coming out and marrying a woman and that was before the plane crash that killed Mark and—“

“Alex. You’re rambling.”

“I, yes. Right. Sorry. It’s just, seeing her brings it all back.”

“Sounds traumatic.”

“You have no idea. Or, actually, I guess you do. I don’t know. It’s probably just adrenaline from the fight.” She bounced on her toes. “I’m a little hopped up.”

“I see that.”

J’onn walked in with Supergirl and Alex felt her confidence return. She asked, “Supergirl, are you all right? That kryptonite LexoSuit didn’t affect you?”

“No, I’m good. And Lillian is behind bars again.”

“For now,” muttered Vasquez.

J’onn frowned at his agents. “Is there something I should know here?”

Vasquez said, “Alex called in a consultant to help with Livewire’s recovery. She’s down with Pam in HR filling out paperwork.”

“Okay…”

Vasquez turned on her heel and walked away, and J’onn watched her go, still frowning. He turned back to Alex and said, “Deal with it, Agent Danvers. Whatever it is. Don’t let it become a problem.”

He walked out and Supergirl said, “What was that about?”

“I have no idea,” said Alex, and she quickly returned to her station under the computer feeds.

//

The moment Pam saw the woman Winn brought to her in HR, she immediately knew that her professional life was about to get… complicated. Winn was a fairly trustworthy weathervane for the DEO, and he looked confused, attracted by the new woman and also worried.
Pam pulled out the consultancy forms and the NDAs and explained the purpose behind them. She explained about aliens and powered humans, and nodded with respect when the surgeon murmured, “Yeah, that explains a lot.”

As she took the signed documents back, she let her hand brush the woman’s tan hand and she felt the woman’s look sharpen on her.

Yep, Pam thought, gay. Well, she’d fit in just fine at the DEO.

She handed her a lanyard with the consultant badge and told Winn to take her to Dr. Hamilton in Medical, and then she sat down at her desk, thoughtful, and texted Jess and Eve. Pam was nothing if not proactive, and she firmly believed that damage control should always start before the damage did.

//

In the med bay, Dr. Hamilton handed Torres Livewire’s chart and watched seriously as she read it. When Torres looked up, with her brown eyes wide, Hamilton nodded. “You see the problem. Normally we would rebuild with titanium, but considering the voltage of electricity she generates, even a low conductive metal like titanium could be dangerous. I thought maybe a hard polymer?”

Torres tapped her fingers against the chart. “Have you actually measured the voltage?”

“No, but last year she electrocuted a cop. Also, she was able to turn herself into electricity and travel through the wires, but we haven’t figured out how she did that, and I don’t know what effect plates or rods would have on that.”

“She turns… How is that even possible?”

Hamilton shrugged. “A lot of things that shouldn’t be possible are when it comes to powered individuals. You learn to run with it.”

“Ceramics might work. If we had a big enough 3D printer, we could use scans of the bones in her healthy leg to model bones for her shattered leg. I’d need to do some research on it, but…”

Hamilton smiled. “I can show you our medical library upstairs. I have to admit, when Agent Danvers suggested calling you in, I was skeptical, but she said you were the best.”

“I am,” said Torres. “I am that good, and I will find a way to build this woman a new leg.”

//

Supergirl went looking for Winn, and found him in the command center, monitoring the feeds with a plastic gun in his hands, feeding it yellow ping-pong balls absently. Vasquez was nearby, frowning as always. Supergirl did not have Alex’s categorical knowledge of the vast number of different Vasquez frowns, but she was pretty sure that if Winn even accidentally shot Vasquez with a ping-pong ball, he was going to lose his face, so she took it from his hands. He opened his mouth to complain but she rolled her eyes at Vasquez and back at him, and he closed it.

“Good call,” he muttered.

“Winn,” she said quietly. “What is going on? Who is this consultant?”

“Some surgeon Alex used to know. No big deal.”

Supergirl narrowed her eyes, but Winn gave a barely visible shake of his head and so Supergirl
changed the topic. “How is your algorithm going?”

“The Kryptonian body density one isn’t working. It still just shows you and Superman.”

“Maybe we’re going about this the wrong way. I’ve been thinking about Psi, how one day she couldn’t do anything with psionics and the next day she could. Did we ever find out how that happened? Was it like Leslie getting hit by lightning?”

Vasquez turned her chair to look at them. “Winn, she’s right. You need to look for people who survived impossible things.”

“But that’ll just lead us to metahumans, won’t it?”

“Maybe. But it could lead to aliens as well. It’s certainly worth a shot.”

“Yeah,” muttered Winn as he typed away on his tablet. “It’s worth a Schott…”
Dr. Hamilton was just about to go home for the night when she saw a light coming from Agent Danvers’ lab. That woman never stopped working, she thought, and went to encourage her to go home.

But when she walked into the room, she found Dr. Torres stabbing a calculator like she had a personal grudge against it and jotting down numbers in a notebook, snapping the lead of the pencil and swearing in Spanish.

“Hey, Dr. Torres,” said Hamilton, making the woman jump. “Sorry. It’s just you’re here awfully late.”

“Is it late?” she looked at her watch. “Oh, wow. I had no idea. And I still have to find a hotel room.”

“Didn’t Pam in HR work that out for you? I’m sure you could stay in the women’s barracks for tonight and figure that out tomorrow morning. We do appreciate your determination to help us with our patient, but you have to sleep.”

“I know. It’s just the bone density problem. I’m trying to come up with ceramic or polyethylene or hybrid solution that won’t make her artificial leg noticeably heavier than her healthy leg, so she doesn’t develop gait problems.”

“Well,” said Hamilton, “tomorrow, if we’re not being attacked by aliens, you can get Agent Danvers to look at your calculations. She’s quite good at that.”

“I’m still having a hard time processing little Lexie Danvers being some kind of badass federal agent.”

If Dr. Hamilton noticed the look of warm speculation on the surgeon’s face, she refrained from commenting on it. “Here. Tidy up and I’ll take you down there, make sure you have what you need for the night.”

//

It was a long night for everyone.

Lena Luthor tossed and turned in her king-sized bed, her feet cold without Kara’s legs to warm them. She kept dozing off, only to relive that strange almond-taste and the sensation of her throat closing off, and falling, falling to the floor of Cat’s balcony, but also falling off the balcony at LCorp, the sidewalk of National City reaching up to embrace her before she woke, gasping and heart pounding. She got up and went the bathroom, where she splashed cold water on her face, dried it off with a soft green towel, then padded back to bed, where she lay tossing and turning, then dozing off and dreaming. Again and again.

Alex Danvers lay flat on her back on one side of her huge bed, leaving what she still thought of as Vasquez’s side empty and cold. Outside her windows, in National City it was raining lightly, not the heavy relentless rain of Seattle that had not infiltrated her dreams in several years. But the sound of the rain brought it all back: Mark Sloan and their off-again on-again romance that they just had not been able to make work, the sudden shock and pain of the plane crash, her own survival at the hands of her peer surgeons, his death despite all their best efforts. She had not thought when she called Dr. Torres to consult that those memories would come pouring back in. She had not thought at all, just made the call.
Susan Vasquez did not hear the rain. She dreamed of hot sand and terror and a grey-scaled lizard-man towering over her commanding officer as he stood above her broken body shooting round after round into the beast as it took a swipe at him and a shower of red blood sprayed the parched ground. She turned her head as he fell, but it wasn’t Lt. Bayles, it was Alex Danvers falling, falling, her eyes open and blank as she slowly bled out even while the thrum of helicopters landing made the aliens turn to flee, too slow, too slow. She woke with a start, soaked with sweat, and pushed herself to get up, strip out of the damp pajamas and put on dry ones. It was an old dream, and it no longer held the power to repeat itself all night. What she really feared was a new dream about Alex falling, falling into the arms of an old friend.

Livewire lay in a haze, hanging between the pain and the pain medications. It was all she could do to keep herself corporeal, because she suspected in the tiny self-aware portion of her brain that if she let herself turn into electricity, dive into the DEO’s electrical supply, she would never come back. From time to time some DEO agent or lab tech would talk to her quietly, giving her a tether to hold onto, an anchor to keep her there. She knew she should be grateful, but Leslie Willis had never been too good at gratitude, and although Livewire had some complicated feelings about Supergirl—pity, disgust, attraction, respect, annoyance—gratitude was still a bit of a stretch for her. So instead she dreamed that she was hanging off the edge of a cliff, with a strong woman’s hand encased in a bright blue sleeve holding onto her and urging her quietly to stay, just stay, and hold on, just hold on.

Callie Torres lay on a narrow cot in the women’s barracks at the DEO, unable to get to sleep. When she had been an intern and resident, she had slept in some uncomfortable places in the nooks and crannies of the hospital, but since getting older, she had lost the knack for falling asleep wherever she could find the space to lie down. Seeing Lexie again had been a shock, even though she had thought she had known what it would be like. After the plane crash, Lexie had never been the same: not as lighthearted, not as innocent. And after trying to make it work, she had simply left the hospital. People said she had joined the FBI, or the Secret Service, or even the Federal Aviation Administration. But now it turned out that somehow she had ended here, a super-secret government facility for protecting the Earth from aliens. With an alien gun slung from a thigh holster. Which was crazy hot, and clearly something Callie shouldn’t be thinking about. At all. And certainly not at length.

Kara Danvers got into her flannel pajamas and went to bed, sending a short prayer to Rao to help Livewire hang on so that they could help her. She had believed in the woman, despite her constant cynical negative snark: Kara understood about the kinds of appearances people used to protect themselves from their vulnerabilities. And she wondered about Alex’s flustered look at the DEO that evening, whether it was just the tail end of adrenaline from the fight or something else. She thought about having flown Lena back to her condo after the fight. Lena had been exhausted and Kara still needed to get back to the DEO, but she had asked Lena her thoughts on replacing Livewire’s leg, given the electrical problem, and a sleepy Lena had looked fascinated by the problem, even as she fell asleep on her couch as Supergirl left the same way she came in.

National City slept an uneasy sleep, broken by thunder and lightening, no one noticing the bolt of lightning that hit the city’s hydroelectric plant, the repeating explosions that rocked the city until the sky was lit with fire to the high heavens, worse than the wildfires that routinely rocked the California skyline. And no one noticed the three women flying above the city, each standing slightly behind the other. But Supergirl saw. She saw Reign with her red eyes, and behind her—a black woman with white eyes, and behind her—

The sun rose, the yellow sun, its light reaching in through Kara’s windows to make her strong, to wake her.

Kara sat up in bed, gasping. That dream again.
Alex woke exhausted, but she got up, did a short run, came home to shower and then reported to
J’onn at the DEO. Winn had just finished his night shift and was going to the men’s barracks to get a
few hours sleep, promising that he had finished the algorithm for people surviving impossible
situations in the last few years, and that it should work. Vasquez took the watch at the command
station, and Alex headed down to the med bay to see how Livewire was doing.

Dr. Hamilton was there, conferring with the nurse and med tech, and frowning at Livewire’s labs.
Seeing Alex, she handed her the tablet. “We really don’t have a whole lot of time, and your Dr.
Torres was here until late last night trying to figure out the density problem. Actually she stayed in
the barracks. You should probably go down and guide her through the ungodly maze to the cafeteria.
I know she wants to work with you on the material problem.”

Alex felt herself flush, but she just handed back the tablet and put her hands on her hips, looking
down at Livewire’s pale face and her platinum hair and the white bandages. She hated even to think
it to herself, but Livewire looked awfully like a corpse. “On my way,” she said with a deep voice.

She thought she saw Hamilton’s eyebrow rise, but maybe she was mistaken.

When she got to the barracks, the female agents coming on duty were just leaving and she found
Torres sitting on her cot stretching and yawning. She wore a black tank top and red shorts, exposing
a rather long amount of tan skin, and Alex felt her mouth go dry.

She coughed. “Oh, good. You’re up. You want coffee? We can go grab breakfast and start talking
about Livewire’s case.”

“God, yes. Coffee. And juice, too. I’m ridiculously thirsty. It’s really dry down here.”

Thirsty, thought Alex. Oh yes.

Out loud she said, “The ‘boiler room’ isn’t far, so it does tend to be warmer down here.”

“Why the air quotes?”

“Well, it’s actually sort of a nuclear reactor. We have to be completely independent of the city
systems. Our air, water, heat, electric is all self-generated and endlessly circulating. It protects us in
case of most citywide emergencies and makes us not show up on the grid.”

Torres pulled on navy blue scrubs and silver sneakers and said, “Okay. Lead the way.”

The cafeteria was several floors up, and one of the few general areas that actually had windows on
the outside world, Alex explained, because the natural light helped for morale. A chalkboard listed
the breakfast options and Torres took a light blueberry muffin and Alex got a WOW sandwich
(waffle, omelet, waffle). They both got extra-large cups of coffee, and they settled down together at a
small table near the windows.

Torres explained her idea for 3D printing a ceramic leg. “There’ll be no danger of electrical shock,
but it would be heavier than human bone.”

“What about a polymer?” asked Alex.

“That would be the opposite problem. It would be too light.”
“Yeah, but if we’re doing this through additive manufacturing, we can make different layers out of different materials. If the outer coating is hard ceramic and the inside is polymer, the density of the two materials should average out to that of bone. Polyethylene’s density is close to 1.0, isn’t it? And ceramic can be anywhere between, what 2.0 and 6.0? If her bone density is close to a woman’s average, at 2.90 g/cm2, it would be just a matter of math to get the ratio right.”

Torres nodded thoughtfully. “That would make it more like actual bone, too, with the porous marrow inside the hard bone.”

“And just like samurai swords that have harder metal on the outside and softer on the inside, the structure would make it stronger and more resilient.”

Torres grinned at her. “Damn, girl, I am going to have fun working with you. You’ve come a long way since—” And both their smiles faltered. “Sorry. There are actually days I can forget what happened. It took years, but…”

“Yeah. Losing Mark. And getting on planes. And thinking about the ones you can’t save. I have to say, getting out into the field is cathartic. Saving people through SWAT tactics instead of through the ICU.”

“God,” muttered Torres staring out the window. “I still hate planes.”

“You know what helps with that?”

Torres turned back to look at her. “What?”

“Having your plane tampered with by terrorists, resigning yourself to going down in a fiery ball of death, and getting saved by Supergirl.”

“Wait, what? You were on that plane she ditched in the river?”

“Yup. It was the first thing she did, how she came out to the world.”

“Hm. Speaking of coming out, who was that woman I saw kissing you last evening?”

“What? Oh, that’s. I, um. Vasquez was my, we were dating, and she, so yeah, but I fucked that up big time.” Alex went silent, then stood up with her coffee cup. “I’ll be in the command center if you need me.”

“Yeah, sure. Hey, Lexie, I mean Alex, if you ever want to talk about it, you know where to find me.”

“I certainly do,” said Alex. “You’re working in my lab.”
I've spent a month trying to figure out why Alex would act so out of character in Both Sides Now. This is what I've come up with. Comments are welcome.

When Alex called her, Lena picked up Sam and drove them over to Kara's place. She smiled as she walked in. It didn't matter how grim the world was, how scary Sam's situation was, or even what a walking turd Morgan Edge was (and don't even get her started on her mother winking at her), Kara's apartment was like Kara: full of yellow sunlight.

Alex was pacing, still on the phone. Lena and Sam joined Kara on the couch.

"Yes," Alex said. "Thank you." She hung up, and came and sat down across from them. "Okay, so all the test results came back normal. No tumor, no blood disorder, nothing. You are as healthy as an Olympic athlete.

"Really," said Sam, looking even more unhappy.

Kara touched her arm. "Sam, this is a really good thing. The worst possibilities have been ruled out."

"No, I know. But we still don't know why this is happening to me."

"We'll figure it out," said Alex. "I promise. But for right now, just take the good news."

Lena felt warm, grateful that her girlfriend's sister had all their backs. "Alex is right, Sam. Go home to Ruby. Enjoy the now. Every second of this is important to you and it's important to your daughter."

"No, yeah, you're right. Thanks, guys. I don't know how I lived my life before without you."

Lena watched her leave and frowned.

Alex said, "I'll figure this out."

Lena's mind was moving a mile a minute. "We all will. Kara, would you mind if I go? There are some things at LCorp I want to check."

"Do you have an idea?"

"Thousands, darling. You know me. But there is one possibility I need to go ask some experts about. It's probably nothing."

"But you'll come back for dinner? And maybe a movie? Or..."

Lena smiled. "Yes, dear, or some very serious fucking, if you like."

Alex stuck her fingers in her ears. "I didn't need to hear that!"

//
Livewire lay in the med bay silently telling herself to stay corporeal, not to turn into electricity and fade away. She told herself to stay. Just stay. There was a reason, although at that moment she could not for the life of her remember what it was. So when Agent Danvers and Supergirl and the hot new doctor walked in with what was apparently a ceramic tibia and were falling all over themselves explaining how they were going to rebuild her bad leg, Livewire had a hard time concentrating on anything they were saying, just gave them permission to continue and passed out again.

//

Supergirl sat in the med bay, holding Livewire’s hand and talking to her. The agents were taking turns. Chen and Jordan hadn’t been too happy about it, but Supergirl used her smile and Agent Vasquez used her frown and Alex used her low voice, and between them, they got all the agents on board: every hour a new agent came and held the hand of an elemental supervillain so that she wouldn’t disappear into the ether.

The 3D printing was taking time. The tibia wasn’t a big problem, but the fibula was (in Dr. Torres’s words) proving to be a bitch. She was less concerned about manufacturing the cartilage, since apparently that was a process she had perfected back when she had still worked in Seattle.

Supergirl sighed. Every time Dr. Torres said “Seattle,” Alex turned away, her face registering a series of mixed emotions. Kara had been in college when Alex was in med school, and then she had taken time off to do an internship at CERN when Alex was in her residency, so that was the one time in their lives when they hadn’t been close, geographically or otherwise. A lot of things had happened to Alex in Seattle before the plane crash that had broken her bones and her spirit.

And then the drinking and partying. And then Hank Henshaw. And then the failed plane trip to Geneva. And then Supergirl.

Agent Finn showed up on the hour to take her place and she squeezed his shoulder and made her way down to Alex’s lab. She could hear Alex and Dr. Torres arguing loudly before she even opened the door.

“So make it all out of polymer!” yelled Alex. “It’s such a narrow bone anyway—“

“But it won’t be strong enough to take the weight—“

“Then maybe a single coat of ceramic—“

“It still won’t—Holy shit! Supergirl?“

Alex frowned. “Wait, you two haven’t met yet? I thought you’d already met.”

Supergirl stood taller and put her hands on her hips. “No, nope. Kara told me about Dr. Torres, but we haven’t met yet.” She reached out and gave the surgeon a firm handshake. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Doctor.”

Torres frowned and looked confused. “Er, yes. Likewise. Alex, you didn’t tell me you knew Supergirl.”

“The DEO works closely with a number of powered individuals, but Supergirl is the one I work with most.”

“Um, yeah. Okay. So, Supergirl. Wow. At some point could I get a picture with you? My daughter still lives in Seattle with her other mother—“
Supergirl and Alex gave each other a quick look.

“—and I would get some seriously needed Divorced Mom Points if I sent her that…”

“Of course. Alex, would you?” Supergirl stepped next to Dr. Torres and put her arm around the surgeon’s shoulders, to Torres’s great surprise. Alex held her hand out for Torres’s phone and quickly took a picture.

“Wait, what? I mean, you didn’t have to, I mean. Thank you. That was, I mean.”

Supergirl laughed. “Any friend of Alex’s is a friend of mine.”

Torres looked impressed. Alex blushed.

Supergirl said, “Divorced mom? So, are you seeing anyone?”

“I, er, no, I’m not. I’m, it’s just. No.”

Supergirl’s phone rang and she pulled it from her boot. “Oh, sorry. I have to take this. See you guys later?”

She hurried out into the corridor. “Lena! Are you okay? Do I need to go punch someone for you?”

Lena laughed. “No, nobody has tried to kill me today. Yet. I just wanted to see if you wanted to go out tonight. I could really use a drink and maybe to get my dance on.”

“How about the Amphipolis? The new consultant that Alex is working with would fit in there, and I think you’re going to like her.”

//

Winn brought sandwiches down to Alex’s lab and watched Alex and Dr. Torres argue about how to make the fibula. It was not lost on him that they were finishing each other’s sentences. When J’onn called Alex up to his office, Winn watched Dr. Torres scribble calculations on a scrap of paper and swear.

“Can I help?” he asked.

“No,” she sighed. “I got this. I do. I just don’t quite have it yet. Which isn’t horrible, because the cartilage needs at least another day, but every hour we wait, that girl is in a world of pain.” She rubbed her eyes.

“How about I distract you? Let your subconscious work on it while you do something else.”

“Okay. Tell me something. I just met Supergirl.”

“She’s really great, isn’t she?”

“She is. Um, I just kinda got a queer vibe from her. That’s crazy, right?”

“The whole DEO runs on queer vibes, Doctor. And Krypton was less black and white about those kinds of things than Earth tends to be.”

“Huh. Interesting. And Alex…”

“Oh, yes, Alex has long since left the land of the straight and narrow.” He took the last bite of his
sandwich.

“So, do she and Supergirl maybe have a thing?”

Winn choked on his sandwich and gagged. Torres stepped behind him and quickly did the Heimlich maneuver and the bite of sandwich flew out of his mouth. He coughed several times, his eyes wide and watering.

“No, nope, no. And um, thanks for that. But those two, no, nope, not at all.”

Torres laughed at him. “You seem very sure about that. Okay, question two. Is Alex seeing anybody right now?”

“Nope. She and Vasquez used to be a thing but they had a huge fight. They’re only just now back to working together smoothly.”

One of Torres’s exquisite eyebrows rose. “Interesting,” she purred. She glanced down at her sketches on the table. “Rope,” she said. “We could make the fibula out of a polymer rope. Winn, you’re a genius!”

She hurried out of the room, leaving Winn feeling uncharacteristically uncertain about whether or not he was actually a genius, and also wondering how Alex was going to handle the oncoming whirlwind that was Dr. Torres.
Alex strode into the DEO thinking about discretion being the better part of valor, and trying not to think about her sister and Lena, so when she entered the command center, she did not immediately notice Agent Vasquez standing behind Winn with her arms crossed, wearing her curious frown.

Winn looked up first. "Alex! Good news. Your Dr. Torres finished up building Livewire's tibia. They're just waiting on the cartilage. Also, you owe me twenty dollars because Agent Chen is totally falling for Livewire."

Vasquez frowned her annoyed frown. "Pretty sure Leslie Willis is a lesbian."

Alex pulled out her wallet and handed Winn a twenty. "Seriously? How can you tell?"

"You still have no gaydar, Danvers. Back when she was a shock jock, she said Supergirl had a Sapphic vibe. Straight women don't notice things like that and even if they do, they don't talk like that. I mean, she might have been in the closet at the time..."

Winn said, "Now she's in the electrical lines."

"Wait! Winn! Did she dematerialize?" Alex's heart raced.

"No! Nope, I was just making a bad joke. As far as I know the agents have been holding her hand and keeping her in her body."

"I'm so glad Callie was able to come," said Alex.

"I'll bet you are," murmured Vasquez.

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"I've seen the way she looks at you. And she keeps calling you Little Lexie. Talk about a Sapphic vibe. That woman is totally a lesbian."

"Actually, she's bi, like Kara."

"You can't tell me she's 50/50," said Vasquez.

"More like 75/25, women in the lead."

"Like me," laughed Winn.

They both stared at him. Alex said, "You've never dated a guy."

"Well, not exactly dated, but during the pink kryptonite fiasco a while back, I did end up kissing James, and that was nice. And I had the hugest crush on He Who Shall Not Be Named before the invasion."

They both nodded, looking mildly sick.

"I also had a crush on Riley Finn for a while, but it turns out he is hella straight, so no luck there."

Vasquez nodded. "He really is. Pity. You two would be cute together."
"And anyway," said Winn, "even if Dr. Torres is gay or bi or whatever, it wouldn't matter because Alex is with you, Agent Vasquez."

This time it was the sad frown. "No, Little Plaid Shirt. She's her own woman. A free agent. She can do what she wants. And who." She turned and marched out of the command center.

Winn turned to Alex. "Did she just give you a free pass?"

Alex slapped the back of his head. "Shut up, Schott."

//

The next morning, when Winn showed up for work at the command center, the agent on watch showed him the results from his algorithm. "Should I text Agent Danvers, Agent Schott?"

"Oh, yes. And J'onn and Supergirl. They're going to want to see this!"

It took a while, but they all showed up, and then Winn let loose.

"What's that, you ask? Has Winslow Schott, your favorite human, finally cracked the case and maybe come up with a hot lead?"

Kara sounded tired. "What did you find?"

"I cross-referenced meteor impact sites with police reports and hospital records, and looked for any anomalies. So, let's see. This guy had superstrength, but it turns out he was just a Maldorian. And then we have a Kalo'in and a Fourian, and then there are these four."

The screens showed four women, captured by the surveillance cameras that littered National City.

Winn continued, "There is no reason for these anomalies. They survived horrific car crashes, falls off a cliff. The doctors said it was unprecedented, like a miracle they're alive and completely unharmed."

J'onn put his hands on his hips. "So two of these are our Worldkillers?"

"Maybe, yeah," said Winn. "But which one or ones is going to take a lot more research."

Kara pointed to the black woman, Julia Freeman. "It's her."

"Her? How do you know?"

"I dreamed about her with Reign. They were burning the world down."

"Okay..." said Winn. "So what do we do?"

"We go get her."

//

It was an ordinary looking house in an ordinary neighborhood, the kind of house Alex Danvers had imagined living in one day with a husband and maybe one or two children, back before she had recognized that her life was never going to look like that, and that she should be glad about it. Still, an ordinary house like that wasn't the sort of place Agent Danvers was used to seeking rogue aliens. Derelict warehouses, sure. But boring middle class neighborhoods? She was surprised the neighborhood watch wasn't all out on the sidewalks to complain about the SWAT team surrounding the little white house with Supergirl in the lead, and then—on three—breaking in.
The DEO agents followed Alex and Supergirl into the house and cleared each room. In her ear, Winn told Alex to look in the back room.

They heard her singing before they saw her.

A young black woman in headphones knelt on the striped carpet singing to herself with her eyes closed.

Alex frowned. Worldkillers shouldn't be singing. "Is that her?"

Supergirl nodded. "That's her, all right."

J'onn and Alex gestured for her to do something. Supergirl bent down and reached out and touched the girl's arm. Her eyes flew open and she screamed at the sight of the superhero and all the agents in black tactical gear. She scrambled away from them and threw herself back against the wall, still screaming.

Alex raised her alien pistol and aimed. She hadn't planned to. It just happened. And why didn't Vasquez have her back?

Finally, the woman focused. "Supergirl! What are you doing here?"

Supergirl approached her cautiously. "Are you Julia Freeman?"

"Yes... What do you guys want from me?"

Supergirl turned back to Alex and the agents. "Stand down. It's okay."

Alex lowered her gun, but frowned. If this woman was as powerful as Reign, they might all be about to die, Supergirl included.

Supergirl said, "Do you... You didn't know we were here..."

"No... What's going on? Supergirl, please don't, don't let them hurt me. Please."

"No, don't worry. I won't." She bent down and reached out her hand to the woman who was still breathing heavily and shaking.

Julia took her hand. "Why are you here? What is Supergirl doing in my house?"

Supergirl held her hand and looked her square in the eyes. "Julia, were you in an accident recently?"

"I, I was. How did you know?"

"Can you tell me what happened?"

"I don't really know. It all happened so fast, and I, I think I hit my head..."

"Just try."

"My friend and I had gone out to dinner, you know Chef Chang's down by the port?"

"I do," said Supergirl seriously. "They have really good potstickers."

"I know, right? So we had just left the restaurant and were walking down the street, and all of a sudden, out of nowhere, this car was speeding down the street, just as we were about to cross and it
was coming right at us, and all I could think to do was push my friend out of the path of the car."

"But you stayed."

"There was no time! It came right at me. And then I don't know. I was pushing myself up from between these two cars."

"So it knocked you between the cars?"

"No, you don't understand. It hit me full on! I should have been crushed like a bug. But I woke up and I was whole. And I just pushed the car away, like it was a feather. And then, I don't know. The next thing I remember, I'm at National City General Hospital sitting in the Emergency Room while they're checking out my friend, and she's telling what she remembers, but when I pushed her away, she fell and hit her head, so she didn't actually see it. But the police came to get a statement from me and the video from the parking lot--"

She started hyperventilating.

Supergirl said, "Just calm down. You're going to be fine. We're going to figure this out."

But Julia shook her head and tried to push herself to her feet. Her eyes flickered an unearthly white.

Alex yelled, "Don't move! Stay right there!" She aimed her alien pistol at the disoriented woman who was pushing herself up to her feet.

Supergirl whirled around with her arms out, blocking Alex. "Wait! No! She's okay. We can handle this!"

J'onn said, "Let's get her back to the DEO!"

Alex yelled, "Stay still!"

"No, no, no, no!"

The room shook as the woman sent out some kind of shock wave, and a high piercing sound split the room, causing J'onn and Supergirl to wince with pain. The windows shattered and agents tried to cover their faces as a wind blew through the room. J'onn caught a flying fire poker as it blew past his face and Agent Chen gave him a quick look of gratitude for not letting him get skewered.

Then she screamed. Agents flew across the room from the force of it. She screamed again.

Supergirl blew her freezebreath into the doorway, creating a wall of ice. "J'onn!"

J'onn ran at the ice, turning bright red and passing through it without breaking it. When Supergirl tapped at the ice, it cracked and collapsed on the floor, revealing J'onn pulling Julia Freeman to her feet, wearing cuffs that were adapted to hold people with super strength. But she wasn't entirely Juila Freeman anymore. Her eyes were still that unearthly white, and she looked very, very pissed.

Alex swallowed. "Well. It could have been worse."
Girls' Night

Lena’s driver, Ted, dropped her off at the Amphipolis that evening, and she was the first to arrive. Kara had texted that DEO business was going to keep her and Alex a little later than planned and that she had asked Winn to drive this new consultant off at the bar on his way home. Lena asked for a booth for four, a Cosmo and a food menu, and sat sipping her drink and watching the door.

Several times a single woman walked in and looked around before moving to a table with friends or to the bar for a drink. But then a rather stunning, curvy dark-haired woman came in, wearing a tight black dress and three-inch heels, looked around, saw Lena, and came over right away.

Lena swallowed. She hadn’t had a woman that hot notice her like that in a long damn time. But here was this gorgeous woman approaching her and asking her about, wait, what?

“Oh, gosh, Lena Luthor! Your company made the tech that enabled skin grafts to be grown thirty percent faster and twenty-two percent more resilient. We’re using that mesh now to build cartilage as well. Wasn’t that part of your alien grafting project? I was just talking about that project today. I didn’t think I would actually get a chance to meet you! This is such an honor! Can you tell me how you solved the tearing problem?”

Lena looked up at this woman and raised her eyebrows. This was not the way lesbians usually flirted. If anything, when women found out that she was an engineer, their faces usually fell. This woman’s brown eyes were positively shining.

“Oh, well, I didn’t personally solve that one. My R&D rockstar, Kate, was the lead on that project.”

“Do you know how many lives that one thing has saved?”

“Well, several, I hope. Look, I’m sorry. I appreciate your enthusiasm for my company’s work, but I’m waiting for some friends.”

“Oh, yes! Sorry, of course. The Danvers sisters.”

Lena stared.

“Yeah, I’m sorry. I’m Calliope Torres. I’m an orthopedic surgeon, helping a colleague of Lexie—I mean Alex Danvers.”

Lena smiled, trying not to show her surprise. “Well, in that case, join me and let me buy you a drink.” She signaled the waitress. “Wait, did you just call Agent Danvers Lexie?”

“Oh yeah. Don’t tell her. When we worked together back in Seattle, that’s what she went by.”

“That is very difficult to believe. I can more easily imagine Agent Danvers springing out of Athena’s head dressed in black tacticals.”

“And the sexy thigh holster,” purred Torres.

“And that,” agreed Lena.

The waitress reached their table just as Lena’s phone pinged. “They’re on their way. Trina, can I get the Danvers sisters their drinks, and something for my friend here.”

“Scotch, thanks.”
“Sure thing, Ms. Luthor.”

When Alex and Kara came into the bar in their civilian clothes, Lena saw Torres’s eyes narrow with confusion. Kara automatically sat next to Lena and kissed her on the cheek.

“So I see you’ve already met Lena,” said Alex, taking a seat next to Torres.

“Yeah, I was just grilling her on that new grafting mechanism her company invented.”

The waitress brought two Cosmo’s and two glasses of scotch. Torres raised her glass, saying, “To innovation. And change.”

They toasted and sipped their drinks.

“So,” said Lena. “What was Alex Danvers like when she was younger?”

Torres gave Alex a slow once-over with her eyes.

“Be careful what you say,” warned Alex.

Torres nodded. “She wasn’t battle hardened back then. Easily intimidated, at first.”

Lena let out a breath that she had not realized she had been holding. This wouldn’t be so difficult after all.

//

Alex excused herself to go to the bathroom and wash her hands, and when she got back, Lena and Kara were out on the dance floor together and Callie was watching them with a perplexed look on her face. Alex slid into the booth across from her.

“What’s wrong, Callie?”

“Kara is your sister, right?”

“Yeah, adoptive sister.”

“Adoptive.”

“Yeah, her parents died when she was a kid.”

“Her parents died. Like the way Superman’s parents died? Like her whole world exploded died? Like that?”


“Danvers, Kara is clearly Supergirl. Take off the glasses, ditch the ponytail and the little pink sweater? Oh. My. God. You said she caught your airplane, and that that’s how she came out! Of course she would out herself for you! After what happened with the plane and Mark and you leaving medicine!”

“What? Wait. No! Sure, Kara might superficially—“

“Lexie—I mean, Alex. Stop. Look at me. I know bone structure. Also, don’t they have the same scar?”
Alex opened her mouth and shut it again, then pulled her phone out of her pocket and started typing rapidly.

“What are you doing?” asked Callie.

“Texting Pam in HR. You’re going to have to sign more NDAs.”

Callie grinned and tipped back her drink. “Does Lena know?”

“Yeah, she eventually figured it out. Took her a lot longer than you.”

“I am on a roll today! C’mon, dance with me!”

Alex opened her mouth again, but Callie took her by the hand and dragged her out to the dance floor.

Alex had danced with a lot of men, especially in the years between Seattle Grace and the DEO, and much of the time she had been pretty drunk. Sober, she had danced with Vasquez, who was, let’s face it, a cute little butch who danced a mean salsa. She had dreamed about dancing with Maggie, who was a hot cop that she had only ever seen in a dress once. But she had never danced with anyone like Callie Torres in a clingy black dress, with a bit of a neckline that led Alex’s eyes to drop and then rise to the ceiling to appreciate the spinning disco ball. Callie raised her arms and wiggled her ass, and Alex’s mouth went dry. She thought about Vasquez’s kiss after the last mission and the hope that had exploded through her and she thought about all the small electric shocks that seeing Torres had been sending through her and she wondered, briefly, if maybe she had been spending too much time with Livewire.

Because this? This wasn’t Alex Danvers.

Alex didn’t notice people. Not like that. She had never really had time for boys in school, and then medical school had taken up so much of her time and energy, and she had no patience for most men, and although Mark had been an exception, they hadn’t been able to make it work. And then he had died, and the men after that were simply a way to not feel anything.

And then Maggie. And then Vasquez. But while she had been pining away after Maggie, she had never really noticed Vasquez at all, and once she noticed Vasquez, she stopped noticing anyone else, male or female.

Well, except for Sara Lance. And look at what a red-hot mess that had turned into.

So this? This was wrong. This was a mistake. And she was going to end up paying for it down the line.

So when the song changed to a slower beat, and Callie pulled her in close, Alex murmured into her ear, “Maybe we should go check the 3D printer. You’re going to want to go into surgery as soon as you can after it’s done.”

Callie pulled her head back and raised one perfect eyebrow. “All right. We can crash in your barracks so that we’re well rested for surgery tomorrow. It’s bound to be a long one.”

Kara and Lena waved to them as they left together.

And Alex thought, Wait. What?

//
Vasquez sat in the command center, her notebook open and empty of scribbles on the console in front of her. Her face was blank, devoid of her usual frown, and the agents were now openly avoiding her. Winn was down in his lab, tinkering with the red sun grenade—at least that’s where he said he was going. She wasn’t convinced and she didn’t much care.

It had been a long day, avoiding Alex and trying to decide what to do. Just the day before, she had been ready to forgive her and move on, maybe go out on a date. Nothing fancy, just pizza and a beer maybe. They had worked so seamlessly in the helicopter. They were back, she had thought.

So much for her ability to predict the future.

When Agent Chen came to take the watch, she stuffed the notebook in her cargo pocket and stretched. Winn’s algorithm was still ticking away, but it would be easier if she was on site when it finally came up with some possible results. She made her way down to the women’s barracks, enjoying the quiet of the DEO at night—or at least on a night without enemy alien incursions. These serene moments were highlighted by the chaos that was so much more often what surrounded them. She stepped into the barracks with a sigh and then caught her breath. On the two cots closest to the door were Alex and Dr. Torres. And yes, their cots were the usual two feet apart. But still.

Vasquez moved down the row of cots and snagged one on the other side of the room, wrapped herself up in the scratchy black blanket and curled up to sleep.

It took a long time to come.
In her sleep, Alex dreamed of training. Her hair was long, her muscles were soft, and her reflexes were a joke. Agent Vasquez was fast and agile, and her frown cut like a knife. At first, when Director Henshaw had assigned the petite Agent Vasquez to be her Supervising Officer, Alex had assumed he was going soft on her, maybe for her father’s sake.

Nope.

In the cafeteria with the other recruits, all men, she had heard them comparing SOs, and she had realized that the bald six-foot tall ex-cop was a pushover compared to the five-foot-six ex-Marine with a pixie cut. And she came to the conclusion that Director Henshaw was in fact going hard on her, probably for her father’s sake.

She woke disoriented. A few feet away, Callie Torres was changing into navy scrubs, but Alex could smell Vasquez’s perfume and she couldn’t remember what year it was.

Callie turned. “You ready to do this?”

“You don’t need me.”

“Danvers, I absolutely need you. But I was talking about surgery.” She grinned.

“So was—Callie! Just don’t.”

“Seriously, Danvers. When did you last get laid?”

“Um, November? I don’t know. I was on another Earth at the time.” Alex distracted herself by tying her shoes.

Callie sat down on her cot. “Another Earth?”

Alex waved the question away. “The multiverse theory is true, okay? It’s complicated.”

“Right… And we’re about to operate on someone who can apparently turn herself into electricity at will.”

“Yeah, the world is way weirder than we thought. Get used to it.”

“Wow. And I thought living in New York was exciting.”

“How’s that going anyway? Are you and Penny still a thing?” Alex didn’t meet her eyes.

“Hardly. We didn’t last a year out there. Sofia is back in Seattle with Arizona.”

Alex tried hard not to feel elated about that, and simply strapped on her thigh holster and headed for the door. “I’ll be in the command center, but we have a roster of agents who’ll be scrubbing in to hold Livewire’s hand and keep her solid while you work.”

“You aren’t going to help me?”

“I haven’t done any major surgery in years. You don’t need my help. And Reign is still out there and we think there are two more. We have to find them before they find each other.”
“Wait, there’s more of her? But didn’t she nearly kill Supergirl at Christmas?”

“Yes, she did. She nearly killed my sister, my super, indestructible sister. So you can understand why this is my priority.”

Callie stepped forward and pulled her into a bear hug, a lavender-scented bear hug. “Well, then. Go save the world.”

//

J'onn had overseen the transfer of Julia Freeman into the DEO's containment facility, watching as she attempted to yell her way out of it and failed. Nodding his satisfaction, he had gone upstairs to medical to check on his other important guest, Livewire.

When he got there, he immediately realized two things. Dr. Torres was very good at her job and she was very gay for Alex Danvers.

Terrific. That wasn't going to cause any problems, no sir. He sighed.

Now he stood in the command center as the night watch filled him in on the details of the uneventful night and then Alex marched in and let him know that Livewire's surgery would be starting soon.

And he didn't need to be psychic to catch the layers of Alex's concern about Dr. Torres and Livewire and Reign and Supergirl and Agent Vasquez. He rubbed his eyes. It was going to be a long day for everybody.

//

Jess watched Sam stride into the office, with her eyes glued to her tablet, growling, "Yes, you met your KPIs but you're still underperforming. I'll call you back. Hey, Lena! What's up?"

"Nothing," said Lena as the door closed behind Sam. Jess switched to her surveillance mode and listened in as Lena reassured Sam that she still valued her focus and her hard work and her initiative, and forced her to take a day off to be with her daughter.

Jess sighed. Unlike Sam, Jess had no daughter, and not even a past relationship. All she had were her parents in San Francisco and her work in National City. If she suddenly came down with a brain tumor or something equally deadly, who would Lena encourage her to go be with? Winn?

As strange as it was to admit it, the person Jess was closest to was Lena.

Better not come down with a brain tumor, then.

//

Alex led the crew through the command center to Winn's lab. "Well, we've already taken down Purity, only Reign and Pestilence to go and it is still only a Wednesday!"

J'onn agreed. "It's certainly been a good week so far."

"Yep," said Winn. "And bonus points: the DEO techs found this at the Worldkiller's home." He took a seat in front of a delicate looking apparatus with, at its center, a narrow black stone. "It is a Kryptonian cache crystal. As you know, they're used to store information."

"I've seen crystals like this in the Fortress of Solitude. They contain elements of the Fortress itself, kind of like an artist's stamp."
"Yes," said Winn, "but this crystal has a very different home, a very different stamp."

"We might be able to pinpoint the location of the Worldkillers' headquarters if we analyze it."

Alex grinned. "First round is on me. And Winn, you get your chicken wings."

"And I will have an unnecessary amount of chicken wings, as befits a man of my stature."

Supergirl shook her head and went to check on Livewire.

//

Dr. Hamilton assisted with the implant, clamping bleeders and watching Dr. Torres work tirelessly and with great precision to rebuild Livewire's leg. Her two greatest fears seemed now to be unfounded: either that Livewire would disappear into the electrical grid, leaving them with an empty surgical bed and a lot of useless bloody tools and implants, or worse, that Livewire would send a charge through the metal tools and fry them all where they stood.

She had not expressed her fears to Dr. Torres. If the woman had figured out the possibilities for herself, she showed no signs of it.

"So tell me, Dr. Hamilton, what are National City's hospitals like?" asked Dr. Torres.

"Why? Are you thinking of moving here?"

"I could do worse. New York isn't really for me. I'd like to be closer than 3,000 miles away from my daughter. How far is Seattle from here? Maybe 800 miles?"

"Sounds about right. Well, NCGen is the biggest. It's a good hospital. It's attached to NCU's med school, so it's a teaching hospital and there are some researchers there who have been doing interesting work with metahuman physiology, especially since Lena Luthor founded the Lionel Luthor alien clinic. There's also St. Wulfric, which is Catholic, and the Luthor Children's Hospital."

"So Lena and her family are big into philanthropy?"

"Lena is dedicated to making up for her brother and her mom."

"So, I heard that the mom was back, trying to kill Supergirl. Does she seriously not know that Supergirl is dating her daughter?"

"Um, the fewer people who know about that, the better."

"Shit! Sorry!" She looked around at all the masked scrub nurses and doctors.

Hamilton shrugged. "Oh, well, everybody in medical knows. Those two are always getting attacked one way or another, and we're always putting them back together again. You ever think about coming to work here?"

"Well, it would be a lot easier if I had a job I could actually tell people about."

"Yeah, that." Dr. Hamilton sighed. "My husband still thinks I work for the FBI."

"Doesn't that cause a strain?"

"Sure, it does. I can't tell him about half the amazing stuff I get to do. On the other hand, it keeps him safe. So I can live with the strain."
She looked up at the viewing booth and saw Supergirl's red and blue among the pale blue scrubs. Dr. Torres followed her gaze and gave the superhero a thumb's up. Supergirl nodded seriously and left.
Good Cop, Bad Cop

Alex went down to the detention center and watched the surveillance feeds of Julia Freeman with her strange white eyes. She had recalled the trauma of her car accident and then she had changed. Well, Alex of all people certainly understood how trauma could change someone. It had been a long time since she had woken in a cold sweat from dreams of being trapped under the airplane fuselage while her colleagues from Seattle Grace Hospital used bits of the broken plane as makeshift shovels to dig her out. And then the splints, and the cold nights when one or another of them would wake up lying between the trees, screaming.

Except for Mark. He stayed quiet, and they all knew that that was a bad sign.

Supergirl walked in behind her and Alex shook her head. "Hey, how are you holding up? That sonic blast was nasty."

"I'm fine. It's not the blast that worries me." Supergirl pointed to the feeds showing Julia sitting on her cot, staring up at the surveillance cameras as though she was looking back at them. "Back at the house, she was afraid. She looked me in the eye and asked me for help. It's like someone else took over her."

Alex frowned. "Kara, I trust your instincts. I do."

"But?"

"But let me be devil's advocate here. What if this woman is just a very capable liar putting on an act to get closer to you so she could kill you?"

"No. No, I don't think she's faking it."

"You told me about the vision you had. The world was burning. That is the Worldkiller that you saw."

"Yes, but what if there is a part of her that isn't? If I can get her to be Julia again, doesn't that mean that there is someone we can work with? This?" She gestured around the room at the surveillance feeds. "This isn't telling us anything. Julia might."

"We'll try it your way."

"Thank you!"

"But take Vasquez in there with you. Meanwhile, I'm going to see what Winn has pulled up. I need to go pick a fight." She rolled back her shoulders, patted the alien pistol at her side.

"You don't really think I'm right, do you?"

Alex sighed. "I don't know. You were right about Livewire, and I would have bet good money against her ever having your back and being willing to die to protect you. And you may have been not entirely wrong about Psi. But they're metahumans, Kara. This woman, if she is like Reign? She could kill you, kill us all. So, yes, I am feeling cautious. But you've been right before. Let's do it your way."
Agent Vasquez reported to Supergirl just outside the containment cell. "Supergirl. Agent Danvers said you needed me?"

"Yes, I need to go question Julia Freeman and I need you to be the bad cop. I want to see if I can help her, but I don't want her to think that the DEO is a bunch of pushovers, just in case."

Vasquez frowned in surprise. "Yes, ma'am. But, ma'am, Agent Danvers suggested, well, ma'am, she seemed to suggest that I needed to be in there to protect you."

Supergirl rolled her eyes. "Oh, Alex. No, Agent Vasquez, I do not think this woman poses a threat to me at the moment. And if I can reach her, maybe not at all. She might be an ally, and with Reign out there, we need all the allies we can get. But Alex doesn't trust her, and I've learned not to totally discount her instincts. So I want another set of eyes on this conversation. Can you do that for me?"

"Of course, ma'am."

Supergirl looked as if she wanted to say something else, but she simply stood straighter up and turned and entered the outer containment cell. Vasquez followed, still frowning. Quietly, she moved to the side of the room and leaned against the wall with her arms crossed.

Supergirl went and stood in front of the inner cell, where Julia sat looking mildly amused.

"Julia, back at your house, you seemed scared. I can understand that. And I'm here to help you."

The woman laughed drily.

"Julia?"

"That is not my name."

"Okay. What would you like me to call you?"

"I am the Scalding Light. I am the Flood that Sweeps Away Sins. I am the Word and Cry of Justice."

Vasquez drawled, "Would you mind just condensing that? A bit? It's a little long."

"I am Purity."

"Nice to meet you, Purity," said Supergirl, sounding as always very sincere. "But can I call you Julia? Is that okay? It's just that I met her first. She's who I would really like to talk to, actually."

Purity smiled. "Call me what you will, Kryptonian. You don't understand yet." She turned to Vasquez. "You do."

Vasquez pointed to herself. "Me?" Her eyes flickered to Supergirl who gave her the tiniest of nods. Vasquez stepped forward, saying, "Yeah. Yeah, I do. I understand it just fine. See, I know that look. You think you're smarter than me, stronger than me. And that's fine. You're entitled to your own opinion. For now. It'll change in time though. Because after days, weeks, months in here, you're going to feel like I peeled your skin off and saw everything underneath. You can call me Agent Vasquez, Purity." She smiled.

Supergirl looked just the tiniest bit disconcerted, but then covered it. "Julia, I know you're in there. If you can show yourself, I will help you. I will."

Vasquez said, "Or you could just tell us where Reign is. That's why we brought you in here. Which was super easy, by the way."
Purity smiled. "Oh, ladies. How will you ever make your minds up about me?" She laughed freely.

Supergirl gave Vasquez a nod and they left the room.

Vasquez asked, "Is that what you wanted?"

Supergirl shook her head. "I don't know. I mean, I know that Alex thinks she was lying before at the house. You didn't see it, but she was scared. That was real. This? This feels like the lie to me. This is the exact same way that Livewire and Psi were: vengeful and dark and laughing. It's a facade."

"Including the creepy eyes?"

Supergirl sighed. "The powers are real. But powers don't have to make people become evil. Take a look at the photos of the house. That was not an evil lair. It was a nice little house, and she was singing along to her playlist when we broke in. What turned her was her fear. If I can make her trust me--"

"Have we ever made somebody in one of those cells trust us?"

"No, we haven't." Supergirl looked like she wanted to pound something. "If only we had had more time, if I could have talked to Julia for a little bit longer..."

"Supergirl, go down to training room and pound some rock into rubble. It'll make you feel better. Then maybe we can think of something."

Supergirl nodded. "Thanks, Susan. You're a good friend."

She strode off down the hall, leaving Vasquez feeling too many emotions all at once: empathy for Supergirl, sadness at losing Alex, frustration at herself for feeling so jealous of Dr. Torres, who was, to be fair, risking her life to operate on a woman who could electrocute her in a heartbeat. And J'onn had been rubbing his eyes all day, and Vasquez knew what that meant. So Dr. Torres, as femme as she was, was just gay enough to want Alex, and she looked very much like a woman who got what she wanted.

With a sigh, Vasquez went off to medical to check on how the surgery was going. If they couldn't get Purity to let go of Julia, they were going to need powered allies like Livewire. She had held her own against Reign before. With any luck she would be able to do it again.
Ever since the most recent school shooting in Florida, Ruby's school had been having more regular active shooter drills, which Ruby's friends hated, saying it just made them more scared. Ruby shrugged. It wasn't that she didn't think that mentally ill white guys weren't a huge problem in America or that she couldn't imagine being gunned down in the hallways. She understood her friends' fear. She just didn't share it.

Ruby was way too busy being afraid of powerful men in submarines shooting torpedos at her, or wrecking balls dropping on her, or psychopathic metahumans trying to kill her mother. And she was terrified of Reign. She was completely confident that Supergirl could protect National City from all of the other kinds of threats. But Reign had made her bleed.

So she sat along the inside wall of her classroom keeping complete silence along with her teacher and peers as they waited for the all-clear signal to be given, and she held on to her Supergirl pendant that she wore everywhere, and she prayed for Supergirl.

Because God had made Krypton, right? And then sent Supergirl and her cousin to Earth to protect Earth. So surely God would protect Supergirl. He just needed to be reminded, Ruby figured.

When the all-clear signal sounded, the students stood up and went to change classes, but the principal called over the PA system for Ruby to come to her office, and Ruby went, afraid that whatever was going on with her mother was finally happening in earnest. But when she got there, she saw her mother telling the principal that she was needed for a family emergency, but she heard that special nuance in her mother's voice that suggested what her mother called high-jinks.

Ruby sighed with relief, got her coat and books and got into the car. "Family emergency?"

"Well, not really," said her mother. "Ice skating, if you must know. We're taking a mental health day."

"Is everything okay?"

"Yes, of course. I miss seeing you, babe. It's been a rough couple of months, and I feel like we could both use to play hooky."

"Oh, my God. You're serious!"

"I'm serious. Sound like a plan?"

"Hell, yeah!"

"You get exactly one hell yeah today. I hope you enjoyed that."

"Okay. And I did."

//

J'onn was up in accounting when he got the text. He apologized profusely for leaving the meeting, but Tony in accounting wasn't fooled in the least. He hurried down to medical, hoping for good news.

As he entered, he saw Dr. Torres leaving the OR. The doctor turned and smiled tiredly. "Director
Henshaw, our patient is doing very well. She is stable and her numbers are good. We'll have to keep an eye on her for a while, in case she shows signs of rejecting the implants."

"Is that a strong possibility?" asked J'onn.

"In a normal human, we've had good luck with implants like this, and we injected some of her cells into the cartilage I grew so that her body should recognize it. But she is a, what do you call them? Metahuman? So it's almost impossible to say, because different bodies react differently, and Dr. Hamilton doesn't have a sense of just how much her electrical abilities might make her biology different from a regular human."

"Thank you, Dr. Torres. So how long can you stay to help out with this?"

"Well, indefinitely. When the federal government asks for a consult, the hospital can make things happen."

"But the federal government didn't ask you here. Agent Danvers did."

"Well, Lexie always did know how to get things done. Remind me to tell you about the time she gathered– Actually, maybe that's not a good idea. Let's just say, my Chief of Surgery said that President Marsden got into the mix."

"Ah, yes. She would, wouldn't she."

Alex walked in behind them. "Who would do what?"

"You, Agent Danvers. Calling the president..."

"Pfft. I just put a call in to Cat Grant. What she did with the information I gave her was up to her."

"But you know that she cared for Leslie Willis and still feels guilty about her becoming Livewire."

"Director Henshaw, I have no idea what you mean. I just made a call."

Dr. Torres grinned and one eyebrow rose.

J'onn said, "Agent Danvers, Dr. Torres here was just telling me that the surgery was a success."

"Excellent. Supergirl will be relieved to hear that."

"And now," said Dr. Torres. "Alex, I mean, Agent Danvers. I am going to fall asleep on my feet. The surgery took almost seventeen hours. Can you guide me back to the barracks? I got lost this morning, and I don't really feel like ending up falling asleep next to your nuclear reactor."

"Can do. J'onn, will you let Supergirl know the good news?"

"Absolutely." He watched as the surgeon stretched and yawned hugely as they made their way down the hall, then laughed at something Alex said. The hormones were practically a palpable wave. He was going to have to check on Vasquez. While Dr. Torres was a fantastic resource and had probably saved Livewire who was looking like being a valuable asset for the DEO, particularly with Reign and company in the mix, the surgeon was also a potential time bomb.

Just what he needed.

//
Down in the women's barracks, Callie Torres flirted with Alex as she changed out of her scrubs and into her tank top and shorts, noticing how Alex's eyes kept checking her out and flickering away, just as they had done at the lesbian bar. It crossed her mind to test the waters, but Alex kept using her deep agent voice and so Callie had pity on her and thanked her for the guidance. Alex looked slightly relieved to leave.

Callie smiled to herself as she turned the light off and lay down. Within seconds she was herself out like a light. She slept like the dead. At first she dreamed of the surgery, watching her own gloved hands cut into the woman's mangled leg, insert the 3D printed bones and the homegrown cartilage and sew everything together, while Dr. Hamilton clamped bleeders and the DEO medics suctioned blood. But gradually, she dreamed that she was back in Seattle in the OR, looking over her surgical mask to see Lexie Danvers' big brown eyes looking back at her.

Little Lexie was gone now, replaced by a grown woman who wore a thigh holster with an alien pistol from another planet. During the surgery, Dr. Hamilton had told stories about Alex training with Vasquez, cutting her hair short so it couldn't be used against her, fighting Supergirl's aunt, Astra, with a kryptonite sword, leaping out of the skyscraper during a fight with the Daxamites, and free-falling into Supergirl's arms. And she had never stopped shooting.

That was the woman Callie Torres dreamed of fucking in an on-call room several hundred miles away.
Supergirl paced back and forth in the command center, her cape swinging as she walked. Alex was working at her station on the right, comparing something on her tablet to something on the computer feeds above. Winn was playing with plastic dinosaurs at the middle station, muttering, "Curse you for your sudden but inevitable betrayal," which probably meant he was trying to figure out a coding problem for his KillSeeker algorithm. On the left, Vasquez was clicking a pen but not writing anything in her notebook, which was a very bad sign indeed.

Supergirl wondered if Alex were really oblivious about Vasquez's fairly obvious (and possibly dangerous?) jealousy. She wondered what godawful name Winn would give Alex and Torres if they did start a relationship--LexOpie? Canvers? It didn't bear thinking about.

But Supergirl had made a promise to Vasquez, that if Alex broke her heart, she would have Vasquez's back. Or her heart's back. Or something. And then Alex had broken Vasquez's heart and Kara had not done anything, and worse, neither had Supergirl. It was time for her to do something.

"Agent Vasquez?" she said.

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Can you get background information on Julia Freeman? Who was she? Where did she go to school? What was her favorite color? If we're going to get her back from Purity, we have to know who she really was. Is. Who she is."

"Yes, ma'am," said Vasquez. "I'm on it."

"Thank you, Vasquez."

Supergirl strode out of the room and went down to medical. She had told herself she would stay away, on the off chance that Livewire reacted badly to seeing her, but she just couldn't do it. One good thing had to come out of this day.

In the recovery room, Agent Oliver, a rookie, was sitting beside Livewire's bed, reading superhero comics on her tablet with one hand while she held Livewire's hand with the other. A medic came in and told Supergirl that the doctors were optimistic about her prognosis, and Supergirl smiled her thanks.

"Agent Oliver," said Supergirl. "If you need a bathroom break, I could sit with her for a bit."

The woman thanked her and hurried out. Supergirl took her place and sat holding Livewire's hand.

"Shrpergil," murmured Livewire groggily.

"Livewire, good morning." She gave the woman her megawatt smile.

"I'm not... dead?"

"Nope. One hundred percent alive. And eventually, kicking, although you might want to wait on that a bit."

"Yer funny..."

"And you still need to sleep off that lovely knockout gas they gave you." She looked up to see Agent
Oliver returning. "So I will leave you to it. Be nice to Agent Oliver here. She's reading Livewire comics."

"O-kay!" Livewire drifted off to sleep again.

"Um, Supergirl?" said Agent Oliver. "They're actually Agents of SHIELD comics."

Supergirl shrugged. "If you don't tell her, I won't tell her." She left the agent chuckling behind her.

By the time she returned to the command center, Vasquez had come up with a file of information that she gave Supergirl.

"This was all we could get. She has almost no online footprint and even less offline."

"It's a start. Thank you, Vasquez. Care to join me?"

Alex looked up. "Supergirl, I should be the one to help you interrogate Purity."

"I think Vasquez is the better choice for this, Alex. You have a bias. We can't afford to let that get in the way."

Vasquez studied her feet, frowning. Alex raised a hand to protest but then said, "If you think that's best, Supergirl."

Supergirl nodded, then gestured for Vasquez to come with her.

They went down to the containment cell. Supergirl flipped through the file, then took a deep breath and stepped into Julia's space. Inside the glass-walled cell, the woman was sitting, maybe meditating, maybe just bored. Supergirl read from the pages. "Julia Freeman. No birth certificate. Adopted in 1993 by Laurence and Molly Freeman. Allergic to milk. Studied music at Cincinnati Conservatory--"

"Doesn't Julia sound nice," said Purity.

"Yeah. From the little I've been around her, I liked her."

Vasquez stayed in the back of the room, with her back to the door, just watching.

"She was very fun to play," said Purity. "Everything you have in that file is just a character description. There never was, and never will be, a Julia Freeman. Just little old me."

"Why keep up an act for decades?" asked Supergirl.

"When my sister and I arrived, we knew it would be many years before the cosmic alignment of forces came to pass. An act would be necessary." Her voice was studied, careless.

Supergirl pulled a photo out of the file and held it up to the glass wall for Julia to turn to see. Benita Ripson, your roommate at Cincinnati, your emergency contact, your best friend for a decade. I bet she's really worried about you right now."

Purity looked upset, but she simply said, "Sounds about right. Benita was always so clingy. Drove me crazy."

"Crazy enough to save your life?" asked Supergirl. "Julia?"

For a moment, it almost seemed like Purity was going to let Julia come back, but then she stopped and snapped, "Do you imagine I care about humans just because you do?"
"I think you do care, Julia. And I care about you."

"Hm," said Purity, standing up to look down at Supergirl kneeling before her. "Will you still care when I tear open your bones and rip out your soft parts?"

Vasquez strode over, growling, "You're never going to get that chance. 'Cause you are going to sit in that cell until I say so."

Purity ignored her. "And after, I'll open up your friend and eat her heart with the other gods."

Vasquez smiled, and it wasn't pretty. She said, "My heart is made of steel, bitch. And you want to talk about opening people up? Because you are going to have eight different government agencies fighting over who gets to dissect you."

Supergirl stood and pushed Vasquez gently away. "Okay, let's speak outside, Agent Vasquez."

Vasquez pulled back. "You're not a god. You're just meat and bones."

"Agent Vasquez? Susan!"

Supergirl pulled her out into the hallway. "Okay, that was a little over the top."

"No, it's not. It's what Alex would have done."

"Which would be over the top, which was why I wanted you in there, not her."

"What if Alex is right? What if she is just toying with you?"

"If we have the chance to save Julia, we have to take it."

"Supergirl, I respect you. I do. But my job is to predict future outcomes. And I do that based on psychology, xenobiology, understanding how power goes to people's heads and corrupts them. If somebody's been sitting around for two decades with the kind of power that Reign has, and if that person has had to put on an act as a woman of color in our really problematic society, then even if she hasn't been genetically modified to really want to use her powers to create justice, my guess is she hasn't been sitting around twiddling her thumbs for twenty years. She has probably been making plans. Okay?"

"Vasquez, we don't know that Purity was in charge all that time. What if she is just one aspect of Julia? I can help her!"

"That is a nice motto, Supergirl, but it isn't very practical. We can't help everybody, and usually everybody isn't trying to burn the world to the ground. No matter how much evidence piles up saying that you are wrong, you always hope."

"That's my job."

"But what if Purity is the one in charge? What if she is just evil? We know that she is a Worldkiller and there are two others out there who are just like her, endangering lives. I know that you feel that you can help her, ma'am, but your feelings are costing us time that we could be spending looking for the third Worldkiller."

"Okay, but my feelings have saved lives countless times."

"Your feelings are why I am in there with you instead of Alex. And we both know that she is better at this than I am."
"I don't believe that. I love my sister, and I know what her skills are, because her skills have saved me over and over again. But her judgment is off, Vasquez. It's been off for a while, and I want somebody who has good judgment in there to have my back."

"What, you think her judgment is off because she-- Her judgment is not off, Kara. Her judgment is just fine."

"If her judgment was fine, she would have made it up to you by now. She would have done the work to make your relationship work. The fact that she hasn't worries me. And now--"

"And now there is somebody else in the mix who is turning her head." Vasquez shrugged. "As there should be. I always thought it would be Maggie, that somehow the two of them would make it work once Maggie saw that Alex wasn't a baby dyke anymore. And you know what, I could almost have borne that. Maggie made Alex figure out she was gay, and that is no small feat. So yeah, if she went back to her? I could have handled that. Because then it wouldn't have been about me. It would have been about Maggie."

"You don't seriously think that Dr. Torres--"

"Seriously, Kara, have you even been in a room with Dr. Torres? She's freaking perfect. Off-the-charts gorgeous femme. Even Maggie wore dresses. I have managed to avoid wearing a dress for I don't even know how long. Years. Decades. But what if that is what Alex wants? Not this." She gestured to herself dismissively.

"Agent Vasquez, when did you become so hard and cynical?"

"Well, not all of us are bullet-proof, Supergirl."

"I know--"

"So cynicism, that's what's keeping the rest of us alive."

"Well, it seems like it's killing you. My sister, the sister I know, hurt you, and I thought I could keep that from happening or fix it when it did happen. And I feel like I've failed both of you. And now both of you are hurting and taking it out on Julia."

"She's a freaking supervillain, Kara!"

"So was Livewire. So was Psi. So was Astra. We don't give up on people. We have compassion!"

"I am just trying to do my job. We've tried it your way. We did. But now we're going to do it Alex's way. Because I trained her to be as good as she is. And we need to get results and we need them soon, and Alex may not love me. I know that. But when it comes to this job, she gets results."

Supergirl watched her march away, feeling like she did when Reign first made her bleed, incredulous and nauseous and scared.
Ruby was excited. She laced up her ice skates nice and tight and gingerly followed her mother onto the ice. As they made their way to the center of the rink, Sam was confident and Ruby was wobbly, but who cared? She was playing hooky with her mom, which was hella cool.

Even if she could never say that out loud in her mother's presence.

At the center of the ice, her mom took Ruby's hands. "Ready for this?" she asked.

Ruby was brash. "I'm young and reckless. I got this in the bag!"

"Three, two--" Sam took off without waiting for her daughter.

"What? Cheating will get you nowhere!"

Supergirl marched into the command center. "Agent Vasquez? We need to go back in again."

"Supergirl--" said Vasquez.

Alex stood up. "Kara, can we talk?"

Supergirl frowned then gestured for Alex to follow her. She led them into the electrical closet. "Talk. I don't have much time."

"I should be in there with you."

"Yes," said Supergirl, crossing her arms over her chest. "You should. But you can't. Alex. You are compromised. You compromised yourself on that other Earth, when you decided to cheat on Vasquez with White Canary. I never told Eliza. She doesn't know why you and Vasquez broke up. But if she did? You know she would never let you live it down."

"Are you threatening to tell her?"

"Of course not! But Alex, that was a major lapse in judgment. And with Reign and the other Worldkillers, I need someone to have my back that I know for certain I can trust. Whose judgment I can trust. And that is not you right now."

"I made a mistake."

"Yes. Yes, you did. You really did. And you haven't made it right. And now, from what I'm hearing? The DEO agents are all casting bets in a pool to predict when--not if--you end up having sex with Dr. Torres. J'onn's been having his headaches, and you know what that means."

"I'm not going to have sex with--"

"Aren't you? Does she know that? All those sly smiles and eyebrow raises? Because I'm pretty sure that she thinks you are."

"Kara, I'm not--"

"Horny? Gay for Callie? What? What are you not, Alex?"
Alex opened her mouth and shut it again.

"Exactly," said her sister. "Now excuse me. Vasquez and I have a prisoner to interrogate."

"A supervillain to save from herself," said Alex. "That's what you really mean."

"And what if it is? I seem to have a better track record with National City's supervillains than I have with my own sister."

She slammed the door behind her and strode back into the command center to see Agent Vasquez look just as shocked as Winn and the other agents. "Susan? Let's go."

Without a word, Vasquez fell in behind her and followed her to the containment area. Supergirl took a deep breath and stepped into the outer cell. Purity was lying on her cot in the inner cell. Supergirl gestured toward her. "You wanted to do it Alex's way," she murmured. "Go ahead. Do it."

Vasquez strode forward. "Where is Reign? We have the Kryptonian crystal from your apartment and we know that it's going to lead to your headquarters."

Purity ignored her.

"Well, you're not so chatty now, are you? That makes sense. 'Cause I'm not your audience. I'm just looking at a bug under glass."

Purity laughed and sat up. "To use your own words, you think you're smarter than me, stronger than me. You think I'm powerless. I see right through you, Susan Vasquez. It's a gift I have, to see inside people. To know them. You want to hurt me. Because you're hurt. You want me weak because you're weak. Someone cut something out of you and you feel the hole every day, a hole that you dug in yourself. And it's not getting any better now, is it?"

Supergirl strode over. "Okay, now. All right. We're done here."

"Where is Reign?" insisted Vasquez.

"Vasquez!"

"See the rage?" said Purity. "That's your loneliness."

"Shut up!" yelled Vasquez.

"Let's go," said Supergirl.

"You had your chance at happiness and you threw it away." Purity smiled as she spoke.

"Vasquez, come on." Supergirl pulled Vasquez away from the cell, and Vasquez marched toward the door.

"And now you're just a broken little doll," gloated Purity.

Supergirl turned back to the cell. "She was right about you. You're just a thing built to destroy, and I'm going to make sure you don't hurt anyone else."

The door slammed behind Vasquez.

Purity spoke in Kryptonian. "The three shall walk across the land, and the blood of the weak will water the new world."
Supergirl responded in kind. "Rao defies you. I defy you. And I will bring you low."

//

Winn sat in front of the cache crystal, brainstorming ways to make it talk to him. But he saw Vasquez pacing across the command center, hugging herself and looking mega stressed. He went to her and gave her a hug. "Vas, what's wrong?"

But she turned and walked away from him.

Back in the lab, the crystal glowed white and emitted an eerie hum.

"Well, who turned you on?" he asked.

//

Ruby sped past her cheating mother and hit the wall at the far end of the rink with a bang, yelling, "Beatcha!"

But when she looked back, her mother was gone.

//

Supergirl stared as Purity grinned. The woman took a deep breath and yelled, and the world turned into a constellation of broken glass. Supergirl was sent flying across the room, hit the far wall and knew no more.

//

Vasquez watched from down the hall as Purity strode into Winn’s office and took the crystal, using her unearthly scream to knock out Winn, armed agents and the rest of the DEO team, then rise into the air and smash through the windows into the unsuspecting afternoon of National City.
Right before the blast, J'onn went down with Alex to medical, to check on Livewire's progress. He walked in and asked the medic in charge about the chance of rejection, and the woman gave him the odds, which seemed fairly good, but what did he know? Dr. Torres walked in and reassured him that every hour that Livewire did not reject the implants made it increasingly less likely that she would.

On the bed, Livewire said groggily, "Can't you people let a girl sleep?"

Torres turned and took her pulse. "How are you feeling, Livewire?"

"Like somebody just buried a hundred knives in my leg and then took them out all at once. Thanks for that, by the way."

"You're welcome," said Torres. "I think."

Alex smiled at the surgeon, a little in awe at how she had rebuilt the leg, but then she knew why Calliope Torres would want to save a leg if she could. J'onn rubbed his eyes. The DEO hadn't been this hormone-soaked since Kara started dating Lena and then Lena had started working at the DEO to help them develop new tech to help Supergirl. And then Alex and Vasquez. And then--

"Got a headache, there, Mr. Director Man?" asked Livewire.

"Indeed, I do. And since you are finally awake, let me just express my gratitude for what you did at Fort Rozz. You saved Supergirl's life."

"Please. Reign was being super annoying. It's not like I have a crush on your superhero or anything." Livewire's eyes went from Dr. Torres to Agent Danvers. "Although crushes abound around here from what I can see."

Alex said, "Pfft. Don't be silly."

J'onn rubbed his eyes again. "I'll be in my office if anyone needs me."

And that is when they heard the explosion and the breaking glass.

Ruby skated off the ice and went straight to the people in charge. "Can you put a call in for my mother to come here? Her name is Sam Arias."

They put out the call, but there was no response. Ruby pulled out her phone. Alex? Or Lena?

Reign was still on the loose. Better call Lena.

She sat waiting, taking off her rental skates and putting her sneakers back on. Before long, Lena Luthor appeared.

"Ruby? Ruby! Are you okay?"

"I'm fine."

"What happened?"
"I turned around and she was gone."

"I'm so sorry. Your mom, she's going through a lot."

"I know but it's not okay. She was so excited to hang out today, and then she just disappeared. It's like a few months ago. She was planning on going on this big trip, and something wonderful was going to happen, and when she got back she acted like she hadn't been anywhere."

"She didn't remember?" asked Lena.

"There's something wrong. I don't know what. It's like sometimes she's a completely different person."

Lena frowned. "Ruby, I know it's scary, okay? But something you need to know about me is when there is a problem, I always find an answer." She smiled.

Ruby nodded, and they got up and went back to LCorp, together.

//

J'onn, Alex and Supergirl reached the command center together. Winn was picking himself off the floor and typing code into his computer, biting his bottom lip so hard it started bleeding.

"Did you find her?" asked Supergirl.

"Yes, indeed. Perfect timing. She's in the subway, although there have been no attacks reported. Yet."

"There will be soon though," muttered Supergirl. "We should head out."

"Same teams as before?" asked Alex.

"Yes, absolutely. I'm not underestimating any of them again. Ever."

"Um, speaking of," said Winn. "Presents. I am Q. I have revamped some sonic technology, the kind we used for Siobhan. I have cut out the frequency that she hit you with before."

"Will they work?" asked Alex.

"I'm ninety-five or six percent sure that they will. They should."

"Good work, Agent Schott," said J'onn, inserting the devices into his ears.

"Hey! Anytime! Now go! Do... superheroic... stuff."

"Let's go," said Supergirl, and her sister followed her, sticking the inhibitors into her ears and praying.

//

The moment M'gann got the text from J'onn, she turned over the bar to Darla, transformed into her green persona and flew to the subway stop in the shopping district. When Supergirl and Purity blew out the back of the subway car and landed in the tunnels, M'gann and J'onn stepped through the walls from one end of the tracks while Alex and Agent Vasquez made their way forward from the other end. Alex had her alien pistol, but Vasquez had gotten one of the Daxamite lance blasters out of storage and when Purity saw it in her hands, she frowned.
J'onn had been keeping M'gann up to speed on their latest Worldkiller (when he wasn't complaining about the rise in loud hormonal thoughts roaring through the DEO), so M'gann knew what she was looking at. And after what Reign had put them all through back at Christmas, she was scared of this new woman. But her friends needed her. J'onn needed her. And National City, which had been her home for decades, needed her now. So here she was. J'onn handed her the sonic earpieces and she put them in her ears just as Purity tried to roar at them. Good old Winn. Purity looked shocked that her sonic offensive wasn't working.

Oh, yeah, thought M'gann. Sucks to be powerless and surrounded.

So M'gann really wasn't prepared for Purity to turn her screams to the ground beneath them, for the ground to crumble under their feet, for them to fall into the thoroughfare beneath the subway tunnel. People were running screaming toward the exits as the superfriends picked themselves out of the broken concrete and rubble. Purity stood and screamed at the massive concrete pillar that was holding up the station's ceiling and it cracked right through. Immediately, J'onn ran to hold it together, and M'gann ran to help him.

"Alex!" said Supergirl.

"On it!" said Alex, as she ran to guide the bystanders toward the exits. "Everybody out!"

She and Vasquez helped up people who had fallen and guide them toward the exits.

At the pillar, M'gann said, "We've got to get these people out of here!"

"Go!" said J'onn. "I've got this!"

"You sure?"

"Go!"

Supergirl and Purity traded punches amidst the chaos. From the little M'gann could see as she raced to help the bystanders, the two looked fairly evenly matched. But when Purity flipped Supergirl, Agent Vasquez ran over and shot her with the lance blaster, but she let herself get to close and Purity threw a punch that sent Vasquez flying into the newspaper kiosk.

Then she turned and picked Supergirl off the ground, putting her in a headlock, saying, "Your friends are here and I'm going to make them watch while I kill you."

Supergirl gasped, "No, Julia, please! Please don't let her hurt me!"

Purity's eyes flickered from white to black and back again. Alex and Vasquez ran to help.

"Julia, I know you're in there!" Alex held her hands up to show she was unarmed. "Julia, no!"

Vasquez lowered the blaster lance to the floor and rose slowly, her hands out. "Julia, you stood in front of a car to save your friend, Benita, because you love your friend. And you know that Supergirl wants to help you. You can fight this. Because you, you are stronger than you think. I know that you can hear me, Julia. I see you in there. And I am so sorry that I didn't see it before, but I swear to God that I'm gonna help you beat this. We all will. But you have to fight!"

Purity held the headlock on Supergirl, but her eyes flickered from white to black and she gasped as if she were in pain.

"Julia!" said Vasquez.
With a very human shout, Purity--Julia--let go of Supergirl and they both fell to the rubble-strewn floor.

M'gann let out a sigh of relief. Then Reign dropped through the roof.

"So the Supergirl kneels," said Reign. "Good practice."

Alex drew her alien pistol and started shooting, but the bolts of blue energy seemed to have no effect on the Worldkiller, who simply kept on coming, growling, "You, I kill." She grabbed Alex by the arm and threw her to the ground, placing her booted foot on Alex's chest and grinding down, while Alex writhed in pain.

"No!" said Supergirl.

"Stop!" yelled Julia, standing. "Take me. You can have me."

"No, Julia!" said Supergirl. "Don't do this!"

Reign took her foot off Alex. "Purity. Sister. We will find our third. And with Pestilence, once we're finally together, we will be nothing but unstoppable power." She grabbed Julia and sped off the way she came.
Something Else to Think About

They returned to the DEO, aching and exhausted. Dr. Hamilton did the post-mission checkup on Alex and cleared her for duty. She returned to the waiting area in the medical bay, where J'onn, Winn and Supergirl were waiting anxiously.

"I'm fine," she reassured them. "Just a couple bruised ribs and what feels like a giant hematoma on my ass. Could have been worse. Could have been rugby."

J'onn frowned. "Alex, you could have been killed."

"Calm down! Winn, please give them something else to think about."

"Well, we lost track of Reign and Julia like minutes after they flew away."

J'onn shook his head. "It's only a matter of time before Reign forces Julia back into Purity."

"Julia, she's tough," said Alex. "Maybe she can hold out."

"Well," Supergirl slowly. "Maybe the Worldkillers are too hard for us to beat. But maybe we're not supposed to beat them."

"Then how are we supposed to win?" asked Winn.

"We save them."

J'onn said, "Let's consider all of our strategies. I'll put Vasquez on strategy analysis." He left.

Winn said, "Save? The, who? Right. I'm just going to. Right." He followed J'onn out.

The Danvers sisters stood there considering each other. Alex moved gingerly as they walked back to the command center. All around them, DEO agents were sweeping up glass.

Alex turned to Supergirl, gestured for her to step into break room. "Thank you, for today. For showing me how to believe in someone."

"That's who you are, Alex. You've always believed in me."

"You, yes. Myself? Not so much. But here's the thing. I've been thinking about this for a while. For months. Why did I cheat on Vasquez with Sara Lance? When did I become the kind of person who would do that? How could I hurt her that way?"

"Alex..."

"No, hear me out." She turned and looked at the coffee pot, which had a thick layer of brown baked into the bottom. She filled it with water from the sink and set it on the counter, saying, "Finally, I realized that it wasn't about Vasquez. It was about me. I had never believed that anyone would want me, not to keep. Mark and I, we couldn't make it work, and I thought it was me. That I was the broken one. And when he died, I thought, well, that's as good as I was ever going to get. And I lost hope."

She pulled a clean coffee pot from the cabinet and filled it with water. "And then when J'onn brought me into the DEO, I replaced hope with mission goals. I replaced the need, the burning desire to be loved with the hard cold reality of protecting the planet from anyone who would mean to cause it
harm."

"That's what we do."

"That's what I did, before you came out to the world. And then, when you did, my job became protecting you, and that came naturally to me because it's what Mom always wanted me to do. And that distracted me further from the fact that I didn't have a life, that I didn't have anyone who wanted to be with me or love me or..."

Alex poured the water into the coffee machine and put the pot on the coil. She opened one cabinet after another. "There's no coffee."

"There's never coffee in here," said Supergirl. "That's why I bring it from Noonan's."

"And you got used to doing that. We all did. That's what I'm talking about. I got used to not having good coffee in my life. I just assumed good coffee didn't exist." She rubbed her eyes. "And you know the funny thing? Maxwell Lord, of all people, made me feel desirable for the first time in years. And also a little dirty, because Max Lord, right? And then I killed Astra, and you and I were in such a bad place, but we made it work. And then I met Maggie."

"Alex--"

"But she didn't want me, because why would she? But Vasquez was there to pick up the pieces and help me finally heal, I thought. And she made me feel things, finally, feel things that I never thought I'd feel. Things I had pushed down. For years."

"Alex, I am so sorry--"

"But underneath it all, I always wondered. What if Vasquez was an anomaly? We're always chasing anomalies, right? Winn writes code to chase anomalies. What if it was just a mistake on Vasquez's part? She's lonely. I'm lonely. We can't tell normal people about our jobs. Our jobs are our lives, just like the surgeons at Seattle Grace. Maybe the only people who could possibly want us are people like us. Maybe the price for saving the world is being lost yourself, being perpetually alone."

"But you're not alone."

"But I was. For so long. And then, suddenly? I wasn't. I was wanted and loved, and somebody gave a crap about what I wanted. What I wanted. And I just could not believe that it wasn't just an anomaly. So I tested it. I got a little drunk, and when Sara Lance came onto me, I tested it. I flirted back. She kissed me. I kissed her. She fucked me. I fucked her. And you know what? She liked it."

"Alex--"

"And I liked it too. But then I felt guilty, because I am supposed to be better than that. I am supposed to be a good person, who doesn't just seek her own pleasure. I'm supposed to protect the weak and the endangered, not go around fucking a beautiful woman simply because I can."

"Alex, don't do this to yourself."

"Me? I didn't do this to myself. You are the one who said that I made an error in judgment and that you feel you can't trust me because of it. And maybe you're right about that, but maybe you're not. You've got Lena, and she adores you. But people have always adored you, back on Krypton, here on Earth. Because you are freaking adorable, Kara. But I'm not. All I've ever had was my brain. But people don't fall in love with your brain."
Behind her a voice said, "Oh shit."

Alex turned to see Vasquez standing in the doorway with an empty coffee mug. "I was just--"

"There isn't any," Alex said tiredly.

Vasquez frowned and then looked at her watch. "Fuck it. Coffee isn't what we need anyway, after the day we've had. My shift is almost over. Supergirl, I need to borrow your sister. We need to go to Dollywood and actually talk."

Supergirl looked relieved, but Alex felt cold and scared.

Vasquez sighed. "I'm not going to bite. We just need to talk."

"All right. Let me just change into civvies."

But when Alex went down to the women's barracks, she encountered Dr. Hamilton sitting on Dr. Torres's cot, while Callie Torres stood there in her underwear trying to decide between two dresses.

Alex stared.

Torres laughed. "Like what you see, Agent Danvers?"

"No, I mean, yes. I mean, wait, how many dresses did you pack? If you add the one you wore to the Amphipolis the other night, that would make what? Three?"

Callie pulled a red dress over her head and adjusted it. "More than that."

"But how long were you planning to stay?"

"At least a week."

Alex stared at her. "Right. Well. That long." She reached into her locker and pulled out her clothes and headed for the bathroom. She didn't need an audience. By the time she got back to her locker to put her tacticals away, Torres was wearing a blue dress but Hamilton was shaking her head. "Too much."

Alex couldn't help herself. "It's all too much, Callie. What have you got, a date at the Four Seasons? National City isn't Manhattan. Women wear pants pretty much everywhere."

"To be fair," said Dr. Hamilton, "it is much easier running in pants and flats, and we probably have more aliens and powered individuals here than you have in Manhattan."

"Good point," said Callie. "I hadn't considered that."

Alex shook her head and went to meet Vasquez in the garage.
The interesting thing about Earth, M’gann often thought, was the idea of weekends. The idea of chopping up time into time specifically for productivity and time for rest was not unknown on other planets, but it wasn’t so programmatic in most places she had been. So although Dollywood was strictly speaking an alien bar, the aliens tended to outnumber the humans more during the week than on Friday and Saturday nights, especially since the members of the DEO had discovered it. This Friday evening, she watched Maggie Sawyer and Lucy Lane challenge Brian and his Infernian friend to a friendly game of pool, while Jess, Winn and Eve huddled in a corner arguing about something.

And when Agent Vasquez and Agent Danvers strode in together and ordered tequila shots instead of their usual scotch, M’gann knew that she wasn’t going to be seeing J’onn walk into the bar anytime soon. He had probably gone home from work with a migraine. She brought the six shots to the table herself, catching the sorrow and anxiety from ten feet away.

Alex said, “And a basket of mozz sticks, please M’gann.”

“Will your sister be joining you?”

“No, just the regular size will do, thanks.”

“You got it.”

M’gann was grateful to be a Martian, even if she was a White. There was a lot to be said for reading your partner’s mind: no secrets, no miscommunication. Fewer hangovers.

Over at pool table, Maggie was blowing every shot she took, but then so was Brian, so it didn’t seem to be affecting the score of the game very much. In the corner, Winn ordered more chicken wings, and M’gann heard Eve saying, “But they’d be so sweet together—” and Jess growled, “Do you have any idea what a bad, horrible, no-good idea that is?”

And M’gann didn’t think too much about that conversation until she saw the DEO’s Dr. Hamilton—whom she had never seen wearing anything but scrubs—walk in with a drop-dead gorgeous woman. They were both wearing tight jeans and leather jackets, and M’gann wondered if Dr. Hamilton’s husband knew where she was. But then she noticed Brian shoot the cue ball right off the table, and the mystery woman caught it, looking shocked and the aliens applauded her, causing Alex and Vasquez to turn to see her and both looked visibly upset.

Suddenly the tension in the room made a lot more sense.

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Callie Torres didn’t think; she just automatically caught the cue ball that was coming at her. She stared at it blankly while the bar applauded, and then she handed it back to the apologizing blue man wearing the bad suit. He introduced himself as Brian, and Dr. Hamilton introduced her to Lucy Lane, apparently Lois Lane’s sister, and Detective Maggie Sawyer, who apparently had gotten the toaster oven for Alex Danvers last year.

Brian’s pool partner was holding a drink that was actively boiling in her hand, which was a little disconcerting, but she had experienced the annoyance of straight people acting like tourists at gay bars, so she tried hard to act like everything was normal, because obviously, for the aliens, it was.
Lucy recommended the Sikkarian ale, and Dr. Hamilton reassured her that it wouldn’t kill her, so she got it and they looked around for a table or a booth, but everywhere was taken. Suddenly, Callie felt a hand on her arm and she turned to see Agent Vasquez.

“Dr. Torres, would you care to join us? We have space for two more.”

Callie hesitated a moment, but then took her drink and sat where Vasquez gestured, next to Alex. Dr. Hamilton followed Vasquez into the other side of the booth.

“So,” said Alex nervously. “How about those National City Heroes out in Arizona doing spring training?”

“What, you’re into baseball now?” asked Callie, sipping her drink.

“I have been known to attend a game now and then.”

“In between alien invasions,” said Dr. Hamilton.

“At least we’re not out there on the East Coast,” said Vasquez. “Then we’d have to go in between Nor’easters. They’ve been having one a week all month.”

Callie waved that away. “I’ve lived in New York City the last few years. The weather is not allowed to get that bad if the Yankees are playing.”

“Yeah,” said Alex. “Kind of like how demons don’t go out on Halloween.”


Vasquez shook her head. “It’s Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Alex and Kara routinely binge-watch it every fall.”

Callie laughed, “But isn’t that a kids’ show?”

“So what?” said Alex. “It has badass women and a canon lesbian couple. Even Xena and Gabrielle weren’t canon. Do tell me you’re at least familiar with Xena, Callie.”

“Hell, yes. I actually went to a Halloween party as Xena this past fall.”

There was a sudden hush over the table as the other three women gave her considering looks. Alex said, “I would have liked to see that.”

Callie pulled out her phone and flicked through it until she found the pictures. They passed the phone around and even Vasquez nodded appreciatively.

“Now you just need a Gabrielle,” said Dr. Hamilton.

“Nah,” said Callie. “I’ve seen Alex Danvers as a blonde and it did not go well.”

Vasquez gaped. “Wait, you were a blonde?”

“It was only for a couple of weeks,” protested Alex. “I had a bad breakup.”

M’gann came over with a fresh round of drinks. “This one’s on Brian,” she said, passing out the ales and scotch and tequila.

Callie glanced back at the blue alien at the pool table, who waved at them. “Well, he’s friendly.”
Vasquez snorted. “Just kissing up to us for the next time he gets into trouble with the DEO. He’s overdue for a scam to go wrong again.”

Alex explained, “Last summer he was selling a so-called vitamin that was a performance-enhancing steroid which had the interesting side effect of turning the person who took it green.”

“Well, why would anybody?” asked Callie.

“Pay for aliens with superstrength is higher in some construction jobs. This was when National City was rebuilding after the Daxamite invasion.”

“Right… Kind of like New York after the Avengers saved us from our aliens. What a mess that was.”

Everybody nodded gloomily, and took a drink. Vasquez sighed. “Yeah, you try to save the world from aliens but the one thing you can count on is damaged infrastructure and the public blaming you for not saving them in a less messy way.”

Callie said, “Surgery’s the same.”

Dr. Hamilton nodded. “That’s why I got out of the private sector. You want to save somebody’s life but you can’t do it without bankrupting them.”

“I think we’re going to need another round,” said Callie, waving to M’gann.
Everybody Has an Opinion, Part 2

Eve was a bit of a lightweight when it came to wine. She knew it. Usually in a situation like this, she would have volunteered to be the designated driver and she wouldn’t drink any alcohol at all, since two glasses would make her sloppy and three would either put her to sleep or, possibly, dancing on tables... Tonight, though she went with a hard cider, and listened very seriously while Jess and Winn explained to her the very unwise idea of letting Alex Danvers hook up with Dr. Torres as long as Vasquez had access to alien weapons or military weapons or, frankly, her own hands.

Eve nodded very seriously, listening, sipping her cider, asking questions, carefully loading nachos with salsa and enjoying the coldness of the salsa and the sharp snap of the chips as she ate them. She didn’t say much, however; she was pretty sure her friends would disagree if she told them what she actually thought about their willingness to micromanage their friend’s romantic choices.

Because she might be a lightweight, but she was a Yale alumna, dammit, and she had her own opinions about things.

And sure, she knew that Agent Vasquez was sad and hurt and disappointed in Alex, but she also knew that Alex was no stranger to disappointing the people she loved and then further sabotaging herself for that. And Eve was fairly straight, but even she had seen pictures of White Canary and she really couldn't blame Alex for going there. It was a wedding, for crying out loud. Things happened, once-off things. And surely the things that happened on an alternate Earth should stay on an alternate Earth. But if they didn’t? Maybe everybody should just move on and get over it. Start fresh.

Eve signaled M'gann. "Kamikaze, please."

M'gann frowned, then turned to Winn and Jess. "Are you guys going to get her home safely?"

"Of course," said Winn before Jess could answer.

"Coming up."

Eve finished her cider and said, "Thank you for that Winn, and Jess, you know I worship the Personal Assistant ground you walk on. But y'all are full of shit about Alex."

Jess gasped. M'gann delivered Eve her kamikaze and Eve took an appreciative sip. "See, here's the thing. I'm all for stable relationships. I've been in two or three for a few years each and, no shit, they were great."

"Eve..." said Jess.

"No, hear me out." She took another long sip. "Long-term relationships give you a lot of good things: affection, respect, stability, a certain predictability that can be hard to come by in a fast-paced world and especially in our alien-ravaged city."

"You make it sound like the aliens only do bad things." This from Winn.

"And before the Daxamite invasion, I would not have said that, but since then, the odds have been heavily biased in the direction of devastation."

"Oh. Fair enough, I guess."

"But here's the thing. Sometimes a short-term relationship, a fling, can be good too. You learn a lot
about yourself by jumping in feet first and just enjoying yourself and the other person. And let's face it, most relationships fail, by definition. If they didn't? Can you imagine that the first person you ever dated was the person you married? For life? Think of all the people you've dated, what you got from each relationship, even if it ended badly. How they made you learn what you wanted and didn't want, what you could put up with and what you just wouldn't. How they changed you and grew you."

Winn murmured, "Well, when you put it like that--"

But Jess said, "No. I think when you find the right person, you have to persist. Make it work. Sure, flings might be fun, but if it puts you at risk of losing the right person? It should be a no-brainer."

"And you, Jessica Huang, are 100% positively sure that Susan Vasquez is The Right Person for Alexandra Danvers? What makes you the expert on their relationship?"

"I've watched them together. I've heard Kara Danvers gush about Vasquez, about how she's the first person who ever made Alex happy or relaxed or willing to be herself. I've seen the evidence."

Eve took another sip of her drink, shaking her head and spilling a little. "I've seen evidence too and I'm not sure that Vasquez didn't start taking things for granted. You know that's the big risk in a long-term relationship. And just because she's the first person who ever did those things for Alex, what makes you so sure that she's the only one who ever will? Or the one who will do it best? You can't know that."

Jess opened her mouth and shut it again, frowning thoughtfully. Eve finished her drink and signaled M’gann for another.

As M’gann brought it over, Lucy and Maggie swaggered over and asked if anybody wanted to play pool, but they were too engaged in their argument.

Winn said, "Guys, weigh in on this, would you? Everybody’s saying that Alex is going to hook up with Torres because they knew each other for years back in Seattle and the attraction between them has been superobvious since Torres arrived the other day. Eve says it would be fine. Jess and I say it would be wrong because of Vasquez."

“Didn’t they break up?” asked Lucy.

“Well, yeah, but—” said Winn. Eve took a sip of her drink.

Maggie glanced over at Alex laughing at something Dr. Hamilton had said. “Well, Alex has been learning how to know her own mind. She should get credit for that, don’t you think?”

“Yeah,” said Winn, “I guess so. But after the last mission when Alex and Vasquez were all badass together, Vasquez kissed Alex very solidly on the lips!”

“Did Alex kiss her back?” asked Lucy.

“It sure looked like it,” said Winn. Eve took a sip of her drink.

“And did they then announce they were back together?”

“No, they put their weapons away in the armory and came back to the command center.”

“And?”
“And Alex introduced Dr. Torres to Vasquez,” said Winn. Eve took a sip of her drink.

“And?”

Everybody looked expectantly at Winn. Eve finished her drink.

“Er, nothing exactly. J’onn had me bring Dr. Torres down to Pam in HR.”

"So," said Lucy, "it's a non-development development. It happened but it doesn't necessarily mean anything. To us, to them."

"O-kay, ladies and gentlemens," said Eve. "It's time to dance. C'mon. Who's with me?"

She slid out of the booth to start dancing with a group of aliens. Jess growled, "Do something!"

Winn and Maggie followed her out and tried to talk with her, but she evaded them and ended up at the table with Alex, Torres, Vasquez and Hamilton. After a moment, the four women guided her outside.

She was still dancing by herself outside when the Lyft came, and Winn promised to pay her tab and she could pay him back later. She sat between Alex and Dr. Torres, chuckling drunkenly.

She knew she was totally going to regret all of this the next day, and possibly for a while to come, but she still was convinced it was worth it.
Everybody Has an Opinion, Part 3

Alex kept the table's conversation going as long as she could, but she was running on fumes, still in shock from her conversation with Vasquez. She needed to get away, get some air, but she was surrounded in the booth, and she felt a small panic arising in her gut.

The irony was not lost on her. She was capable of jumping out of a skyscraper while shooting the bad guys, but being surrounded by women in an alien dive bar was making her panic. She wished Kara were there, even though she knew, with the mood Kara had been in lately, that it probably wouldn't help. She wished J'onn would call with news of an alien attack. She wished she hadn't had that sixth shot of tequila.

It didn't occur to her to wish for anything else, though, once she saw Eve Tessmacher dancing drunkenly with Brian and some other aliens. She saw an opportunity: an opportunity to get out of there, but more importantly, an opportunity to go back in time and save her younger self from doing something (or someone) in a misguided effort to feel something.

Well, maybe that wasn't Eve's motive for getting so blitzed, maybe Alex was projecting just a teeny tiny bit. Still, as she excused herself from the table and went to offer Eve a ride home in the Lyft she was calling, it made her feel better. What surprised her was how Eve, easily convinced to let Alex guide her to the door, turned out to be heavier than she looked. Then the weight was lifted as Callie Torres took Eve's other arm over her shoulder and helped them both exit the bar and inhale the cold air as they waited for the blue Hyndai.

"Do you know where she lives?" asked Callie.

"Jess gave me her purse. She lives in the arts district, not far from Kara. I can drop you off at the DEO right after we drop her off."

Callie groaned. "Tomorrow I am finding a hotel. Those little army cots in your barracks are inhumane."

"Oh, well, you can stay at my place if you like." It was out of her mouth before Alex could even think.

"Seriously? No, you know, I couldn't. I wouldn't want to impose."

The car arrived and they bundled Eve between them in the back seat. Eve leaned over, laying her head on Alex's shoulder, saying, "I keep telling them that you two are the cutest thing! I even told Winn your ship name should be Agent Torres, but he said at the DEO the smart money is on Callexope, which doesn't even make sense. Brian said that the aliens and the powered community--did you know they were a community now? It's crazy how the world has changed, you know? Oh, hey, that looks remarkably like my apartment building--"

Eve's rambling created the space that Alex needed to think, as she and Callie had the Lyft driver wait while they got Eve settled in her apartment with a large pitcher of water, and came back down.

As they got back into the car, the man said, "Where to next, ladies?"

Alex said, "So, um. Callie. Going my way?"

"Absolutely," purred Torres.
Back at Dollywood, Vasquez signalled M'gann to keep the tequila coming. Dr. Hamilton had excused herself when Alex and Callie had gone to rescue Eve, saying that her husband would be expecting her.

Nobody was expecting Vasquez.

At the bar, M'gann was arguing with her cell phone, and Vasquez expected Kara to stroll in next. She was mildly surprised when James walked into the bar, looked around, saw Vasquez, and strode over.

"Hey, Vasquez," said James easily. "Mind if I join?"

"Did M'gann call you get my drunk ass home?"

"What if she did? Doesn't mean I can't have a cup of coffee with a friend before I do that."

"I'm not interested in coffee."

"The coffee's for me. I'm still technically on duty for the next hour, even though J'onn told me to go home."

M'gann brought over a mug of coffee for him and three more shots for Vasquez. "This is it, Agent. After those, you're cut off."

Vasquez growled her acquiescence.

James sipped his coffee. He nodded over to the pool table, where Lucy and Maggie were playing against Jess and Winn. "Life changes in unexpected ways," he said, sighing. "Look at Lucy. She was always a badass, in the army, in court, in bed. And now she's dating a woman who apparently never misses a shot with any gun she picks up but never gets a shot with a pool cue. Is that irony? I feel like that's irony."

"Only somebody with a penis would say something like that." Vasquez drank a shot, turned the glass over on the table.

James laughed. "Maybe. All I'm saying is that when I left Metropolis, when I left Superman, came out here to become my own man, I asked her to come with me and she said no. Her life was there. Everything she wanted was there. And I left. I chose to leave her behind."

"Sure, but she then quit and came after you."

"But it didn't work."

"Because somebody was pining after Kara."

"Attraction's a bitch."

"She sure is."

James sipped his coffee thoughtfully, watching Lucy lean over the table to take a difficult shot. "What are you going to do about Alex?"

"What I always said I'd do." She drank a shot, turned the glass over on the table. To the questioning look, she made a face. "You know the drill: if you love something, set it free, blah, blah, blah."
"Yeah, watch out for that, Vas," James said sadly, watching Lucy high-five Maggie. "Sometimes they don't come back."

Vasquez drank her last shot and turned the glass over. "Then they were never ours." She pulled her keys out of her pocket and handed them to him. "Let's get out of here."

As Alex unlocked her apartment door, Callie looked at her phone. "It's snowing in New York."

Alex flipped the light on. "So? Odds are it's raining in Seattle."

Callie swiped across her phone. "You called it. I so don't miss that part."

"Just Sophia?"

"Mostly her. Also the bone-cracking. I haven't been doing nearly enough surgery, too much administrative stuff, and I was never good at that back during the brief time I was Chief Resident. I hate the paper pushing."

"Oh, I hear you. As J'onn's Assistant Director, I end up doing way more of that than I'd like. I much prefer shooting things." Alex took down two glasses and poured them each some red wine.

Callie took a sip as she turned around and then nearly spat it out. "That-- That is your bed?"

Alex handed her a kitchen towel. "Why does everybody say that?"

"Well, first off, it's enormous and second it's practically on stage. Doesn't that make you feel exposed?"

"Why would it? I live alone."

Callie opened her mouth and then closed it again.

Alex took her stack of mail and flipped through it. "Bill, bill, bill. Credit card I don't need." She tossed it all on the coffee table and threw herself down on the couch. "Have a seat, Callie. Talk to me. We haven't had much time to catch up since you got here. What's up with you?"

They talked for hours, about Seattle, about National City, about aliens and the DEO, about Livewire and the bones they had given her. Alex talked about meeting Maggie and the impact that had on her. Callie talked about having to admit to Arizona that she had been wrong about the doctor she followed to New York. Alex talked about having her heart broken by Maggie rejecting her and Kara giving her comfort and helping her get her self-confidence back.

"So," said Callie, pouring the last of the wine into their empty-again glasses. "What's the story with you and Agent Vasquez?"

"Oh! Will you look at the time! It's almost three-thirty. I go on duty at seven. I have got to get some sleep! Here, let me get you a blanket!

The next morning, J'onn woke with his headache gone—for the moment, he knew. He got to the DEO just before shift change, when the tired junior agents were only thinking about showers and sleep, and the half-awake senior agents coming on duty were mainly thinking about coffee.
His computer inbox was full of emails, but only one really caught his attention. His friend in the Senate was giving him a heads-up on budget cuts coming down the line. Although how he was supposed to trim his already thin budget with Reign on the horizon was anybody's guess.

Reluctantly, he stepped out into the command center, where Vasquez, Winn and Alex were all typing away silently at their stations, nursing some fairly considerable hangovers.

"Agent Vasquez? A word."

She stood to attention. "Sir?"

"It looks like we'll be facing some budget cuts in the coming months. Can you prepare a memo for--"

She reached into the file cabinet under her station and pulled out a folder. "Yes, sir. Right away."

She handed it to him.

"Well," he murmured. "At least you know that your job won't get cut. As you were."

She returned to her station, and he noticed that she was wearing the psychic inhibitor again. He returned to his office, thoughtful. He knew things were in a bad place between his agents, but he hadn't been sure just how bad. Now he had a better idea. But he also had another job to do. He sat down and read the memo.

"Given the recent push in Congress for a 'leaner government,' it is only a matter of time before the buck gets pushed as far as black budgets. But given the recent proto-Kryptonian violence, we are going to have to give in on the most basic things and push back--hard--on others. So we give in on the coffee and housing non-agents and consultants in the barracks. We give in on lead-based ammunition, since it doesn't affect most of the aliens we interact with anyway. But if there is some way we can get the proton cannon back, if there is any way that we can increase our Special Enemy Weapons, we are really going to need to push back on those. Because Reign is still out there, and we can't lose the city because some bureaucrats decide to start counting paper clips."

J'onn smiled. He had been a bureaucrat for a few hundred years, and it had taken him that long to find a left-hand woman who would have a firm grasp on the essentials.
Jess stood in front of her desk, trembling as she flipped through her tablet. In about five minutes, Lena was going to step out of the elevator and Jess was going to have to speak her mind, and for the first time since not long after Lena hired her, she was nervous about it, because she was pretty sure that Lena was going to deeply dislike her opinion. And it wasn't that Lena would fire her for having that opinion, but still, Lena could be kinda scary when she was angry, and Jess was fairly sure that what she was about to say might very well make Lena angry.

The elevator door slid open at exactly 7:59. With her back to the elevator, Jess heard the click of Lena's extreme heels as she marched toward her office. Jess took a deep breath. "Ms. Luthor? Might I have a word with you, ma'am?"

"Of course, Jess. C'mon in while I prepare for the board meeting."

"Um, yes, ma'am," Jess said, following her in. "Actually, about that..."

Lena sat behind her desk and raised The Eyebrow.™

Jess swallowed. "Ma'am, I know that you are strongly motivated to raise the profile of aliens in National, City, and I know you are trying to make a difference with the alien clinic."

"But?" said Lena.

"Well, ma'am, I'm just concerned that this new program of joint hires might cause problems. Are aliens going to trust human doctors?"

Lena gestured for Jess to sit, and appeared to choose her words carefully. "Jess, would you agree that in this country, white doctors outnumber Asian-American doctors?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so."

"So you need to trust white doctors in general because you might not have an alternative, particularly in emergencies."

Jess frowned. "Are you saying I'm speciesist?"

"I'm saying that our city's doctors and surgeons--human and alien--need to be prepared to help whoever comes to them for help. That has absolutely got to be the norm."

Jess frowned. "I guess I hadn't thought of it like that."

Lena looked tired, but not angry. She said, "I've been thinking about this, about all the angles connected to the clinic, day and night for months, Jess. I've been consulting on this for months. You know that. Those consultations weren't just about where the money was going to come from, or the specialized equipment. It was about the optics and the messaging and, well, all of it."

"I should have realized."

"It's okay, Jess. We've all had a lot on our minds lately, and we don't all prioritize the same things."

Jess returned to her desk, thoughtful.

//
Cat Grant liked a change now and then, and when it came to the recent craziness of DC, a change was well overdue. She enjoyed the flight to National City. It was the first vacation time she'd taken since the reelection. If President Marsden didn't take time off, neither did her Press Secretary. Cat Grant was no stranger to long hard days and weeks and months, but there was a limit, even for her, and she was happy to have a good excuse to take a few days for herself. She started where she always did, CatCo Media.

Eve Tessmacher was doing a halfway decent job pretending to be Kyra Danvers, while James had apparently gone back to the DEO (again), probably due to the appearance of the Worldkillers. Well, fair enough.

Lena, Eve said, was back at LCorp, trying to come up with anti-worldkiller tech for Supergirl. Well, okay. No surprise there.

So who was minding the store? Eve Tessmacher?

Cat kept calm and collected as she had her driver get her to the alien clinic. She had never cared much for the waterfront part of town. Everyone knew that bad things happened in the Warehouse District. The Tribune reported on them practically every day. Cat might not like how Lena was taking care of Cat's baby, but she could respect her effort at redeeming this horrible part of town. Also, to be fair, the real estate would be dirt cheap down here. Ms. Luthor was no fool.

Cat decided to give her the benefit of the doubt. She could afford to, being certain that the rest of the board members probably wouldn't.

She watched Lena's seamless proposal, the organizational charts on the PowerPoint display, the shared payment between NC General and the Luthor Clinic. Surprisingly, the Board members were... onboard, for the most part. They questioned the nitpicking details about how the human doctors would work through internships and residencies at the clinic and the alien doctors likewise at NC Gen, but for the most part, they welcomed the idea of getting more of National City's medical professionals to work together for the benefit of the whole population, regardless of their planet of origin.

Cat was impressed despite her reservations. Of course she knew that Lena Luthor was a technical genius, and a large-hearted philanthropist who genuinely wanted to make the world a better place, to fix what Lillian and Lex had broken (and just possibly rub their noses in it). For all of these things, Cat respected her.

And she was grateful to Lena for buying CatCo, for saving it, even though she knew that Lena had done it as much for Kara as for Cat or National City or the country's journalistic integrity. But she did think that Lena was stretching herself too thin, and had considered recommending that she step away from the clinic as just that one too many balls in the air. Now she realized that such would have been ill-advised. The flash in Lena's eyes was back. Her clothes were a la mode again, which they hadn't been since the end of the past summer. Her hair-do's could cut like a knife, again, back to the way things had been the previous year. She was back to looking like the power lesbian she had always been. Cat was relieved.

Lena would make the right decisions for CatCo now. Cat didn't know what had changed, but she trusted it. All the crap that had fallen out of the sky on Lena due to Morgan Edge and to some extent (according to Eve's updates) due to Sam Arias and James, Lena seemed to have gotten beyond it.

The Board unanimously approved the joint program with NCGH. Cat shook Lena's hand and went to find Kara Danvers.
Kara had texted Lena three times that day, and always gotten cheerful messages back saying how busy Lena was. Jess concurred. Kara wanted to text Alex but she figured that would not be welcomed. She texted Maggie, but her captain had her doing a ton of paperwork that Maggie had kept putting off. Lucy was in Metropolis doing legal research on who was responsible when law enforcement damaged infrastructure while trying to take down powered individuals.

Kara was pretty sure that Winn and James wouldn’t get it. She couldn’t call Eliza. She thought about going to Dollywood, but that sounded like the kind of solution Alex would choose. So instead, she changed into her Supergirl uniform and made the rounds of National City, stopping a burglary here, a bank robbery there. She helped an old lady cross a street and helped a young woman without jumper cables restart her car. And that helped, a little.

She flew over the city, listening, but no signs of major foul play reached her ears. Finally, she returned to the DEO. Vasquez and Winn were personning the command center, with Winn playing a computer game on his console and Vasquez scribbling intently in one of her ubiquitous Moleskine notebooks. And that last bit give her a tiny iota of hope, because it had been days since she had seen Vasquez writing.

With a deep sigh she made her way down to medical, to where Livewire was sitting up in bed, reading Agents of SHIELD comics on a tablet that Supergirl suspected she had borrowed from an agent of the DEO.

Livewire looked up. "Well, lookee here: the Woman of Steel. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

Supergirl pulled her red cape out of the way and sat in the plastic chair by the bed. "The city is quiet tonight, and I haven't seen you for a while. How're you doing?"

"Still shaky, even sitting up, but they say they are going to try to get me to stand up tomorrow. Don't hold your breath."

"I'm sure you'll do fine."

"Ha. I'm still afraid I'm going to turn into electricity and not come back."

"We could get agents to tether you, like before," said Supergirl, concerned.

"Nah, at this point, it might be just as well. I've been surrounded by these DEO types so long I'm half considering taking up a job as a superhero."

"That's great! You would be so good at that, and you'd help so many people!" gushed Supergirl. "And with Reign and company, we could really use your help!"

Livewire gave her a decidedly disappointed look. "Seriously? That's what you're going with? Encouraging suicidal behavior?"

"But you're so powerful--"

"Yes! Or I was. And cynical and realistic and not in the mood to be anybody's fucking hero. You claim to be my friend? Then talk me down, dammit."

Supergirl frowned and thought for a bit. "All right. Um, you don't want to be a superhero. It's a horrible job with terrible pay, and um, no health benefits. Well, a few, because the DEO actually--"
"Supergirl..."

"Right! Um, you would totally be a better villain, or better yet, you seemed to be doing really well with that waitressing job you had--"

"You really suck at this, don't you?" said Livewire, awkwardly shifting on the bed and grimacing.

"You're still in a lot of pain, aren't you?" asked Supergirl.

"You have no idea."

"Um, well, that's good then!" said Supergirl brightly. "It means that your interest in being a superhero is just your pain meds talking!"

Livewire came very close to a smile. "Better. Not much, but better."

Supergirl sighed. "Yeah, you're right. I suck at this. At all of it. Being a good superhero. Being a good friend. Being a good sister."

"You have a sister? Oh, wait, Agent Danvers is your sister? Wait, no. You're Kara Danvers! Shit, how did I not see it? You were always around trying to protect Cat, the same way you, I mean Supergirl, was. This is hard to talk about. Wow. In retrospect, the glasses and ponytail really suck as a disguise. I totally would have seen it sooner if I hadn't been electrocuted and then arrested and then--But I was totally right about the Sapphic vibe, wasn't I?"

"Yeah, yeah, everybody has an opinion about us. I mean, about me. Oh, Rao, I don't know."

"And you're upset because your sister is also interested in a girl? In Dr. Torres?"

"What? No! Alex can be interested in women if she wants. It's just that the woman who really loves her, well, they messed things up and really hurt each other, but it was starting to look like they could make it work again, until--"

Livewire studied her face, then looked down at her reconstructed leg. "Until me. Until they called in the big guns to put Humpty Dumpty back together again."

Supergirl sighed. "At least this time, the king's men succeeded."

Livewire studied her face. "You know what I've really been missing in the last couple of days? And, big surprise, it's not Jell-O. God, I need a drink. You know what you could really do for me? Go get a drink, something that will really make you feel less crappy. Then tomorrow you can tell me about it and I can live through you vicariously. Whatya say, Supergirl?"

"Sure. I guess. I can do that."

"Thanks," said Livewire, watching the hero walk dejectedly away, her red cape swaying with each step. To herself, she whispered, "My hero."
Everybody Has an Opinion, Part 5

Cat often thought that if she were some sort of undercover operative, she would totally plant a bug on all the people she held most dear, so she could locate them if they were ever taken against their will. Given the kinds of friends she made, it would actually make a lot of sense. Of course, as a journalist, Cat respected people’s right to privacy too much to actually do it.

Luckily, Cat was also a woman of immense intuitive talent, so for the most part, she didn't actually need GPS data to locate the people she worried about most. One in particular was much easier to find than she should have been.

Cat walked into Dollywood, glanced around, saw Kara alone in a back booth, apparently nursing a club soda. She shook her head fondly, and approached M'gann at the bar.

"Ms. Grant. What can I get you?"

"For me some old scotch, a double. And for Kara, what have you got that will make her relax a bit, but not too fast or messily?"

"Laphroag twenty year sound good for you?"

"Perfect."

"And a Wonder Woman on the rocks. I'll bring them both over."

"Excellent." Cat looked around at the renovated bar, sighing. "Can't say I love what you've done with the place. That old French Resistance look was very apropos for the times."

"Yeah, but people don't want to think about the invasion, and I am not in business to force anybody to remember anything they don't want to."

"Touché."

Cat sauntered up to Kara's booth. "Is this seat taken?"

"Oh! Ms. Grant! No, of course not. Please. What are you doing in town?"

"Several things, naturally, including checking up on Ms. Luthor's latest acquisition. Do you have any idea who is actually currently running CatCo, Kyra?"

"Eve, I imagine, with help from Jess over at LCorp, who has been doing much the same things. It's been... a very hectic few months."

"Yes, I suppose so. In DC as well, though we haven't had to deal with Reign, so I suppose the scale of pain and suffering tips in your favor. How is that going, by the way?"

Kara tipped her hand back and forth.

M'gann brought the drinks over. "It's a Wonder Woman, Kara. I put ice in some to water it down, but do drink it slowly. Alex will kill me if I have to call her to get you home again."

"Thanks, M'gann," Kara said glumly.

"Why so serious?" asked Cat. "You know you'll get the Worldkillers. You always do."
"Fighting evil is much easier than--" She shrugged.

Cat sat taking in the sad look. "Well, then," she said, raising her glass. "Here's to fighting evil."

Kara raised her glass. They both sipped thoughtfully.

"Always do the easy thing first, I say," added Cat.

Kara almost smiled at that. "It's Alex. She and Agent Vasquez broke up. It was Alex's fault, and she didn't make it right, and now it looks like she is probably sleeping with a new woman, somebody she used to know years ago."

"Good for her. Everyone deserves a fresh start."

Kara just frowned. "But it was stupid! It was her poor self-confidence! And Vasquez was so perfect for her!"

"Kyra, do you remember a few years back, when you were angry at me and I told you that there was something underneath that, an anger beneath the anger."

"...yes."

"I think there may be a worry underlying your worry."

"But, what? No!" Kara said and took another long sip.

"Kyra. Why don't we skip the twenty minutes to two days where you pretend you know better than me and get right to the part where you have the epiphany that I'm right and change your behavior to connect better with your new self-knowledge, hm?"

Kara looked at her over the top of her glasses, then sighed gustily. "What if Lena leaves me for somebody else?"

Cat sat back in the booth, frankly astonished, and unaccustomedly speechless.

Kara continued. "What if having a superhero girlfriend who is never around and leaves dates suddenly and leaves her to wake up alone, because so much crime happens at night, and what if having a cub reporter girlfriend who doesn't get paid much and isn't terribly important even at her job, and what if--"

"Wait! Hold up! Slow down, Kyra. Are you telling me that you think Lena Luthor might be cheating on you?"

"What? No! Never! Lena is so good and so sweet and her heart is so pure, and she would never cheat on me! Are you saying that because she's a Luthor?"

Cat thought she saw a brief red flash in Kara's eyes and quickly backed down. "No, no. Of course not. But you do sound a bit... concerned."

Kara took another sip of her drink. "It's just, well, Lena likes to take care of people. And I'm hardly someone she can take care of. And she has her pride. If I'm always saving her, that has to be a problem for her, doesn't it?"

Cat mimicked Kara's see-sawing hand. "Speaking as someone that Supergirl has saved from, just for example, having been thrown off the balcony of a skyscraper...."
"In both cases because of me."

"Details. The point is, on the human level, yes, it's true, gratitude can be a hair shirt. But gratitude for being saved from becoming a thin-film splat on a National City sidewalk? That lies in a very different category. I'm pretty sure you two will be just fine on that count."

"But--"

"And on the other? Taking care of you? Doesn't she feed you? And, if I recall correctly, fill your office with flowers on occasion?"

"Well, yes, but--"

"That may not be how aliens take care of each other, but it is very much how humans do it, particularly women. I mean, not me, of course. But other women do, I'm told." She waved that away. "The thing is, Kyra, what every strong woman needs is a partner who has her back, which you two appear to do for each other. And if you think that Lena might have a problem with you not being around as much, then you probably need to have a talk about expectations and the issues surrounding both your lives and work. After all, now you both have two jobs. I'm sure she'll be reasonable."

"I guess..."

"And as far as your sister goes, the impression I've always gotten from her is that she has always been so focused on her job at the time, and in retrospect, presumably you, that she hasn't had a chance to play the field, see what's out there--or who. Your Vasquez will know that. And if Vasquez is really perfect for her, then dating women who aren't will show her that."

"I guess," sighed Kara. She looked at her glass, which was inexplicably empty. "At least now I feel all floaty." She giggled.

It was Cat's turn to sigh. "Let's get you home, shall we?"

//

Since the Christmas fight with Reign, Astra had been working out six hours a day: staff and sword one day, strength and agility the next. Today she had asked Agent Vasquez to give her some hand to hand practice in Kara's kryptonite practice arena, and the smaller woman gave her a go of it.

After Vasquez took her down for the third time in a row, Astra tapped out, turned off the kryptonite emitters, and drank from her DEO water bottle. Vasquez wiped her face off with a towel with the SHIELD logo on the bottom.

Astra said, "Well, Agent Vasquez, you're frowning more than usual today, but it seems to be giving you great power."

"You frown too, General."

"Of course. Kara was trying to explain 'resting bitch face' to me, but it is not something that comes naturally to her."

"No, she's either sparkly or worried or righteous. Not a lot of in between with that one."

"Alexandra, on the other hand, has enough for the both of them."
Vasquez did not reply, just drank from her own water bottle.

Astra sat on the edge of the platform. "When I first met Agent Danvers, I was quite taken with her, you know."

Vasquez growled, "Get in line."

"Quite. But the people we care for, Agent, often disappoint us. My late husband, Non, never understood my niece, and it led to his ruin. I blame myself in part, but I blame that horrible blue woman more. After my death, she seduced him, and he let her. I had always thought that men were fools, but increasingly I realize that people are fools. We fool ourselves. We want, endlessly, and we convince ourselves that our desires are the greatest good, because that gives us permission to pursue them with great fervor."

"And that's what you think Alex is doing?"

"Hardly. She seems to be the opposite kind of fool, second-guessing her relationship with you because she wants it so much. Rather like yourself, in fact."

Vasquez frowned harder. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Your Director Henshaw came to me today with a proposal that you inspired. He asked me if I would train DEO agents in fighting with the Daxamite blasters that got left behind and confiscated. He said you thought the DEO needed special weapons to fight a special enemy, especially now that your funding is potentially going to be cut."

Vasquez stared. "Wait, you know how to use those?"

"Of course. The Daxamites were our enemies for centuries. It pays to know how to use your enemies' weapons."

"But we can't practice with those things. They're lethal."

"I recommended building plastic practice versions with your additive technology, as that medic did to build bones. We begin by training with simply the lance part of the weapon, and once we have identified which agents are skilled in such combat, then I can train them in using the blaster part."

"That's actually kind of genius..."

Astra nodded seriously. "We need to begin as soon as possible, since we don't know when Reign will return."

But Vasquez was already scribbling in her notebook, muttering to herself. "Not Chen, he's no good at hand to hand. Maybe Jordan? Absolutely Alex..."

Astra smiled.
Chapter Summary

And now we're finally back from the hiatus...

Cat didn’t have to be part of the interviews for the clinic’s program, but it gave her an excuse to stay in National City a few days longer. They sat in the LCorp conference room, Lena and Cat and the interviewees, one at a time, with Jess in back unobtrusively taking notes.

“So, Ms. Ardeen,” said Lena. “Thank you for coming in. Why don’t you tell us about your interest in the position.”

“Well, before I started fighting as a gladiator, I worked in post-operative care, rehabilitating injured soldiers from Saturn’s civil war.”

Cat looked down at the folder in front of her. “Oh, I see you have started to work with Leslie Willis. How is that progressing?”

“Livewire, yes. We’ve just begun a course of physical therapy that—”

Privately, Cat wondered why so many of the aliens they met, much like Disney villains, tended to have British accents. It wasn’t as if the British Empire had gone off world, after all.

Lena asked Imra more questions and the Alien Who Does Everything Better Than You had ready answers for all of them. Cat stifled a yawn. The whole day was the same. Just as she was about to decide that Washington DC really did need her back sooner rather than later, the last two interviewees came in. The first of them appeared to be an African-American man, but she quickly realized that he was Martian-American, and that he wasn’t applying for a job as a doctor but rather as a chaplain. To be fair, the man had a calming presence and about three hundred years of experience. When they asked him whether he would pray to his own deity or to the deities of the clinic’s patients, he replied, “To the seeking spirit, all stars give the same light.”

It didn’t exactly answer the question, but Lena was an atheist anyway, so she just gave a miniscule shrug. Cat, half Jewish and half Episcopalian, figured that they were wandering in unfamiliar territory there, but if he was willing to do the job, they should probably let him.

The last interviewee walked in at quarter past five (they’d been running half an hour late all day—many species answered yes/no questions with stories). The tall dark-haired woman strode in confidently, and Cat Grant sat up straighter (so to speak) at the sight of her. This was Dr. Torres, the woman that Kara was so worried about. Cat had dismissed her protege’s worries as baseless. Agent Danvers was loyal to a fault, Cat knew; it would take a lot to make her turn away from someone she was both professionally and personally deeply attached to. On the other hand…

Dr. Calliope Torres was… a lot.

She spoke with great enthusiasm about her work, some of the notable surgeries she had performed, the process she had developed for growing cartilage in the lab and then seeding it with a patient’s DNA so they wouldn’t reject it as foreign. Lena asked about her work with Livewire, but she only
said that she was not at liberty to discuss a current patient, and Lena looked disappointed, but Cat approved of her professional reticence.

Cat asked, “So how did you hear about the position? We haven’t posted widely for human doctors.”

“A colleague mentioned it, Dr. Hamilton, one of my recommenders.”

“And how do you feel about moving so far from New York?” asked Lena. “Give that we have medical professionals who will be joining us from all over the world, we can’t afford to offer anyone a moving stipend.”

Dr. Torres waved that away. “Once I’m here, I’ll be saving money, and not just because National City’s cost of living is so much more reasonable than New York’s. Here, I’ll be ninety percent closer to my ex-wife and our daughter, who live in Seattle.”

“How convenient,” murmured Lena, with just a trifle of undercurrent. Clearly, she knew of Kara’s misgivings, but she didn’t seem to share them. “Well, we’ll be making decisions very soon, so we will let you know within the week. It was a pleasure meeting you.”

Dr. Torres’s handshake was firm and strong. When she left, Cat sat back in her chair, exhausted.

Lena smiled. “Let’s go back to my office and get a drink. It’s been a long day for all of us.”

They followed her into the office. She kicked off her heels and padded barefoot over to the table, where she poured each a generous portion of scotch. She sat on the white couch, tucking her feet under her.

Cat sat next to her, saying, “Do you really intend to get back to them all within a week? Going through that many people is going to take a lot longer than that.”

Jess handed Lena her tablet. “Is this right, ma’am? Once you okay it, I can get it down to HR, have them liaise with the clinic’s HR and get contracts out by noon tomorrow.”

Lena read through the list and nodded. “Thanks, Jess. It looks good to me. Cat, what do you think?” She handed Cat the tablet.

Cat looked at a long list of names under YES, a short list under NO, and only one name in the MAYBE column, Imra Ardeen. She nodded slowly, impressed once again by Jess Huang, who may just have slipped past Kara Danvers in the contest for most impressive personal assistant. “Looks about right to me. What, do you two share a brain?”

Jess laughed but Lena said, quite seriously, “Pretty much.”

“I must say, however,” said Cat, “that I’m surprised about your greenlighting Dr. Torres. I know both Kara and you, Jess, have strong feelings about her.”

Jess shrugged. “She’s the surgeon we need.”

Lena nodded. “Exactly. Many human diseases and emergencies can be solved with organ transplants, but for many of the less common alien species, that just isn’t an option. We need to find ways to build or grow new options, and she is just the kind of out-of-the-box thinker who can help us figure out how to do that.”

Cat’s phone rang. She looked down, saw her son Adam’s number and murmured, ”I have to take this. Adam! Darling, how are you?”
"Hey, Mom. Quick question. I got a job offer and it's either going to be the office in Metropolis or the one in National City."

"Okay, and the job is--"

"So I was just wondering. Are you still in touch with Kara Danvers?"

"I am."

"Is she still single?"

Cat looked over to where Lena was flipping through her own phone. "No, dear. She's really, really not."

There was a gusty sigh. "And you think she's solid with this guy?"

"Sorry, darling. You know I love you, but even you can't compete with Lena Luthor."

"Lena-- Wait, what?"

Lena looked up at the sound of her name.

Cat waved at her and made her way out of the office. "Look, Adam, it's a long story--"

//

J'onn J'onzz sat in his office, counting his blessings. At the very least, his agents were all off doing things, so he wasn't getting one of his headaches based on their attraction and feelings for each other. Don't discount that, he told himself. Reign was still off the grid--for now--and the third Worldkiller had not yet shown herself, so that was more good news.

On the flip side of the ledger, Pam from HR was hounding him to make a decision about a dozen pending promotions of his administrative staff, the one layer of DEO personnel he didn't know that well. Accounting was sending him nagging emails about budgetary issues. Janitorial was complaining about the K'Hund's cell cleanup every thirteen hours based on Food Service not getting the nutrient mix for its meals quite right...

So basically, typical of his fairly meta life, the flip side of J'onn's ledger was basically people waving ledgers at him and people complaining about a shitshow.

"Well," he murmured out loud. "At least it's not like the DEO this time last year, forced to work out of Dollywood as the sky melted around, well, not me. I was out cold, come to think of it--"

A rapid knock rattled his door.

"Come."

Vasquez said, "Sir, a Sergeant Wilson to see you."

A half-dead-looking Air Force sergeant limped into the room and saluted with a bandaged hand.

"At ease, Mr. Wilson. Thank you, Vasquez."

She nodded and left, letting the door fall closed.

"Speak."
"Director Henshaw, sir. I have a message for you from General Talbot, sir. He said to tell you that there has been a total blackout, sir. It happened, he thinks, while he was in Israel conferring with our local troops on the situation in Syria. He came back to a Rogue One situation and no allies on the ground. He says he fears that Lola has been dismantled."

J'onn stared at the man, then quickly scribbled a Martian translation of what he had just said onto a scrap of paper. "I see," he said finally. "Is that all?"

The man stared at him. Clearly he had a sense of what the code terms meant. Or possibly he was just in shock from his injuries.

"Er, uh, sorry, sir. Yes, that, that's all. Sir."

"Very good. You're dismissed. Agent Vasquez will escort you to medical. Please stay available in case I need you to convey a reply."

"Sir."

After he left, J'onn went and locked the door behind him. Then he went and shifted the NASA image of Mars from its space behind his desk and opened the wall safe. He took out the codebook.

Total blackout = all operatives presumed captured or dead.

Rogue One situation = coup d'etat.

Lola = SHIELD under Philip Coulson

Dismantled...

"Oh, crap." (It was not what he would have said even two hundred years previously, but to be fair, he had been spending a lot of time with Kara Danvers lately.)
Kara wandered around the DEO, distracted. Normally she was a ray of sunshine that the agents loved to see striding down the hallways, smiling and waving. But her mild hangover and her worries about the Worldkiller and her confusion about Alex all ate away at her sunny disposition. She considered going down to the training room to break some concrete, but the noise would be too much. Instead, she wandered and eventually found her way down to Winn’s lab.

She didn’t bother knocking, since she knew Winn always wore his headphones while he worked and wouldn’t hear it anyway. She slipped in the door and leaned against the wall, watching him as he typed away at his tablet and watched mice in a large glass box march around in formation. When he turned to grab a tool, he saw her and jumped.

Tearing off his headphones, he said, “Kara! How long have you been standing there?”

“Just a minute or two. I like watching you work. You’re methodical. It’s soothing.”

He gave her a long look, then gestured to two wheeled stools. They both sat.

He asked, “Want to talk about it?”

She sighed gustily. “It’s Alex. I’m pretty sure she is sleeping with Dr. Torres. And it just feels wrong.”

“I know. But it’s her choice.”

Kara nodded. “What are you working on?”

“Oh, you remember those mice that were loaded with Kryptonite last year? I wondered if I could instead get them to sense Kryptonite, send them into the city. My scans are mostly for above ground, but what if the Worldkillers are hiding in the sewers?”

“Winn, somehow I have a hard time imagining Reign hiding out in sewers… What gave you that idea?”

“I… might have been binge-watching Buffy reruns… But there are also a lot of abandoned subway tunnels, and we already know she likes the subway.”

“Well, it’s worth a try, I guess.” She looked at her phone. “It’s J’onn. I gotta go.”

Winn hugged her. “It’s going to be all right,” he said.

“From your lips to Rao’s ears.”

//

Dr. Isles didn’t like working in the prison’s mortuary because it wasn’t set up as intuitively as her
own, but she did the autopsy on the dead prisoner by the book. As serial killers went, he wasn’t the worst she had had to cut apart, killing by proxy through toys, not up close and personal with, say, a scalpel. That made it a little better.

She lifted out the heart and weighed it. The attending surgeon then took the heart and cut out the pacemaker to examine if its failure might have caused the prisoner’s heart to stop. Dr. Isles took the heart back and cut into it, examining aorta, vena cava, pulmonary artery and vein. What a mess.

“What do you think?” she asked the doctor who still stood with her back to her.

“Looks like mechanical failure. I’ll take pictures and send them to the manufacturer to be sure.”

Dr. Isles stripped off her gloves. She had already been standing there for three hours. “Listen, I’m going to go grab lunch. Do you want to join me?”

“No, that’s okay,” said the other doctor. “I’m going to finish up here and then go back to work. You don’t need me for the rest of this, right?”

“No, you’re good,” said Dr. Isles.

She did not know just exactly how very wrong she was about that.

//

From: Albatross Bay Prison
Re: Winn Schott, Sr.
To: Mary Schott

Dear Mrs. Schott,

Pursuant to our phone conversation two days ago, I would like to inform you that your husband’s body is being released for burial. If you give us the name of the funeral home you have elected to use, we can arrange for them to come to the prison. You do not need to come here at all. We are mindful of how difficult all of this must be for you.

Sincerely,

Earl Bayles
Prison Warden

//

M’gann knew she had a very good brand, and it had only gotten stronger with the decades. The bar in National City was the most successful one she had ever managed, and the version 4.0 called Dollywood was the most successful of all of its previous incarnations that had protected aliens while offering them a refuge in the past and now offered aliens a refuge while also--very carefully--allowing a select few humans the space to interact with them in a neutral space, making everybody recognize the need for interaction and friendship.

And M’gann, herself a Martian well known in National City, was her own asset, sure. But her big gun was Kara Danvers, beloved in her different ways to humans and aliens alike. When Lena Luthor had reached out to M’gann to offer support for the program between National City General Hospital and the Lionel Luthor Alien Health Clinic, M’gann knew exactly how to handle the situation. She delegated.
That evening, even though the headliners of the event were noticeably nervous, Kara Danvers, in her little twinset and trim trousers, took command.

"I know some of you are scared," she told her troops. "I know some of you have never done this before."

James, Alex, J'onn, his father, Winn, Astra, Vasquez and Torres stood in a short line, standing to attention and sweating.

Kara continued, "I know some of you are ready to get out there and prove yourselves. Just remember why we do this. We do this for the aliens of National City whose healthcare has been suboptimal for decades. Well that is about to end. Because of you."

Winn stood up straighter and handed Kara a blinged-out mic.

M'gann watched with pride. Kara, much like her aunt the Kryptonian general, had that old black magic. The woman was wearing a leather jacket and tight jeans--sure to make her catnip for the women-loving-aliens/humans-both--singing in her throaty alto...

This is Major Tom to Ground Control
I'm stepping through the door
And I'm floating in a most peculiar way
And the stars look very different today
For here
Am I sitting in a tin can
Far above the world
Planet Earth is blue
And there's nothing I can do...

M'gann looked around. Perhaps the song had been a bad choice to start the karaoke fund-raiser. Or perhaps not. Nostalgic people of all species tended to dull the pain by substance abuse and singing. This might just work after all...

And then Alex went to her not-singing-with-Kara go-to song:

Two a.m. and she calls me, cuz I'm still awake
Can you help me unravel my latest mistake
I don't love him. Winter just wasn't my season...

And then Winn got up there with his usual style and grace, calling the audience his fellow drunks and getting ready to get down right up until the one TV monitor in the bar that was showing the news rather than lyrics showed a picture of Winslow Schott Sr., dressed in an orange jumpsuit. The headline said that he had been found dead in prison. Winn walked off stage.

James waved the rest of the group away and followed him out the back.

M'gann could feel the powerful waves of relief and regret and grief and more relief. Then she turned to Dr. Torres and asked her to take Winn's place.

All of these lines across my face
Tell you the story of my life
So many stories of who I am
And how I got to where I am
But these stories don't mean anything
When you've got no one to tell them to
It's true
I was made for you...

M'gann gripped the bar, to strengthen herself against the onslaught of emotions from the bar patrons: nostalgia and grief, drunken light-heartedness, relief-regret-grief from Winn, sadness from James, fear from J'onn and his father, and something different, something curious and hopeful from Alex and Dr. Torres.

Oh, batten the hatches, thought M'gann. The seas are about to get rough.
The Apprentice was familiar with funerals. People wore whatever black clothes they owned and gathered around a flower-covered casket looking sad, hands folded, while some clergy-person who had never met “the deceased” said sanctimonious words about him or her, often talking about how good a person it was who lay in the box before them. After all, the term eulogy came from Greek: eu, good, and logia, words. Would this minister suggest to the Master’s family that he was good? Would he acknowledge his many great accomplishments? Or would he emphasize payment for so-called sins?

The crowd should have been much bigger. There should have been hundreds here, weeping for the loss of the great toymaker, a mechanical genius, a great man.

Instead, there was his estranged son and second wife, and four of the son’s friends. The minister stopped talking and gestured for the son to take a handful of dirt and drop it onto the walnut coffin. Without making eye contact, he threw it onto the wood, glared at the woman, and turned to stalk off.

No! That wasn’t right. They were supposed to stay near the coffin!

Hurriedly, the Apprentice flipped the switch. The coffin exploded.

//

If the minister noticed that, at the moment of impact, the blonde mourner disappeared and Supergirl took her place, protecting them from the blast with her alien red cape, he never said anything about it to anybody. He figured that he and she were in the same business, to an extent, and professional courtesy was at least as important a value as getting the name of the deceased right.

//

Anger knows no boundaries. That was the lesson Winslow Senior had taught his apprentice. Anger, he used to say, was the most renewable and inexhaustible source of energy. Every time she saw him, he recommended books on mechanical engineering and prototyping, YouTube videos to watch an expert put the theories into practice, and, oddly, movies about anger, power, and revenge. He told her that his favorite was the Wizard of Oz, because the Wicked Witch of the West had not simply drafted willing soldiers, but had built them, genetically engineered them, and trained them to be extensions of herself. Physically, she could only wreak havoc on people and things she could reach with her own arms, but with the use of her special army, she could envelop the land in darkness and work her will everywhere.

The Apprentice had appreciated the lesson, and taken it, as one might say, to heart.

//

Vasquez grilled Winn Schott, Junior. "Are you sure it's your father, and not a stand-in body?"

"I had the prison warden and two different medical examiners verify that it was him through DNA and dental records. It was him."

"I still think we should run the explosive residue through mass spectometry. It might help us identify who was helping him."

"No one was helping him!" Winn shouted. "Serious, he was a crazy person. Crazy people do crazy
things, like oh, I don't know, mass murder?"

Alex walked in and her voice was calm, as if she was trying to talk Winn down. "Well," she said, "I'm happy to report that Mary has a clean bill of health."

Vasquez thought it interesting that she didn't say "your mother," but then Alex had always been closely aware of nuances. The flash of pride in her protégé was followed by a clenched stomach. Vasquez looked away and worked to keep her face under control.

Alex continued gingerly, "She wants to talk to you."

"Yeah," Winn muttered. "She's had twenty years to talk to me." He sat at his station with his back to them.

Kara and Alex shared a look, which was to be expected. What was less usual was the interaction between J'onn and his father, who had bought a pizza, apparently forgetting the grocery shopping they had done just two hours before. Alex looked troubled, and Vasquez immediately thought about the stories Alex had told her about her grandmother's struggle with Alzheimer's.

Oh shit, thought Vasquez. As if they didn't have enough problems, enough foreseeable heartbreak.

And when Alex walked off with M'yrrn, telling him that "tomato pie is my favorite hors d'oeuvre," Vasquez carefully wiped her eyes to make sure that her modest amount of mascara didn't run.

//

Mary Schott had done her PhD at MIT and her post-doc research at CalTech, so she was not a woman easy to intimidate. After Winn Senior lost his first wife to cancer, he had taken her on in his private R&D prototyping factory, and up until he started showing signs of instability and abusive behavior, she had kept up with him idea for idea and patent for patent. Naturally, he didn't start showing his dark side until she had already married him. Statistically, men like him often didn't. And she had been strong for a long time, based on her hope for him (unfounded) and her concern for Winn Junior (in the end, untenable).

But it meant that, now that she felt free of her late husband, despite the explosion that she honestly believed was the bastard simply choosing to go out with a bang, she felt free to wander around the clandestine government agency's building with impunity.

"You can't just walk around here like that!" argued Winn.

"Oh, come on. If anyone asks, I'm just looking for the bathroom." Mary, hands in pockets, was smug.

"Yeah, it's right around the corner," said Winn. "Bye now!"

"Yeah, I tried that one, but it had a sign that it was closed for enhanced interrogation."

Vasquez turned and said blandly. "That's odd. We haven't used those methods since 2017."

Mary blinked at her, unsure whether to take her seriously or not.

"You think this is funny?" growled Winn.

"Oh, a little gallows humor never killed anybody! Well, except for those fellows hanging from the gallows."
"What do you want!!"

They stared at each other, and finally Winn waved at her to follow him out of the command center. When Mary looked back, that Agent Vasquez was following her with an enigmatic stare that had a soupcon of stink-eye.

Mary followed Winn to a large open room with thick steal doors.

"I just wanted to see your face, Winn, I wanted to hear your voice. I wanted my stepson back. I've spend twenty years imagining this moment, and now I... Leaving you, it gutted me. I've carried that with me, and I had to, because your father--"

"Oh, let me guess. He threatened your life."

"No. He threatened yours. He said if I ever went near you again, he would kill you."

"Sure. You say that. But when I was sitting in that police station in my pajamas, my feet dangling, and the cops kept saying that my mom would be coming in maybe an hour, and hour after hour went by and no one came... You left me when I needed you most!"

"I'm so sorry. I thought, when I heard about his death, that was my chance, I could come back..."

"I don't need your excuses. And you want to keep me safe? Leave again!"

He went and yanked open the door, and Mary slowly walked toward it head down, but they both looked into the hallway to see agents running at the double.

"Something's happening," growled Winn, and he hurried out the door.

//

Supergirl!

The Apprentice had seen the flash of red in the rearview mirror and swore loudly, then picked up the tablet and deployed Plan B. Winn had been saved by the Girl of Steel before, so it wasn't a huge surprise that she might stop by at this funeral.

A small drone in the shape of a red house (with a tiny recumbent Snoopy lying on the top, because, duh, Apprentice to the Toymaker, after all) shot out of the back of the pickup truck, locked onto the target and followed the group north, back to the center of the city, back to a tall skyscraper that was listed on every map available as the headquarters of a national life insurance company.

That was irony for you, thought the Apprentice, once the Dark Net had served up the information about the Department of Extra-Normal Operation: ensuring the lives of humans in this world against... the much weirder world.

By the time the Apprentice had reached the factory, the drone came back with schematics of the building and the GPS location of the target.

Winn Schott, Jr.

Excellent. What an excellent opportunity to test the prototype combat drones, the W3FM2000s. The Apprentice picked up the tablet and stabbed the green icon.

"Fly, my pretties... Fly..."
When the Wind Blows

On the one hand, Kara being Kara, of course she felt bad for Winn, who had been her best friend for a long time and didn't deserve the kind of colossal parental fails that everyone in their friend group seemed to end up with.

Of course she did.

And nobody at the DEO, not Vasquez or Jordan or Chen, deserved to have to combat flying monkeys, especially after having had to fight the Daxamites last year, which was enough to traumatize the entire DEO for life.

It's just...

By Rao, Supergirl had wanted to hit something for weeks now. Hit it hard and watch it explode. And now she finally had the chance.

She flew over the city, shooting them with her laser eyes, pulling up a streetlight and using it as an aerial lance. It was even better that they were some kind of robot rather than sentient flesh and blood. She could decimate them with absolutely zero guilt. And she did.

Then she flew back to the DEO and decimated more of them.

When they were all destroyed all over the floor in bits in the command center, Mary Schott turned to Winn and asked with dismay, "This is your job? This is???

Supergirl grinned. "I know! Awesome, right?"

//

Jillian Holtzman rolled into the DEO (literally, she was wearing roller skates), sleeves rolled up and goggles on, reading to Work the Problemo! "OMG, Winn! This is the best horrible thing to happen to you ever! I've been theorizing how to deploy murderous robots for years, purely as a theoretical exercise, you understand, although with convenient potential applications for anti-ectoplasma delivery in Metropolis, in case we ever have another epidemic that the Ghostbusters are unprepared to deal with but--"

Winn's dark frown cut her off.

"Sorry, my dude. Can't stop the brain. Don't let it get to you. So. Your dad seems to have either a live human accomplice or, my professional preference, a plan from beyond the grave--much easier than live humans to handle. I've already sent a message for the girls to get on a plane to National City tout suite! You're welcome. In the meantime, give me one of these beautiful babies and a socket wrench and I will reverse engineer the shit out of them!"

"Holtzy--" murmured Agent Vasquez warningly. "Hey, Little Plaid Shirt. How can we help?"

He picked up one of the more intact of the flying monkey robot bodies and shoved it into Holtzman's arms, and she carried it off to a work station, ignoring their conversation. Here was the opportunity of a lifetime!

//
Supergirl, once she got over her post-fight rush, realized that perhaps she had been indelicate earlier. And yes, she knew that the whole Worldkiller thing had definitely been frustrating her and maybe making her a bit more bellicose than she would normally be, but still, there was a line, and fighting was only one of the things she needed to do as a superhero. Maybe it was time to put down the chainsaw and pick up the Band-Aid.

She found Mary Schott on the balcony, overlooking the command center where Winn and the other agents were working.

When Supergirl approached her, Mary said sadly, "I always knew Winn was brilliant, but later I worried that he might also go the way that his dad did."

"He worried about that too," said Supergirl.

"I should have been here to tell him that he and his father were worlds apart. Did his friends tell him?"

"We did."

"Thank you for that."

"It was easy. He doesn't always get the credit, but he keeps us going around here. He's always the one with some crazy idea that no once else would possibly dream up."

Mary laughed, and she sounded relieved. "My son works with Supergirl. He saves lives. I just wish he'd let me tell him how proud I am of him."

"I think he will. Eventually."

"Sorry about the mess."

"Oh, this? That's not your fault. You should have seen us after the Daxamite invasion."

"Can I ask, when it comes to your day to day, how big of a pain in the ass are flying monkeys?"

"Maybe a two? That make you feel better?"

"Oh yes! Very much so."

//

Winn was used to working through his pain. Literally, when he was injured or humiliated, from junior high through his accelerated PhD, he worked: coding, designing, testing materials, building prototypes. Or, as in this case, taking apart enemy tech to figure out how it worked, steal what he could for the long-term future, create counter-tech for the short-term future.

What was less familiar to him was the work itself actually causing him pain. He tried for the fourth time to extract the servomotor from one of the flying monkey robots, and for the fourth time, he felt a mild electric shock and dropped his tools. It didn't help that his stepmother saw that last bit.

"That is an angry monkey corpse," she said from the doorway.

"I was hoping to access its inner workings, but it's like a game of Operation. Every time I get close to cracking it, it just zaps me."

"Can I help? I always loved Operation." She squeezed past him to pick out her own tools from his
"Um, I'm not sure you noticed, but this is a top secret government organization--"

"Oh, nobody cares! Hey, you," she said to a passing agent. "Do you care? See? Above her pay grade. You should unionize, by the way."

"Mom--"

"Oh, Winn, you know I started out as his apprentice, back before your mother passed. I know how his brain works." She unscrewed the chest plate and set it aside. "Your father's brain was a wind-up toy. I knew what made him tick."

"Then you knew how to stop him from going crazy, killing a bunch of people."

"Winn, he didn't just wake up one day crazy. He had always been paranoid, manipulative. Remember when I took you to Disneyland when you were nine?"

"We left in the middle of the night because you wanted to be there the moment it opened, and then we got into a car accident and never ended up getting there at all."

"That wasn't ever the destination. I was trying to get us to a domestic abuse shelter. But your father caught up with us, ran us off the road. That's when he threatened your life."

"I don't, I don't remember that."

"You wouldn't. You ended up with a concussion. He forced me to come back home, with you, but as long as I stayed, you were in danger. He was controlling. He was mean. The toys? His boss? Sure, that was the trigger for him to stop threatening and start doing. But it wasn't the start, not by far."

"I never saw..."

"No, of course not. I didn't want you to. I tried to protect you. That's why I left in the end. And I'm sorry, Winn, that I couldn't get us out together, that I couldn't save you."

"That's not your fault."

"Maybe not. But the last twenty years were. And I'm sorry."

//

Supergirl prowled the DEO, watching the facilities folks sweeping up the debris, watching through the glass walls as Winn and his stepmother had what looked like a serious conversation, both of them frowning a lot, and watching Alex and J'onn also have what looked like a serious conversation. She wished there was something she could do. She pulled her phone out of her boot and called Lena, but, as had been happening all week, Lena didn't pick up.

"Hey, Lena. Just touching base, making sure you're okay, don't need saving or maybe fried sugary goodness... Give me a call when you get the chance, okay? See you..."

She texted Jess: Is Lena okay? Should I worry? Or is she just overworking?

Jess texted back: Overworking on a crucial project. Don't worry, I am keeping her fed and making her hydrate.
And that was about as much as Supergirl could hope for, the way things were going.

She strode into Winn's lab, where he and his stepmother seemed to be working together, with less frowning. "So, any luck on figuring out who's behind the Toyman attacks?"

"No," said Mary Schott, "but we've discovered a thousand ways not to make a flying monkey."

"And a few ways to make a much better flying monkey," said Winn.

Mary waved some wires. "The wiring on these is amateurish at best. This wasn't your father."

Winn leaned on the desk and rolled his head. Gently Supergirl massaged his shoulders. "You'll figure it out, Winn. You always do."

Mary said, "I think I need a break. I'm going to head downstairs, rest for a little bit."

Winn said to Supergirl, "Thanks. But what if I can't?"

"I believe in you, Winn."

//

Mary Schott had not survived being married to an abusive man by being unattentive to details. She had noticed where the agents had headed when the robot monkeys had come flying in and she had caught the numeric password—911, appropriately enough—for the armory. She slipped in with no one the wiser and looked around at the options: army assault rifles (tempting but hard to hide), sci-fi looking blasters (might have bigger side effect, best not to try it), and the old standard, Glocks. She was familiar with the power of a Glock, having spent hours in shooting ranges practicing, trying to imagine being able to shoot the man she had once loved if she ever had to.

Now she pulled the Glock off the rack, checked its magazine, slipped it into the back of her waistband and slipped out of the DEO.

The nameplate in her pocket had the three Ws for Wicked Wizard of the West, the company Winn Senior had been trying to get off the ground when his boss stole his patents and Winn's control slipped. If someone was helping him past the grave, it made sense that they would be using the small manufactory at the edge of town. Once upon a time, she had known it well.

It didn't take her long to get there. She was seething with rage. Winn Junior might not be her biological son, but she still felt all the mother-bear urges, and now that he finally understood the truth of his father, she was not about to let anyone take him away from her.

The password for the lock had not been changed: WWUU. In some things, Winn Senior had been remarkably uncreative. She slipped in and slipped the gun out of her waistband. The irony was not lost on her: that she was planning to kill an unknown person for wanting to kill her son for her late husband who went to prison for killing unknown people instead of his known target. Fuck it. The man had made her life a living hell, and now that she and Winn Junior were finally free, someone else was taking his place.

But not for long.

The manufactory was dimly lit, even this late at night. Toys lined shelves, both packaged for sale and in prototype form. She went to the brightest corner and saw the back of a person, wearing a blue mechanic's jumpsuit, working at a workbench. She aimed the Glock.
She said, "I don't know why you hate me or my son, but it stops. Right here."

She saw long blond hair tied up, presumably to keep it out of the person's way as she (or he?) worked.

She said, "I'm pointing a gun at you, by the way."

"A gun," said the woman, unconcerned. "That's a dangerous toy." She reached behind her and pulled two levers. "But mine are worse."

Mary looked up to see a huge mechanism reach down and grab her.

Crap, she thought. This was why cops always brought backup.
The Cradle Will Fall

It took Winn twenty minutes to realize that his stepmother had potentially played him. That was how he thought of it at first. He marched into the command center, where Vasquez was explaining something to Alex, Supergirl and J'onn, looking stiff and uncomfortable while sounding very authoritative. Everybody looked serious. They turned as he entered. "Winn?" asked Alex.

"Has anybody seen my stepmom? She's gone, along with the faceplate of the gear chamber."

Vasquez started, "And in English, that would be--"

But then the computer turned itself on, to show

"I have your stepmother. You can trade your life for hers. She's hanging out at the Wicked Wizard's game factory. But you'll have to move fast. This offer won't last."

They could all see Mary Schott enclosed in some kind of mechanism and hanging from the ceiling. She yelled, "Winn! Don't come here!"

Supergirl said, "I'll go."

"Me too," said Alex.

"Not without me," said Vasquez, exactly as Winn said the same thing.

J'onn said, "Agent Schott, you're what she wants. You have to stay here."

"I lost twenty years that I might have gotten to know her," said Winn. "I'm not abandoning her now."

//

The Apprentice felt the thrill of anticipation. Months of planning were about to pay off. She had the fly in her spiderweb, so to speak, or better yet, Auntie Em trapped in a place where, once Dorothy and her outcast friends came to rescue her, all of them would pay the ultimate price.

Once, long ago, the Apprentice had had more "normal" aims. She had been a master of her craft, putting people back together again when their servomotors had gone bad. And then she'd had her heart broken and started over again, and then she'd met Winn Schott, Senior.

It had been an unusual call, a consultation at the supermax prison for a mass murderer whose heart was failing. She had gone in ready to hate him. Surely, a killer like that had no heart. Except...

He did. He was charming, interesting. He thought about mechanical engineering and could talk to her about his own body's failures in terms of gears and mechanisms, in terms of his own body as a wind-up toy. He had useful ideas about how to build a better pacemaker, and together they had written the patent on it. When the pacemaker finally failed, he left her the patents to his toys in his will. But by the time he died, Hahn had worked herself up into a froth, took over the old toy factory and had built a small army of toys.

So, although in a former life, she would have mocked a self-proclaimed villain ranting angrily at a victim, now she couldn't stop herself.

The evil stepmother asked, "Hey, Buffalo Bill, why are you doing this to us?"
"Us? Who's us? The shrew wife who wouldn't let her husband have any fun? The son who never called, never visited his lonely, ailing father in prison? You really think you're a pair worthy of sympathy?"

"You knew my husband. How?"

"I was the cardiothoracic surgeon called in when he started showing signs heart failure. But we clicked from day one. We bonded. And he taught me that mechanical things aren't so different from bodies, and they are much, much easier to fix. Oh, he taught me a lot. He changed my life. He graced me with everything he knew, and in exchange, I promised to carry out his plan. To kill you both."

//

Vasquez helped Winn put on the bullet-proof vest, since he never pulled the straps tight enough. Alex drove like a woman demon-possessed. The DEO SUV screamed to a halt outside the factory. They jumped out like a well-oiled machine. The gate was unlocked and they went in without having to blast anything and give away their presence. As they marched, four abreast, onto the floor of the factory, Vasquez swung her flashlight around at eye level, noting the Tyrannosaurus Rex dolls, the huge fuzzy panda dolls, but seeing nothing really weapon worthy.

"We've got to find that claw apparatus, figure out how to get her out of there, " said Winn. He sounded uncharacteristically angry.

"We'll find her," said Supergirl.

A loud buzzing noise sounded behind them and they turned.

"Is that a plane?" asked Alex.

"No, it's a bomb," said Winn. "Run!"

Alex, Vasquez and Winn ran, but Supergirl braced herself and shot her eye lasers at it, exploding it just as it got close to her. Two more were flying in behind it. "Go find Mary!" she yelled, as she aimed her lasers at the incoming planes.

Alex and Vasquez shared a glance, then each grabbed one of Winn's arms and dragged him away at a dead run. They turned a corner and suddenly there was fire behind them, a toy truck with a flame thrower attached to the front.

"What the fuck!" shouted Vasquez. "That's not a toy!"

"You never met my dad!" yelled Winn.

"Run faster!" yelled Alex.

They ran faster. Alex turned and shot it with her alien pistol, blowing it up. "Hot wheels down!"

Sparks flew. They kept running.

The strange woman's voice came over some kind of intercom. "I'm so glad Junior brought along his friends! It's always friendlier with more to play the game!"

Vasquez saw a rack of baseball bats and grabbed one in her left hand. Her right held her Glock, but she figured it was always better to be prepared for everything.
The intercom again: "Heat vision. Freeze breath. And so many points of articulation? I think I'll keep you!"

There was a loud slam up ahead. Alex and Vasquez shared another glance and then they both put on speed, leaving Winn far behind.

"So rare to find a vintage superhero in mint condition!"

Vasquez and Alex sped ahead, to see Supergirl encased in what looked like a plastic box. They saw the red light of her laser vision fail to blast through the material.

Alex yelled, "Supergirl!" and charged forward. A roar came from behind them, and Vasquez turned to see a T-Rex, life-sized, hurtling toward them. She squeezed off three shots, and the dinosaur tipped over long enough for her to see behind it, where Winn was beating off the truck with a stuffed panda. The T-Rex righted itself and Vasquez came in from underneath with the baseball bat, shattering its left hip and leaving it scrambling on the ground. She hurried to catch up with Alex, who shot Supergirl's case with her alien pistol, shattering it and dropping Supergirl to the ground, gasping for breath.

The three of them ran to the gigantic claw, but not before Winn ran to the control mechanism and pulled down the levers.

"Mom! I'm here to rescue you!" he said as the claw opened, dropping her to the ground.

"Don't Luke Skywalker me! This crazy woman is trying to kill you. Don't give her the--"

Bullets shattered the computer screen with the hourglass on it. They all ducked.

There, in front of them, was the strange blonde in the mechanic's jumpsuit, holding up a gun. "Well, if it isn't Toyman Junior, running headlong into danger. I see your father left you none of his brains."

"Well, really," said Winn. "Cuz I see he left you none of his showmanship. What? After all this, you're going to just shoot us?"

"Most important thing he taught me? Stick the landing."

"Really?" said Winn. "Because what I got was more is... more." He hit the button on the control device, and a New and Improved Flying Monkey flew threw a window, spraying shattered glass in its wake, and knocking the gun out of her hand.

But of course that wasn't her only weapon. She pulled a yoyo from her pocket and sent it flying out at him. The string wrapped itself around his neck and she yanked him back.

"Winn!" yelled Mary.

"Your dad taught me this one too," said the woman, yanking the string tighter.

"Really," gasped Winn, pulling with his left hand on string around his neck. With his right hand, he grabbed the yoyo and hit the control button, yelling as the blades popped out, one right into his palm. "Did he... teach you... this too?"

He sliced the string she held and pulled free. Mary pulled the claw forward and smashed it into the woman's head. They both pulled clear.

Vasquez and Alex ran forward.
"Winn? Are you all right?"

"Yeah."

"Holy shit." This was from Alex.

They turned to her. "What's wrong?"

"I know her. I mean, I knew her. Once. Years ago. In Seattle. She's a surgeon. Holy shit. Torres is totally going to freak!"
And Down Will Come Baby, Cradle, and All

Chapter Summary

End of Schott to the Heart, and trying to set up my fix-it for the end of this season.
Shoot me ideas in the comments. Thanks for reading!

On the last of the three nights of the karaoke fundraiser at Dollywood, M'gann relied on her
telepathic abilities to bring people the drinks they wanted so she didn't have to take the earplugs out
of her ears. Winn and his stepmother weren't nearly as bad as everyone had predicted, but Imra had a
tin ear. When M'gann brought Alex a beer and a glass of red wine, Alex gestured and M'gann took
out one ear plug.

"Yeah, I know you didn't order it, but your friend is on her way and she is really going to need a
drink."

"Oh, shit," said Alex. "It must have been on the news."

Callie Torres came in, winced at the bad singing, and quickly made her way between aliens to get to
Alex's table. If M'gann stuck the earplug in her pocket and eavesdropped, well, let's face it, you
couldn't make this stuff up.

"Lexie--I mean, Alex! Is it true what they said on TV, was it really Erica Hahn?"

"Yup, the Toymaker's Apprentice was your ex. That's for you by the way."

Even in her agitated state, Torres swirled the wine and sniffed it before taking a long sip. "She wasn't
just my ex, she was my first. She's how I figured out I liked chicks. This is insane. Was she insane?
How does such a brilliant mind just snap like that?"

"Well, Winn's dad was brilliant too, and she respected him. The rest I guess we'll never really know.
But there are a lot of charges against her--attempted murder, grievous bodily harm. And since she's
the one who blew up Schott Senior's body, there's a charge for that as well. Turns out that's illegal
too."

Torres just stared, shaking her head and taking larger sips of her wine. Alex looked up to see J'onn
walk in, looking serious, and behind him was Lena, looking utterly exhausted. Alex got up to go talk
to her boss, while Lena sought out Kara. M'gann went and fixed Lena a Cosmo and brought another
beer for Kara.

Kara jumped up and hugged Lena. "Lee!"

Lena sat down, thanking M'gann for the drink and taking a deep swig. "Oh, that's good. Sorry, Kara,
it's this project I've been working on at LCorp. Sam and I have been swamped."

"How is she? We've been so busy with Winn's evil dad's crazy apprentice that I haven't had time to
call you. Where have you been? Winn kept saying it would have been so much faster working on
those flying monkeys if you'd been there!"

"Wait, flying monkeys?"
Kara went back and described the attacks and the final surprising conclusion. "And it turns out that it was this woman, actually the one who got the toaster oven for Dr. Torres."

"Wait, what? I really have been away for too long."

"What have you been working on anyway?"

"I have a theory about certain kinds of consciousness, based on the things that you and Alex described about that poor woman, Julia. We know so little about the brain, but I've been reading studies of people with multiple personalities, and the things that trigger them to go from one to another. I have some ideas about your Worldkillers."

Kara sighed deeply, finished her first beer and started on her second. "It's not like we can test your theories. I mean, for that, we'd have to catch one and basically, what? Experiment on a prisoner? That has to be breaking all kinds of ethics."

"Unless we could get her back to her human self and get consent..."

Kara picked at the label of her beer. "That's three impossible things right there."

"Kara, you do the impossible on a regular basis. So I figured I should tell you that I am setting up a lab at LCorp, so that when you do get one of these women back to her human self, I'll be ready for you."

Kara stared. "Lena, that's crazy. First, you have no way of controlling her--"

"Actually, I have a few things in mind, one of which is a scaled-up version of the red sunlamps Winn made for the bedroom. Don't you fret, Kara, you just have to get me a Worldkiller, and I will be ready." She finished her Cosmo and pulled out a twenty dollar bill. "I've got to get back to work. Tell M'gann to keep the change." She leaned over and kissed Kara. "I believe in you, Supergirl."

M'gann smiled. It wasn't just that Lena Luthor was always a generous tipper. It was that she gave M'gann faith in the possibility of good relationships based on honesty, trust and respect. You almost never saw that shit on television, she thought. It was pretty awesome to see it in real life.
Making Hard Choices

When Lena had first seen Sam's eyes go red, she had a moment when she didn't believe her own eyes, but only a moment. When Sam stumbled and reported just then going blank, Lena knew her worst fear was realized. She also knew that no one would believe her, starting with Sam herself. She promised Sam that she would get to the bottom of this and immediately sat down with Jess to make a list of everything she would need to set up a Kryptonian-safe space in her basement lab. Then she contacted Mrs. Finnigan, the mother of a friend from her old boarding school who currently lived in Metropolis, and asked her for a big favor. Luckily, she was happy to help.

The next thing she did alone. Down in the secret lab, she used the bioscanner to open up the vault, where she had put her brother's LexoSuit and his warhammer after the DEO had cleaned up his vault on Mt. Haystack. Those weren't what she was looking for, however. Deep in the back was a small, lead-lined box. This also had a bioscanner, although, strictly speaking, the domino-sized white tablets were harmless and valueless.

Then again, one could say that about a lot of things, hydrogen, for example. That didn't mean that you could do harmful and valuable things with hydrogen. And Lena was a scientist, engineer, businesswoman, fashionista and lesbian extraordinaire. But she was also a Luthor. And she was about to do something very harmful and very valuable with these little white tablets.

She just hoped her superhero girlfriend would forgive her when she finally found out.

//

In Manhattan, it wasn't raining.

Calliope Torres had simply lived in Seattle way too long, because she was still always astonished when she was in any city and it wasn't raining.

It was just as well that it wasn't raining, since that made it much easier to convince her friends to help her finish moving the last of her belongings from the tiny apartment into the U-Haul. The muscular queer boys from the hospital joked that she was probably moving in with some new girl, and she laughed it off, but she also kept thinking of that night earlier in the week when she had gone back to Alex's place from the bar and they had talked about Erica Hahn and Maggie Sawyer and Arizona and Vasquez and then ended up necking on Alex's couch. Almost immediately, they had stopped and it had gotten all kinds of awkward.

Alex said, "Oh, Callie, I'm so sorry. That was wrong of me. You needed a place to stay and I should never have--"

"No, it's my fault. The shock of seeing Erica being hauled off by the cops on the news--"

The next day she had bought a ticket back to New York, and only from that great distance, by phone, had she admitted to Alex that the Luthor Alien Clinic had offered her a job. Alex enthusiastically encouraged her to take it. So here she was hugging her friends goodbye and driving across the country with everything she owned to start on her next great adventure.

As she crossed the state line from New York into New Jersey, big fat raindrops splashed against her windshield. She smiled. It felt like a good omen.

//
James Olsen felt lost. He had given up being the Guardian to join the DEO and then he had given up the DEO to hold the fort at CatCo for Lena. Then his suit had gone missing, so even when he woke up in the middle of the night wishing that he could just suit up and go out into the dark streets and kick some righteous ass, that simply wasn’t an option.

But Reign and Purity scared the shit out of him and he really wanted to hit something.

Sitting in Cat's office he flipped through an old issue of CatCo Magazine and came across the pictures he had taken of Lillian Luthor and the remains of Lex's kryptonite exosuit. It was a thing of beauty really. He wondered if J'onn would let him have it. Winn had been busy with some other project lately, but surely he could retrofit it for James. Lillian was a tall woman, so it wouldn't take all that much work, surely...

James set down the magazine and stood up. "Eve, I'll be at the DEO if anyone needs me."

"Yes, sir."

//

Vasquez sat at her station in the DEO command center, staring off into space. Her threat assessment on the Toymaker had been way off base. The one-page memo she had written after the last time Schott Senior had escaped prison and gone on a rampage had mentioned in passing the danger of a high-functioning copycat. But flying monkey drones attacking the DEO? Not so much.

She watched as DEO janitors resigned swept up shattered glass, something they’d had to do far too many times in the last two years. The Nevada site had been much quicker to clean up after alien devastation. The view hadn’t been much to speak of, especially at night, but underground caverns didn’t shatter easily.

Vasquez glanced glumly at the pocket notebook that lay open to a blank page. Sighing, she wrote: FLYING MONKEYS? She looked over at Winn, who looked blank. She wrote: There’s no place like home…

J'onn’s voice sounded in her earpiece. “Agent Vasquez, may I have a word?”

Leaving her notebook behind, Vasquez marched to his office.

“Have a seat, Vasquez.”

J’onn looked tired. Vasquez checked to make sure her psychic dampener was on.

J’onn opened a grey folder on his desk. Clipped to the cover was a surveillance camera shot of a group of SHIELD agents walking into a diner.

“Sir?” she asked.

“Agent Vasquez. I know we have our own problems here at the DEO, but something has gone very wrong at SHIELD and I need you to go in and figure it out. Your team went missing back in the fall. At the time, General Talbot just assumed that they had gone dark out of mission necessity, but recently, other agencies have identified them as terrorists. And you know as well as I do that Coulson’s team are not terrorists.” He slid a manila envelope over the desk to her.

Inside were IDs for Agent Piper, a resume that claimed she had been working for the past year as a security consultant for LCorp, a burner phone and a thumb drive. She closed the envelope and stared at him. “But sir, you need me here.”
J'onn sighed. “Vasquez, you are one of my most valued agents, but right now, your head is not in the game at the DEO. And yes, I appreciate your using the psychic inhibitor, but I don’t have to be psychic to know what you’re thinking and feeling when you sing ‘How to Save a Life’ at karaoke night while making puppy dog eyes at Agent Danvers.”

Vasquez opened her mouth and closed it again.

He said, “Agent Vasquez is not of much use to me right now. But Agent Piper might well help our friends save the world.”

“Sir, do you really think the stakes are that high?”

“It’s Phil Coulson. Of course the stakes are that high.”

She rose to go. “Thank you, sir.”

“You’re welcome. And Susan, good luck.”

//

Sam sat in Lena's office at LCorp with a headache. She had gone over the numbers at least three times, but all she could think about was her blackouts and all the failed tests. Not cancer, she thought, and tried to see the R&D budget without wishing she could spend some of it an figuring out what was going on with her. So when Lena walked in looking very serious, Sam was more than ready to say yes. She went down to the basement lab she would have sworn didn't exist and put on the scrubs that Lena gave her and let Lena hook her up to machines and sedate her. Lena had even gone and found a picture of her and Ruby, so that the last thing she saw as she fell asleep was the smiling face of her daughter.

That was so like Lena, to be that thoughtful.
There were a handful of things that made Lena Luthor's top-floor executive suite... different from the office of, say, Cat Grant, Morgan Edge, or even Max Lord. Many disliked CEOs had a panic room. That wasn't particularly special. And a top-secret staircase down to the first floor in case of other kinds of emergencies, that wasn't so terribly unusual either. The secret elevator down to the subbasement where she kept all of Lex's more dangerous tech, that was different. And the only person who knew about it besides Lena was her trusted personal assistant, Jess Huang.

In the past week, Jess had worked day and night to set up the lab to Lena's specifications. She was even in charge of the night shift experiments supercharging the small white chips into pseudo-kryptonite.

So she was there when Lena (when did that woman sleep???) bravely locked herself into the K-vault with its red sunlamp lighting and conducted the experiments on Sam Arias. Jess looked up from her work to see Lena turning down the sedation on Sam and taking notes on her tablet as Sam's numbers updated. Jess had been the one to witness Sam's signature on the consent forms. Jess had mixed feelings about Sam, mainly because Jess was personally loyal to Lena alone, and kind of resented Lena's saving CatCo since it had meant that they had not really worked together for months. And she had at first been really angry when it had seemed that Sam was taking Lena for a ride and not doing the work. But then it came out about Sam's blackouts, and Jess immediately supported Lena's plan to figure out that problem herself. As far as Jess was concerned, there was no one more qualified than Lena to solve a problem like that, although she had several times recommended to Lena that she read Alex Danvers in. But Lena had said no every time.

And while Jess thought that was a mistake, she backed Lena's play.

That's one reason why she was willing to work so closely with Lena. Someone had to protect her in case she was right about Sam being Reign, which she still had yet to prove, but Jess trusted Lena's intuition, if not her sense that she didn't need protection.

And that was why Jess was there the night that the sedation wore off and Sam woke up and started asking questions.

"How long have I been sleeping? Where's Ruby?"

"She's with her nanny. She's safe. Not long."

"What's wrong with me?"

"Most of your bloodwork came back normal. But I also studied your cell replication process. There's trace evidence that your cells have been undergoing a mutation that has only been seen in insects. It indicates metamorphosis. When you black out, your body seems to be changing on a cellular level."

"Changing? To what?"

"To her. Reign."

"I'm not an alien. I don't have special powers. I bleed. I get sick. My adoption papers say I'm from Scranton. Look, I know you mean well, but I haven't got time for this. I need to see my daughter." She moved to get off the hospital bed.

Lena nodded. "I knew this might be hard for you, so I also compiled a timeline of the blackouts you
couldn't remember." She picked up her tablet and sent its data to the computer screen near Sam's bed. "This is the first one." The news from Station 3 showed Reign beating on people, and the ensuing destruction. "And the next, and the next."

"This is ridiculous. I need to go see my daughter." She got up and tried to walk out of the chamber, and came up against the forcefield holding her in.

"Lena, let me out!"

"I can't. You asked me to help you."

Lena looked tired and sad, and Jess knew nothing made Lena sadder than not being able to help the people she cared about.

//

Kara insisted that that they not let rampaging Worldkillers change their Friday night plans. After all, if they did, then the terrorists had won, right? So Game Night went on as usual. Or almost as usual. It was hard not having Lena there, but she had said that she had made a small breakthrough in her consciousness project that might have some bearing on Sam's problem. So Sam and she were both at LCorp, and from what Winn had said, Jess was probably there too.

And it didn't take Alex glancing at Kara's empty armchair to guess that she was thinking about Vasquez. Kara had invited her, hoping that maybe the lighthearted atmosphere of Game Night might work to get her and Alex back together again, but she had said that J'onn had given her a mission and she couldn't come. Kara didn't like the sound of that, but at least if Vasquez was doing research for one of her tactical scenarios, she wouldn't be in any danger. That was a relief.

M'yrnn was there, playing charades with James, Winn, J'onn and the Danvers sisters and bumbling through it the way new aliens always did, even when they weren't facing catastrophic memory failure. The others were kind to him, and Kara got up to open another bottle of wine. J'onn came with her to the kitchenette.

"I'm really glad you guys came," said Kara.

"Me, too," said J'onn, watching his father fondly.

"Your dad is really strong." Kara used the corkscrew on the merlot.

"Yeah, he's taking this better than I am, doing everything he can to keep his mind sharp."

M'yrnn won the next round, guessing Winn's highly unlikely phrase.


"You accuse me of cheating? When he was a boy, he would wait for me to leave and rearrange the pieces on the board. When I caught him, he blamed his imaginary friend, what was his name?"

J'onn shook his head, smiling. "Zook."

The others burst into laughter.

James looked incredulous. "You had an imaginary friend?"

Alex's phone went off. "Oh dear. It's a trouble alert. There's a big disturbance downtown."
"Well," said Kara, carefully unbuttoning her plaid flannel shirt. "It's time to get back to the saltmine."

Everyone stared at her, Alex most pointedly.

"What? I like this shirt."

As she flew across town, in between all the skyscrapers with all their little lights, Kara remembered the time she had first worn that shirt. It was just after the last time they had caught Lillian Luthor, and the woman had actually been strangely... nice? to Lena, and Lena had been kind of disturbed, so Kara had stayed the night at Lena's place. The next morning, Lena had lent her clothes to go to work in, since she had been wearing a good dress to the gala, and when Lena had seen her in the shirt, she had looked all hot and bothered and told Kara to keep it. "It looks better on you than on me." Kara was pretty sure that nothing except her supersuit could possibly look better on Kara than on Lena, but since Lena really, really liked it when Kara wore it, it was now officially her favorite shirt ever.

Supergirl landed at the coordinates the DEO had sent her, surprised to find herself at Dollywood, which given that it was pretty much the DEO watering hole, was usually one of the safest places in town. Not that night.

Inside the bar a green-haired punk alien was raging, punching other aliens and humans and throwing a bottle of (according to Alex) pretty decent scotch, which Supergirl was careful to catch and put down safely on a table.

Agent Chen was there. "She was fine and then she just went crazy!"

Supergirl said, "Get everybody out. I'll take care of this."

The woman was fighting like a beast, but after Supergirl had fought Worldkillers, a single enraged alien was pretty tame. They traded punches, fell into the photo booth and grappled some more and then Supergirl knocked her out. She took the photos and stuck them in her boot. They'd look good on Supergirl's Instagram account.

//

Back at the DEO, Alex almost didn't notice Vasquez not at her station in the command center on her way to the med lab to examine Supergirl's latest catch. The computer ID'd the woman as Finhead, a Callinorian. "She's got no criminal record," Alex told J'onn and Kara.

"So why'd she go all Roadhouse on me? Chen says she wasn't provoked."

J'onn said, "Callinorians are psychics, empaths."

"Maybe she got her signals crossed with another psychic," suggested Alex.

J'onn frowned. His eyes went red for a second and then went back to normal. "I don't see any psionic anomalies."

"She tore that bar up," said Supergirl.

"Callinorians are known to have outbursts during astronomical events, like Mercury being in retrograde..."

"So... astrology?" asked Supergirl.

"Sure, call it that. We have enough to deal with, with those Worldkillers. Put her in containment."
Alex called two agents to move Finhead to a containment cell while she followed Supergirl and J'onn to the command center where Imra and Astra were helping Winn.

Kara asked, "Any luck?"

Astra said, "We've been using the devices on our ship to track Purity and Reign since the subway attack, but there's no sign of them."

Alex said, "Well, they're probably out looking for Pestilence, right?"

"Whom we still no nothing about," said Supergirl grimly.

"Exactly," said Winn. "And based on our assumption that pestilence means disease, I have piggy-backed our tech onto the Centers for Disease Control here in the US, and the European, Russian, and Japanese equivalents. I've also reached out to some of my geek friends in India and South America. If diseases start to show up out of the blue, we'll be ready."

Astra said, "And when you find them, you'll need all of your agents ready to deal with Worldkillers. I have Agent Vasquez's list of agents she wants me to train with the Daxamite blaster lances. Director J'onzz, do I have your permission to begin training?"

"Right away, General Astra. The sooner, the better."

But Alex thought he looked distracted. She said, "J'onn, isn't Agent Vasquez on duty tonight?"

"What? No. She's on another assignment. She might be gone for a week or two."

"Sir? Really? We need all our best agents on this one."

"Agent Danvers, it might be hard for you to imagine this, but the DEO has crucial operations going on all over the United States, not just in National City."

"But sir, we have Worldkillers here!"

"Agent, if your study of history has taught you nothing else, it should have taught you that there are potential worldkillers everywhere, all the time. I have sent Vasquez to sort out a problem that she is uniquely qualified to handle. You will need to use the team you have to solve this more local problem. Dismissed."

He marched off.

Alex turned to Supergirl and the others. "Oh, that can't be good."
Lost Time, Lost Memories

M'yrrn had not survived centuries of imprisonment to simply give up the moment his mind started to show signs of age and weakness. The psychic games and spiritual practices of the Green Martians were a few thousand years old, created by his ancestors to keep the mind sharp. He hated the way his son kept hovering, though he was grateful for J'onn's friends' kindness to him.

And when J'onn told him about the poor Callinorian who had apparently been sent into a rage by M'yrrn's psychic practices, of course he felt bad, and after J'onn's visit, he went to the Luthor Alien Clinic at first to find the young woman and apologize at the same time as he dropped off the paperwork for his job as a chaplain. They explained that they had no Callinorians at the clinic, and then he realized that of course the DEO would have detained the woman. So obvious. He really needed to find a safe place to do his spiritual practice. He didn't want to hurt anyone, but he really needed to get his memories in line, and he only knew one way that would work for sure.

Sam hated small spaces, and the chamber in Lena's secret lab was fairly small. She paced like a caged panther, hating her diseased brain, hating the chamber, and yes, a little bit hating Lena Luthor, who was brilliant but clearly, utterly wrong about Sam. Cellular metamorphosis. It was ridiculous.

She remembered Ruby insisting that her mother had superpowers, but she had long since made peace with the idea that a mother whose child is in danger could achieve some practically miraculous things with a big enough dose of adrenaline. She was not an alien, and she was definitely not an alien supervillain.

The elevator opened and Lena came out, still as stylish as ever in her short-sleeved knit dress and heels. Her makeup also was impeccable. That told Sam that Lena didn't really believe she was an alien supervillain. What woman would face down such a horrific beast in makeup and heels?

"Have you thought about what I told you?" asked Lena.

"I get squeamish when Ruby asks me to kill a spider. How could you possibly think I could kill people?"

"I don't think you could." Lena emphasized the "you."

"You think I have a split personality?"

"Essentially, yes. Reign is a completely different entity. When she takes over, you lose all awareness, all control. Your DNA rewrites itself. Please, Sam, I would not tell you this if I wasn't sure."

"This is what I get for asking for your help. You ask an oncologist, they'll say cancer. I asked a Luthor, and they tell you you're a supervillain."

Lena's phone rang. "What? Just tell her I'll call her back. She's where? Of course she is. Why did I put that balcony in? I'll be right up."

Sam watched her go, wondering about the comment about the balcony, but mostly feeling trapped and alone.

//
Agent Chen sat in Agent Vasquez's station in the command center of the DEO, watching the feeds and feeling resentful. He knew that Vasquez had left him off the list of agents currently training with Astra down in the training rooms and he was pissed. He was also pissed that the only reason he was doing her job was that J'onn had so highly valued her that he had sent her on a solo mission to another city, apparently to save the fucking world. Even Alex hadn't known about it, and Alex was the Assistant Director.

Who was he in comparison? Just Agent Chen, as in "Chen, give Winn backup": not Supergirl, not Agent Danvers, Winn, the glorified IT guy who never even bothered wearing the uniform. And they shouldn't even get him started about the flying monkeys.

Agent Winn ambled into the room wearing one of his ubiquitous plaid shirts and a knit tie that looked like it was from the 1980s.

"Hey," said Winn. "Any luck with the Worldkillers?"

"No."

"Well, you can catch a break. I'll take over scanning for a while."

Chen's head throbbed. He turned to Winn. "I know what I'm doing. You don't need to take over anything, Agent Schott."

"I didn't say you didn't know what you were doing. You need to get out of here right now!"

//

Down in the training room, Alex followed Astra's lead with ease, even as some of the other agents fumbled with the 3D-printed plastic facsimiles of the Daxamite lances. Some were swearing, and Astra spoke sharply with them about it. "You are warriors. Deal with your failures with the dignity befitting a warrior."

She watched as Alex successfully executed a complicated maneuver that combined footwork with striking five opponents in succession and smiled. "Agent Danvers, I believe Director J'onzz wishes to speak with you. Take a break. Your progress has been excellent."

Alex blushed at the compliment and went to where J'onn was standing at the door. She followed him out.

He said, "I am worried about my father. I am now thinking that maybe that Callinorian was actually affected by my father doing a psychic practice for gathering his memories, and I--"

"Wait, what? You said it was astrology! The moon in retrograde. Did you lie to me, and to Supergirl, directly to our faces?"

"No, lunar discontinuities can in fact--"

"And what about Vasquez? We always discuss special missions before you make final determinations. Did you go around me because of my former relationship with her?"

"Alex, I think you need to stop and--"

"I need to stop? You need to stop! You are not my father! You don't get to rearrange the people in my life just because you want to. Where did you send her anyway?"
"I sent her to rescue some SHIELD agents."

"You sent her back into SHIELD? She nearly died the last time you sent her in there. Remember the Kree?"

"Of course, I remember. Agent Danvers, you will not question my judgment on this!"

"You trained me to question authority, sir. This is me questioning authority."

"Agent Danvers, come to my office. Immediately."

//

Winn really wouldn't have believed how fast Agent Chen could get in his face.

"You egotistical little son of a serial killer!" Chen pushed Winn against the computer terminal.

Winn punched Chen in the face, but Chen caught his arm and twisted it to push Winn down onto the terminal, ignoring the sparks that flew. He then grabbed Winn's throat and started to choke, but Winn had been training with Vasquez for a year now and he pulled Chen's service weapon out of his thigh holster pressed the barrel against Chen's belly. Chen froze.

"Get off me. Now!" growled Winn.

Chen backed off, hands up. Winn raised the gun with both hands, holding it steady, with a look on his face that said cold-blooded murder was an option for him just as it had been for his father. Chen blanched, but he growled, "Really, coward? Have you ever even held a gun before?"

Winn pulled back the magazine. "I'm holding one now!"

Chen quickly disarmed him, knocking the gun away and pulled back his fist to punch him, but just at that moment, Alex and J'onn hurried into the room and Alex pushed the two men apart. "Hey! What is this? Stand down!"

She turned and punched Chen in the jaw and, even as he was falling to the floor, he thought, Great. I fail even at this.

She turned to Winn and barked, "I am always cleaning up your messes!"

"Get outa my face!" shouted Winn.

Alex kicked him, twisted him around and man-handled him to the floor, where she put him in a joint lock. From the floor, Chen saw Supergirl's boots run in as she said, just like Agent Danver, "Hey, stand down! Get off of him!"

She pushed Alex off and then they all felt a sudden decrease in the pressure in the room, and the anger dissipated.

"What the hell just happened?" asked Alex.

J'onn looked grim. "It was a psychic anomaly. I just put a barrier up to protect you all."

Alex helped Winn to his feet and then Winn came over to Chen. "Um, sorry, buddy. I don't know what came over me."

Chen accepted his hand up. "Hey, I'm sorry for what I said."
Winn said, "For the record, I think you're super smart and great..."

Supergirl said, "It's just like what I saw the Callinorian to in the bar."

"I told you she needed more observation," said Alex to J'onn.

"Well," said Supergirl. "It's still visiting hours..."

"In the meantime," said J'onn. "Round up all the psychic inhibitors we used on Psi. Make sure we have enough."

Chen hurried off to obey, wondering just exactly how badly trying to kill one of his team members would count against him when he was trying to get a job with Blackwater after his tour at the DEO.
Lost Time, Lost Chances

As the Danvers sisters made their way to the containment cells, Supergirl said, "Alex, I have a problem. I just flew over to LCorp to ask Sam a question and instead Jess sent in Lena, even though she said that the two of them were working on an important experiment. When I told Lena I really needed to talk to Sam, she got all evasive. So then I asked about the experiment, and she kept being evasive. She told me before that she had some theories about consciousness that she wanted to test out, but that doesn't sound like the kind of thing Lena does. She is tech, through and through."

"Do you think she lied to you?" asked Alex.

"Not lied. Just... not answering my direct questions. And seeming very defensive."

"Well, you guys haven't exactly been spending a lot of time together in the last few months. Are you sure she's not, I don't know, being passive aggressive, or trying to make you jealous?"

"That just doesn't sound like Lena. She has the purest heart, Alex, and I know she loves me..."

To distract her, Alex told Supergirl about Vasquez's new mission, and about Alex having yelled at J'onn for having sent Vasquez into danger without her.

"Well, it's not like you two were getting back together anytime soon, what with you sleeping with Callie Torres," said Supergirl bitterly. She really liked Vasquez.

"I am not sleeping with Torres! I mean, I might have kissed her once, but it was a mistake and will never happen again."

"So you're admitting that you have some past issues with her--"

But just then they reached Finhead's cell and she was in the throes of a seizure, so they hit the code button and hurried in.

Alex said, "Get her on her side!"

Supergirl rolled her over and she started repeating the same phrase over and over. "What is she saying?"

"I don't know," said Alex. "But it is definitely Martian."

//

After Supergirl flew off, Lena stood on the balcony, lost in thought. She hated lying to Kara, or if not lying exactly, at least misleading, misdirecting. Failing to provide all the information, certainly. Once she had found out about Kara's public persona, they had agreed to never lie to each other again. It had only hurt them both when Lena had lied about Lillian's diabolical plan of alien genocide. And this had the potential of being much, much more personal.

Lena told herself that it wasn't Supergirl she didn't trust; it was the DEO. What would J'onn J'onzz do if he found out that Sam was Reign? What would Alex Danvers do? Lena had seen up close how protective Alex was of her super sister. And both the Danvers sisters (as well as Winn) referred to J'onn as "Space Dad." The three of them potentially wielded so much power. And sure, so did Reign. But not Sam. And certainly not Ruby. Lena had grown up an orphan. She didn't want that for Ruby.
With a sigh, she turned to the private elevator and pushed the button. The doors slid open and there was a Post-It note above the button for the subbasement. In Jess’s ultra clear print it read:

L--
1. Tell Alex.
2. This won't go well with S/K if NOBODY knows what you're/we're doing until they find out. You know what I mean.
J--
PS: This is what you're paying me for, you know. ;0)

Lena folded the blue square in half and then in half again, then tucked it into her bra. If she didn't keep it with her, she would forget to think about it later, and she had no pockets in this dress. At least when she changed for bed that night, she would be reminded to reconsider. Jess rarely repeated advice more than once or twice once Lena had said no. If she was still saying the same thing, she must really mean it. And in fact, when she had hired Jess, she had told her that not being a yes-man was "what I'll be paying you for." So maybe she should listen to her younger, wiser self’s foresight. But not right now.

The elevator opened into the lab. The moment Sam saw her, she said tiredly, "I just want to go home. Lena, please. Please let me out of here."

"I want to get you home to your daughter as much as you do," said Lena equally tired. "Believe me. I am just trying to protect you. Both of you."

Sam sat down, rubbing her eyes. "I told you. If I had hurt people, I would remember."

"You're right. You would remember. At some deep level, you would feel what you had done. When you look at this," she said, clicking the remote so that the computer screen behind Sam showed Reign at Edge's company, "do you remember what it was like, attacking Morgan Edge? What I wouldn't give to have seen that up close."

Sam shook her head.

Lena said, "No? How about this? Supergirl? That would be hard to forget, having your fist connect with something so solid, so powerful."

"Well, this is insane."

And Lena hated herself now almost as much as she had hated herself when she had kicked Supergirl out of her office right before she and her mother had set off that rocket. God, she still had nightmares about that horrific day and evening. Still, she persisted. "How did it feel to obliterate those men? You tore the limbs from their bodies and you dragged them across the beach!"

"Why are you doing this?" begged Sam. "Why? I just want to go home to my daughter!"

"Like I'd let someone like you near Ruby!"

"How dare you!"

"What did it feel like? Living in that house day in and day out, pretending to be her mother? Watching her sleep? Knowing that at any moment you could rip her apart with your bare hands. You're not a mother. You're a monster! And I will make sure that you NEVER see Ruby again!"

"Enough!" yelled Sam and she smashed her hands against the force field. Her eyes glowed red.
Lena took a step back, praying that the red sunlamps and the kryptonite powering the force field would hold. She had known down in her bone marrow that she was right; there was no way on Earth she would have been so cruel to Sam--to anyone--without that kind of rock-hard certainty. But it was terrifying to have been proven right.

//

The moment Alex had identified the language the Callinorian was speaking during her seizure as Martian, Supergirl had instantly put four and four together and gotten sixteen. She had spoken with J'onn before about the spiritual practices of their peoples, and found that they had much in common. She knew a little of the things older Kryptonians did to keep their minds fresh and young, and to repair damage as the decades took their toll. Once Finhead was stabilized, Supergirl grabbed Alex's arm and dragged her up to find J'onn.

He had admitted to the subterfuge, to guessing that M'yrn might have been the source of the alien attack, and he apologized for keeping them in the dark.

"There's always the psychic dampener that Vasquez left behind," Alex said pointedly, and Supergirl gave her a swift look, and she subsided.

"That wouldn't be strong enough. And the tech we do have that would be strong enough... It would be like putting him in shackles. He's always relied on his mind, first as a theologian, and then as a prisoner. It's what kept him alive for three hundred years. The White Martians might have had him in a cage, but he was still free. It just seems like it would be cruel, stripping him of his independence, his dignity."

Alex softened. "I remember when my grandmother drove through a traffic light, and my mom had to take her keys. She yelled at her and then she cried. It was hard, so hard, but it had to be done."

"I just got him back. He's been hurt so much."

Supergirl said, "My uncle Jor-El used to say that the son becomes the father, and the father the son."

J'onn nodded, then excused himself. He looked like he was going to cry.

Supergirl took off to patrol the city and think. She always thought more clearly when flying.

She thought about meeting Lena with her cousin, and feeling an instant connection. She thought about their deepening friendship coinciding with her own stepping into the role of a superhero, and the cost that had, forcing her to lie to someone who was special from the start, and increasingly heroic the longer she was friends with "both" Kara and Supergirl. And then she became so precious that Supergirl had risked everything to save her from a nuclear-sized kryptonite explosion. And she had hid who she was and how much she loved Lena Luthor, and she had had good reasons to do so. She also had some bad reasons. That was how lying worked, she thought.

But she trusted Lena Luthor. And if Lena was in fact keeping something from her, then Supergirl--and Kara Danvers, and Kara Zor-El--trusted that she had good reasons. Maybe she was protecting herself, maybe she was protecting someone else. But whatever it was, Supergirl promised herself that if and when she found out the truth, she would remember her own lies, and handle the situation with honor.

Lena deserved that much from her, at least.
Lost Time, Lost Selves

Sam woke up on the floor of the chamber, feeling like her skin was being chewed off by fire ants. She gasped and sat up. On the computer monitor above her, a recording was playing of what she immediately realized was the last five minutes before she passed out. She was pleading with Lena to let her go home to Ruby, and Lena was taunting her, and then--

Red lasers shot out of her eyes. She destroyed the bed.

Sam's jaw dropped and then a cannon ball fell into her stomach as she realized the truth of what the recording had shown her. She was Reign.

"Oh my God. Stop! Stop, stop, stop!"

Lena turned it off. She looked sad. "I needed you to see it for yourself."

"All those people!" Sam sobbed.

Lena let down the force field and stepped into the chamber. "It wasn't your fault, okay? You weren't in control." She knelt down next to Sam, stroking her hair. "When you transformed, I was finally able to get some of her DNA. We have knowledge now. Knowledge is power. Okay? We're going to get you through this." She pressed her head against Sam's head. "It's going to be okay."

//

When his son told him about the chaos he had caused at the DEO, at first M'yrnn had resisted admitting the truth. He had insisted on returning home. But J'onnn had insisted, and then, what was it the Earth agents said? M'yrnn had "lost it"--to the extent that J'onnn was thrown across the room and the electronics in the room exploded. The ensuing containment breach loosed the criminal aliens from their cells, and as M'yrnn shot from floor to floor of the DEO, watching agent fighting agent, agents fighting aliens, aliens fighting aliens, he was shocked, appalled.

He watched Alex Danvers, who he quite liked, fighting with electric sticks, shocking agents. He watched her sister, the Kryptonian, fighting the superpowered aliens and taking blow after blow. Even the little fellow, Winn, was fighting off Agent Chen and Pam from HR and others, and the moment they were out cold, he put those psychic dampeners on them, apologizing even as he did so.

Little Winn was apologizing. But it was not his fault.

Still, when J'onnn limped into the command center and knelt next to his father, M'yrnn resisted. "Stay away from me!"

But J'onnn said, "Father, look around you. You're hurting people. Your mind is doing this."

"You are trying to trick me!"

"I would never do that! I love you. All I want is to protect you, as you have protected me my entire life. Trust me."

When the White Martian got free and landed in the command center, Supergirl landed next to M'yrnn, saying, "Go! I'll stay with him."

And M'yrnn saw his son take on his true form and--what was the phrase Agent Alex used? J'onnn
kicked the shit out of the White Martian. It was beautiful to behold.

And then Supergirl said, "Hey, I'm here. You're okay. I know how hard it is, when everything we know to be true changes. But sometimes all we can do is just accept the way things are, and make the best of that."

She was so young, so much younger than even his son by centuries. But she spoke with such gentle authority, and those strange blue eyes just emphasized her youth and, perhaps, naïveté.

But he remembered that she had been sent by her parents when she was just a child from her exploding home planet to a strange new world, to live with a new family--Agent Alex and her parents--so maybe it was not inexperience, but rather harsh experience that she spoke from.

J'onn knelt down next to him, transforming into his human persona. More glass exploded.

M'yrnn held out his arm. "Do it!"

Looking pained, J'onn clamped the psionic inhibitor on his wrist, and instantly, the screams and crashes stopped. J'onn hugged him tightly. Over J'onn's shoulder, M'yrnn could see the agents coming to their senses and apologizing profusely to each other. He knew he had done the right thing.

//

Kara wanted to go see Lena, but she realized that first, if Lena was working to hide something from her, continuing to push it would be a bad idea; second, Lena almost definitely had some sort of psychic inhibitor tech at LCorp, so she would have been safe from what happened at the DEO (once the computers were working again, Winn would be able to tell them whether M'yrnn's influence had gone beyond the DEO--Rao, she hoped not); and third, it occurred to her that Krypto would probably be connected to her and also need to be walked. She walked into her apartment, fearing he would have torn it to shreds, only to discover that he had figured out how to turn on her Netflix account and had been watching Puss 'n Boots all afternoon.

And chewing on her plaid purple slippers, but nobody was perfect.

//

Lena didn’t generally sit on the floor in her designer dresses, but she kept her labs so clean you could do surgery in them, so sitting just outside Sam's chamber, watching her make a heart-breaking phone call to her daughter was only hard emotionally, not sartorially.

Watching Sam lie to her daughter, telling her that she was in the hospital and she was contagious—that hurt. All of this was causing just too much lying. She hated it. But at least now Sam was no longer lying to herself. That had to be an improvement on a horrible situation.

Sam hung up, crying.

"Don't worry about Ruby. I'll take her--"

"Don't tell me where she is! You keep her away from me until I'm cured!"

Tears in her eyes, Lena nodded. But, Rao, she thought. The lies and disinformation kept adding up.

//

When his father asked his permission--his permission!--to address the DEO agents, J'onn felt his
heart wrench. All he could say was "Of course" and he called the agents together in the command center.

"May I speak to you all?" asked M'yrn. "I am sorry for the pain I caused. I hurt you. All of you. I was so fearful of losing control of what's left of my life. I refused to accept what was happening to me and it nearly cost me everything I hold dear."

J'onn said, "I had hoped I would have been able to protect you all..."

Supergirl, looking sad, said, "You protect us all the time. Today was our chance to protect you."

She put her hand on his father's shoulder, and J'onn felt, not for the first time, his deep gratitude that he had met Jeremiah Danvers, saved his life, and inherited his daughters. Unlike his father, he was not a religious man, but he felt the presence of something greater when he looked at the trajectory his life had taken. His eyes met Alex's and she gave him the nod. These strong, principled women had his back, he knew, always.

//

Lena was exhausted. Channeling her mother to force Reign to reveal herself in Sam went against the grain in so many ways, she couldn't even begin to count. She took the elevator back up to her office, yearning for a well-earned glass of scotch and then a brief ride back to her apartment. She intended to crash for at least six hours before coming back and doing it all again.

That was the plan.

But the plan had not accounted for Kara Danvers and her love of take-out food.

And her love of Lena Luthor.

She was dressed in that little grey button-up shirt with the little pink flamingos all over it, and the little black pants and the black penny loafers. Honestly, all she needed was an undercut to make her the perfect soft butch, although to be fair that would totally make her secret identity much, much harder to protect.

She sat on the white sofa with several white cardboard takeout boxes on the coffee table in front of it. She fiddled with her glasses. "Honestly, I was just going to leave this here for you. You always forget to eat when you're deep in a project. There's lo mein and potstickers and, um, that horrible kale salad that you like."

"That's thoughtful. I haven't eaten all day."

"I'll leave you to it then."

"Kara, you brought enough to feed both of us. Or me for a week. You might as well join me."

Kara sat down on the other side of the couch.

Lena said, "Um, in my work sometimes discretion is important--"

Kara cut her off. "If you feel that a secret needs to be kept, then it needs to be kept. I trust you, Lena. Always."

Lena let out a sigh of relief that came from her core. "I appreciate that."

"Tell me it's going well at least?"
"Not yet. But it will."

And for a little while, it felt like they had gotten back a little of the closeness they had shared so
easily before Sam and Reign had entered their lives. Lena Luthor was used to making the best of bad
situations, of taking what she could get, knowing that it wouldn't last, that people wouldn't truly care
about her, that the world was a harsh place.

But sitting in the office on the top floor of LCorp, her office, eating potstickers with Kara Danvers,
she could believe that someone cared, that the world, as imperfect as it was, could sometimes be
kind, and that, in fact, she would sort out Sam's problem in due time.
Supergirl didn't stay overnight at Lena's, much though she wanted to. When Lena was working on a project, she only worked and slept, and to be honest, having been so distracted by the Worldkillers, Kara had gotten very far behind on her work for CatCo, so after dinner, she went straight home and used her superspeed to research and write six articles. But on her walk to work the next morning to drop them off, she was appalled to see dead pigeons all over the streets and sidewalks of National City.

Quickly, she handed in her articles and announced that she was going to cover the pigeon story. One of the other reporters muttered under his breath, "Thank God. Better her than me! Those things are rats on wings. They carry disease. Yuck!"

Disease, thought Kara. Pestilence.

Carefully she took an old Noonan's paper bag and scooped up one of the dead birds and brought it back to the DEO. Alex, who had been working the overnight shift, looked exhausted, but she took the body into the bio lab and started to conduct tests, while Supergirl stood there, twisting her red cape in her hands. She had always loved birds, from the first time she had seen a robin outside of the Danvers household and Alex had explained about feathers. Krypton didn't have birds. Their flight fascinated Kara, and it was climbing a tree to get up close to look at them and then falling out of the tree that had first made her realize that she could fly like her cousin. So birds were important to her. And if someone or something was killing birds—even pigeons—they were going to pay.

Finally, Alex said, "Well, that was a very sick creature. And what's odd is that I can't find a virus or infection of any kind." She took a syringe and drew a small vial of blood, squirted some in a Petrie dish, and slid it under her microscope. "Oh, that's not good."

"What is it?" asked Supergirl.

"Remember when Mom looked at the disease your dad engineered, and she could tell that its source was Kryptonian?"

"Oh no."

"Oh yes."

"So it's Pestilence? But why would she kill birds? Wouldn't she kill humans?"

"Well, but then think about SARS. That was connected to swine flu. The pigs and geese were vectors for the disease. Maybe this is like that?"

"But how would pigeons come into contact with one of the Worldkillers?"

"Who knows? The real question is can we make a serum from pigeon blood that will protect humans? I'm going to call Mom in on this. Xenobio is her field."

Standing in the doorway, J'onn said, "Good idea. Meanwhile, Winn's connection with the Centers for Disease Control has already started small alarms going off. Nation City General is reporting a half a dozen cases of strange symptoms: high fevers, bloody noses. I want agents over there now collecting samples. Alex, get Agent Vasquez to get a HazMat team--"

Alex snapped. "Sorry, sir. I can't. She's not here."
J'onn rarely looked at a loss, but he opened and closed his mouth. Finally, he said, "Right. Then I guess you're on it. Liaise with NCPD Science Division. We want to make sure that we don't start a panic." He marched out, annoyed.

Alex rubbed her eyes. "I can't do everything!"

Kara said, "I'll come with you as Kara, reporter. I'll help however you need me to and get some more information about this."

"Thanks, sis."

//

Lena checked in with Jess about general LCorp business and then took a deep breath and went down to the secret lab. There was one weight off her shoulders, the secret she was keeping from Kara. And to an extent, having proven to Sam that she was in fact Reign was another weight off. She no longer had to fight the woman to help her. This would all go more smoothly with Sam actively on board.

She entered the chamber and Sam pushed aside the crossword puzzle book she had been frowning at, waved at Lena, and said tiredly, "Thank Jess for thinking of this. It doesn't help much, but it's considerably better than nothing."

Lena looked at her tablet and then looked at the computer monitors above the bed.

Sam said, "Explain it to me again."

"When Reign is triggered, your genome is rewritten. It's why you can't shoot lasers out of your eyes whenever you want."

"So you think there's an enzyme in my body that triggers the change."

"Yes. If we can identify it, we can eliminate it."

"But?"

"In order to identify it, I'm going to have to study you while you're her."

"And the only definite way to turn me into her is to electrocute me."

"The pain response brings her out."

"How much is it going to hurt?"

"We'll start with five hundred volts."

"That's not what I asked."

"A lot." She paused. "If we had more time, we could find another way, but we don't."

"Okay."

Lena hated herself as she put the electrodes on Sam's head, then stepped out of the chamber and put the force field back up. Sam lay back on the bed.

Lena reached out a finger to the computer keypad, hesitated, then pressed the key.
Sam screamed.

//

By the time the team had gathered, J'onn came in with two more teams, surgical masks and boxes of rubber gloves. He said, "Plan B. The problem has already escalated. The mayor, five city councilmen and a number of workers at City Hall are all showing the same symptoms, so we're going there first, make sure we can contain it and, if we need to, offer an escort to get them to the hospital. Alex, send the quarantine protocols to everyone's phones. Kara, suit up. All right people, move out."

The black SUVs didn't use sirens, but traffic was fortunately light for a Tuesday morning and it didn't take them too long to get to City Hall. Already several different ambulance companies were at work getting people on gurneys. Alex saw Maggie Sawyer talking to the mayor while a woman with a CDC nametag took notes. She and J'onn put on facemasks and joined them, followed by Supergirl.

"It was a nightmare," the mayor said. "It all happened so fast. First the councilwoman, then me. We ordered a quarantine."

"You did the right thing," said Supergirl. "Now rest. We've got this."

The CDC woman stayed with him. Alex shot Maggie a look and they all stepped away. Supergirl said, "Did you see the mark on his hand?"

"Yeah," said Alex. "Might not be airborne."

J'onn said, "Alex, check and see if any of the other patients have similar marks. I'll check the visitor logs."

Supergirl looked around at the carefully controlled and contained chaos. She saw a redheaded woman sitting on the floor, looking devastated. She approached her and leaned down. "Hey, are you all right? Do you need a doctor?"

"No," said the woman, wiping tears away. "I'm all right. Just scared."

"You're going to be all right."

//

Alex approached one of the doctors with her question. The woman looked at her chart and nodded. "Yes, most of the patients were scratched, but none of them reported being scratched. Maybe they didn't remember it?"

"They probably didn't feel it," said Alex. "But I think that might be the source. And that would imply that it wasn't passed person to person."

"Well," said the Asian American doctor. "If it's not contagious, then I need the quarantine lifted so I can get these people transported to hospitals."

Alex watched as a blue alien dressed in a St. John's Ambulance uniform shook out a gurney with a human peer and helped a tentacled city worker climb on it. He saw Alex noticing him and waved. Brian.

She hurried over.
Quickly, Brian said, "We're gonna take him to the Luthor Alien Clinic! Isn't this great?"

"Just go!" snarled Alex.
Sam woke in a full body sweat, feeling like she had just run a half marathon, chased by a bear. Or possibly, a very lithe, very scary, Kryptonian panther. She gasped for breath and pushed herself up to sitting.

Lena turned off the force field and entered the chamber with her tablet.

Sam said, "I was there, in the dark valley."

"What valley?" asked Lena, frowning.

"I've seen it in my dreams, my nightmares, but it was real this time. I remember everything. I was talking to her like I'm talking to you."

"Wait. A parallel dimension? Is that where you go when Reign takes over? That would be why you don't remember anything. When your body changes into Reign, your body literally goes there."

"So why was she there with me?"

"I've been suppressing Reign's consciousness. She couldn't manifest fully in this one, so she existed with you in that one."

"She said they were coming for us. What does that mean? Did you find what triggers the transformation?"

"Not yet." Lena swallowed. "I need to increase the voltage. I need more time to observe Reign."

Sam took a deep breath, and then another. "Okay," she said.

//

Winn scrubbed all the surveillance video from City Hall. Not once. Not twice. Hell, not even three times. And there was an existential abyss about three feet away at the unmanned (unwomanned?) station of Agent Susan Vasquez.

It was like that thing that happened when you were walking down the street carrying a heavy bag in your right hand and nothing in your left. The moment you put down the bag, your left side overcompensated and you were uneven, unbalanced, unmoored. Well, J'onn had said she would only be gone a week or two, right? So this hole would not last for long.

Surely.

//

The Danvers sisters, Agent and Super, strolled through the DEO, their slow pace belying the speed and urgency of their thoughts.

Alex insisted, "I'm putting the pilot rat serum through some simulations, trying to see what might make it more compatible with humans. It's just a matter of time."

"Hopefully," said Supergirl, but she didn't really sound like she had all that much hope, even to herself. "I'm afraid that J'onn and the other agents are convinced that we'll need to kill Pestilence. And you know how much I hate killing. If we had been able to get to Purity, to Julia, sooner--"
"I know, Kara. But it took you time to show me that side of her."

"We don’t have that kind of time. So maybe J’onn and the other agents just need a little more convincing."

"I think I found her!" Winn came racing across the command center to them, carrying his tablet and gesturing with his free hand, clearly out of breath. "Okay, there was one person who came into contact with everybody who got sick at City Hall: Adelaide Swanson, an administrator known for her famous lemon poppy seed cookies!"

Alex and Supergirl both frowned. Alex said, "A Worldkiller who bakes cookies. That's unexpected."

Supergirl said, "Wait, let me see?" She looked at the footage and said, "Yup, I saw her at City Hall. She looked—well, she looked terrified, just like Julia."

Supergirl leapt into the air and flew through National City’s night sky until she reached the coordinates that Winn had sent her. She broke a window on the ninth-floor apartment and entered, alert.

But in the second room she entered, she found the redhead lying on the floor with a stream of blood from her nose staining the carpet. She tapped her earpiece. "Alex, it's too late. She's dead. She can't be Pestilence. And she has one of those cuts on her hand. Um, Alex? Are you there?"

Alex's voice changed, became tighter, more urgent. "Supergirl? You need to get back here right now. All units, report back to central!"

//

Alex texted James: You might want to drop by the DEO. Winn is sick.

Kara texted James: Are you free from CatCo duties? Winn is in the Med Bay.

J'onn texted James: I know that you have always been close with Agent Schott. You might want to drop by the DEO.

And that last one made it sound potentially dire. James turned off his phone, because the DEO "tailor" was griping about "peoples" (he was Russian) who "prioritize their electronicals over their mission-sensitive necessaries." James said, "Sorry, um, sir, but it kinda sounds like my best friend might be dying, so I'm going to take a break from the fittings and go see my guy."

Russian (probably) swearing followed him out of the office. He trotted down to Medical, only to see a very pale Winn lying there trying to make jokes. {And it was bad enough when Winn tried to make jokes at the best of times, but this? This was clearly not the best of times.}

When James walked in, Winn shouted, "Hey, James! Tell them I'm not dying!"

"Um," said James. "He's not dying?"

J'onn said, "Winn gave us consent to try the prototype of the rat serum on him--"

"Wait!" said James. "Dude? Rat serum?"

"Alex invented it! You know it's safe."

James gave Alex the hairy eyeball.
Alex was immune. Mostly. She said, "I'm pretty sure that he'll start showing signs of improvement in two to three hours. Maybe four. Five tops."

James took that for what it seemed to be worth. "Okay... How ya doin', buddy?"

"You should be at CatCo."

"It's called delegation buddy. I've got every reporter in the building working on this." He turned to J'onn. "Which reminds me. If you've got any information I can disseminate which will decrease the panic, I'd be grateful."

"Once we see how this works, we are ready to mass-produce it and send it to all the hospitals and clinics in National City."

Supergirl looked sad. "The Worldkiller is still MIA."

"Sure," said James, "but now that Winn is infected, doesn't that give us another lead?"

Alex nodded, stabbing her tablet as though she had a grudge against it. "Yes. The scratch on the hand seems to be the point of infection. So, Winn, do you remember who scratched you?"

Winn giggled, "Freddy Krueger?"

Alex shook her head. To the others, she said, "The scratches don't seem to manifest until the symptoms do. And the only trace evidence I could find in common was a mild anesthetic."

"Well, keep running those tests," said J'onn. "See if you can find something more promising. In the meantime I'll get a team out, see if I can talk to these patients and find a common link." He marched out of the room.

//

The valley was dark; the darkness of long resentment oozed from the damp, sickly trees. A fog hovering just above the ground like a cloud of pale hands dragged at Sam's legs, and she got flashes of grade school, when she had had fainting spells, that her doctor had put down to a growth spurt, which had made no sense to Sam back then. It had always felt more like shrinking, like keeping herself tightly constrained. When she had started to menstruate, the dizzy spells had stopped, but the cramps had been violently painful. Then the doctor prescribed codeine, and the haze that had induced had damped down the pain but made her dream of this forest.

That's all she had thought those dreams were, a byproduct of the drugs and her pain.

Then in high school, she had been smitten by the football captain, her greatest mistake, which had led to her greatest pain and her greatest joy. For years after Ruby's birth, she had felt nothing unusual, had been healthier than she had been in years, strong, energetic, productive. Then her old job went sour. Then Lena had found her...

A jolt of pain went through her and she woke again, gasping.

Lena hurried to her side. "Was it the valley again?"

"Yes!" Sam wiped tears from her eyes. "It's too much, Lena. It's like facing your shadow," said Sam. "Everything dark that you've ever feared about yourself. I can't go back there."

"If we don't do this," said Lena, "she will take control of your body and she will condemn you to
that place forever, okay, she will win."

Sam gasped in pain. Holding her head together against the throbbing. "Give me a minute."

"Okay," said Lena, and she walked away to check the numbers on the monitor.

Sam took deep breaths. She might be a world-killing alien supervillain, but by God, she had not risen to replace the smartest CEO in the US by being weak.

//

Supergirl paced through the DEO, frustrated. At the command center, she hovered behind Agent Jordan until he complained.

"I promise you," he said through gritted teeth. "The moment I have a ping on Pestilence, I will call you, ma'am."

Down in the training area, she watched as Astra led the other agents through the forms for the blaster lance. When Astra saw her in the doorway, she gave the class to one of the agents up front, and came to see her.

"Every day they progress," she said proudly.

"I can tell," said Supergirl.

"There is no word on the final Worldkiller?"

"Not yet."

"Don't let it bother you, little one. She will appear before long, and when she does, you will vanquish her."

"I don't want to vanquish her. I want to save her."

Astra shook her head. "The tales of the Worldkillers of old said that they would stop at nothing to reduce a world to ash. You cannot be lenient with her."

"My sister is working on a cure for the sick ones."

"I heard that a blight had started. What are the symptoms?"

"Bloody nose, light-headedness, fever. Some people have been coughing up blood."

Astra frowned. "That sounds a little like the childthief."

"The what now?"

"A devilish disease that usually attacks babies. It kills half of those it infects. I had it as a child and survived, thank Rao. You would have been vaccinated against it. If that is what Pestilence is spreading, and to adults, no less, all the more reason to destroy her when you get the chance."

"Wait, what? Do you mean that you and I might have antibodies against it?"

"Of course."

"Rao, that's fantastic! Come with me!"
Astra followed her up to the med bay and stood looking mildly amused as her niece stumbled all over herself to explain to Alex what Astra had just told her.

"So you're saying that your blood--" began Alex.

"Exactly! Get out the red sunlamps and take samples of our blood!"

Alex looked as excited as her sister.

Astra said, "That does not eliminate the need to kill Pestilence when the time comes."

Kara watched the syringe in Alex's hands fill with her blood. "One problem at a time," she growled.

After Astra returned to her class, Supergirl said, "You agree with her, don't you?"

"I don't know, Kara. It's complicated, and when we finally find her, we may not have the time it takes to deescalate the situation long enough to reach her, especially if they are together."

"But you know it's possible to reach them. You of all people know how important it is to help whoever is Pestilence."

"Yeah, I do. But I didn't see that at first. You were the one who convinced me that the Worldkillers could even be saved. J'onn agrees with you in theory but I know he thinks your way won't be practical. I'll go with whatever you decide, but you are going to need to get your aunt on board. She's one of the most powerful allies we have. We all need to be on the same page."
Reign hated the forest. She knew rationally that she had only been trapped there for thirty Earth years, but it had felt like an eternity, an eternity with no sun, no warmth, no food, no company, just fog and endless gloom. And now she was back. The rage she felt she could barely contain.

And then she saw... her, the weak one, now appropriately dressed like an invalid in those blue pajama things. She ground her teeth.

"You!" she said. "You kept me here. For so long. You were strong. Much stronger than you should have been. But that's changing now. Your friend? She's breaking your body. You should stop her."

"Why? So you can break me? Or are you just afraid that we're getting close to an answer?"

"No, but it will so much better if you give in. There is bliss in surrender. I've seen your life. All those sleepless, solitary nights when you stare into the dark, unable even to dream of an escape. You've been trapped since Ruby was born. It doesn't have to be that way. There's another life, one of power, control. It's here for you. Just reach out and take it. You'll be free, Samantha. Surrender."

And then she reached out her hand.

//

M'gann answered her phone and heard Kara's voice. "Hey, have you talked to J'onn lately? This thing with his father is really getting him down. Do you have time to drop by the DEO? I've talked to him and Alex has, but I think he needs someone he shares the bond with... if that's not asking too much?"

"You got it, Kara. I'm on my way."

She asked Laurie to take over the bar and flew through the night sky to the DEO. She transformed on the balcony to see J'onn there, where she had sensed him in her mind. "Howdy, stranger."

He laughed, but it was a rusty sound, as if he had not done it in a while. "Hi. What brings you here?"

"Kara thought you could use a friend."

"Always."

Shyly, she lifted her hand to the side of his head and he leaned into it.

"May I?" she whispered.

"Please."

Suddenly she was in his apartment, watching him and his father interact, having the same conversations over and over again. She felt J'onn's love and frustration and helplessness. When she removed her hand, she was back on the balcony with him, looking at the lights of National City.

"J'onn, I'm so sorry. I wish I could do something to help. But White Martians aren't close with our parents."

"It's enough that you understand, that one person understands. Thank you for that, M'gann. And I know you have to get back to Dollywood. But you know you have my gratitude."
"Always."

//

Lena was looking at the computer numbers, watching the adrenaline spike in Sam's brain, when Sam sat us gasping, and tearing the electrodes off her head. Lena turned off the force field and ran into the chamber. "Sam, it's okay! Deep breaths!"

"She reached out her hand for me! I can't go back in there! She knows me too well. I can't, I can't!"

"Sam, stop, hold on. It's okay!"

Sam held her aching head in her hands, gasping. "We have to find another way!"

"There is no other way!" said Lena. "Sam, I know how hard this is, but we don't have time to find a way that won't--"

"If I go back in there, she'll have me! We've never both been in the forest at the same time! She knows me! I'll listen to her! I'll surrender. She's offering a way that doesn't have the pain. Everything dark you've ever thought about yourself!"

Lena held Sam close, rocked her. "All right, Sam. Give me a day to figure another way out. But, Sam, if I can't, people are getting sick all over National City. If I can't do it, we'll have to go back in. Just rest now. Let me figure out another way."

And Lena had never had a little sister or cousins, had certainly never wanted children, but she felt less Luthor-like holding Sam close like this, turning her back on inflicting pain on her, than she had ever felt before.

//

Supergirl stood outside of Winn's room in the med bay, worrying. When J'onn came in, he looked more relaxed than she had seen him in days.

He said, "Thank you for calling M'gann. Seeing her helped."

And she was pretty sure that by "seeing" he meant "bonding." She smiled and then her face fell back into the crinkled, worried look.

"The rat serum isn't working?" asked J'onn.

"No, but Astra and I gave blood. She thinks it's a Kryptonian killer chicken pox thing, and that we might have antibodies. Alex is working on it now." She sighed. "Do you think that I can save Pestilence? That I can get through to her?"

"There's no way of knowing. You just have to try."

"That's not what Yoda would say."

"Do or do not. He was wrong about that one. I've had the same conversation with my father every day. And I keep trying because sometimes he remembers and we laugh about it. I keep trying so he can find those moments of clarity. Just because something is hard, doesn't mean it's impossible. You break through impossible every day, and you inspire the rest of us to do the same."

Supergirl gave him a small smile. "You're a good son. And a good Space Dad. Thank you."
He squeezed her arm and left.

A beeping started. On the bed in front of her, Winn started gasping.

"Winn, are you all right? What's happening?"

Alex trotted in carrying a small box.

Winn said, "I don't... think... the cure... is working."

"Well," said Alex as she took a syringe out of the box. "Let's try Plan B. Antibodies from Kara and Astra."

"Come on, Winn!" said Supergirl. "You're strong!"

Alex pushed the syringe into Winn's tube. "Um, Supergirl, Kara?" she said.

"Yes, what?"

"I don't feel so..." She dropped to the floor, with blood dripping from her nose.

"Alex!"
Astra came to the med bay and let the human medic take more of her blood. Agent Chen had said that Winn was doing better since they had given him the vaccine, but that now Alex was down and had started coughing, which was a worrying sign. Astra feared that if this was the childthief that Pestilence had infected these people with, it might work even more powerfully on humans than it did on Kryptonians. The medic said that now that they knew the vaccine worked, they would artificially replicate the antibodies from her blood and mass produce it so they could send it to the hospitals to cure the ill, and at the DEO vaccinate all the agents so that if and when they ran into Pestilence, she couldn't hurt them. That was the theory anyway.

Astra approved. She was a firm believer in being prepared. When the medic was done, Astra went and stood outside the chamber where Supergirl stood holding her sister's hand. Winn's color was better, but Alex looked pale. And that cough.

Astra walked in and Kara looked up.

"Any signs of improvement?"

"They say it's too soon to tell."

"She is strong, that one."

Alex opened her eyes. "I should be helping!"

"You need to rest," said Kara. "The other agents are on it."

"Is Vasquez okay?"

Supergirl frowned, but she said, "She's fine. Don't worry."

"I should be in the lab--"

Astra laid her hand on Alex's head. "Your mission is to get well, Alexandra. Whatever is attacking you, you will fight it. You are stronger. No one is more of a warrior than you. Keep holding on."

She squeezed Kara's shoulder and returned to the training hall.

//

James entered the med bay just as Astra and Kara were leaving. He sat down next to Winn's bed.

"Hey," he said quietly.

Winn opened his eyes. "They claim I'm not dying, but I'm pretty sure they're wrong."

"Winn, they wouldn't lie to you."

"Dude, I was attacked by a Worldkiller. Pretty sure there's no cure. But that's okay. I've done some amazing things, you know."

"I know you have, buddy." James frowned at Winn's extreme pallor and the redness around his eyes.

"And I finally made up with my mom. And I became a secret agent and walked on another planet."
"Yeah, you did."

"My mom... all the baggage? But now, despite..." His eyes closed and he fought to open them. "Your friendship... has been the best part."

"For you and me both, Winn."

"And if I'm going to die now, then you should know..."

"Buddy, no. Don't go there. You're going to live."

"You don't know that! And I've been lying here... thinking about Vasquez..."

"Agent Vasquez?"

"She told me about displacement. And I think when I was pursuing Kara, it was because I really was in love with somebody else..."

James frowned.

"I love you, man." Winn's eyes closed. His breathing was regular.

James sat there staring, then quietly got up and walked out of the med bay.

//

Lena watched as the sedation took hold of Sam, then paced back and forth the lab. She had tried everything she could think of, and the only thing that had given them even marginal benefits was this: basically torturing her friend. There had to be another way.

She went to the elevator and pushed the button for her office. That reminded her of Jess's post-it, which she pulled out of her bra and unfolded. Alex's degrees were in biomed. Maybe she would have another way of looking at this, something that Lena couldn't see.

Once she reached her office, she dialed Alex's number, but it went directly to voicemail. She left a message. "Alex, this is Lena. I've been working on the Worldkiller problem and I have some ideas, but I really need your help, and it's urgent. We have a time window. Call me back. Soon!"

She stood looking out over National City's nightscape, thinking. Then she dialed Winn's number, got sent to voicemail, sent him the same message.

Then she dialed another number. Surely Agent Vasquez would know where the other agents were. Maybe they were out there fighting Purity. Maybe they were sleeping in the barracks. Vasquez's number was the same as the others. She sent the same message.

Maybe she should just go directly to the DEO?

She poured herself a glass of scotch and slipped her heels off. Maybe just a nap on the couch. If she didn't hear back from them by morning, she would go in and ask them for help directly. That would be best.

They weren't going to be happy knowing that she had been harboring one of their most wanted in her basement all week, but Lena was out of options.
Frustrated with the DEO, Supergirl flew over National City, with all its little lights in the tall buildings. She listened for signs of trouble to distract her, but the city was mostly sleeping, or at least the criminals were. She drifted, as she often did, over to LCorp, and used her x-ray vision to check Lena's dark office. Sure enough, a form in a dress lay on the white couch. Supergirl landed on the balcony.

The sound of her boots didn't wake Lena, so Supergirl was careful to enter quietly. She saw a half empty scotch glass on the coffee table and saw Lena shiver. Carefully, she detached her cape and draped it over Lena's body. Immediately, Lena snuggled into it.

It was almost dawn. Supergirl lay down on the floor next to the couch and let herself drowse off.

As always, she could feel the sun rising before she saw the light change, even in her sleep. She opened her eyes to see Lena sitting up and yawning, discovering the cape and looking at Supergirl with a laugh in her eyes.

"When did you get here? Why didn't you wake me?"

"You've been working 24/7. I figured you must be exhausted."

"You're not wrong." The laugh left her face. "Were you out fighting earlier?"

"No, pacing, flying, worrying but no actual fighting. Why?"

"Because I called Alex and Winn and even Vasquez, but I couldn't get through to anyone."

"Vasquez is out of town, lucky her. But Alex and Winn, oh, Lena, they are sick. Pestilence got to them. The serum that Alex gave Winn lessened his symptoms, but it wasn't until something Astra said that we realized that our blood might have antibodies, but right after she developed the vaccine, Alex went down. So we gave it to them and they're stabilizing, but that's not really a long-term solution."

"No..."

"At least, we'll need to mass produce it for the people already ill and for first responders--"

"Kara, Supergirl, I need you to stop talking for a moment. There's something you need to see and you're not going to like it." She rubbed her eyes. "God, I could use some coffee."

Supergirl put on her cape and said, "I'll be right back!"

She was heading toward Noonan's when she heard J'onn on her comms. "Supergirl, are you there? Winn's program has given us another possibility for Pestilence. She's at the Silver Mine Health Insurance building. Astra and I will meet you there."

//

All her life, Grace Kim had dreamed of cells replicating out of control. When she was a child, she liked the colorful pictures in her head. It wasn't until high school biology class when she finally realized that all her life, she had been dreaming of cancer, that when she had enjoyed the patterns like the ones in her kaleidoscope, she should have been disgusted and afraid. She had been dreaming,
had she but known it, of death.

It was beautiful, evolutionarily perfect. But it killed.

So then she decided to become a doctor, to be the only predator cancer had to fear.

For a long time she had succeeded. As an oncologist, she used chemicals and radiation to blast those replicating cells out of people's bodies. She had been very good at. She had saved lives.

But then she had started to realize how many of those patients whose lives she had saved had lived only to go into bankruptcy because of the astronomical medical bills.

That, Pestilence had quickly realized alone in the dark forest, was her way in. Gradually, whispering to Grace in her sleep, that the cancer wasn't the bad guy. The people who profited off cancer were the true bad guys. They were the true cancer. And she could still be the one who blasted that cancer off the face of the planet.

And gradually, Grace had listened.

//

Once she had an address, Supergirl was able to hone her superhearing as she flew closer and closer. She heard a man talking about an evaluation process and stop short.

He said, "Can I help you?"

And a woman with those strange harmonics of the Worldkillers said, "You could have. But you missed your chance. You sit here wallowing in your own ignorance, looking for any ways you can to deny your customers the very service you sold them."

Supergirl put on more speed.

The man said, "Can we get security in here?"

And the woman--Grace, thought Supergirl--said, "You won't need them. Life and death decisions are out of your hands now."

"Just make your point and get out, okay?" The man sounded afraid.

Supergirl x-rayed the building as she approached, looking for a Kryptonian solid body. She found it on the seventh floor.

"I was hoping you'd say that," said Grace. Supergirl flew down the hall in time to shoot her laser eyes at Grace just as she was about to scratch a man sitting at table looking terrified.

Supergirl yelled, "Don't take another step, Grace!"

The woman turned. Here eyes were an unholy yellow. She said, "It's not Grace anymore."

The people who had been sitting around the table jumped up and ran out. Supergirl heard a rush of air and felt Astra land behind her.

Grace said, "You would save even these scabs? They who profit on the suffering of others?"

"Everyone deserves to live," said Supergirl.
"Not them. They're not good."

"But you are."

Astra took a step forward but Supergirl gave her a quick pleading look and she nodded.

Supergirl stepped closer, saying, "Think of the lives you've saved. You're a doctor! Grace, the day you became a doctor. You took an oath to do no harm."

The woman stopped short. "Do... no harm..." She gripped the back of one of the leather chairs, and her golden fingernails retracted. The yellow left her eyes.

"Grace, it's okay. You're going to be fine."

She shook her head sadly. "My mother used to always say that good would be rewarded with grace. But when I became a surgeon, I realized the truth. Good people die. Bad people heal. There is no reward for being good."

"Grace, whatever is happening to you doesn't give you power over who lives, only over who dies. You don't want that! But we can help you stop it." Supergirl reached out her hand.

Grace stepped forward, took Supergirl's hand in hers, caressed it. "Stop it?" she said quietly. "Why would I want to stop it? This is the greatest thing that's ever happened to me. I don't have to worry about saving anyone anymore. I can choose who dies. I can decide who deserves to be stopped. I will kill the unjust, purify this world and the next by taking away those who are a cancer on society. I am death, the destroyer of worlds. I am a god!"

She raised her hand, nails out, to strike Supergirl down, but Astra tackled her and brought her down to the floor. Grace reared up, throwing Astra off her back and she ran through the door, leaped unto the glass wall of the walkway above the lobby, paused, smiled at them and leaped six stories down. Supergirl was right behind her.

They faced off in the lobby. Employees ran away screaming.

Grace said, "You thought you could talk me into redemption? You are such a child."

She leaped to fly away, but Supergirl used superspeed to follow. They traded blows, sending each other into the glass walls on either side of the open space. Astra flew up to the roof and then hurtled down on top of them, grabbing Grace and smashing with her into the floor. Supergirl landed next to them, seeing, first, that Astra had stabbed Grace with something that looked technological, and second, that Astra had a cut on her cheek, and blood was starting to dribble from her nose.

J'onn's tactical team poured into the lobby, threw kryptonite cuffs on Grace and dragged her into one of the DEO vehicles. Then he personally picked up Astra, transformed into his Green persona, and flew her away. Supergirl limped up to the lead vehicle and got in next to Agent Jordan.

"Ma'am," he said nervously. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah," she said. "Just need to take a breath before I can fly again. Let's get to the DEO."

And she thought that she might be forgetting something, but for the life of her she couldn't remember what it was.
Agent Jordan drove very fast and very carefully. He was pretty sure that they were in the most danger while between the insurance building and the DEO. Once they got the Worldkiller into a containment cell, they would be safe. And although he liked Supergirl, of course he did, he found himself nervous to find her in his passenger seat. Sure, if the other Worldkillers decided to attack his vehicle, she might be able to protect him. But given that she was listening to her voicemail and looking upset, he wasn't convinced that she would be all that useful.

She pressed a button. "Lee! I'm so sorry! We got a lead on Pestilence and fought her and now we're bringing her in. I don't know when I'll get back to you. I'm so sorry about the coffee!"

She listened, frowned, and said, "Alex? Probably not soon. Okay, I will tell her."

She turned off the phone, but the crinkle was still there. As Jordan drove into the underground parking lot, he started to breathe a sigh of relief. Then he remembered what Vasquez always told them: just when you think it's safe to breathe, make sure your weapon is loaded.

So he said, "Um, ma'am? Until we get her into containment, could you, um, please pay attention? If she breaks those cuffs..."

Supergirl nodded. "Sorry. You're right."

They got out of the van and went around to the back doors. Four agents pulled Pestilence out. Supergirl stood with her hands on her hips, looking serious.

"Now I suppose you're going to torture me," said Pestilence.

"What? Of course not! We just want to talk. But you can't be going around spreading disease. You're hurting people."

"Yes," said the woman. "I am."

There was a tumultuous crash and a tall black woman in a strange black suit flew into the garage, took one look at them and screamed. Agents got blown down, including Supergirl. Only Pestilence stayed on her feet.

The woman, Purity, took her by the hand. "Sister! I found you. Come with me!"

And they flew off together. Jordan picked himself up, then gave Supergirl a hand up. "Ma'am, I'm so sorry."

She looked more sad than anything. "Not your fault, Jordan. I think they can sense each other. Let's check on our sick agents. Don't forget to write up your op report."

//

Still uncaffeinated, Lena stood in the lab in the same dress she had worn the day before, but when the lights started blinking and the colors on the brain scan from Sam started lighting up like a Christmas tree, she forgot all that.

"Sam! I think I've found something! The trigger!"

She turned to see Sam looking very calm, staring at her hands. "They're coming."
A strange noise made her turn away, to see Supergirl and J'onn and that new woman Imra standing there in her lab.

They stared, clearly startled. Supergirl's jaw dropped to see Sam in containment. Lena could see thoughts flash across her face with superspeed.

Lena said hurriedly, "Supergirl! This is what I wanted to show you this morning! Wait, how did you get here?"

Supergirl shook her head, said, "Lena, the Worldkillers are coming. We have to get you somewhere safe."

Lena said nothing and Supergirl looked around. She stepped toward Sam, put out her hand and felt the force field. "Wait. What is this?"

"This is what I was trying to tell you about earlier, the project I've been working on, with Sam's consent."

"Sam?"

"I was going to tell you," said Lena.

"About what?" asked Supergirl.

Sam pulled off the electrodes and stood. "About me."

Just then the heavy steel doors blasted into the room, followed by two women in strange black suits. Lena recognized Purity and could only assume that the other was Pestilence.

Purity screamed, sending equipment flying. Pestilence ran into the chamber, ignoring the force field like it was nothing. Sam's eyes turned red. Reign.

The three women joined hands and suddenly Sam was Reign, cape and all. Then in a large blue blast, they were gone, leaving their joined voices behind them.

"El Mayarah."

Stronger together, thought Lena. Except, looking at her friends' faces, she wondered if that would be as true for the good guys as it looked to be for the bad guys.

//

J'onn looked around at the basement lab, not entirely surprised. More... disappointed. It had taken him a while to come around on Lena Luthor, to see her more as Winn and Vasquez did, as a valuable ally, someone who could make his job easier rather than harder. But now that supercilious look was being aimed at him and Supergirl, even as papers fluttered around in the wake of the Worldkillers' departure.

"Ms. Luthor," he said. "Would care to join us at the DEO? I have many questions."

She raised one eyebrow. "Are you asking? Or ordering?"

"Asking. For now."

"Should I call my lawyer?"
"That wouldn't help."

"Can I at least tell my assistant where I'm going?"

Supergirl nodded at J'on. He said, "Yes, of course."

She sent a text off and then turned on Supergirl. "Could you gather up all that paper? Your boss is going to want to look at it."

The Girl of Steel used superspeed to gather all of the pages of paper and Lena gave her two file boxes to put them in. J'on gave her a questioning look. "My documentation," she said. "You don't think I wouldn't take detailed notes. That's just sloppy science."

When they got to the DEO, he asked her to wait in a conference room with Agent Chen at the door "in case she needed anything." They both knew he was her guard.

He and Supergirl took the boxes down to Medical and sat with Alex going through Lena's documentation for her experiments. Alex got excited as she worked her way to the most recent paperwork. Alex looked at J'on. "She almost has it. And this morning, apparently she sent me a text, asking me to come to LCorp to help her. Winn too. We only just got our phones back when we woke up an hour ago. J'on. I need to get up there in that conference room. We can't interrogate Lena like she's a criminal. She's a friend."

Against his better judgment, J'on agreed.

They returned to the conference room. J'on sent Agent Chen to get coffee for all of them. "Ms. Luthor, thank you for coming in to speak with us. The quick look we just took at your documentation was quite impressive. Please tell us more about your work."

"For the past three weeks, I have been observing Sam. But wait, I should go back. Something happened in my office three and a half weeks ago. Sam got angry and her eyes glowed red, just for a few seconds, but it made me suspect she might be Reign. Since Alex had not been able to find anything wrong with her from a human perspective, I conducted a series of tests, with her consent."

"So what did you find?" asked Alex.

"After sequencing her DNA and comparing Sam's blackouts to the series of Reign's attacks, I came to the conclusion that Sam is Reign."

"So," said J'on. "For three weeks you've been harboring and abetting a mass murderer."

"I was helping a friend."

"And you didn't think to bring this to our attention?"

"Of course I did. But aside from keeping Supergirl safe, the DEO has other agendas. I do know that you keep alien threats contained here, Guantanamo style. In my judgment, that was not what Reign needed to go back to being Sam and staying Sam."

"As a consultant with the DEO--" began J'on.

"Precisely. I am a consultant. My contract very specifically delimits the kinds of activities I can engage in and the kind of documentation I need to produce for transparency, which I have handed over to you. Aside from that, I conducted an LCorp experiment, using LCorp technology, with an LCorp employee, on LCorp property."
Supergirl crinkled. "What did you discover?"

"I was trying to isolate the spark that turns Sam into Reign, but I didn't get the chance to finish."

"Do you have any way of tracking the Worldkillers?"

"Not exactly. Something happened today, right before you showed up and then they showed up. I think they communicated to her. I would like to get Winn to look at the signals I caught. If anyone could turn them around, it would be him."

Alex asked, "Why did you text us last night? What changed?"

"The process I was using to bring Reign out was very painful for Sam, both psychologically and physically. It was the only thing out of many I tried that worked. But she finally asked me to stop. She said she just couldn't do it anymore. I hated seeing her in so much pain, but I was out of possibilities. My assistant, Jess, the only one who knows what I've been doing, had recommended my reaching out to you, Alex. Finally I realized that I couldn't do it by myself. I just wish I'd brought you in sooner. Your work as a bioengineer--"

Supergirl broke in. "Wait, Lena. How did you keep her contained? I fought her. She's so powerful..."

J'onn could feel the whole room think back to Supergirl's broken body at Christmas.

Lena crossed her arms over her chest defensively. With a measured voice, she said, "Lex kept a vault in his lab in Metropolis. When I took over LCorp, I inherited all of its assets, for good or ill. I used kryptonite."

J'onn felt the stab of betrayal as though it was striking him personally. Supergirl got up abruptly and left the room. "Alex," he said. "Go."

Alex hurried out after her sister.
Sam woke up in the dark forest again, gasping for breath. But Lena had promised to stop the experiment--

She looked up to see a body lying on the ground a few yards away. The woman was Asian, and she wore a white labcoat, but she was not breathing. Sam whimpered.

She heard a small moan and turned to see a young Black woman in a bright red sweater curled up in a ball at the foot of a tree. She was whimpering too.

"It's okay," said Sam, all evidence to the contrary. "I'm not going to hurt you."

The woman stared a few feet in front of Sam and murmured, "I'm so sorry!" She saw Sam looking confused. "I killed him!"

"I don't see anything."

"That's because he's mine, not yours. But your kills will come back soon."

"We're the same. Was she one of us too?"

A scream sounded in the distance and shadows flew between the trees.

Sam reached out her hand, "Come on. We have to get out of here. It's not safe."

"There's nowhere to go!"

"There is. Come on."

Sam hadn't gotten through a difficult life by sitting around and waiting for the bad things to find her.

//

Alex found her sister where she thought she would, in the training room, pounding concrete. "Kara? Are you all right?"


Quietly Alex said, "I think she was trying to save yours. You didn't see how devastated she was when you were in that coma at Christmas."

"But Alex, kryptonite!"

"I know. It's bad."

"Why didn't she tell me?"

"Kara, Lena's a genius, but sometimes that genius focus ends up being like blinders. She sees one way to do something and struggles to make it work. She has been successful many times before. I think she wanted to take care of this for you, keep Reign away from you long enough to eliminate the threat."

"You don't know that."
"No, and yes. It's what I've wanted to do for months. I even thought about asking her if she would help us. I was pretty sure that Vasquez would have said yes and J'onn would have said no, but I couldn't ask Vasquez, and then--"

Supergirl wrapped her sister in a hug, and they hugged each other hard. Alex gasped.

"Sorry."

"No, I needed that. Kara, you need to go back up there and give her the chance to explain."

"I think she was going to show me, this morning, before everything fell apart."

"And she had already called me and Winn several hours before that. This much of her story checks out. And the genetic component mentioned in her documentation? I want to find out more about that. Come on. Let's go."

They returned to the conference room. "I'm sorry," said Supergirl. "I needed a moment."

Lena said, "My friend came to me, alone and afraid. I had to do something."

"You need to level with me. Do you have any more kryptonite."

"No, I used the last of it to keep Sam sedated."

The room dimmed. Alex got up and looked out of the window, where it looked like a solar eclipse was just beginning. Supergirl stood up, put her hand to her head, and passed out.

//

Supergirl woke up in the dark, disoriented. Above her she could just make out slick black branches of dark trees, and a ground fog that made her face damp. She heard sticks breaking and turned her head. Not far away, she saw Sam, still in her blue hospital scrubs, guiding Julia in her red sweater. They both looked terrified.

Supergirl inhaled a breath to call out to them, but her head swam and she woke up on the floor of the conference room. "I saw Sam! And Julia!"

Lena was staring out the window. "The Earth and moon each turn on an axis. No amount of technology can change that."

Supergirl sat up slowly. "This isn't technology. This is older than science."

"Please don't say magic," said Lena.

"Dark magic," said Kara, pulling herself up to stand.

"You should be in the med bay," said Alex.

"I'm fine. Reign, Purity, Pestilence, they were all created by Kryptonian witches to kill the world. Taking away the sun would do that."

"So whatever ritual the Worldkillers are doing is creating the eclipse?" asked Lena. "Well, the world can't live without sunlight."

"Nothing can," said Alex. "Including Supergirl."
They went down to the command center together.

J'onn asked, "How long do we have?"

"Two hours until totality," said Winn.

"And then the temperature drops fifty degrees, maybe more," said Lena. "So, what? Are we helpless?"

"My dream was different this time," said Supergirl. "I was in the Valley of Jiru, but instead of seeing the Worldkillers, I saw Sam."

"You dreamed of Julia Freeman before, and she turned out to be real."

"Oh, it's not a dream," said Lena. "The valley's real. Sam said it was an alternate dimension where her consciousness would go when Reign took over. But why would Supergirl see it?"

J'onn said, "On Mars, my people would share strong emotions. Maybe Supergirl is picking up on their terror?"

"So if I go back into my dream, I could contact Sam, get her to tell me where the Worldkillers are."

"How are supposed to do that?" asked J'onn.

"Winn," said Supergirl. "Could you strobe a blue light at a speed I could give you?"

"Yeah, sure, but..."

"Kryptonian self-hypnosis."

"Lex wrote in his journal about the time Superman took him into the dream realm with him," said Lena. "You need to take me with you. I know Sam and I know her DNA sequence better than my own phone number."

Alex said, "I'm coming too. You might not have your powers in this dark valley mind realm thing."

"Fine, but Lena, you need to change. In our dreams we dress like what we are. I need you to be an agent, not a fashionista."

"Come with me," said Alex. "I'll get you set up."

Supergirl turned back to J'onn and gave him a cheerful smile. "Well, there's one good thing. If we fail at this, we'll probably never find out!"

//

Twenty-seven hours of labor before giving birth to Ruby was nothing like this. Sam and Julia made their way into the shelter of a monstrosity, but Julia was losing her shit, pointing out the people she had killed and claiming that she was Purity. Sam gripped her by the wrists. "You are Julia. Tell me your name, Julia. Tell me your parents' names. Here!"

Sam handed her a sharp rock and pushed her toward a slab of stone. "Write down what you know about yourself, and I'll do the same."

And she wrote: RUBYRUBYRUBYRUBYRUBYRUBYRUBY...
When Alex took Lena down to the women's barracks and gave her some tactical gear to wear, she said, "You know, I always kind of thought this day would come."

"Unzip me? What day? When I fail Kara?"

Alex unzipped the back of Lena's dress. "No, when you suit up to fight by her side. Oh, and you're going to want to braid your hair so no one can use it to grab you. That hurts like fuck."

Lean masked her surprise as she quickly got changed.

"One question though."

"You want to know why I didn't come to you sooner?"

"I was the one who did the first tests on Sam, who told her to come to her friends. So why didn't you tell me the truth?"

"Kara has told me stories about things that you've had to do at the DEO. She told me about how that general used a syringe to put kryptonite into her aunt, tortured her to get information. I know that you care about Sam and Ruby. I couldn't put you into a situation where you might get those kinds of orders. And anyway, it wasn't my story to tell."

"Fair enough. Just tell me, is Ruby safe?"

"Yes."

Supergirl walked into the med by with snow on her boots and handed Winn a clear crystal. "I just got this from the Fortress of Solitude. It will give you the precise pulse rate for the blue light."

They lay down on the three beds.

Winn held up the tablet and made an adjustment. "Shall I count to three?"

"Will it help?" asked Lena.

"Nope."

"Let's just get it over with," said Supergirl.

The blue light started pulsing and Supergirl stared at the light and then dropped off to sleep.
A Trinity to Save You

Sam had told Lena about the dark valley, but it was quite another thing to wake up on the damp ground, gasping for breath, with Supergirl right beside her, and Alex looking just as shocked as Lena felt.

"Well, we're here," said Supergirl grimly, pushing herself off the ground.

Alex got up and immediately began rummaging around in the underbrush.

Supergirl said, "Yeah, this is the forest of Jiru."

"What do we do next?" asked Lena.

Alex came up to them, carrying three long branches that she had stripped of twigs and sharpened.

"Are those for Sam and Julia?" Lena asked.

"It's for whatever might be around."

"We don't even know if we can even get injured," said Lena.

Alex poked her in the stomach. "Ow!" So much for people not wanting to touch a Luthor with a ten-foot pole, although to be fair, this was Alex, who was definitely not most people.

"Yeah," said Alex. "We're good." She hefted the stick. "This one. I like this one. It's mine. Here."

The other two took the remaining sticks. Supergirl pressed the point of hers against her hand and drew blood. She showed them her hand. "This place bites."

Alex stepped away and nearly stepped on a hand. "Oh no. It's Grace."

They looked down to see an Asian woman lying on the ground. "Who?" said Lena.

"It's the human form of one of the Worldkillers," said Alex.

"So we're running out of time with Sam and Julia," said Supergirl. She turned and pointed. "They headed in this direction."

The three of them moved carefully through the fog that made it hard to see the ground under their feet. Alex said, "Kar, you don't look so good."

"I'm just tired. If we'd come in here with the sun uncovered, I wouldn't be losing energy this fast."

She was a little out of breath. "Is this what it's like when humans exercise? This is terrible. Why would you ever exercise?"

"One foot in front of the other," said Alex.

"Well, it's no worse than light kryptonite poisoning."

Lena stopped. "Come on. There is too much at stake for you to still be mad at me."

"I'm not still mad. I understand. Do you think I like it that the DEO has kryptonite? That when Alex
was training me to fight, she used a kryptonite emitter to weaken me enough for it to be a fair fight? That J'onn used a kryptonite knife on my aunt? That Alex killed Astra with a kryptonite sword? I understand why humans feel threatened by Kryptonians. But I also became that real threat a couple of years ago when Max Lord infected me with red kryptonite, and I became my own worst nightmare and I spread my pain all over National City. Forget that it took me months to win the city's trust back. If I didn't have PTSD from watching my planet explode, watching myself explode and endanger everyone I loved still gives me nightmares. You know this. I know I've woken you up screaming. So I shouldn't need to tell you how much that stuff scares me. And I know the DEO needs it for things like this. But I hate it."

"I hated doing it," said Lena.

They were interrupted by screams in the distance. Suddenly they were surrounded by some sort of masked spirits whirling around them in a rush of darkness, roaring in their faces.

"What is that?" yelled Lena.

"The reason we have sticks," growled Alex. She threw her stick javelin-style right through one of the creatures and it exploded. Kara threw hers and exploded another. Lena swung hers like baseball bat and exploded a third.

"Kryptonian demons," said Supergirl. "They came from that structure over that way."

"There's an entrance," said Alex. "Let's go."

They hurried into the bizarre structure. Although it seemed to be made of immense stones, there was a metal door inscribed with the skull marking of the Worldkillers. Supergirl pulled the door open, waved them through and then yanked it shut again.

Even inside, fog covered the floor. They heard panting and saw Julia Freeman leaning against a slab of rock covered with messy writing: her name, address, the names of friends and family.

Alex knelt down next to her. "Julia, it's okay. We're here. It's Supergirl and Agent Danvers. We're here to help."

Lena looked around. On another wall she saw written in large letters: I AM SAM MY DAUGHTER IS RUBY RUBY RUBY. A few yards away, she saw Sam huddled on the ground, shaking and muttering.

"Oh my, God, Sam. Are you okay?"

"I killed them. I killed them."

"No, Sam. You didn't kill anyone. That was Reign, not you."

Alex and Supergirl came running over. Sam looked up. "Alex! Supergirl! Oh! I killed you too? I'm sorry. I'm sorry!"

"What? No!" said Alex. "Reign didn't kill us! We're here to help you."

Lena said, "We're going to make sure that Reign doesn't hurt anyone ever again."

"But Sam, you have to wake up," said Supergirl. "You have to go back to your body and send us a message, tell us where the Worldkillers are. Sam, we don't have much time. Stay with us, remember who you are."
Supergirl stumbled and rubbed her eyes. Alex put an arm around her to support her.

Lena approached Sam. "You are Sam Arias. You are the woman I would trust with anything. You're a friend, you're a mother, you're a fighter. You have to think of Ruby. She's waiting for you to come home."

Suddenly Sam's eyes glowed red. She lunged at Lena and lifted her by the throat. Lena fought for breath, hearing Supergirl yell, "No! Let her go! Take me instead!"

They snapped awake back in the bright med bay. Lena coughed and gasped for breath.

Supergirl asked, "Did it work?"

"Like a charm," said Winn. "We have the location and coordinates."

"You should rest, Supergirl," said J'onn.

"There's no time! Alex, let's go. Get Astra. We're going to need her too."

"What about me?" rasped Lena.

"Help Winn!"

"Yes, exactly," said Winn. "I'll be right back, Lena!"

And everybody abandoned her, racing in all directions.

"Well," Lena croaked to herself. "At least you were right about getting through to her."

//

Winn chased after Alex. "Alex, wait!"

"Sorry, Winn, I gotta go catch up."

"Okay, walk with me, I'll bring you to it. See it's always seemed so unfair. J'onn can phase, Supergirl can shoot things with her eyes, and she's so strong."

"You're not exactly making me super hyped to go join the fight, Winn."

"Exactly!" He pulled her into a side lab where a silver suitcase sat on the table. "For our most badass agent." He pulled some black material out and handed it to her.

"Oh, Winn. You didn't."

"I did. What if I told you," he said pulling a glove off the pile, "that the future is magnets."

A nearby agent went whirling around and his ring smacked into the hand of the glove. "Sorry, man," said Winn. Then he handed her a pistol. "And wait until you see the bullets."

Alex's face got all soft and happy. In a quiet voice, she said, "I'm going to go change now..."

Winn grinned. "Who's the man? I'm the man!"

He hurried back to Lena. "Lena! Want to help me figure out how to fly an alien spaceship and then fly to Arizona to back up the team?"
Her green eyes flashed as she grinned.
A Trinity Broken

Astra was more than willing to fly Alexandra with the team to the desert hideout of the Worldkillers. Together with J'on, M'gann, Supergirl and Imra, they soared across the dimming sky, breaking the sound barrier. From a mile away, they could see the strange structure through a shimmery haze. Whatever signal Sam had managed to send from this place was clearly obstructing the cloaking technology. All the better.

They exploded through the spiky roof straight down into a cavernous stone building, dark and damp. They took a half a moment to lay eyes on the three Worldkillers, and then the battle began.

Supergirl took on Reign like she had a score to settle, which Astra reflected, she really did. J'on and M'gann went after Purity, leaving Pestilence for Astra and Alex. Purity screamed then, shaking the building, but still they traded punches and kicks. Reign kicked Supergirl across the arena and Alex shot her with her new pistol, which engulfed Reign in red flames. Supergirl pushed herself back up again and went after Reign.

By the light of the fading sun, they fought relentlessly. Purity screamed again, but J'on tackled her anyway. She spun away from him and kicked him to the ground. With a grin, she stalked closer to him, but Alex pulled out her gun and said, "Julia!"

The woman turned around.

"You're in there, I know it. Now you've gotta rise up and help us."

Purity smiled. Then she screamed. Alex shot at her and the sound vibrations and the red flames exploded against each other, leave both women on the ground.

Astra turned on Pestilence. "This is not the way, little one."

"Don't call me little!"

They flew at each other and bounced off the walls. Below Supergirl shot her laser eyes at Reign, who countered with her own. But then Supergirl faltered and her lasers went out. "The eclipse is full! No more powers!"

Reign grabbed Supergirl's fist and twisted until the superhero was on her knees. Then Reign kicked her across the cave.

Alex shook her head and looked for her gun. It was a dozen yards away. She squeezed the magnets in her glove, opened her hand and the gun came skittering across the gravel right into her fist. She rose to shoot, but Reign tore the gun out of her hand with one hand and lifted her up by the throat with the other. Supergirl struggled to rise, but every moment, the world grew darker. The yellow sun was about to go extinct.

Bodies dropped. Reign tossed Alex aside, into the pile with her friends. She stood there, grandstanding. She was joined by Pestilence. Supergirl, who for thirteen years had thought that nothing on Earth could kill her, tried to readjust her assumptions.

But it didn't work. Hope refused to die, which meant that she had to do the same.

She turned to where Alex's gunfire had left Purity on the ground, dazed. "Julia! You are so strong. You have to be stronger than this. You have to stand. For us. For the world."
Alex joined in the pleading. "Julia, please! Julia, rise up!"

Reign strode forward confidently. "It's over."

Julia looked at Alex and Supergirl and her eyes changed back to black. She pushed herself up to look at Reign. "What did you say before? That only one of equal strength could subdue you? Well, come at me, witch!"

This time, when she screamed, Julia was screaming at the home team. And the percussive force of her scream sent them sliding back, an inch at a time, across the gravel. But Pestilence was as good as her name. She waited until Julia had to take a breath, then she leaped up and across the cavern, grabbed Julia by the throat and slit her first across the belly and then across the throat. The disease she spread would never have time to incubate. The blood seeping out of Julia's body would carry her life with her much, much faster.

"I always knew you were weak," said Pestilence.

And if she hadn't said that, hadn't literally added insult to injury, Julia might have died... quietly. But no.

With her last deep breath, Julia screamed directly into Pestilence's face, kept screaming even after she saw blood start to seep from the Worldkiller's ears. They both dropped together.

Alex and Supergirl scrambled toward the bodies. Alex checked for a pulse on Julia's neck. "She's not going to make it. I am so sorry."

Stars rose out of Julia's body, silver stars and a silver mist, and they rose up and floated up through the ragged hole in the roof.

This time it was Reign who screamed. "Nooooo!"

Then gold stars rose out of Grace's body, and a gold mist that followed the silver mist up, up and away.

Reign screamed, "Noooo! We were supposed to become one!"

The earth shook. Astra and J'onn landed next to Alex and Supergirl, followed by M'gann and Imra.

"She did it," said M'gann. "They're dead. Pestilence and Purity are dead!"

"Let's get the hell out of here," said J'onn.

The flyers grabbed the Danvers sisters and shot up through the hole they came in by. Hovering above the strange fortress of weird was Astra and Imra's space ship, which opened its door to let them in. They dragged themselves to the command bay only to see Lena at the helm.

Winn shrugged. "Yeah, turns out, Lena's a natural!"

//

Once the world had righted itself, the yellow sun back in ascendance, Supergirl insisted on going back out to destroy Reign's fortress, but when she returned to the DEO she reported that it was gone, stone turned back into sand.

Alex said, "Reign's gone too. She's untraceable."
Winn, opting for optimism, said, "But we got two out of the three of them. And Reign looked super pissed about that! So that's a win."

"It's something," said Alex.

Supergirl turned, "Wait, what are you wearing? Wait, is this a Winn Jr. exclusive? Cool new suit!"

"Yeah, I've been asking for something like this for years..."

J'onn shook his head. "You know Congress. We get attacked by alien supervillains and they cut our budget. Besides, that polo was sweat-wicking!"

"I have a cool new gun, J'onn. Don't think it won't work on you."

"Hey, don't shoot!" He laughed and ambled off.

"Actually, J'onn," said Alex, following him. "I thought of a way to cut costs. Outsourcing. Let me show you the chart I put together..."

Supergirl watched her resilient sister hurry off after their Space Dad/Boss Guy, smiling. Then she saw Lena, still in DEO black, walking away. She hurried after her. "Lena!"

Lena turned. "Don't tell me. You are going to castigate me for keeping secrets from you."

"No. No, I'm not. I was going to thank you. First, for your help in reaching Sam in the forest, so we could find them all. Without that, there's no way we could have--" She caught her breath and looked away.

"Killed Julia and Grace? Yeah, but we couldn't save Sam."

"We reached Julia before the end. We didn't kill her. She died to save us. And if we could reach her, there's hope for Sam too. But none of that would have been possible if it weren't for your persuading her to go back. Also, Winn says you were a regular Han Solo on Astra's ship..."

"Lex was a sci-fi nerd too... And Kara, we need to talk. Not here. Maybe your place? You pick up pizza and I'll go to Oishi-ya for potstickers?"

Supergirl grinned. "That sounds great! Say an hour from now? It's just that Vasquez always insists... insisted on field operatives writing up post-op memos right afterwards, when our memories were clear..."

Lena glanced over Supergirl's shoulder, where Alex was gesturing animatedly to a bemused-looking J'onn. "She's not gone for good, Kara."

"Oh, I sure hope not. Because if she is? Alex will be broken. And even Dr. Torres won't be able to put that Humpty Dumpty back together again."
Shelter Out of Place

If Kara used superspeed to write up her post-op memo for Vas-- for the DEO, nobody had to know. And if she went all the way to Chicago to pick up her online order of deep-dish pizza (Lena’s guilty secret love), well only the pizza guy and Lena would ever find out. And the fact that she managed to do all that with thirty seconds to spare before Lena showed up at her apartment? Priceless.

Lena looked disappointed. "Fuck you, Supergirl," she said with a saucy look. "I was sure I'd beat you this time. Holy f-- You got deep dish?"

"Your favorite," said Kara, for whom thirty seconds meant that she had also had time to change from the supersuit into jeans and her Power to the Girls sweater. Lena looked overdressed, but then Kara supposed, Lena almost always looked overdressed. She could wear her Lilo and Stitch pajama pants and her MIT sweatshirt and no one would question the diamond earrings.

They settled in on Kara's couch. Kara dug between the couch cushions for the remote, saying, "Call the Midwife, or--"

But Lena said, "Kara, this is serious. I have to tell you something that you are not going to want to hear."

Kara froze, then looked into Lena's huge green eyes, then relaxed. "Lee, you can tell me anything." "Maybe. Maybe anything but this."

Kara pulled a huge piece of deep-dish pizza onto her plate and ate it very quickly. Surely bad news was better on a full stomach? "Shoot."

"The kryptonite. I implied that it was Lex's. It wasn't. He didn't leave any of it behind and I wouldn't have kept it if he had, because I was... a little naive back then. Before you and I had met and I found out how what I had thought was the world being a hard place was just... life in a complicated universe."

"Lee--"

"What he left me in that vault was proto-kryptonite. Isn't that what the DEO called it last year, the stuff that Max Lord turned into pink kryptonite and then red?"

Kara wiped her fingers off on a paper towel. It meant she didn't have to think. "Proto?"

"I figured out how to make it."

"But you said there was none left..."

"Yes. I read my contracts with the DEO very thoroughly. And I had my L-Corp lawyers read the laws about 'alien controlled substances' even more thoroughly. Kryptonite is one of those substances that the federal government says that individuals and institutions can't use or store. But usage, if you are a contractor, is allowed, with certain caveats. And storage, well. I got by that one by only making the very minimum I needed at any given time. There has never been any extra lying around."

Kara stared at her for a while, then she stared across the room at nothing, really, just processing.
"Do you hate me?" asked Lena.

Kara turned her head and blinked several times. "Lena... I am pretty sure that if Alex had figured out how to make kryptonite, she would not have done it as carefully as you have. And anyway, dummy, how could I possibly hate you?"

"But I--"

"Nope."

"But you said--"

"Yeah, but you know I can be an idiot at times. And yes, that stuff scares the shit out of me."

"I hated it. The whole time. I hated lying--"

And then Kara's floor-to-ceiling windows exploded.

//

Reign hated waiting. She had waited thirty-odd years just to come out. Then she had waited for Sam to give in. Then she had waited for her sisters. Then--

Then her computer simulation told her she had to give up being human (easy), kill her human counterpart (thrilling), and kill the woman's daughter (harder). She would have thought, how hard could it be to hide one half-alien human hybrid amid 7.6 billion humans and something like 1.2 million nonhumans... Right?

Wrong.

But if Ruby had been sent into hiding, Reign had a pretty good idea of the three or four individuals who might be responsible. And pain could be very persuasive.

//

"Supergirl," yelled Lena, "go to your room! I got this!"

And .19999% of Kara wanted to say no, but the rest of her supersped into her bedroom, fled, and let her very human girlfriend save her life. And she leaned against her bedroom door shaking with fear until she heard the swoop that meant Reign had left. She started to open the door, but Lena yelled, "Not yet!"

And it sounded like Lena was vacuuming, which made no sense, but if there was one thing she had learned in the last two years, it was about trusting the people you loved.

The living room made her nauseous but Lena insisted that leaving the windows open should clear most of the aerosolized kryptonite that she had used to fend off Reign.

"We need to get back to the DEO."

//

By this time, Lena was pretty good at throwing her arms around Supergirl's neck and just holding on for dear life, eyes tightly closed. Walking into the DEO wearing her black dress with the red cherries all over it seemed odd after having walked out of it most recently wearing a castoff pair of Alex's tacticals. For the first time in her life, she felt underdressed.
They gathered around that round computer table thing and Supergirl described Reign's attack. "But why would Reign go after you guys?" asked Winn.

"Well," said Lena drily. "I did hold her hostage for several weeks and experiment on her. Also she knows that I know where her daughter is. It's Ruby that she's looking for."

"And are you okay?" asked Alex.

"I'm fine."

J'onn paced behind them. "So. Reign is after Ruby and she started with Lena. Where else might she look?"

Lena offered, "Sam's mother, Patricia. She's got a farm outside of the city."

J'onn said, "Supergirl and I will get Sam's mother to safety and then we will wait for Reign to attack. Anything you've discovered while you were studying Reign that you think we should add to our arsenal?"

"Electricity," said Lena. "It was how I was able to wake Reign up and force her back down."

Alex, Supergirl, Winn and J'onn traded meaningful looks. Winn said, "Pretty sure she's not ready to be up and around yet. If we are translating 'up and around' not to be walking back and forth in the DEO med bay but rather shooting supervillains with... yeah, I'll look into it."

Alex approached Lena. "Meanwhile, I need to get to Ruby."

"I told you," said Lena. "She's safe."

"And has she been given the anti-viral? Because Pestilence may be gone, but what she left behind is still the gift that keeps on giving. And she's probably afraid. She's tough, Lena, like you and I were at that age. Tough and afraid."

Supergirl passed Lena a pad of pink Post-Its. Lena scribbled a latitude and longitude. Alex took it from her, read it, and then turned to Agent Chen. "Lighter?"

"What? Agent Danvers! I quit already--"

Alex took a step closer to him and gave him a little smile. "Your lighter... please?"

Chen handed her his lighter and looked away as she turned the Post-It to ash.
Shelter Far from Home

There were a lot of things a lightweight motorcycle were good for: impressing people, especially women; getting around traffic during (say) alien attacks; getting places quickly with a smaller footprint than a car or a DEO van might produce on someone else's tracking software.

To get to a place that was not on any maps, that couldn't be seen from space, that almost no one in the world knew about, except for Lena and her brother, who built it... a motorcycle was actually pretty good for that too.

Alex drove for a few hours on the highways before she peeled off and took the rougher side roads, following the paper map that Lena had drawn, since GPS couldn't help. She arrived (eventually) at a series of (apparently) empty fields and a tired stick of wood with a metal box attached. She popped up the cover, punched in the code and ahead of her, a huge pile of a mansion appeared out of nowhere.

Yahtse.

//

Patricia Arias was a friendly woman in a friendly part of the world that city folks wouldn't even recognize for the most part. Nobody locked their doors and people visited all the time. It had been changing a bit in the last few years. That young man who came in looking for pills, for example, was the reason she kept her shotgun close. Fool me twice, shame on me. Try it a third time and get buckshot in your ass.

But when she heard her front door open and picked up the gun and raced into her living room, she really hadn't expected to see...

"Supergirl?"

"We're sorry if we started you, Ms. Arias. This is John Jones, from the FBI."

J'onn showed her his ID. "We have reason to believe that Reign is on her way here, which means this house isn't safe."

"We need to get you out," said Supergirl.

"She's her, isn't she," said Patricia, feeling the tears just behind her eyes. "My Sam is Reign."

Supergirl frowned. "How do you know?"

"Come upstairs."

She led them up to a room filled with pastels and posters of late nineties bands. She said, "I never told her where she was from. I just wanted her to be normal. Then when she was ten, she started doodling all over her books. I punished her for it, tore up the pages." She turned and tore a big piece of wallpaper off the wall. There in marker was a huge Worldkiller symbol. "So she drew it on the wall to spite me. When I saw the same mark all over the news, I knew."

She showed them a picture of a dark-haired little girl hugging a puppy. "I just wanted to protect her. But when we bury things, they come at you even harder."
Supergirl said, "What Sam has become has nothing to do with the way she was raised."

Patricia shook her head. "I was an awful mother. I kicked her out. I've never even met my
granddaughter..."

J'onn said, "You know, we really need to get you out of here."

"No, if she's coming here, I want to be here. I kicked her out when I should have helped her. I am
not going to turn away from her now."

Mrs. Finnigan was not the woman Alex expected. She talked a mile a minute with a thick Irish
brogue about how much trouble her daughter and Lena had gotten into when Lena was at the
boarding school.

"Now, mind you, it was just the one year for Leeena, since once her mother found out how much
fun she was having, she sent her somewhere else, such a pity."

"Um, Mrs. Finnigan, are we almost there yet?"

"Oh, not much further. And you think this place is big? The castle was much, much larger, and I'd
swear that the staircases moved when you weren't looking--"

They finally made it to a dining room where Ruby sat with her headphones on. When she glanced up
and saw them, she dropped the headphones and ran up to hug Alex.

"Oh, Ruby, I'm so glad you're okay!"

"Is my mom with you?"

"No, she's still sick. But--"

Ruby cut her off. "What's wrong with her? She won't tell me and Lena won't tell me. Do you know?
Was she infected with the pestilence?"

"What she's got is different, but yes, there is a very serious disease going around National City. I had
it, and you remember Winn? He had it worse than I did. But we have a vaccine for you, on the off
chance you came into contact with it before Lena sent you out here, and I can give that to you--"

"Yeah, great, whatever, but what about Mom? I haven't heard from her in days. I'm twelve years old,
Alex. I can handle anything. Just tell me what it is!"

And Alex had thought about how to answer that question during her entire ride from National City
and she was no closer now than she had been on the road. "It's complicated, Ruby. You know how
genetics can make you more susceptible to certain diseases?"

"Like sickle cell anemia?"

"Exactly like that. Right now the doctors are thinking what your mom has might be something like
that."

"Then that means I could get it too?"

"Well, only half of your DNA comes from your mom, so probably not. But they're still testing to see
if that is even what this is." Alex hugged the girl. "Now, why don't you take me on a tour of this
mausoleum."

//

Supergirl paced in the kitchen. Patricia had fed them spaghetti, but J'onn hadn't eaten much, and
Supergirl ate without really even noticing what she was putting in her mouth. She could feel the sun
setting without even looking out the window. Undoubtedly, Reign would wait until it was dark.
What was that line, deeds of darkness done in darkness? That was Reign all over, so opposite from
Sam's sunny disposition.

J'onn came in. "We're all set. Patricia's in the safe room." He looked down at the windowsill, where
Patricia had a small vase of flowers. The ones closest to the window started to droop.

"Reign?" said Supergirl. "How did she get Pestilence's power?"

"She didn't," growled J'onn. "At least not all of them. That was why she was so angry. They died
before they could completely meld."

Supergirl tapped her earbud. "Are you ready? It's showtime."

//

Reign strode down the middle of the street toward that house. A lone car let out a long honk and
veered around her, and on a whim, she didn't destroy the driver. She had more important fish to fry.

She had been wanting to do this for fifteen years, more really. She had had plenty of time in the
valley of Jiru to plan the perfect vengeance. She had hoped, back then, to have her sisters with her or
inside her when she finally got the chance, but she would have to make do with the little she had
gotten from them. Anyway, they had been weak. She was strong. She was strength, arbiter of
worlds. She was pain, the cleansing pain that wiped away injustice.

She strode up to the house, taking a moment just outside the front door, then stepped inside.

She moved slowly upstairs, listening for a whimper or a breath. "I know you're scared," she said
evenly. "But I've come back for you."

She heard a swallow coming from the closet and reached for the door handle. "Did you miss me?"

She opened the door to find a white-haired woman who was not her alter ego's mother.

"So much!" said Livewire and then sent ropes of electricity out of her hands to wrap around Reign's
body and propel her backwards out the window. "Well, now that was fun." She limped to the
window, the leg brace on her reconstructed leg heavy and annoying. Reign was on the ground
outside, rolling across the grass, trying to fight off the electricity. Finally she broke the ropes but by
that time J'onn and Supergirl were approaching her from both sides.

She screamed at J'onn, but the man seemed immune, just as he had been in the train station with
Julia. She shot her laser eyes at him, and J'onn threw himself on the ground to roll and put the fire out
of his jacket. She turned toward Supergirl and shot her laser eyes at her, but Supergirl shot her laser
eyes right back at her and they were at a standstill.

Suddenly, she heard a familiar voice. "Sam! I know you're in there. I know my daughter's in there."

Reign broke off the attack and shot her eyes at Patricia, but her aim was off and she set the small
Unlike every other human that Reign had ever met, this woman did not attempt to run. She came right up to her.

"I need you to know that you are not a monster. You are kind and good. You are everything that I wasn't. You are not this. Honey, if you can hear me, I need you to rise up! Not for me, not for me, Sam! For Ruby. For your daughter!"

She held out that old photo of Sam and Ruby together, the one Sam had sent years ago, hoping it would make Patricia want to meet Ruby. When she had gotten no reply, she had assumed Patricia had simply thrown it away. She certainly wouldn't have thought that the woman would have framed it, not after the harsh words, the throwing her clothes out the window, the words of shame.

Reign's eyes moved from the picture to the woman, and hardened. "What did you do for your daughter?" Then she flicked out the sharpened claws she had gotten from Pestilence and sent them into the old woman's soft underbelly.

Patricia screamed. Supergirl screamed. Reign pushed her hand into the woman's guts. With her last breath, the crone gasped, "I love you, Sam. I forgive... you..."

And as she fell away, Supergirl hit Reign with her laser eyes, pushing her across the lawn. Then she grabbed her by the arm and sent her flying into the house.

//

Livewire was tottering down from the front porch and looked back to see the house on fire. "This girl throws one hell of a party," she muttered to herself.

Supergirl picked up the old woman. J'onn stepped back and offered his arm to Livewire. They got back to the DEO van and J'onn drove like a bat out of hell while Supergirl tried to stanch the woman's wounds. "She's stopped breathing!"

"Clear," said Livewire and Supergirl shifted backwards. Livewire reached out her hand and let just the smallest trickle of electricity out, starting the woman's heart again.

"Thanks, Livewire. Thanks for having our backs."

Livewire shrugged. "Sure beats lying around the DEO medical bay."
Dr. Hamilton apologized. In the days that followed, that would be the odd thing that stuck in Kara's mind. They had managed to get Patricia to the DEO still alive, hanging on by a thread. Patricia had told Supergirl to tell Sam that she was sorry, to tell Ruby that her grandmother loved her. Then she had just... given up. Dr. Hamilton put a hand on Supergirl's shoulder and said, "I'm sorry. If she had been younger, maybe I could have..."

"No, it's all right. It's probably better this way. If you'll excuse me."

And she knew that she should have washed up, washed off the blood and ashes, but she had someplace she needed to be, and it couldn't wait.

The moment her boots hit the balcony floor, Lena was rising out of her chair and hurrying to the door.

Supergirl stepped through and into Lena's arms. "It's bad, isn't it?" asked Lena.

"Yeah." She stepped away, trying to keep her voice steady. "Patricia Arias is dead. Reign killed her. And Reign now has some of the powers that Purity and Pestilence had. Not all of them. Purity died to prevent that, but..."

"So do you have a plan?"

"Several. None of which I like. At least one of which includes you making more kryptonite for our DEO weapons and somehow mass producing your red sun grenade."

Lena stared. "But..."

"Lena, I've thought about it. And I understand what you did, and why. And I am grateful to have you on my side. Because I cannot do this alone. And when Alex gets back from seeing Ruby, the two of you are going to have to put your enormous brains together. Because I would like to have kryptonite as my absolute last-ditch option. I want better choices. Can you help me with that?"

"Of course, Kara."

"Thank you. And can I stay at your place tonight? I'm exhausted and I sleep so much better if I can hear you snore."

"I do not snore!"


"I do not snore!"

//

J'onn called Alex to update her. As usual of late it was pretty much just bad news. She ended the call still frowning and that is how Ruby knew that something was off.

"What's wrong?" she asked. "Who needs your help? My mom?"

"No. No one. It's just that Reign is still out there, hurting people."
"I don't care about Reign. What about my mom?"

"Well, the thing is, they had to move her, for her safety. She's stable, but the tests are still inconclusive. Ruby, she's got some of the best doctors in the country trying to figure this thing out."

"So what can we do?"

"Right now? Nothing. And I know it sucks, but sometimes the only thing you can do is just wait and hope."

"I'm sick of waiting!"

"Well, how about a movie to make the time go by faster? Have you ever seen Young Frankenstein?"

"No..."

"Well, let see if Mrs. Finnigan can hook us up with some popcorn."

And in retrospect, of course, later Alex would be forced to admit in her mission debrief that she had left her phone behind. Rookie mistake.

//

Supergirl stood outside of the med bay, staring at the empty beds. Alex and Winn were healthy again. J'onn was healing. Patricia was dead, killed by her own daughter, sort of. She leaned her head against the glass window.

"Supergirl?" said J'onn behind her. "Are you all right?"

"You should be resting."

"I was going stir crazy in there."

"I don't have to be lying down for that. J'onn what am I going to do? I got through to Julia, but there is nothing left of Sam in Reign. The White Martians were pretty soulless too. Were you ever able to get through to them?"

"Besides M'gann, no. I just used my skills as a warrior, like you. But there was one who thought he could reason with them. He did. He got them to spare his life."

They flew to the apartment together. When they entered, M'yrnn was just sitting on the couch, looking unhappy. The moment he saw Kara, he started talking as if they had just had a conversation.

"I am not looking to be persuaded!"

"Father, this is Kara, my friend. We need your help."

"I can be of no help to any creature!"

"Dad, I knew you can't use your mind the way you once did. But your memories are still there, since you've been doing the chanting. You just need help to access it."

"I can do nothing for you."

Frustrated, J'onn stepped away. Supergirl sat next to M'yrnn on the couch. "J'onn told me that when the Greens chose to fight the Whites, you pleaded with them to have open talks. Is that right?"
He nodded.

"Everyone else just saw their aggression," continued Supergirl. "But you saw something you could reason with. What was that?"

"I don't remember."

J'onn shook his head and transformed into a White Martian. "Father, look at me! What do you see in me that you could reason with? The memories are there! Tell me how you could get through to me."

"You are stubborn and righteous. I can't persuade you of anything you don't already believe in."

Supergirl stood up. "The Whites kept you alive. Why?"

"Because I knew that the sacred scrolls were important to them. And inside my mind, I held all of the knowledge and secrets of those scrolls."

"And if they killed you, that knowledge would be lost," said Supergirl.

J'onn transformed back into himself. "You appealed to their beliefs, their code."

"Reign has been pretty clear about her code of justice," said Supergirl.

"Father, you may have just saved all of us!"

//

Lena called J'onn and requested an armed escort from LCorp to the DEO. It felt extreme, but these days, extreme measures were appropriate. She carried the lead-lined case herself. She had sworn that no one but she would touch it and she kept her vows. From down the hall she could see Supergirl pacing in the command center, and didn't need to get up close to predict the presence of the Crinkle.

"Lena!"

"Supergirl. I did what you asked. This is as much as I could fabricate in a day. I can do more tomorrow. I supercharged it just for Reign. I'm pretty sure that it won't make it more dangerous for you."

"So just normally dangerous for me."

"It was the best I could do. If I'd had more time with Reign..."

"I understand. I, I'm grateful, really. It just..."

"I know. When I studied martial arts in college, my teacher always said that a weapon you don't know how to use belongs to your enemy. A knife or a gun can be taken away from you and used on you. This... just be careful with it, Supergirl. I can't lose you."

Supergirl nodded and, overcoming her internal terror, picked up the suitcase and brought it to the restricted section of the armory.

//

Ruby didn't think. She just acted. The moment Alex was out of the room, she scooped up her phone, before the security feature had time to set, and she ran out and dialed her mother's number. She asked her to pick up, to call back, to come get her.
And as she hurried back into the library, it occurred to her that if her mother was hospitalized, there would be no way she could come get her. She hadn't thought that through. Still, she didn't regret it. It was just a phone call after all. It had been weeks, weeks of missed school and no information. Weeks being bounced around from one place to another. She felt like going rogue, just a little bit. And probably, with her luck, her mother wouldn't even get the message, but at least then no one would find out about it.

Alex came back in saying that she had finally figured out the twentieth century projector for the movie. But to be fair, Alex was FBI, so when she figured out what Ruby had done in like, a nanosecond, Ruby figured it wasn't so much about herself being a terrible liar so much as Alex being a badass.

So when the lights started flashing in the mansion and an alarm started going off, she said, "What is it?"

And the last response to that question she ever would have expected was, "It's Reign."
When people saw Winn Schott Jr. playing video games, they nodded knowingly. He was a geek from way back, always had been, and nobody who had known him when he was a kid was even the slightest bit surprised when he had gone into, among other things, computer science.

But Winn was not only a geek. He was also a nerd. And before the video games there were role-playing games. He had played Dungeons & Dragons, dreaming of the day when he might become a hero. But since he started working at the DEO, he had remembered something about D&D that he had not thought of in years, and that was the importance of NPCs, nonplayer characters, characters whose main purpose was to convey information from the Dungeon Master to the players.

Winn often thought of himself that way these days. His job, especially since Supergirl had shut down the Guardian, was to convey information to the real players--Supergirl, Alex, J'onn. And one of the things about the players that had not changed at all was how much they thought they could take on, realistically or not.

So when Winn saw J'onn insisting on being up and around even though his wounds hadn't finished healing, Winn might have... made a few calls. And to be fair, his timing was impeccable.

When the monitors started flashing, his stomach sank. "It's Reign. She's at Lex's mansion. Which means she knows Ruby is there."

"And Alex," said Supergirl.

J'onn carried in the suitcase, grunting from the strain.

"You can't go," said Supergirl. "You're still injured."

"But I can use Lena's kryptonite. There's no one else."

"Actually, there is."

They looked up to see M'gann switching from her human persona to her Green. Imra came trotting into the room with Astra. "Imra can help M'gann," said Astra.

"But the two of you against--" started Supergirl.

"Wait for it..." murmured Winn.

They heard heavy footsteps and James walked into the room wearing--

"Wait, is that Lillian's krypto-suit?"

"Yup," said James with a grin. "Ivan from the quartermaster's office refitted it for me. Astra's been teaching me flying technique. It's okay, Supergirl. We got this."

//

The moment she saw her phone, face up on the table, and Ruby averting her eyes, Alex knew: knew
her mistake, knew what Ruby had done and why, and how horribly wrong the next several minutes of their lives were probably about to go, especially if they didn't move fast.

Thanks to Lex Luthor's world-class paranoia, his version of a safe room was safer than most Army bases and much more interesting. Alex hurried Ruby downstairs and through the corridors down to the suite with the three-foot thick steel doors lined with lead.

They just missed getting roasted by Reign's laser eyes but they got through the door and the door held. Alex pointed to the back of the room. "I want you to get back there and hide. And keep your eyes shut!"

Alex stood her ground, having changed into her suit, and she held her new gun on the door and strained not to panic but she could hear her own breath, and when the door came flying into the room, she faltered. Just for a second, half a second. But still. What would Vasquez have said?

Then Lex's countermeasures kicked in, and this time they weren't lead, so Reign didn't just stand there and take it. She jumped away, bounced off the walls practically, while Alex shot at her, hitting her a few times, but it wasn't enough. And then Reign looked at the machine gun hanging from the ceiling and screamed at it. The vibration took it down and Alex had to somersault to get out of the way before it landed. In the process, she dropped her gun. Lying on the floor, she triggered the magnets in her glove, but just as the gun was moving in her direction, Reign kicked it away.

Then a voice yelled, "Reign!"

Reign turned to see Supergirl, the small Green Martian, and two of the hero's other friends. Supergirl tackled Reign, but Reign threw her over her shoulder, and turned back toward the others just in time for them to shoot something green at her. She knocked the weapon out of the Martian's hands, but Supergirl caught her before she could punch the woman, and she was weaker, so she couldn't break free. She kicked Supergirl and then traded punches with the next woman.

Alex dove for her gun and aimed, but her friends kept getting in the way. "I can't get a good shot," she yelled.

Imra pulled one way and James pulled the other, opening her up. Alex squeezed the trigger and Winn's bullet, like a moon rocket, dropped its jacket in midflight so that the only thing that hit Reign was the electrical payload, that wrapped her up like Livewire might have. And it took her down for a second, but then she was up again.

She kicked Supergirl into one of the Luthor family portraits and Imra tackled her but Reign threw her off in the other direction.

Ruby tore out of hiding and tried to pick up the machine gun that had fallen from the ceiling but then Reign strode toward her, and Reign's mask had fallen off in the fight. Alex saw the moment that Ruby realized that the monstrosity was really her mother. She dove to grab Ruby and drag her away. Supergirl stepped in between the predator and her prey.

"No! You can't!" said Supergirl.

"You would stop me?" asked Reign.

"Not me. I don't have to. You have a code, a purpose. You fight against evil and you dispense justice. You're here to make a better world, one without sin in it. But this girl has not sinned. You can't kill her. You won't."

M'gann took the chunk of kryptonite and squeezed it in her fist, condensing it. Then she inserted it
into the machine gun and shot at Reign. Supergirl used her cape to protect her sister and Ruby.

Reign glowed green, gasping, and collapsed to the floor.

//

The moment Reign was down, Supergirl put the K-cuffs on her, scooped her up, and flew her back to LCorp. When she landed on the balcony, Lena and Jess looked up in shock, and Jess immediately ran to the secret elevator and pushed the down button. Supergirl carried Reign into the elevator and Lena followed, green eyes wide. "Well, that didn't take long," she said.

"That's because your supercharging worked. Lena, I owe you a debt of gratitude."

The elevator reached the subbasement and Supergirl carried Reign into the chamber and came out so that Lena could put up the force field.

"And you're okay, Kara?" asked Lena. "There wasn't any residual effect on you?"

"A little nausea, sure. But flying helped clear my head."

"Oh, thank God." Lena pulled herself together. "You should go rest. And I am going to go work on a cure. When you see your sister, send her by?"

"Will do."

Supergirl took the elevator back up to the top floor of LCorp and stepped out onto the balcony, looking out at all the little lights of National City. She knew that all of the lights were pretty much the same in watts and volts, but she also knew in her heart that the light from LCorp would always burn brightest for her. She took off into the sky, with a song in her head that she couldn't shift. It often got in her head when she thought about Lena.

Warm, we'll keep each other warm
We'll keep each other safe
And sheltered from the storm.
Love, we may not call it love,
But looking at the loving that I see
I'm happy just to be
So warm...

It was good to know that Lena Luthor always had her back. She might not be able to fly Kara Danvers out of a nuclear firestorm, or take an exploding concrete L to the chest for her, but maybe mind was more important than might when it came to the kinds of enemies they made.

It would have to be.

Chapter End Notes

If anybody knows the title, author, singer of this song, PLEASE let me know. I heard it once and it's been in my head for over twenty years.
Chapter 144

Alex showed up at LCorp, ready to work. Jess showed her down to the subbasement lab and watched with amusement as she quietly geeked out while waiting for Lena to finish the procedure she was doing.

"Ms. Luthor?" said Jess, when her boss looked up. "Agent Danvers is here."

"Lena, Kara told me you wanted my help."

"That's right. Come here and look at this. It's a delivery system, usually used for overwriting genes in crops. Oddly, Reign's cells are more like plant cells than you'd think."

Alex nodded. "Part of how Kryptonians process sunlight. How does it work?"

"You take particles of heavy metal, coat them in DNA, deliver the payload and then overwrite Reign's DNA with Sam's. She hit the button and the robot inside Reign's chamber shot her in the arm. Reign's eyes opened wide. The computer announced, "Payload rejected."

Lena ground her teeth. "I thought this would work. I just need the right vectors or the right metal. I just need more time!"

Reign looked up. "Yes, give Lena more time. She doesn't have much left. I'm going to rip out her spine and crack the world in half, and then--"

"We don't need to hear that," said Lena, turning on a screen that blacked out the force field.

"What's that?" asked Alex.

"It's a reflective scatter field. She can't see through it."

"Even with her x-ray vision?"

"Yes."

Alex nodded. "Have you told Kara about this?"

"Do you think there is a reason I should?"

"Not particularly." She gave a small laugh. "Actually, this would have been really useful about a year ago. Kara walked in on me and Vasquez one time..."

"That woman really needs to learn to knock. So how are you and Vasquez?"

"Nowhere. J'onn sent her off on a mission, I don't even know where or how dangerous it might be. I think about her-- But we have our own mission. Show me what vectors you've used and what metals..."

//

Kara printed out her article and put it in Snapper's "in" tray. On her way back to her desk, she saw James talking to a woman with a large leather-bound book. He looked up and waved her to come join them, and she listened while the woman—a linguistics teacher she had apparently saved at some point—described Coville’s cult and how it had changed since Reign came.
"So you translated his journal for them," said Kara.

"It was like a recipe for explosives. I think they're trying to make a bomb. I know I should have left earlier, but I wanted my miracle to mean something. And the community, we bonded. But now they're just fanatics. I have to go back before they miss me."

James shook his head. "Now you're free, you should stay free. I'll call security."

"And I'll get this to Supergirl," said Kara.

//

Winn stood at the command center and saw his kryptonite sensor go off. He tapped his earbud. "J'onn, we have a K emergency not far from CatCo. Do you want to get a strike team together?"

J'onn hurried into the room. "Kryptonite?"

"Um, I think it's Lex's krypto-suit. James may have... kept it. At CatCo. Where he used to keep, um..."

"His Guardian armor? Before he gave that up, you mean?"

"Um, yes."

"Okay, get Agent Vasquez to gather a--"

"Um."

"Where's Alex?"

"At LCorp? I think?"

"And Supergirl?"

"Checking out that cult with Astra."

"Dammit, I'll do it myself. Get Agents Finn, Holtzman, Chen and Jordan. Have them meet me in the armory in five."

Winn watched him stride away, growling to himself. He texted the agents.

4theWinn: You've got 5 min to get to the armory for a mission with the martian. Good luck.

//

It's not that James hadn't ever considered the possibility that he might get caught by National City's finest when he had been working as Guardian. It's just that after that close call with Maggie, he forgot about it. And half the point of the mask, aside from keeping his head in one piece, had been just regular anonymity. He hadn't really given much thought to racial anonymity, even though he knew that the NCPD was overwhelmingly white, something Maggie complained about on a regular basis. The Science Division was better, including aliens as well as people of color, but James was not an alien and the Science folks were not going to be the ones holding a gun on him and, especially once they saw his face, keeping their gun on him and letting the white criminals run away.

Seriously, not one single cop left him to go after them. Not one.
So at least, although the krypto-suit would probably deflect their lead bullets, it was a good thing he still had some of his old toys and really, really good reflexes. The tear gas he shot at the cops distracted them long enough for him to get himself and the woman from the cult away and underground until he could figure out the next thing to do.

//

When Kara and Astra entered the old school where Coville had had his cult meetings, they found no one there. No one living, at least. The shadow against the wall looked like the pictures of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the salty residue on the floor and the half melted necklace, suggested that they might well be looking at someone dead.

Astra pulled pencils out of a jar and gathered up the residue. She didn’t say anything. She didn't have to.

//

The DEO vans careened through National City. J'onn and his agents listened to the NCPD scanners report that they had caught the kidnappers, one male and one female, and were bringing them in. Then chaos. Then they had lost the two. The male they described for the APB sounded an awful lot like James.

J'onn handed Finn and Holtzman portable K scanners.

"Find him. Bring him into the DEO. And don't kill him. That's my job."

//

Alex studied Lena's meticulous charts listing the 97 combinations of vectors and metals that she had tried in the last few days since Reign was back in custody.

Lena said, "Thoughts?"

"Always. I'm thinking that you work very fast. I'm thinking that the problem is likely that we don't have the element we need on Earth."

"Yeah, that occurred to me too."

"I'm thinking that just because I lost my dad when I was not much older than Ruby it doesn't mean I can help her. I thought I could, but nothing I've tried has worked. There's an element missing in me too."

"Too bad she doesn't have a sibling. That's how you and I faced our pain. I had Lex. You had Kara. I've always felt bad for Winn, having to go through his parent trauma alone."

"Parent trauma. Add in J'onn, then. He has M'gann, sort of. But his father has just been withdrawing more and more since they put the psychic dampener on him. If there was only a way to slow down the disease..."

"You know, Alex. I see what you're doing there. Giving me a second or third problem to solve to take my conscious mind off of this problem so that my unconscious will solve it for me."

Alex opened her mouth to protest, then just said. "Sure. Assume that I am that devious. Go right ahead."
"You know, I was reading a lot about brain plasticity when I started this project, when I really did think it was about consciousness. It turns out that playing 3D video games can support brain function, maybe even rebuild capacity."

"So you're saying J'onn should take his dad to an arcade."

"Why not? It might be good for Ruby too. It's good for people to have multi-generational relationships."

"So you've given me a possible solve for my problem. Did your unconscious fix our bigger problem?"

"The only element I know of that isn't an Earth element is kryptonite..."

"Oh yeah, because Reign on red K wouldn't be even more terrifying!"

"Not red. But... maybe pink?"

"You're insane. Let's try it."
Agents Finn and Holtzman stood on the corner of Cordova and Broadway looking at their portable K sensors.

"This is totally not my jam," said Holtzman. "If you were him, where would you go?"

"I don't really know him. He always was so quiet during training."

"Well, where would you go? Where would you have gone in your last job?"

"To hide from the police? The sewers. A bombed out high school. Sunnydale didn't have a lot of options."

Holtzy looked around. "Parking garage? That's underground."

They wandered into three different parking garages before they picked up the trail, and then they hurried after it as the beeps on their sensors got louder. A shot of green just missed them and they threw themselves on the ground yelling, "Don't shoot, James! We're friendlies!"

James and a woman came out from behind an SUV. "Finn?"

"What the hell were you thinking, Olsen? You can't shoot people with kryptonite!"

"I'm not used to the trigger on this suit."

Holtzy got up and went to look at it. "Oh, yeah, looks like Lillian Luthor has a light trigger finger, no surprise. I could fix that."

"That's not the point. James, J'onn wants us to bring you back to the DEO. And I'm thinking we'll be better able to protect your friend there too."

James's phone went off. He pulled it out, stared at it, and swore. The others looked too.

"They're going to tell National City I'm Guardian."

Finn shook his head. "Let's get back to the DEO."

//

Alex and Lena reached the DEO at the same time that Finn and Holtzman brought back James and Tanya. Supergirl and Astra were down in Winn's lab with the residue from the cult experiment. J'onn listened to all his agents and consultants talking at once and finally yelled, "Enough! James, that suit belongs in the armory, in the restricted section. Finn, check the facial recognition programs for the cult leaders. Holtzman, go help Winn. Ms.-- I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name."

"Tanya. I'm so sorry for having put Guardian in danger, sir."

But Winn, Supergirl and Astra were hurrying in just as the others were hurrying out.


"Winn..."
"Right, on to more important things. We've been looking at the residue. We had to use the mass spec here because--"

"Winn..."

"Right. Well, conveniently, Alex and Lena are here, because I wanted to run my results by them before I--"

"Winn..."

Winn hadn't known that J'onn could hit such low notes. He waved Alex and Lena over to the computer terminal. "Is that what I think it is?"

Lena purred, "You really are a genius, Winn. What killed the girl wasn't a bomb at all. It was caused by a heavy metal reaction."

"A heavy metal not found on Earth," added Winn.

Supergirl looked at the chemical structure. "That looks familiar." She turned to the heavy leather book and leafed through it. "Here, the rock of Utical. He found a statue of her when he was in Addis Ababa searching for Kryptonian relics."

Astra said, "Utical is the goddess of life."

Lena shook her head. "I don't know anything about a goddess, but this is the exact inverse of what I need to cure Sam."

"We were wrong," said Supergirl. "They weren't using the rock to make a bomb. They were trying to make a new Worldkiller."

Lena said, "And we could reverse the process, use the rock to turn Reign into Sam permanently. We could cure her."

Tanya said, "I don't know who you're trying to cure, but James risked his life to protect me and now they're going to out him as the Guardian if I don't bring that book back to them by 5:00."

Winn said, "Strictly speaking--"

J'onn growled. Winn stopped talking. J'onn said, "You're not wrong, Agent Schott. But given that James has been on a leave of absence from the DEO since September, he's on his own with this one."

Alex said, "Normally, I'd agree, sir. But if we follow them, we can get hold of the rock they're using, take it back. And if James doesn't get outed, that's just extra."

James came striding into the command center back in his shirt and tie again. "I heard that."

"Fine," said J'onn. "Agent Finn can--"

"Director," said Astra very formally. "I request the honor of this mission. The humans will have lead bullets. They will not work on me. And once I locate this rock and liberate it, I can fly back here immediately."

"I can run backend from here," said Alex. "Winn should work with Lena to prepare for using the stone once we get it."
"Fine. Fine. Just do it!"

//

Winn and Lena gathered the equipment from the page of Coville's book that they had Xeroxed. Winn carried the box down to the garage, and Lena drove the DEO van back to LCorp.

She said, "You really think they'll manage to get it?"

"Of course. Astra will follow Tanya and make them take her too. She's strong, so even if they try handcuffing her to a chair or something, she can break that. She'll probably be pretty good at breaking them too. You do not want to get that woman mad. She is strong!"

"You forget, Winn, that I am familiar with Kryptonian strength. Kara broke my headboard three times last year."

"And I did not need to know that! Anyway, I'm guessing that it will be a cross between a knighting ceremony and stone soup: in go the ingredients, out comes the Worldkiller. Except that Astra will lift the stone and fly back to LCorp, where we can save the day!"

"Optimist," said Lena.

//

Astra, unlike her sister, was not one for speeches. She hid during the adding of the ingredients and she frowned when the little girl spoke of things she did not understand: Rao, Utical, Worldkillers. She used her superspeed to sneak a sunstone off the table, and when the child playing priestess took out the bust of Utical, Astra used the sunstone to send a high frequency pulse that her niece was sure to hear.

The moment the child dropped the statue into the chemical stew, Astra used her superspeed to attack her, but she was a split second too slow. The girl had her by the neck, and her eyes were glowing, her voice had taken on that extra resonance, and she was strong, far stronger than a human should have been.

Luckily, that was when Supergirl showed up, followed by J'onn. Olivia kicked Astra away to take on Supergirl, "the false god."

Astra recovered and joined J'onn in fighting off the fanatical humans.

Olivia still held the black rock in her hand as she punched Supergirl.

"Olivia, this is not you! The girl I saved was good!"

"The girl you saved was weak!"

They traded punches and Supergirl flipped Olivia onto her back, then reached down to take the stone out of her hand. Immediately, her laser eyes shot light everywhere as she stumbled around trying to get under control. Fires started. Finally, she covered her eyes with her hands. It stopped the lasers but she was still stumbling blind and fell down. Olivia came right at her again but Supergirl, her eyes still glowing, said, "Wait, Olivia. You thought I saved you for a reason, and I did. You have a lot to offer in your life, but this, this is someone else's life, a life of destruction. This is not it."

The light left Olivia's eyes. "Who am I without it?"
"Let go of it, and you'll have a lifetime to figure that out."

Olivia tried to drop the rock, but it was still burning and it wouldn't leave her hand. She struggled to pull it off with her other hand. "I can't. I can't get it off!"

"I can't touch it. J'onn! J'onn, you have to help her!"

The Green Martain flew over and tried to pull the rock off her hand. "Won't budge!"

"Oh, this is going to hurt." Supergirl shot her laser eyes at Olivia's hand until the rock fell off, then she blew the burn with her cold breath. "You're okay." She held Olivia and rocked her while she wept.
Making Better Mistakes

Winn texted the DEO and then counted, "Four, three, two--"

J'onn and Supergirl walked into Lena's previously secret lab. "Any luck?"

Lena shook her head. "The rock you brought us was no good. All its power went to that girl's transformation."

"Then why did you ask as to come here, Agent Schott? And why don't you sound more troubled about this, Ms. Luthor?"

Winn smiled. "Because Ms. Luthor and I very intelligently recorded the radiation signature of the stone during the cult's ritual, and did a scan of the heavens," he said, typing into his computer and getting a picture of the solar system. "Now, it is very rare, but the exact same rock is now hurtling through space on a meteorite five light years away."

J'onn frowned. "But Supergirl can't handle that rock. I'll have to--"

Winn said, "Yeah, since I've been having to channel Agent Vasquez of late and think ten steps ahead, I'd have to stop you right there, Director J'onzz, sir. Your father needs you."

Supergirl said, "A human shouldn't--"

"Way ahead of you too. M'gann is going to meet you at her garage. She says her ship will absolutely get you there and back again, as Bilbo Baggins would say."

There was a noise from inside Reign's chamber. Lena turned off the scattering device so they could see inside. She had broken her kryptonite cuffs and was pacing back and forth seething.

"How'd she do that?" asked Supergirl. "The kryptonite is supposed to keep her weak."

"Her body's adapting," said Lena. "She's becoming immune."

"How long can you keep her in containment?" asked J'onn.

"A few days, maybe more, but not much. Alex and I tried something earlier today that should keep her calm for a little while."

"Should I ask?" said J'onn.

Lena shared a look with Winn. "No, no need. I'm sure the effects will be short-term anyway..."

"Right, well. Supergirl, are you ready to go get a rock that might make you lose all control of your powers and bring it back in a souped-up science fiction version of a 1960s Chevy?"

Supergirl shrugged. "Well, when you put it like that, who can resist?"

//

M'gann had not exactly been waiting around for the call, so to speak. But having been an alien on Earth for a long damn time, she always, always made sure she had an exit strategy, and she always kept her ship in tiptop shape, just in case.
This was a much better "just in case" than, say the French Revolution had been. But still. She was more than happy to drive Supergirl to a meteorite that might get rid of their Reign problem. Alien terrorists like Reign were just bad for business.

And anyway, she really liked Supergirl. And she hadn't gotten the chance to take her ship out of mothballs since J'onn's dad came back. She was completely ready for a girls' roadtrip.

"Put on your seatbelt," she said and they took off into outer space.

Supergirl was smiling. "I forget how beautiful it is out here. Mostly when I remember space, I remember Krypton exploding, or the darkness of the Phantom Zone on those annual wakeup moments when the ship's computers checked my health. It was terrifying."

"I hear you," said M'gann. "I was flying for my life when I left Mars. Gotta say, the beauty was lost on me." She looked at the console. "We're coming up on--"

They shifted into real-time speed and saw what looked like a jagged tooth of a planet, with some kind of bubble on top of it.

"What the hell is that?"

They felt a huge pull, and saw a bluish glow connecting them to the meteorite thing.

"A tractor beam," said M'gann. "All my controls are locked up. I hope this is where we were going, 'cuz it looks like we are going to end up there whether we want to or not."

//

Sitting around the apartment watching a documentary about outer space wasn't helping either Alex or Ruby stay patient while they waited for Supergirl to come back to Earth with what they needed to cure Sam, so they did the next best thing.

Ice cream truck. All the toppings.

Silly hats. Sunglasses.

Alien grenade.

In retrospect, Alex thought as she drove Ruby to the DEO, documentaries weren't so bad after all.

//

The tractor beam pulled M'gann's ship through the shield that protected the strange city, but the moment they got through, M'gann was able to transform the ship and ditch it in the forest outside of the built up area. She set its camouflage setting and they hurried away. Supergirl pulled out the tablet J'onn had given her.

"The black rock should be a mile inside the city," she said.

"Then I guess we start walking," said M'gann, transforming into her human persona. The people in the outdoor market all wore bland colors, white and tan and brown. She touched Supergirl's cape. "Pretty sure you are going to stand out like a sore thumb in that outfit."

"Maybe we can change?" Supergirl walked past a clothing rack and pulled two dark cloaks out, handing one to M'gann. "Your huui leather jacket isn't exactly standard wear here either."
M'gann smiled. "I like it. I've lived on a lot of planets, but Earth is still my favorite. When I first left Mars, I thought I'd never find a home, or a self I could live with."

"I just always feel like I'm hiding. I'm always in disguise, even here on the other side of the solar system."

"That's why we have family, the people we don't have to hide things from."

If Ruby thought Alex had been a badass at the park, that was nothing compared to watching her intimidate the six foot six guard at the alien FBI place. By the time he gave Ruby her visitor's lanyard, he was practically shaking in his shoes.

"Wait, you're Assistant Director of the FBI?" said Ruby.

"Yeah, well, we're just one division..." Alex took her up to the fiftieth floor where the command center was shiny with tech.

"This place is intense!"

"Yeah, I guess. Just don't touch anything."

J'onn and Winn came to greet them.

"Good to see you, Ruby," said J'onn. "How are you?"

"Oh my God, it was crazy. There was this guy at the park and he was shooting and people were running and then Alex caught a grenade!"

"Yeah, it was not that big of a deal. Everything's chill. Hey, I have some work I need to do, so why don't you go read that Ada Lovelace book I got you, over in the conference room? Great."

And Ruby thought, She's such a badass, she doesn't even think that catching a grenade is that big of a deal!

Winn, of course, had watched Alex Danvers jump out of this very building while still shooting the Daxamite invaders, so when she said she was chill, he figured that she meant it. Ruby disappeared into the conference room with her book and Alex turned back to them and said, "Someone's trying to kill me."

"Oh, so, not chill. Okay."

"Are you sure you're the target?" asked J'onn.

"Absolutely. Guys, we have to figure this out. I cannot have some psycho trying to murder me while I'm taking care of Ruby!"

Winn said, "So your focus here is on Ruby? Because the whole 'trying to murder you' thing, that would have gotten my attention..."

"She has seen so much. And what if she got hurt? On my watch? I can't live with that!"

J'onn said, "Okay, but who would want you dead?"
Winn sat down at his terminal. "Where do we start? There's Griggs, the Helgramite, Hannibal..." The pictures came up on the monitors above them.

"The first two are in containment in Nevada," said J'onn. "Hannibal we deported after the invasion."

"Okay, well, who else has tried to kill me and failed?"

"Well, there's good old Ricky," said Winn. "He definitely hates you."

"I mind-wiped him," said J'onn. "But it could still be someone from your past. Maybe from before your time at the DEO."

"Ron Carlson. He was my first arrest."

Winn brought up the record. "Wait, you would have been seventeen--" He caught Alex's look. "Yeah, that tracks. He just got out on parole and is now living in National City... six blocks from your apartment. That can't be good."

"I'll deal with him," said Alex. "Winn..."

"No, I do not babysit. Any more. That never goes well."

"It takes a village, Agent Schott," said J'onn. "In the meantime, see if you can get surveillance videos from the park, and get a look at the shooter's face. Just in case Carlson's not our man."

And on the one hand, Winn thought, Kids. Why do people always assume I'm going to be good with kids?

And on the other hand, Winn knew he would rather be stuck with Ruby than have to watch whatever Alex did to this Ron Carlson fellow, who was in for a world of hurt.
On the Dark Side

M'gann and Supergirl paused at the top of a hill. Supergirl said, "There's something about the skyline of that city that just... It reminds me of somewhere..."

"How many cities on meteorites did you visit as a child?" asked M'gann.

"Very funny. None, of course. But it's been more than twenty years. You and I both know how much the galaxy has changed..."

"You think this is a piece of Daxam?"

"No, the architecture is closer to Kryptonian than Daxamite... In fact, that small structure down there, that looks..." Suddenly Supergirl trotted down the hill, and M'gann hurried to keep up.

At the bottom of the hill, Supergirl stepped up to the wall and touched the carving on the wood. "In remembrance of the souls lost in the destruction. May they live in Rao's endless light... M'gann. It's Kryptonian!"

"So this is Krypton?"

"It's Argo. How could I not recognize my own city?"

"A better question might be how did your city end up on a meteorite drifting through space..."

Suddenly a dozen flying robots came zooming at them. "Don't move. Identify yourself. Stay where you are."

"I am Kara Zor-El of Krypton."

The robots beeped at each other. Then the leader said, "You will come with us."

And the last person Kara ever expected to see once the robots had escorted them into the center of the city, was Alura Zor-El.

//

M'gann stood quietly by as mother and daughter had their tear-filled reunion. White Martians didn't do that kind of thing. Alura explained the shield that Kara's father had devised to protect their city, just one city, from the destruction of their entire planet. The mother said they hadn't believed it was going to work and that they would not have sent Kara away if they had thought they would survive. M'gann didn't have any experience of a loving maternal presence in her life, but she was not impressed by Alura Zor-El.

Kara turned and introduced them. "This is my friend M'gann M'orzz from Mars. She came to help me on my quest."

"Quest?"

"Earth is in trouble. When Krypton exploded, the followers of Utical sent three Worldkillers after me. I've stopped two of them, but the third... She is so strong. She's terrorizing Earth, murdering indiscriminately, hurting people I love. We think we've found something that can stop her. We followed its radiation signature here."
Alura's face fell. "Herenel, the black rock of Utical."

"You know where it is?"

"Of course I do. It's what has powered Argo for the past thirty years."

First someone shoots at her during her perfect ice cream truck outing with Ruby, and then throws a grenade at her. Then her perfectly legit rant at kid-killer Ron Carlson goes astray, as he seems to hate himself even more than she hates him. Alex Danvers could deal with those things just fine.

But then they had to mess with her bike.

J'onn came with the crime scene techs and looked graver than usual as he looked at all the pieces of her exploded motorcycle. "Winn said the surveillance video was useless. The fellow was wearing a hood that concealed his face. Male and five foot nine or ten is about all we could tell."

"That doesn't narrow it down very much. The list of people who could want me dead is endless."

"Winn's culling by height and--"

"You know what? Screw the list. This guy wants me, he can come and get me. It's our turn to hunt."

"You want to set a trap?"

"I'm already a target, so let's draw this guy out and take him down."

Supergirl listened to her mother's words of repentance, words she once had longed to hear. Alura claimed that Fort Rozz had been a mistake, that damning her own sister to that place had been a mistake, that sending Kara away had been a mistake.

"Can you forgive me?" she asked.

Kara said, "Astra died. She had put the world at risk, Earth at risk. My home. And she was coming around right before she died. We gave her Kryptonian funeral rites, sent her off to Rao. But something happened that no one could have predicted. Her funeral pod orbited Earth's yellow sun and she was resurrected. She was taken to be a gladiator and led an uprising. She ended up back on Earth. She's been helping me and my friends protect Earth from Reign. You would be proud of her, mom."

Alura stared. "That's... a wild story."

"It's a wild galaxy, I guess."

Ruby couldn't concentrate on her book. Alex was off hunting the guy that tried to kill her. Supergirl was on the other side of the solar system looking for a cure for Ruby's mom. All these FBI or DEO or whatever they were called, these agents were running around looking serious and fierce, and all she had was a book to distract her. She needed a job. Sticking a tissue into the pages to mark her place, she left the book in the conference room and went out to see what Winn was doing.

"Any word from Supergirl yet?"
"Not yet."

"Or from Alex?"

"No."

"Can you show me how this works?"

"Listen, kid, I'm sorry. But I've been sitting here for thirty-six hours, waiting for a signal. I haven't eaten. I haven't slept. I am exhausted. I don't need your help. I have to keep an eye out for the signal that means Supergirl is on her way back and we can finally deal with--"

"My mom."

Winn sighed. "She isn't really your mom."

"No, she's not. She's here and my mom is just gone. I don't sleep anymore either."

Winn turned toward her. "Okay, that was unfair of me. But I know what you're going through. My dad killed a lot of people and then he tried to kill me. And for the longest time, dude, I was terrified that I would become like him. Evil."

"I know what you mean," said Ruby. "But you're not evil."

He smiled. "No, I'm not. Just a jerk. But hey, Supergirl is coming back. And maybe you could aid me in tracking her after all."

//

Even before she became a reporter, Kara had faced difficult persuasive situations: after the red K incident, it took a long time before the citizens of National City trusted her again. And after Maggie rejected Alex, it took Kara a long time to convince her sister that she was in fact lovable. Those incidents were nothing compared to first, convincing the council of Argo City that Wordkillers existed outside fairy tales, second, that they could be stopped with the black rock of Utical, and lastly, and most importantly, that they should give Earth a piece of this precious rock, a Kryptonian solution to a problem Krypton had caused Earth.

But that was the thing about Kara Danvers. When it really mattered, she never gave up.

//

J'onn didn't particularly like taking on the appearance of his friends, particularly the women, but he agreed with Alex that this would be the safest way to lure out her attacker with minimal damage all around. So he transformed into Alex in her running clothes and ran through the park, exposed, covered by dozens of agents with assault rifles and scopes on the rooftops, and Alex running the op from another rooftop.


Then a gun went off.

"J'onn, we're made! Think he knows that you're not me."

J'onn looked up to see Alex fire at someone on another roof, then say, "I'm going after him."

J'onn transformed back into Hank, watching his agent run across the roof. "Wait for backup, Agent
Danvers!" She didn't listen. No surprise.

He watched her chase the man from rooftop to rooftop, leaping from a tall building to a less tall one in a single bound. "Dammit, Alex."

He watched the man use a curved piece of metal to zipline down an electrical wire and then cut the wire so that Alex couldn't follow.

Except, thought J'onn, the words "Alex couldn't" weren't in Alex Danvers' vocabulary. She leaped across the divide, just barely grabbing on to the edge of the building.

J'onn thought he was going to have a heart attack. When Jeremiah Danvers asked J'onn to protect his daughters, he couldn't have known how hard those daughters were going to make J'onn's job.

He saw the man point his handgun at Alex, where she dangled from the edge of the building. Even if he transformed, he would never get there in time. He transformed anyway, flew as fast as--

But this was Alex Danvers he was thinking about. She leaped over the edge, catching the man with her foot as she somersaulted to the roof, and held her gun on the man? alien?

J'onn landed a second later, gave her the Bro Nod of Respect.

Because that was the thing about Alex Danvers. When it really mattered, she never gave up.
Krypto spent the day as he normally did: sleeping, pooping in his litter box, and looking for good things to watch on Kara’s Nedfligs. Apparently there was a documentary on a superdog named Benji, and that was so much fun to watch that he watched it three times before he thought to listen for Kara's heartbeat. He didn't catch it at first and he thought about how she had said she sometimes traveled for her job and if she was far away, she might be hard to hear. But nobody could be that far away.

He spent the next several hours chewing on two pairs of shoes with strap things, and then he was so exhausted, he went to sleep for days. When he woke up, her heart was going strong, not far away, maybe at that DEO place. He looked at the chewed shoes and felt guilty, but luckily, the sand in his box was deep. He could bury them there and she would never find them.

//

For the last year or so, whenever Alex doubted herself, her toughness, her resilience, her sheer badassery, she went to the rebuilt balcony of the DEO and remembered that jump. She knew that Vasquez's heart had very nearly stopped when she had jumped, because they had been on comms and she had heard Alex tell Supergirl that she would meet her outside, and she knew what that meant. For Alex, it wasn't even a question. It was days before she realized that the entire DEO knew what she had done, and the entire DEO, hundreds of agents, thought she was insane, would never have done such a thing in a million years, and certainly wouldn't have thought to turn around and keep shooting at the Daxamites while she was falling into space.

Because they weren't a Danvers. Alex Danvers had never thought she was falling into space. She knew that she was falling into her sister's arms. There was no question about it. And Kara Danvers hadn't let her down.

And today, even without Kara being there, Alex had leaped. But maybe...

Maybe she shouldn't have?

J'onn came over. "We just finished with your attacker. He was able to tell us apart because of his heightened sense of smell."

"A whole list of suspects from my past and he wasn't even on it. You know, when you first came to get me for the DEO, I was failing out of my bioengineering program, I was drunk, and I was completely lost. You gave me something to stand up for, to live for. But today I risked my life for it. I leaped across today without hesitating, without even thinking about it. And that's not the tallest building I've jumped off of in the line of duty."

J'onn sat down next to her. "You are someone who makes the hard choices, Alex."

"Yeah, that's who I am. It's just baked into me, jumping buildings... But the irony is that the thing I did to save myself could have killed me. One more inch..."

"We all make those choices..."

"If I had died, what would have happened to Ruby?"

"Supergirl is on her way back. Winn just got word. We will take care of Sam--"
"But if I ever end up with someone again--"

"You will."

"But she won't be Vasquez. She won't be an agent who understands why I do what I do. And even if she is, is that fair? To her?"

"Maybe not. But we have to be who we are. We have to be that thing that is baked into us."

She leaned her head against his shoulder. "Thanks, Space Dad."

//

J'onn let Alex rest her head against his shoulder, but he said, "Alex, things are about to get... interesting."

She jumped up and pulled her new pistol, pointing it at the floor as she scanned the command center for trouble. Supergirl and M'gann flew onto the balcony carrying a bag, and the agents in the command center cheered and rallied around them, congratulating them on a successful mission. Winn and Ruby ran up to join them. But Alex kept her eyes on what wasn't moving, there by the elevator.

Agent Vasquez in civvies, carrying a large black duffel bag.

J'onn said, "Okay, people, back to your jobs. We've still got to get this to LCorp. Alex, you and Vasquez prep a team for back up." He transformed into his green persona. "Let's go, ladies."

The three of them flew to LCorp and theMartians together materialized with Supergirl into the basement lab.

"We're here, Lena," Supergirl called out.

"Did you get the rock?" yelled Lena. Reign was pounding on the force field walls of her chamber.

Supergirl threw the bag across the room to Lena, who caught it like the former softball player that she was. Supergirl yelled, "Put in your dampeners!" even as she plucked hers from her cape pocket and hurried them into her ears. Lena took a few seconds away from pulling the stone from her bag to insert the earplugs Winn had given her. Then she broke a piece of the rock off and inserted it into a micro-kiln, set it to its highest heat setting, and waited for the long seven seconds it took for the stone to melt.

M'gann, J'onn and Supergirl were ready when Reign exploded out of her cage and they took turn trading punches and kicks with the killer.

Lena opened the kiln and poured the black fluid into the gun-shaped syringe, glanced up to where Supergirl had just thrown Reign to the floor, then slid the syringe across the floor to Supergirl, who quickly inserted the point into Reign's neck and squeezed the trigger until the vial of black fluid was empty.

Reign screamed, turned red, rose up into the air, looking for a moment like conjoined twins, then exploded into a burst of golden-red stars. Supergirl flipped her cape over the naked body of Sam that lay on the floor, gasping.

J'onn could feel the presence of Alex, Vasquez and the DEO troops right before he hurried into the room. There might be angst and doubt between those two, but there was also rock-hard confidence, much like what he felt emanating from Supergirl and Lena Luthor.
Lena stepped close, looking scared. Sam still hadn't opened her eyes. "Sam?" she said.

"Lena?" Sam blinked and her eyes opened. "Do you have some aspirin?"

Supergirl and Lena took Sam away to find clothes for her. J'onn looked away as Alex and Vasquez stood there with their assault rifles, looking uncertain. J'onn nodded at them. "Agents, stand down, but keep your eyes open. We still don't know if this is permanent."

Alex said, "Sir? Request permission for Winn to bring Ruby here?"

"Granted, but let's stick around to be on the safe side."

Alex stepped away and spoke into her comms. Vasquez gave J'onn a worried look. "Welcome back, Agent Vasquez. I hope your mission went well."

"Yeah, that. Um, sir. I've had better and worse. My report will be on your desk as soon as we get back to base. Sir."

Supergirl and Lena came back with Sam dressed in a sweater and MIT sweatpants. Supergirl lifted her up and put her back on the bed inside the chamber. She looked weak.

J'onn stepped forward. "Ms. Arias, how do you feel?"

"This is a cliché, but I feel like I got hit by a bus." Her eyes slid to Supergirl. "A blue and red bus..."

"Sorry..."

"No, it's okay. Those things I did to people, to you. I know I hurt you--"

Supergirl's voice deepened. "That wasn't you. And good friends helped me when I was hurt. I'm fine now."

"But the others, all the others..."

Lena said, "L.Corp has trauma experts you can talk to..." She saw J'onn's look. "Director, you must see how much this company goes through in a year, even before I became friends with a superhero. The difference is that I actually try to do something for my traumatized employees."

"Admirable. And do they actually take advantage of it? I find that many of my employees are a bit... resistant."

Lena snorted. "I find it helps if you cultivate a reputation for not taking no for an answer."

"I'll keep that in mind."

"Mom!"

They turned to see Winn standing behind Ruby, who hesitated and then ran to hug her mother. "Ruby! Look at your hair!"

"Do you hate it? Alex helped me with it..."

"I love it. I love you. I have missed you so much."

"Are you okay now?"
Sam flicked a glance at Lena, who gave an ambiguous nod of her head.

"I'm out of the woods, but they're going to need to do follow up to make sure it doesn't come back."

Lena nodded her approval, then she took Supergirl's hand and led her out of the chamber.

Supergirl said, "You went to great lengths to save Sam and Ruby."

"And the world," added J'onn. "The DEO thanks you once again for saving it when we couldn't."

"El Mayarah," said Lena.

Supergirl continued. "I have to ask. You were able to synthesize kryptonite. Is there any chance that you could synthesize that black rock?"

"Possibly. Why?"

"The meteorite we found it on is inhabited. It's a precious resource there. They sacrificed some to help us. Also... what if one dose of this medicine isn't enough? We can't be blindsided if..."

"I'll get to work on it right away." And she literally turned and went back to where she had left the rest of the rock.

J'onn said, "Supergirl, good work on this mission!"

"Yes, sir, thank you. But I really need to talk to Alex."

J'onn frowned, then nodded. "Yes, I think you really do."
Alex returned to the DEO to secure her weapons in the armory and change into civvies. Then she took an Uber to her sister's loft, still swearing to herself about her motorcycle, may it rest in pieces. She had heard what Supergirl had said to Lena about an inhabited meteorite, and she didn't need to be a psychic or a fortune-teller to have a bad feeling about that.

Kara had a Crinkle. Something bad was up.

By the time she got to the loft, Kara had bought four pizzas and changed into jeans and an MIT sweatshirt that had to belong to Lena, which suggested that Kara needed comfort. Alex's stress level, pushed up a notch by Vasquez's return, moved up two notches further. This wouldn't be good. Alex waited until Kara had eaten two pieces of pizza and poured them each a glass of wine, then she said, "Okay, spill."

"My mom is alive."

"What?"

"My dad created a shield for Argo City. That small chunk of Krypton is still floating through space."

"Wow."

"It doesn't feel real. I talked to her. I hugged her. My mom has been alive all these years, living in the city where I grew up. I never thought that I would see it again. But here's the thing, Alex. I didn't recognize it. I was walking around under those twisted skyscrapers and, sure, I thought it looked vaguely familiar, but I never dreamed..."

She jumped up and ran to the side of the room, where she kept her paintings. Slowly, Alex followed, taking a long sip of her wine. Kara flipped through the pictures, but they were largely watercolors, mostly of places in National City and Midvale. None of the oil paintings she had done of Krypton were there.

"Mom must have them," said Kara. "I mean Eliza."

Alex nodded. "That must have felt... great. To be home."

Kara shook her head. "It was bizarre. I kept expecting it to feel like home, but I just felt out of place, you know? And my mom, she kept talking to me like no time had passed. Like I was still just thirteen. I mean she got the council to listen to me, obviously, but otherwise... Alex, I'm not that little girl anymore."

"I know."

"You know, before we left, she asked me to come back."

"And you want to go."

"It's complicated. I managed to make Earth my home because of you. You've been so much more than a sister to me. We got off to a rocky start, but once we got close, you filled up the hole that having my world torn from me had left inside me. And last spring, on my last Earth Birthday, I crossed this invisible line. I have now lived longer on Earth than I did on Krypton. If I went back, I would be a little girl in an adult body, who doesn't have a place or a job. Here, I'm needed. By my"
world, and my city. And my family. The family who took me in and made me one of them. I know now why Eliza and Jeremiah always emphasized that I was chosen, that they chose to be my parents. And I just talked to the woman who chose not to be."

"So you don't want to go?"

"I feel selfish. She is my mother. She sort of saved my life. But I would have died with them gladly. And instead, I got this incredible chance at a new life, a much more meaningful life than I could have had there. And the space that Krypton used to fill, is filled with you. And Eliza, and Lena. And Earth. And I can't give that up. I'm so selfish."

"Then I'm selfish too. I don't want to do without you."

They hugged. Then Kara said, "So Vasquez is back. What are you going to do about that?"

Alex wiped tears out of her eyes. "Um, well, first, panic. Then, go prep a team for an op together. Then get sidetracked by my sister and her girlfriend taking out a Worldkiller. Thanks for that, by the way."

Kara laughed. "You're welcome. When all this is really over, we'll have to come up with a plan."

//

Clark came when Kara called, and she and Astra met with him in the DEO conference room.

When she described what she experienced on the meteorite, they had the opposite reactions than she had expected. Clark said, "Kara, you know Earth is the only home I've ever known. I assume that my parents are dead?"

"Yes," she said hesitantly.

He sighed. "I thought as much. It might have been nice to have them at the wedding, but..."

Astra said, "Did my sister... ask about me?"

"She did. I told her your story."

"Does she want to see me?"

"She didn't say. Do you want to see her?"

Slowly Astra nodded. "I have hated her but I have missed her. And the longer I have spent free of Fort Rozz, the more I understand her."

"I'll ask J'onn, but I imagine that you could take my pod back."

"You will not return?"

"Maybe someday I'll visit again, but like Clark says, my home is here, and I am not convinced that the Worldkiller threat is entirely over. I can't let me guard down."

Astra nodded again. "Duty. Well, I will not stay long, in case you need my help again. But there are things to be said between us..."

//
J'onn was distracted when Kara went to him and asked permission for Astra to take her pod to see her sister and their rescued city. He signed the form and wished her a safe journey, but it was clear to Kara that his heart was nowhere near his office that day. She texted Alex that she should check on him and his father. She didn't know what else she could do. Sometimes, parents and children were simply a mystery.

//

Astra took the pod back, although "back" wasn't precisely the right word for it. The meteorite that housed Argo was nowhere near where Krypton had been. It was floating through space, far from the light of Rao.

Astra parked the pod and went and paid her respects at the memorial. So many of her friends and colleagues had been in other cities with their families and their jobs when the end had come. And apparently, the only ones who had ever had a chance, had they but known it, were the ones who happened to be in Argo on that fateful day.

Astra knelt before the memorial, waiting for the robots to come and find her, and bring her to her sister. Or kill her. At this point, it was all one to her.

//

When Alura set eyes on Astra, it was like it had always been, like looking into a mirror. And then, of course, when the two women had started talking, trying to make up for decades of lost time, decades of lost trust, the talks faltered and they changed the subject. Alura cooked for her sister, festival foods though it was not festival time, for Kara had mentioned the Earth equivalent "otstikrz" and Astra, like her niece, had always loved the dumplings.

And in an attempt to find something, someone, who could stand between the twins and help them make peace with each other, Alura had invited L'Thora, Astra's friend from before her time as a warrior. The woman was now a civil peacekeeper, so Alura assumed that they would have plenty in common. And at first it had seemed that they did.

//

When Alex got Kara's text, she was concerned. Maybe it was having been trained by Susan Vasquez and then dating her for months, but she had gradually learned to predict the future just a little bit, in the interest of mission preparedness. And remembering her mother's experience with her own mother's Alzheimer's, Alex had a feeling for how the intermediate future might go.

She just was not prepared for it to happen in the near future. In the now. But since Vasquez was back, she could afford to deputize and reprioritize, and let's be honest, beg Winn to take point on filling Vasquez in on the more recent happenings, while she went over to the J'onnz house and tried to be a neutral observer. Or a friend. Or... whatever she was.

But when J'onn heard his father's idea to empty his now apparently lucid mind into his son's, and J'onn begged Alex as a medical professional weigh in on the inadvisability of that, she had to step back. This was so far past anything they had trained her for in Seattle or at Stanford.

Except... Seattle.

She had been hard at work in physical therapy when they said that Sloane had been getting so much better. And then she had heard nurses whispering about the surge of lucidity and clarity that could come right before the end, and Sloane's advisory about when he wanted the plug pulled. One month,
after he lost... everything. One month of the coma, and then let it all go.

And Alex hadn't believed it would come to that.

But it had.

So when J'onn asked her to intervene, she made her excuses and ran back to the DEO, hoping that someday, her Space Dad would understand.
Astra felt the same tension that her sister did. Well, of course she did. The decades between them would not change something so basic as that. So when Alura suggested that she and L'Thora take a walk through the city, she had readily agreed.

She told her old friend about worlds where she could fly and resist weapons and her friend seemed awed. She asked L'Thora about her own life, and her friend talked about her husband and two children, a family gained after the rest of her family had been lost. And Astra pushed the feeling down, but she had to wonder why this woman had gained something in the wake of her huge loss, never realizing that her friend might possibly be dreaming of flying among the clouds of another world, free of the burden of her new life.

//

Vasquez had a few days before she had to get back to work full time. After she filled out her post-mission memo once Reign had been taken down, she went back to the files under her desk and looked at the unfinished memos that she had been drafting in anticipation of J'onn's requests. Most of them were as uninteresting now as they had been several months prior, but one got her attention: the Lionel Luthor Alien Health Clinic. She hadn't written anything about it since the problem with Brian selling performance-enhancing drugs to construction workers there and elsewhere, and she thought that perhaps by now enough had changed that it might be time to look at it again.

Susan Vasquez was not one to visit museums on her down time. That was one of many things she still had in common with Alex Danvers. But she did have an alien friend with what best translated into Earth English as asthma. Maybe it was time they took a look at this new potential resource...

//

The walk through Argo City was disrupted by the collapse of part of a partially erected building. Scaffolding fell around them and Astra dragged L'Thora with her and ran, but she had no superspeed so they only just barely made it out alive.

The woman was shocked. "I will check on whether the site actually passed inspection. Are you all right? Wait here!

But Astra saw a woman in a black cloak glance back nervously and run away. This, she thought? This wasn't about inspections.

Throughout the few days she spent on Argo, she kept seeing the same woman's face, slightly shrouded by a black hood. Several times she had tried to follow her and come back to her hosts simply saying she thought she had seen an old friend, but it was never the same person.

When she tried to tell Alura, her sister basically waved it off. "Astra, I know that being back here is an adjustment. The remnants of your home that you thought had been destroyed."

"I know it seems crazy to you, Alura, but the accident seemed off... I think something was behind it. And I have always followed my intuition. That is what kept me alive in the battles with Krypton's enemies, and all of my Earth enemies until Alex Danvers, and in all of my enemies in the gladiatorial ring... Something is behind this."

"Astra, you've had to live your life as a warrior, so you've lived on foreign planets, among foreign enemies... I understand. But you have to understand that you don't have to live that way anymore.
You don't have to take care of others anymore. It's time you take care of yourself."

Astra nodded. "Kara's sister, Alex, has said something quite like that to me..."

"Now I know why you love Earth so much."

//

Callie Torres spent the week unpacking boxes that she had spent days packing. Well, she supposed, that was how the world worked. It had been so much easier moving away from New York where she already had friends to help her carry boxes from her apartment to the U-Haul truck. This time, she had to do it all on her own. Fuck it, she thought. I've carried half of these boxes, but the ones in the back are the heavy ones. They can fucking wait until tomorrow.

She rubbed her shoulders and lower back. Yeah, okay, maybe the day after...

So she went down to Dollywood and M'gann brought her a scotch, and a little bit after that, she brought her three guys: a human, a S'beerian (larger, blue, with six fingers), and Brian (also blue and not very strong, but quite willing to help). Callie tipped well and then brought the boys back to where her U-Haul was parked, half-full, outside her apartment. They grinned and helped her unpack the truck.

And weirdly, just like human males, they were very willing to work for pizza.

//

When L'Thora asked Alura and Astra to come to the Hall of Justice, they did not expect to see a familiar woman in a black cloak and hood, more than willing to admit to her attack against Astra In-Ze. "I am the last of the daughters of the night, children of Jiru hoping for the deliverance of all Krypton. I, Selena, am the last high priestess."

"Selena?" asked Astra. "But didn't you help my niece defeat Reign?"

"Nothing is as it seems."

//

Krypto loved Kara's Nedfligs. He could watch the documentary about Benji the superdog, or that one about the cat with the boots and sword, or the TV show that pretended to be about Supergirl, except for getting all the details wrong. Gradually, he was learning Earthlish, or what ever they called it. He still couldn't speak it yet, and Kara said that maybe his mouth wasn't optimally shaped for it. But he could say, "I want out" relatively well, and that was the most important sentence, except for Pizza Please, and he was pretty sure dogs weren't designed by Rao to pronounce peas.

At midday, Kara always flew home to walk him, and she promised, when the most recent spring chaos was over, that she would take him somewhere empty where they could practice flying and play catch and he could just general stretch himself. It would happen. he was convinced. Alex had tried to tell him in Krypt-lish about spring chaos: Non, the Daxamites, Reign. For some reason, the worst stuff seemed to always happen in May and June.

That was okay. He had his food and the weird litterbox and a whole basket of chew toys, and if she needed his help taking down this witch person, he would totally go and chew on her ankle. That was what friends were for.
Not the Night You'd Planned

Astra had argued against simply putting Selena under house arrest. She had a hard time believing that the woman who had consigned her own sister to Fort Rozz and who had sent her thirteen year old daughter off to an alien planet alone could possibly be so naive. But people change.

When the message came to the Council that Selena had stolen Astra's pod, leaving her stranded, and flown off to Earth, Astra blew a gasket. When more messages came, this time saying that at least two pieces had been chopped from the main core of the Harunel and some cache crystals had also turned up missing, Astra yelled at her sister so loudly, it could probably be heard on Earth.

But the missing cache crystals did give Astra an idea of how they might contact Kara and the DEO.

//

Selena had no time to notice the beauty of space as she flew the pod back to Earth. She was on a mission, one that she had from time to time over the years lost faith in. When Krypton was in its last years, as the older priestesses had long foretold, they took Jor-El's idea for his son one step further—or, rather, three steps. Each child had her own pod, her own crystal, and her own destination.

In the exact center of the enormous triangle that those three points made was a point in the desert. Selena's pod set down there, an hour before midnight. She had time to use the crystal to build the Fortress and begin preparations for the ritual. She knew the ritual would be excruciatingly painful, especially since she had no one to syphon off the pain for her. No matter. If Reign was to be saved, and the Earth turned into New Krypton, a dark planet for her dark goddess, it would have to be done.

And when it was over, she would no longer be Selena, but rather Serenity.

//

It was a slow night. The computers were glitching and Winn was working with the IT team to fix them, but until they got the feeds back up, there was no way they were going to have a mission. Supergirl was flying over the city listening for trouble, but the DEO command center was quiet for a while. It wouldn't last, Alex knew, but it gave her enough time to sit down, put her feet up and flip through her laptop.

The National City Humane Society always had photos of the dogs that were up for adoption. She just wished that she was doing this with Vasquez.

//

J'onn woke up in the middle of the night, hearing his father puttering around in the living room. Rubbing his eyes, he got up to make sure he was all right.

M'yrnn had a sheaf of papers in one hand and was poking around J'onn's desk.

"Father? What are you doing up at this hour?"

"Have you got a writing implement? I can never find one that works." The desk was strewn with pens.

"Father, you have to click the end to make it write."
"Ah, of course. A much simpler mechanism than I might have thought."

"What are you writing?"

"Forms!" he said grinning. "For my new employment at the Alien Clinic! I am going to be a Chap'lan!"

"A chaplain?"

"Yes, for when the alien patients want someone to pray with them or to help them talk to their families." He handed Jonn the HR paperwork. "What is a Social Security Number?"

//

At first Ruby thought she was having a nightmare, and then she realized it was her mother, curled up in the bathroom shaking. Again.

Ruby got her mother back to bed, and then called Lena.

//

Since Winn had familiarized Astra with the way they had integrated Alura's hologram with the DEO technology, it didn't take Astra long to use the cache crystal to make contact with the hologram and then project it into the room where Winn was, a dark room with many cots. Winn was sleeping in his clothes, and so Astra had to shout at him to wake him up. He jumped and fell of the cot when he saw her.

"Alura?"

"Winn! It is I, Astra. My pod was stolen and now I am stranded on Krypton! I require your assistance. Selena of the Argo Council stole the pod and is on her way to Earth to support Reign. Can you configure the DEO's transmat portal to--"

Winn sat up on the floor and rubbed his eyes. "Wait, wait, okay? What time is it?" He looked blearily at his watch. It was just past nine in the morning. "Oh, sh-- Alex was supposed to wake me two hours ago! Okay, Alura, er, I mean Astra-- How are you doing that, by the way? No, you're right. Never mind. Let make some calls. God, I need coffee..."

Back on Argo, Astra saw Alura's skeptical look. Astra said, "Agent Schott is much more competent than he seems at first glance. He will get me home to Earth."

And Astra saw Alura's look change at that, but she couldn't read what it might mean, so she just ignored it.

//

Early that morning, Vasquez draped several towels over her passenger seat. Her friend T'Voot was a great person, but when she got excited, her body steamed. It wasn't a horrible thing, it didn't smell, but it wasn't really good for the leather seats.

She picked up T'Voot, a redhaired girl with just barely noticeable gills and they got to the clinic right when it opened at 8:00. Vasquez could hear the slight wheeze as T'Voot talked to the doctor on duty and as the woman took her into another room, Vasquez looked around at the waiting room, which was already starting to fill up. She took a brochure from a coffee table and read through the clinic's mission statement. She folded the brochure and stuck it into the pocket of her leather jacket.
She was surprised to hear a familiar voice and her head snapped up to see Lena Luthor dressed to the nines in four-inch heels standing talking to a doctor with green skin and a white lab coat. The man nodded, shook her hand and walked away. Lena looked at her phone, and hit decline.

Vasquez heard her own phone go off. "Vasquez."

"Vasquez, it's Winn. We have an emergency and I need you to come in if you can. Also, have you got any idea how to get ahold of Lena? She's not picking up."

"Winn, you know me. Two birds, one stone. I'll see you in a bit." She hung up and said, "Lena!"

Lena turned and saw her, "Vasquez, what are you doing here? I mean--"

"Wheels for an alien friend. Winn's been trying to get ahold of you. Can I offer you a ride?"

Lena bit her lip. Finally she nodded. "Let me just cancel my driver."

"Actually, maybe we could help each other out. Let me just get my towels."

And that was how her friend T'Voot got taken home from the alien clinic in an LCorp limo.

Serentity woke up lying on the ground inside the Fortress. The pain was less now, though she was still shaking. It would pass. She just had to be patient.

Soon she would have the strength to sit up, and then stand. Slowly she would be able to make her way to the computer, and find the right cache crystal to create the scan that would locate the blood of a Kryptonian. The fools had done her work for her, splitting Reign and Samantha. Now it was simply a matter of time and the rituals and the mercy of the dark goddess before Reign could be supreme on this Earth. And Serenity would rule by her side.

But first, her body had to stop being wracked with the ending vestiges of the pain. It was the pain of new birth, the pain of transformation and genesis. It would pass. She just had to be patient.
Make the Reign Go Away

It had been about three in the morning when Alex had finally picked Winn off the floor where he was digging into the guts of one of the computers and she had pushed him in the direction of the men's barracks, telling him he would be of much more use if he got some sleep. He agreed on the condition that she woke him in four hours and she had agreed without really intending to wake him up at all. She knew that Winn often solved tech problems in his sleep. But that would only happen if he actually slept.

Kara had checked in not long after, and had gone home to walk Krypto and get some sleep before showing up at CatCo.

Now her shift was almost over and Alex was tired, but wouldn't have been able to sleep if she tried, so she didn't bother. She scrolled through the Humane Society website, thinking about the problem of dog-walking. She also thought about the dangers of her life. If anybody tried to hurt Krypto, well he was Kryptonian, and as relatively indestructible as Supergirl. What Alex really needed was a K-9 dog. Maybe if she got a German Shepherd and put her through agility training--

And that's when Winn came running into the command center babbling about Alura in the barracks, and then the elevator doors opened, and Ruby walked in slowly, with her mother's arm over her shoulder.

Alex said, "Winn, just stop! Text J'onn to get his approval for you to rev up the transmat portal, while I deal with this. And call Lena. We're going to need her help for both these things."

"I already did, and Vasquez as well. They're on their way."

Alex didn't reply, just got Sam to put her other arm over her own shoulders and walked her down to Medical.

//

Lena got into Vasquez's car with a small smirk on her face. She tried to hide it, but it just refused to go away. She held on tightly to the coward's bar while Vasquez presented some very impressive driving skills, getting them to the DEO in just under ten minutes. It would have taken Tom at least twenty.

As they got out, she saw Vasquez frown. "What's so funny, Luthor?"

"Just, you're so much like Alex, the badass super agent, but you drive a Beetle!"

"They're small, maneuverable and easy to park."

"They're cute, just like you, Vasquez."

"I thought you were into femmes."

Lena shrugged. "I like power, strength." They hurried from the parking level to get up to the command center, where Winn was working away at his tablet.

"Lena! Alex needs you in Medical for help with Sam and then I will need you to help me with our transmat portal. Vasquez, you're on command center until J'onn gets back."
"Where is he?"

"I have no idea. I don't know where anybody is, because our computers are down and I need to fix that before I can help Astra get off Argo and stop a new Worldkiller from being formed, if I understood what Alura's construct was telling me."

Lena said, "Let me know when you need me for that, then." She hurried down to Medical, where Alex was checking Sam's eyes. On a tray next to the chair she was sitting in were tubing and a syringe.

Alex saw Lena. "The blood is in the rack. Would you mind...?"

"Of course."

Alex turned back to Sam who said, "I was better. I was me again. Now I feel like I can barely hold my head up."

"What about the blackouts? Are you still losing any time?"

"I just feel like my insides are wilting away."

Lena put the blood under the microscope and hissed. They turned and looked at her. She came over. "Sam, your blood cells have mutated. Before, they presented as human, but now they're transforming back to their natural state, which is Kryptonian."

"But that's good, right?" asked Ruby. "She's like Supergirl."

"I don't feel stronger," said Sam. "I've never felt weaker."

"That's because the cells are oxygen deprived, shrinking, maybe becoming dormant."

"We need to fix this," said Sam. "I have not fought this hard just to lose now."

Together, Alex and Lena said, "We will."

But Ruby said, "If she's Kryptonian like Supergirl, can't you fix her with the sun?"

Alex said, "Yellow sunlamps. She's right. The sunlamps should heal you. We're going to supercharge you!"

//

Winn got the mainframe back online and was congratulating himself just as an agent brought him a box. "Oh, baby! Is this what I think it is?"

"From Archie in the prototyping lab. He said it finally works. Your design fixed it."

"Who da man? I'm da man!" said Winn, and then "Thank Archie for me! And thank you!"

Vasquez looked over from where she was writing at her desk. She had had plenty of time while Winn was working to go down to her locker and change into tacticals. When the feeds came up again, she breathed a sigh of relief. "What's that, Winn?"

He took the metal disk out of the box and inserted it into his belt buckle. "Protection," he said, hitting a button that made him flash blue for a second. "Okay, Vasquez. Punch me."
Vasquez stood up, smiled, and punched him in the stomach. Another blue flash. It hurt her hand more than it hurt him. "That was... less satisfying than I had imagined. What is it?"

"An omni-directional self-maintaining subatomic personal force field. Boom." He took a smaller disc out of the box. "The earlier ones were erratic, but I finally figured it out. Here, have a souvenir. Now I'm off to figure out the transmat thing."

//

After they had shifted the equipment from Lena's lab to the DEO, Alex had been put in charge of what Winn sometimes called Operation Reign, Reign, Go Away—usually right before Alex slapped him upside the head.

After Sam had been lying in a modified yellow sunbed for six hours, Lena said they ought to test to see if it was working.

Ruby had not left Sam's side the entire time. "You're looking much better, Mom."

"You're a horrible liar," said Sam. "But thanks."

"Okay," said Lena. "Sam, I need you to count to three and then look at us."

"One, two, three."

Alex hit a button on her tablet. The blue wall came up around Sam's bed. Lena waved her hand.

Sam said, "Okay, you're waving. So that means what?"

Alex turned the wall off.

Lena said, "It's a refractive scatter field. Basically, an eye test."

Alex said, "If your cells were expressing in a Kryptonian manner, you wouldn't have been able to see us. Your eyes would have hurt just trying."

"So isn't that good?" asked Ruby. "If she's less Kryptonian?"

Sam shook her head. "I still feel weak. What else can we do?"

Lena said, "Maybe this Harunel can rewrite the process... If I take your blood back to the lab, see if it can rejuvenate your cells." She took the sample and hurried out.

Alex said, "We will figure this out. I promise." Then she followed Lena out.

//

Winn managed to make a more direct way of communication than through Alura's construct, which quite frankly had been wigging him out. He and Astra discussed links and power sources. Alex and Vasquez came to check on his progress just as he was about to get the portals synced, but then there was the noise of a massacre coming from the command center: screams, breaking glass. Like that.

Alex said, "Winn, keep working. Vasquez, on my six!"

They ran out. Winn said, "Astra, I think maybe Reign is back..."
When Alex and Vasquez came running into the command center they saw unarmed agents being taken down by a new Kryptonian Worldkiller. She wore a black dress with no mask, and she was shooting her laser eyes at agents too far away to touch. The ones that got close enough to hit her, she threw across the room.

The woman said, "I was drawn by the blood of the fallen Worldkillers. Hand over the blood, and we won't spill yours."

Alex turned to Vasquez. "Get the blood. Destroy it."

Vasquez nodded once and ran off.

Alex stepped forward aiming her gun. "Didn't they teach you how to knock on Krypton?" She shot the woman, and when she went down, surrounded by a net of electricity, Alex hurried the uninjured agents in getting the injured out of the command center. Then she ran.

She was prepared for this. During the months that Vasquez was away on her mission, Alex had found the notebook she had been writing in sitting at her post. A pen marked the last page written on, which simply said, "FLYING MONKEYS??? There's no place like home..."

And then she had had what Winn and Lena called a genius moment: when the world slowed down and her brain sped up, when a problem was one point over there and a solution was another point way over here, and suddenly a zigzagging bolt of lightning connected them. And then she had gone down to her lab and made her idea a reality, with a little bit of help from Archie in prototyping.

So now when she ran from the command center, she ran directly for the armory, hit the code for the restricted section, and took down the case with her... new developments in it.

Time to reload.

//

Winn figured out how to fix the energy surge and said, "Astra? We need you back now! I think Reign's back..." But there, behind him, reflected in the computer screen was... someone else. Judging from her black dress with Reign's crest, she was... not a friend. He hit the disc in his belt buckle, felt the blue electricity tickle his skin, and slowly, slowly turned around.

He heard Astra say, "Winn? Winn? Are you still there?"

"Actually," he said conversationally (although his voice sounded high, even to him). "That's ... not... Reign."

"No," said the woman before him. "I am Serenity!" She shot her laser eyes at him, but his suit flickered blue and left him unscathed.

"Aha!" he said triumphantly.

Then she supersped over to him and threw him over her shoulder. He didn't even feel it when he hit the wall and slid to the floor.

//
Astra and Alura looked at each other. "That didn't sound good..." said Alura.

"No shit, Sherlock," said Astra, who had been spending way too much time with DEO agents lately.

"What is a shurlok?"

"We need to get eyes on the DEO. Let me piggyback on your construct..."

"Piggy?"

"There, now we can see what she can see."

On their viewscreen, they could see the portal's control panel, but the hologram couldn't touch it. She did a 180 and saw Selena in a black dress hurrying down the hallway. The construct appeared in the hall behind her. "Selena!"

"Alura! But how did you get off Argo?"

"I'm faster than I look." She turned and walked away.

The Worldkiller followed her.

Astra turned to the flesh-and-blood Alura. "She took the bait."

//

Ruby and her mom had heard the noises from the upper floors of the DEO, saw agents scrambling first away from the command center unarmed, then towards it carrying weapons.

Ruby said, "Mom, I think we need to get out of here, find a place to hide." Red alarm lights started flashing.

"No, you go, baby. I'm too slow."

"Mom, we have to go now." She could hear footfalls and saw a figure in black moving down hall. She found Alex's tablet and hit the refractive wall, so that the room glowed blue to them, but hopefully the new Wordkiller couldn't see them. They clung together trying not to even breathe.

The woman looked at the wall, squinted, and then winced. She started to turn, but Ruby saw Agent Vasquez in the doorway, so she picked up a small aluminum equipment tray and dropped it on the floor with a clatter. The woman's head whipped around. Vasquez had disappeared.

The woman stepped toward them, saying, "You can't escape me for long." She tried to hit the force field with her laser eyes but then screamed in pain. The wall held.

When she recovered she turned to see Vasquez hurrying out the door. "The blood of my sisters--"

Then there was a sound and she dropped like a sack of flour. And there was badass Agent Alex Danvers with her gun.

The strange woman gasped in pain as her skin went all veined in green.

"Yeah," said Alex. "Kryptonite bullets."

But the woman pushed herself up and threw a metal table at Alex, knocking her down and leaving her gun skittering away. Alex squeezed her glove as the woman grabbed her by the shoulder and
picked her up to hit her. Alex shoved her hand in the woman's face, the kryptonite in her hand made the woman cringe and pull away, which gave Alex the leverage to haul back and punch her with the other fist.

Nothing like being ambidextrous.

They traded punches, but the green veined lines in the woman's face didn't go away. Alex wouldn't let her get away. She grabbed her with her right hand and shoved her left hand with its kryptonite right into her face, shouting, "Vasquez, run!"

And that slight distraction was enough for the Worldkiller to grab Alex and throw her across the room.

//

Serenity was frustrated. These infernal humans. They were a blight on what would otherwise have been a perfectly useful planet. But no. They had to make kryptonite weapons and force fields she couldn't see through, and even though they knew she was going to kill them--because of course they had to know--they kept coming at her with their fists and batons and guns. And she had lost track of Alura.

She left the lab, trying to follow the smell of the blood, but also keeping an eye out for a sky blue dress. It had taken Serenity years of planning and then the accident of Astra's pod to actually get off of Argo and on to Earth. How had Alura managed it in only a couple of hours?

A swish of light blue around the corner ahead of her made her hurry down the hall and into another lab.

Alura turned to smirk at her. "I don't know how you stayed on the Council for so long. You were never very bright."

"What did you just say?"

"You were never very bright."

Serenity was annoyed. She punched Alura right in the--

Portal control?

A flash of purple. Astra In-Ze came leaping through the portal and punched Serenity in the face. The woman stumbled away, which gave Astra time to hit the control again to let Alura step through. When they turned back to the Worldkiller, she was gone.

//

Winn came running back to the command center from one corridor as Supergirl came running in from another. They both saw Vasquez on the platform between the stairs and they both saw the Worldkiller land between them and her.

Winn yelled, "Vasquez, your belt!"

And they both watched Vasquez hit the disk on her belt and the blue electricity that lit her up for a split second. Then she ran a few steps forward and threw the two vials of blood to Supergirl and just as Supergirl caught them, the Worldkiller turned her laser eyes on Vasquez. The blue flash of light fought the two bolts of laser light and then Vasquez fell to the floor, unmoving.
"Noooo!"

There was a pause. Then Selena frowned. "She actually cares for these humans. One would have thought that the girl of steel would know that caring makes you weak. Give me the blood."

"You want the blood? You can have it!" Supergirl tossed the vials into the air and shot them with her laser vision. Selena charged forward grabbing the shattering, melting glass from the air, and disappeared.

Supergirl's head snapped up as she heard Alex's heartbeat near, heard her heavy breathing as she ran to the balcony and looked down on Vasquez's still body. "NO!"

Supergirl scooped up Vasquez's body and flew through the corridors to get to the Medbay, with her sister and Winn racing to keep up. The medics and Dr. Hamilton let her put Vasquez on a gurney, then pushed her away. "We've got this, Supergirl. We'll take it from here."

The doors of the operating room closed, leaving Supergirl empty-handed. When Winn and Alex came running in crying, the only thing that the Girl of Steel could do was hold them and weep along with them.
It took a long time for Winn, Alex and Supergirl to stop crying, but once they did, Alex pulled herself together first. The last few months since Callie had arrived, she had been reminded several times about her time at Seattle Grace Mercy Death, and the lessons she had learned there. She explained to her chosen siblings that with the kind of injuries Vasquez had sustained, a long surgery wasn't necessarily a bad sign, as it meant everybody was still fighting for her. So she pushed Winn to go back to the command center and do damage assessment and control. Supergirl she sent to fly over National City listening, though she didn't really expect her to hear anything. Alex stayed for a while longer outside the surgical bay, but the waiting made her feel useless. She stood up, but couldn't bear walking into the command center just yet, so she just... wandered through the DEO's corridors.

She thought about her conversation with J'onn about jumping buildings. He said that we had to be the thing that was baked into us. She thought about Vasquez's Marine tattoo, the ropy scar on her leg from the aliens she had faced in the Iraq desert. Baked in, indeed.

She found herself standing in the doorway of the training room. She entered to see Livewire on the weight machines, carefully working on her legs, one free, one in a brace.

"I'm sorry," said Alex. "I didn't mean to intrude."

"Hey, as long as you're not a Kryptonian intending to turn me into a crispy critter, you're more than welcome to join."

Alex sat down on a padded bench and rubbed her eyes.

"What's the matter, Big Danvers? Reign fry a friend of yours?"

Alex nodded, then shook her head. "It wasn't Reign."

"What, there's a new girl in town?"

Alex nodded again.

"So all that screaming out there? The glass breaking?"

Alex nodded.

"Well, shiiiiit. And here I thought I was hiding in the closet with the yoga blocs for a test of the alarm system."

Alex said softly, "Yeah, no."

"Does that mean you're going to be needing my help again soon?"

"If you're up for it. Probably. Yeah."

"Winn said he's working on a suit for me, with support for this leg. I see he finished yours. Nice, by the way."

"Winn does good work..."

"How's your sister?"
"What? Oh, fine..."

"So this person who got toasted," Livewire said carefully. "Were you close?"

Alex nodded.

"Sorry 'bout that. I've lost people too."

"She's not lost!" snapped Alex. "At least not yet... Dr. Hamilton is in there with her..."

"Yeah, Hamilton's all right." Livewire rubbed her brace absently. "And that other chick, Torres. You tapped that yet?"

"What? No! Of course not! Why does everybody assume?"

Livewire's eyebrows rose. "You're hot. She's hot. Sizzle, sizzle."

Alex shrugged. "She's a friend."

"What, so no benefits?"

Alex winced and looked away.

"You know," said Livewire, changing the subject awkwardly. "I've been thinking about how I could be more useful in the coming battle against those creepy women."

"Forward planning," said Alex tiredly, thinking of Vasquez. "What did you have in mind?"

"Well, your supersister got me that first time with water. And Reign hates my electricity, but she doesn't hate it enough. So I thought: water canon."

"Hmm. But that would be dangerous for us too."

Livewire's face fell. "Oh, yeah..."

"I just feel like Vasquez would have thought about this before us..." said Alex.

"So ask her."

"I hope I can..." Alex stood up abruptly. "I have to go."

Livewire said, "Wait, Vasquez. Is she the little frowny one? She's the one who got hurt?"

Alex just nodded, not trusting her voice.

"Yeah, well," said Livewire uncertainly. Offering comfort wasn't her thing. "Dr. Hamilton's really good..."

"Yeah, she is. Thanks..."

Alex wandered through the DEO frowning. When agents saw her, they stood straighter, worked faster, swept up shattered glass more diligently. Outwardly, she gave them a curt nod of approval. Inwardly, she wished someone would sweep up her heart.

//

Supergirl flew over the city, listening for sounds of distress, but more than anything she was thinking
about her sister and Agent Vasquez. She had always liked Vasquez, from the first day she walked around the DEO site out in Nevada, when Jonn was so mean to her and Alex was so busy being a company man that she couldn't understand Supergirl's very reasonable concerns about the DEO. But Vasquez had been unfailingly polite to her, and frequently addressed the Danvers sisters as "Ma'ams," which to Kara's ears always sounded like "as you wish," even a year before Alex came out as a lesbian.

And of course neither Danvers sister had ever had so much as a tiny little bit of gaydar, then or now. Although in retrospect, even Kara could see that Vasquez was what Lena would call a "cute little butch." But Kara knew that she was so much more than that. Where Maggie had been close-minded, Vasquez had been willing to give Alex a chance. Where Maggie had mocked Alex learning lesbian culture from The L Word, Vasquez had sat with her one episode at a time and explained things.

And then, right after playing that game of pool with Alex as a way to break the ice that had formed between them, Maggie had gone off to have sex with Lucy Lane. But Vasquez had stayed.

For crying out loud, Vasquez wore underwear that said Semper Fi on the back. And part of that was because Vasquez was a Marine to the core, but part of it, Kara suspected, was to mess with Alex's mind just a little tiny bit. Because Vasquez might be serious and faithful and all the things, but she also had a sharp sense of humor.

Supergirl paused in the air above LCorp, where she always ended up, every night, whether or not Lena was still at work. It was like magnetic North and pigeons.

"That's me," she muttered to herself. "Superpigeon!" It wasn't a horrible metaphor for herself. She was scrappy. She wasn't afraid of a fight. And it's not like she crapped on people's heads, although to be fair, she had considered it for a split second one time she saw Morgan Edge below.

And what on Earth Lena saw in her, Lena the peacock to her pigeon...

And Kara knew deep in her heart that her falcon sister also saw herself as a pigeon and saw Vasquez as the hawk, so she understood Alex's lack of confidence.

She wished they could all be cardinals. It was said that they mated for life.
Making the Diagnosis

Once Winn had finally gotten all the computers back up, he noted some disconcerting action in the desert, pretty much exactly where Reign's fortress had been before they had destroyed it.

It was back. And apparently there was at least one Kryptonian inhabiting it. He tapped his earbud. "Um, guys? Report in. And by report, I mean come to the command center because as J'onn would say events are eventuating..."

Alex showed up first, followed not long after by Supergirl striding in from the balcony, and Astra and Alura--the real one--coming from the labs.

"So here's the thing," said Winn. "The fortress is back and I'm pretty sure the new girl--"

"Serenity," said Alex. "Formerly known as Selena."

"Right. I'm pretty sure that's her at the fortress. But there is something else. The scan is going back and forth between saying the density is a Kryptonian body and saying, basically, that there is nothing there. Physically."

"Sounds like quantum," said Astra.

"Schroedinger's cat," Alex translated.

Winn considered that. "So something is and isn't there yet? Fantabulous."

"Can you imagine if we also had to deal with Reign at the same time?" said Supergirl.

Just then Lena walked slowly in, with Sam leaning heavily on her and looking weak. Lena said, "Unfortunately, I think we do."

Alex said, "Sam, you need to be resting."

Sam shook her head. "I need to be here. This involves me."

Lena said, "I know why Sam's sick." She showed them her tablet. "Okay, these are Sam's blood cells and these are Reign's. Sam's are getting weaker while Reign's are getting stronger. They share a symbiotic nonlocal entanglement. Reign and Sam are still connected. Reign is back and she's getting stronger by the minute."

"But I destroyed the Worldkiller's blood," said Supergirl.

"Vasquez nearly gave her life to stop them," said Winn. Alex looked away for a second and then brought her frown back to bear on the conversation.

Lena said, "Well, I don't know about that, but it looks like they have it."

Astra said, "But if Reign is getting stronger, then couldn't the opposite be true? If Sam gets stronger, then Reign will get weaker?"

"Yes," said Lena. "My thoughts exactly."

"But how?" asked Alex. "Nothing we've tried has worked."
Astra and Alura shared a look. Tentatively, Alura said, "The fountains of Lilith. Years ago, when I sentenced Jinda Kal Rozz to Fort Rozz, she spouted about vengeance. One fountain brought infinite strength, the other, infinite weakness. She spoke of a woman born of the fountain with the power of destruction."

Slowly, Supergirl said, "Reign was created in the dark valley and she doesn't get her powers from the yellow sun. Maybe she got them from this fountain."

"Then it's settled," said Sam, looking grim. "I'm going back to the dark valley."

"Sam," said Alex. "You're too weak."

"But that will be painful, with the electric shock..." said Lena.

"I have to do it for my daughter. I promise you," said Sam. "I am not dying today."

//

Reign woke up lying on a bed of hot coals. She was in the fortress that had been destroyed, or possibly it was new. There was an enormous cauldron glowing red just a few yards away.

She pushed herself up to see two things that made a certain kind of sense even though they were surprising: a sword carved with Kryptonian spells, and the woman from the computer in the old fortress. Except this woman was flesh and blood, standing right in front of her. Her hands were red with blood that Reign thought might just be her own.

"You're real," said Reign.

"Of course," said the woman. "I made you."

"Is it time? Are we going to finally complete our destiny, transform this world into New Krypton?"

"Our time is at hand!"

//

Alura felt unmoored. Back when Kara was a child, Earth was known as one of the more backward planets. That was one of the reasons Jor-El had chosen it as the destination for his son, that and its yellow sun. But when word had come to Alura and her husband that Kara's pod had been forced into the Phantom Zone, Alura had torn her hair. She had thought that her daughter having powers on the backward planet would enable her to do great things, or at least stay safe. She had not meant to send her only child to a lonely death.

And grief was strange. Where her husband had redoubled his efforts to finish the shield for Argo before the planet finished tearing itself apart, Alura had gone cold, keeping people calm, saving as many as she could, and trying so hard not to look back. What was done was done.

And now here she was walking on Earth beside her grown daughter, and trying to save this world from a menace of Kryptonian making. The gravity was light here. She felt like she could push off from the floor of the DEO at any moment, and float through the building like a leaf on the wind.

Instead, she followed Kara down to the medical bay where Kara's friend Sam was being prepared to go back to the Valley of Jiru.

The woman in the black suit approached them.
Alura said to Kara, "Your friend Sam is strong."

The woman said, "She's fighting for her daughter, like you."

Kara grinned. "Mom, this is Alex!"

Alura embraced Alex. "You and your family saved my daughter. I am in your debt."

"Well," said Alex, "sometimes I think she saved us."

They went to join Sam, Kara on one side of her and Alex on the other. The dark-haired woman tapped away at her tablet.

Alex said to Ruby, "You might not want to be here for this..."

"No," said Ruby. "I'm staying."

Sam took Ruby's hand. "Your mom's a badass. I got this. But it's going to be painful."

Ruby shrugged then went to stand between Alex and Lena. Alex put her arm over Ruby's shoulders in a protective gesture.

Lena hit the button.

//

The cauldron in the fortress roiled with red energy. Serenity raised her hands, smiling at Reign who stood on the opposite side with the sword.

"Let us begin." And she began to chant.

Reign rose into the air, then dove, sword-first, into the cauldron.

//

The DEO shuddered from the force of the earthquake, an eight on the Richter scale, Winn said.

The agents scrambled toward the command center. Winn looked at the output the DEO computers were pouring out: "natural" disasters happening all at once all around the world: earthquakes, tsunamis, superstorms.

"Dude, this is terra-forming. Think climate change on nuclear-powered steroids. We could be facing a genesis level event within hours! One hundred percent chance of Reign! These things aren't just registering on the Earth's surface. They're coming from the core."

J'onn came striding in with his father, who was holding the staff of Hieronymus. "We're not going to let that happen," he said.

"Supergirl, Astra: damage control. Alex, get every agent we have boots on the ground, evacuating. Winn, I want you monitoring it from here. I'm going to find out where this is coming from and stop it!"

"Wait!" said M'yrrn. "Take me to the nexus point. If I shapeshift into the Earth, bond with it, I can stop this."

"It'll rip you apart," said J'onn.
"This planet is my son's home. I intend to save it with him."

Supergirl turned to her aunt and her mother. "Let's go."

Alex turned to Winn. "Get Imra out there in her ship. There are things she can do from the ship that even Supergirl can't do."

"Aye, aye," said Winn with a slightly maniacal joviality. As they left, he muttered under his breath, "Guys, don't die out there."
Every member of the High Council of Argo was, strictly speaking, a commander of a regiment of the Defense Forces, with a military title and a uniform, whether or not they actually had combat training. Alura did not.

But when it had become clear that she needed to accompany her sister and daughter to Earth, it was clear to her that her ceremonial uniform was much more appropriate for potential combat than the long dresses she favored for daily wear. It didn't occur to her that her daughter or sister would take her battle-appropriate garb to mean that she was prepared for battle. She could only assume that Astra figured that a few decades leading a broken planet through space would also come with combat training.

They were both wrong, but it wasn't until she was on the ground with them, using her yellow-sun-enabled superpowers for the very first time that it even occurred to her that they might have such expectations.

The laser eyes thing wasn't too hard to pull off. Apparently, shear terror gave her beginner's luck. She could incinerate falling masonry with the best of them.

Kara smiled at her. "Nice one, Mom!"

That gave her confidence. then she turned to see the all-too human Alex Danvers shooting at the aliens, jumping onto a car, electrifying it to create a shield so that the next huge flying chunk of masonry disintegrated on contact.

Well, she thought. If the human could do this with no powers, so could she.

//

J'onn flew with his father to Madagascar, where the nexus of the event was tearing the small island country apart. They landed on a sere piece of desert that was cracking under the tectonic stresses from below, and flames were shooting up from the cracks.

M'yrnn said calmly, "Our time is short, it seems."

"Give them all to me!" urged J'onn. "The memories. I can take it!"

"We haven't the time. If only we had begun when I told you-- But there is one, the only one that really matters." He grasped J'onn's arm with surprising strength, saying, "This is the dawn of our kind.

J'onn saw Mars as he only barely ever remembered it, green and unscathed.

M'yrnn said, "This is the dawn of our kind. She was the first keeper of the sacred scrolls. This is the moment she received them."

And J'onn saw a female Green Martian, tall and proud, bow down before a Green Martian Titan, their god, Hieronymus, whose eyes flamed with justice.

//

"Supergirl, the waterfront!" Winn yelled into the comms in her ear.
"Okay, we're on our way!" responded Supergirl, as she banked, with Astra and Alura flying in her wake.

"Help is on the way!" yelled Winn.

Supergirl recognized Imra's voice in her ear next. "You didn't think I'd miss out on the fun, did you? You freeze that wave up and I'll knock it down!"

"Freeze breath!" yelled Supergirl, and she and Astra blew at the oncoming tidal wave, while Alura huffed and puffed and looked confused.

But Kara and her aunt were a good team and they froze the enormous rising wave into a mountain of ice. "Clear!" yelled Supergirl, and she and Astra grabbed Alura by the arms and flew her away from the chilly confection.

Astra's ship appeared and shot a blast of energy into the ice, blowing it sky high and ocean deep.

//

J'onn shook off the shock of the historical memory his father had shared. He regained his sight of things around him and told his dad, "I'm not ready!"

But M'yrnn said, "I had a good life. And I will always be with you, J'onn. Always. There is one rule taught among the people: promote peace and be happy, my son."

The cascades of flames rising from the cracks in the earth rose higher. M'yrnn picked up the staff, squeezed his son's arm one last time, smiled, and transformed with the flash of red, and sank into the Earth.

J'onn fell to his knees, sobbing.

And gradually, the fire withdrew and the cracks came together. The Earth stopped shaking.

//

Alex strode up the stairs of the federal courthouse, to join Supergirl, Alura, Astra and James in Lillian's Krypto-suit as the Earth's shuddering faded and the city's chaos came to a halt.

She knew from Earth X that there were times for heroes to pose, to remind onlookers of who had saved them, in the hopes that they would remember in the future and not turn against their saviors as humans sometimes did.

This was one of those times.

Alex looked at Supergirl, who said quietly, "M'yrnn saved us."

//

Winn watched Papa Bear/Space Dad hug his girls, including Astra and Alura in his hug. He came over, wanting to break the news gently, but Supergirl asked him very directly, "Did you track down the source of the terra-forming, or Reign's location? And what about Sam?"

"Nothing yet on either front. But she's going to come through this, Kara. You know it. She's going to be able to fight Reign."
Sam woke in the fog-damped Valley of Jiru, with a voice in her head, familiar but unrecognizable, telling her to run, so she ran. She ran until she tripped and fell, her heart pounding with terror. Behind her a branch broke and she turned, gasping, to see the form of Patricia Arias. Well, she remembered her dead coming to haunt her from before, the people she had killed. She should have expected this.

She scrambled backwards. "Go away!"

But the image said, "No, Sam. Shhhh. I'm trying to help you. It's not safe here."

"No, you're dead! This is a mirage. I've been here before."

But Patricia said, "I'm not a mirage. I'm your mother."

Sam pushed herself off the ground. "Get out of my head!" She turned and ran.

She was out of breath when she reached it. "The fountain of Lilith!" Gasping, she threw herself down to look at the two pools of water, one dark green, the other pulsing slightly with a red light.

Green, she thought, was the color of kryptonite. Red was the color of laser eyes. She dropped down to her knees before the green pool, cupped her hands to gather water and raised it to her lips.

"No!" shouted Patricia, who had finally caught up with her. "That's the wrong well!" She gestured to the other pool. "This is the fountain that gives strength. That water will kill you!"

"You're lying to me! Just please stop!"

"This, this is the water that gave Reign strength. I failed you as a mother. And I lost you. And I've lived with such regret ever since. But now I have another chance and now, all that remains of me is my love for you." Tears trickled from her eyes.

Sam was crying too, but she sobbed, "I can't make a mistake. Not just for me, not even just for Ruby. The world, my home..."

Patricia picked up a stone cup and filled it with the water from the fountain she claimed to be good. "Drink this. Now. Trust me, Sam."

And Sam drank.
Deep under the Earth's surface, Reign felt the opposing force under the heady fire of the core of the planet and was amazed. Humans could not do this. She knew of no aliens that inhabited Earth who could do this. The power of a Worldkiller and the sword should have reigned supreme. And yet--

She turned in the churning lava and hurried back to the fortress as the Earth's core gradually solidified in her wake. How would she explain?

As she rose from the red cauldron, she heard Serenity say, "You have returned!

"The Earth's core tried to hold me captive! But I broke through!"

"As I knew my daughter would!" said Serenity. "We must restart the cauldron, and we will, so that we can watch this Earth burn so that Krypton may rise again!"

//

Alex wanted to sit by Sam's side, but there was someone else lying in the medical bay who drew her by her very stillness to sit there and hope in a future she could not clearly visualize and pray to a god she wasn't sure she still believed in.

Lena entered with Dr. Hamilton. Alex was vaguely aware of them murmuring to each other, but she didn't catch what they said and, quite frankly, she was too tired and stressed to care.

Dr. Hamilton left with a squeeze to Alex's shoulder. Lena came and stood in front of Alex.

"Talk to me," said Lena quietly.

Slowly, Alex said, "You know, it took me forever to find Maggie. And so what am I supposed to do? Hope that I fall in love again with someone who understands why I take the risks I take in my job? Because my job is not conducive to a long-term relationship that doesn't include sudden death as a likely outcome. Although, if we don't stop Reign, I guess this is all a moot point..."

Lena nodded. "True, but you've identified what you want, and that's half the battle. People like you and me, we do what it takes to get what we want. And when--when!-- we defeat Reign, I have no doubt that you'll figure it out."

Alex nodded, squeezed Lena's (surprisingly hard) bicep, and walked back to the command center.

During the months that Vasquez was away on her mission, Alex had found the notebook she had been writing in sitting at her post. A pen marked the last page written on, which had simply said, "FLYING MONKEYS?? There's no place like home..."

Alex had left the notebook on Vasquez's console as a visual anchor while she was gone. And now Vasquez had only been back for a few days, but the notebook had been moved, probably because although she was not supposed to have come back on duty until the following week, supervillains had drawn her in.

And now she lay in surgery.

Alex felt like someone had left a bowling ball in her stomach. She couldn't lose Vasquez. She picked up the notebook to flip through it and feel some comfort from Vasquez's very clear printing. She
flipped to the last page, expecting to see nothing after the Wizard of Oz reference, but there, in different colored ink, Vasquez had carefully printed:

Something something I can't remember
When the small rain doth rain.
Christ, that my love were in my arms
And I in my bed again! (16th century? author?)

Very carefully, Agent Danvers set the notebook down, gave a frowning nod to the other agent in the command center, and strode across the room's expanse and around the corner. She opened the door to the electrical closet that other agents often called the "phone booth" because Supergirl often changed there.

Alex stepped inside, closed the door behind her, sank to the floor and wept.

//

Lena heard the call over the comms for lead agents to gather in the command center. She turned to Dr. Hamilton and said, "I have to go. Do you have this?"

And Hamilton gave her a single, confident nod.

Lena strode into the command center and took her place at the round computer thing.

Astra was saying, "Kara's pod is near a power center, possibly the source of the terra-forming."

Supergirl groaned. "But Sam is still unconscious. We need her around if we're to stand a chance against this Reign."

Lena said, "I didn't want to tell you this, but I think I could end Reign with a lethal dose of kryptonite. Now I wouldn't do that when Sam and Reign were connected but--"

"Oh, thank Rao," said Supergirl. "We've found a way out. She's grown invincible to everything else that would normally hurt a Kryptonian. I hate it but--"

J'onn leaned against the console, saying slowly, "I don't like it either. But if all else fails, we have no other recourse. We do what we must."

Supergirl hung her head. "Very well. Whatever it takes."

//

Alura stood on the balcony of the DEO, staring out at these alien Earth skyscrapers. She was still flushed from the fight, but it felt good. Her sister smiled as she approached.

"So you like that taste that you got of it? Being super?"

Alura nodded. "It was thrilling. You will have to help me learn the freeze breath."

"It takes practice." She paused, then said, "Did you like it enough to consider staying? Help the humans with their difficulties of your making?"

"I had not considered that, but the problem is that Argo needs me. The Council is full of bright, well educated people, who mean well, but they are not good at making the hard decisions. That was Selena's and my role, to push them to do the painful things."
"But you will stay until this threat is contained?"

"Of course. And I have to admit, fighting alongside the two of you, and flying!" She shook her head in disbelief.

Astra just laughed.

//

Sam still wasn't sure.

She'd drunk a full bowl of the water and she still felt like shit, as she had when she had arrived in the Valley of Jiru this last time. Patricia encouraged her to drink even more, had sung that lullaby about the pretty little horses. And Sam had drunk just a little bit more, and then just a little bit more than that.

Suddenly, she started to feel it. "It, it's working. It's you. I'm so sorry I doubted you."

"Sam, I'm so sorry for everything, for all the pain that I caused you..."

Sam wiped the tears from her mother's eyes. "It's okay..."

"Now," said her mother. "I need you to do something. I need you to hit me."

"What? Of course not! It's bad enough that I killed you once!"

"Exactly. I'm not really here any more than you are. But you're going to need to bring me with you, and this is the only way to do it. It's old magic. I love you, Sam. And I need you to haul off and hit me and then bring home with you whatever I become. You'll know what to do."

"I am so sorry," said Sam. Then she pulled back her fist and hit her mother in the face.

There was a flash of blue light and a clatter on the ground. Where Patricia had been standing was a large metal flask. And suddenly Sam knew what to do, and she did it.

And then the valley was gone. Sam woke up floating above the med bed, holding a flask in her left hand.

Her friends were all around her. Ruby said, "Mom, you're Super!"

Sam pushed off the medical cuff. "Where are Supergirl and--"

Alex said, "They went after Reign and Serenity."

And Sam used her superspeed to disappear.
Serenity raised her hands. "Let us begin again."

Reign nodded, raising the sword above her head as she had before. She leaped into the air and then dove into the cauld--

SLAM!

She bounced off and tumbled to the ground. "What is this?"

"A force field!" growled Serenity. "They're coming."

//

The Superfriends flew to the new Fortress and paused for a moment, as they sized up their opponents. It was five against two, superfriends in the lead. But that didn't guarantee anything, and it was the whole planet that was at stake. And Reign alone had nearly killed Supergirl at Christmas. With J'onn, M'gann, Astra and Alura, Supergirl felt less nervous. In fact she was pissed. That always made fighting easier.

Supergirl charged Reign, who swung the sword at her. She ducked it and punched Reign in the ribs. Nearby Alura threw a punch at Serenity, but the woman caught her arm and threw her over her shoulder just in time to block a punch from J'onn. Serenity went to pull Alura up, but Astra was between them in a split second, punching Serenity in the face.

M'gann flew over to Alura and pulled her up to standing. M'gann said, "Stay back! If you telegraph like that, you'd get yourself killed in my bar, much less here!"

Supergirl dodged the sword again and while Reign was fighting the force of her own backswing, Kara lunged and grabbed her and took off into the night sky. In the back of her mind that housed Kara the writer, she was peripherally aware of the irony of the peaceful starry desert night. The rest of her was filled with rage over what Reign had done to National City in general and Sam in particular. So as they flew together like mating eagles, she punched the crap out of Reign.

Reign got behind Supergirl and tried to crush her in her arms, but Supergirl elbowed her in the gut and then they fell away from each other, crashing into Imra's ship on their way toward the ground and disrupting her force field.

Serenity and Supergirl trade punches and went crashing through the roof of the new fortress. Supergirl landed badly, with Reign getting her in a chokehold. Her friends were still trying to get Serenity into the kryptonite cuffs that J'onn had brought, but Alura and Astra ran to her aid. Reign screamed, but they had the earplugs that Winn had created to they got close enough to try to pull Reign off Supergirl.

"You cannot win!" Reign growled. "There is no prison you can build that can contain me! There is no one of equal power on this planet that can kill me!"

From behind them, Supergirl heard Sam's voice. "That's what you think."

//

Sam had spent nine months feeling confused, afraid, frustrated and powerless. But now all of that
was over. She had flown (flown!) to the desert with only one thought: to kill the woman who had taken her body, her power, and very nearly her life, who had threatened Ruby, tortured Supergirl and generally made the past year a living hell for Sam.

Then, as she flew off the DEO balcony, blazing a trail of fire toward the desert, she let all of that go and focused on just one thing. Ending Reign.

She flew through one of the two huge holes in the fortress's strange roof and landed in the midst of an epic battle. Immediately, she had seen the sword. She switched the flask from her left hand to her right and picked up the sword. Reign was trying to choke the life out of Supergirl.

Not this time.

"There is no one of equal power on this planet that can kill me!" said Reign.

Sam said. "That's what you think." And she thrust the sword through Reign's body, only barely avoiding skewering Supergirl in the process.

Reign screamed, and let go of Supergirl, who fell, gasping for breath. Sam pulled the sword out. Reign turned and punched Sam in the face, making Sam drop the sword on her way across the chamber. And as she struggled to rise, she saw the rage on Supergirl's face as she backfisted Reign into the huge cauldron boiling with red energy. And she saw Reign rise up out of it, her laser eyes firing out of control as if she were blind, hitting everything she turned toward, hitting Sam, Supergirl and Alura before she finally sank into the fiery pit and disappeared.

Sam lay there gasping, while Supergirl stood shakily and went to where J'onn was mumbling as he pulled himself up from the rocks. "Supergirl. You didn't see it, but your mother gave her life to protect me."

There was a sound from the cauldron, and they turned to see Reign, her face laced with hot red light, rising from the fire of the cauldron. Red sparks were coming out of the hole the sword had made, front and back, and she looked just as shaky as Supergirl and just as filled with rage. Reign rose into the air and landed between where Sam still lay and where Supergirl stood.

Supergirl growled, "Why can't you just die?"

And Reign laughed. "Not until everyone you love has died."

And something in Sam snapped. She stood, grabbed Reign's shoulder, and punched her in the face. "This is for Ruby!"

Reign pushed her self up and Sam kicked in her in the face. "This one's for Patricia!"

Reign fell again, but dragged herself back, only for Sam to punch her one more time. "And this? This is for me!"

This time Reign slid across the chamber, gasping for breath. Sam yelled, "Supergirl, hold her down!"

Supergirl sped over to Reign and held her down. Sam pulled the flask out of her belt and poured the water from the fountain of Lillith down Reign's throat. They were both thrown back as a billowing cloud of ash and red sparks poured out of Reign's body.

She stood, shaky and bewildered. "What have you done to me?"

Dark clouds of Kryptonian demons flew around her, calling out hte names of her dead, those she had
brutalized and massacred. There were dozens, then scores, then hundreds, and they surrounded her in a cloud of black and then they all disappeared, and Reign was gone.

//

Supergirl watched as Reign disappeared. Kryptonian folklore said the demons would eat her soul, or that she would wander the bottom layer of chaos, hungry, angry and alone for all eternity. Either way, she would not return to Earth to plague any of them ever again. She looked around and saw Astra putting the kryptonite cuffs on Serenity.

Sam saw it too. She looked around at J'onn and M'gann tottering toward each other, Supergirl staring at an unmoving Alura lying on the ground, not breathing. Astra said, "Ms. Arias. Do you have any more of that water left?"

Sam shook the flask and heard the tiny splash inside. "Not much."

Astra put out her hand. "It may be enough."

Sam handed her the flask. Astra turned with superspeed, punched Serenity in the gut and when she opened her mouth to gasp, poured the last few drops of the water in. Sparks flew off her as they had flown off Reign, but no demons came to feast on her. Astra shrugged.

She turned to her niece. "Do you wish to carry your enemy or your mother?"

Supergirl looked at her wearily. She knew the order of precedence for such occasions, but for her life, she couldn't remember what it was. "Advise me, Mother's Sister."

"If you will let me, as your general, I will take this one. Unless you feel that Director J'onnz should have that honor. Then you should carry our kin to her launching place. I will conduct the rite, and we shall send her off together."

Supergirl bowed her head. "That sounds right..."

//

It was a mournful cortege that flew home that night, carrying the prisoner and the fallen hero. When the six of them landed on the balcony, Alex was there already, with a detachment of armed agents to escort Serenity into containment, and a gurney draped in green, the color of life, to take Alura to the med bay, where they could prepare her for her funeral. M'gann, J'onn and Astra walked with the gurney toward medical, and Supergirl fell into Alex's arms, sobbing uncontrollably.

The other agents in the command center stood quietly watching. They respected the Danvers sisters. They respected an agent's grief. And they all swore silently to themselves to work harder, fight harder, for Supergirl, since she had given up so much for them
Battles of Expectations

Chapter Summary

So close to the end!

Astra allowed Dr. Hamilton and Alex to help her prepare Alura for burial in space, then went to find her niece. Alex had said that Kara had stayed on the balcony, talking to J'onn, her Space Dad. Astra liked the Martians, liked how they had taken care of Kara, just like the way the Danvers had taken her in so many years before. It comforted her that Kara would always have family.

She approached the balcony. "Kara. Niece. Dear girl."

Supergirl turned, and it was very clear to Astra that this woman in the cape and boots was every bit as much Supergirl as she was Kara Zor-El, maybe more.

And more than that, she was Kara Danvers. Something that would never have happened if Alura had not made yet another stupid, painful judgment call that had actually turned out to be for the best for millions, if not billions, of people. Kind of like sending Astra herself off to a prison off world just in time for their world to combust. Astra had not told her sister that she forgave her, maybe because until just now, she hadn't. But Astra knew that Rao knew her heart and would tell Alura and bathe her in his everlasting light...

Supergirl turned. "Astra," she said. The tears were gone from her voice. Bless Alex Danvers.

Formally, Astra saluted, the salute of a soldier to a general, or a general to a supreme leader or council of leaders. She saw Supergirl's surprised look. So the girl remembered.

"We should wait the required three days, and then conduct the rite of sending. With your permission, as the senior female, I would like to conduct the rite myself."

"Of course!"

"Then I will observe the period of mourning with you."

"Thank you..."

"We should teach your sister and cousin our ways so that they are not lost here on Earth. Argo remembers, but wherever there are Kryptonians, there should be our way, remembered."

"I agree."

"After that, I will return to Argo with Selena, and she will stand trial for her crimes there. And then, if they will have me, I will stay. Alura said that the Council has no stomach for difficult decisions. With your mother gone, they will need me." She said it without pride. It was simply a fact.

"I'll be sorry to see you go..." said Kara in a small voice.

"I will visit. Your sister mentioned a holiday of thanks when family gathers. I would like to meet this Eliza Danvers, and hopefully someday, Jeremiah."
"I hope so too."

"And I will only be a few light years away, so you also could visit me."

"I'd like that."

"I have taught your agents how to fight with the lance blasters of the Daxamites. Your sister can lead them into battle, or Agent Vasquez, the small Marine, if and when she recovers."

Supergirl looked away quickly and Astra noted the tears she wiped from the corner of her eyes. Astra said, "Do not give up hope for that one. She is strong. And she has many reasons to live, not the least, your sister."

Supergirl nodded, still looking away as she tried to school her face.

"One thing only I would ask of you, as your only female kin."

Kara turned to look at her, and it was--despite the cape and boots--clearly her young niece Kara Zor-El looking back at her. "Anything."

"When you decide to wed Ms. Luthor, please, I would very much like to be there. I have read about the customs of Earth humans, and with no Earth father, it would be closest to Kryptonian customs if I were the one to walk with you. If you would prefer your Earth mother to do this for you, then of course, I would acquiesce."

Kara laughed, finally letting some tears fall. "Or one of you on either side of me!"

Astra nodded, smiling. "These things are of the future, but when the distances between family are great, it helps to speak of them ahead of time."

Kara nodded. "Thank you. For everything. I'm so glad that Alex didn't kill you permanently."

"As am I." She sighed. "And now I must bathe before saying the first set of prayers for the dead. If you will take the prayers for the second day?"

"Of course."

Astra nodded and turned to walk away and then stopped. "Your sister..." she said hesitantly.

"Yes?"

"She described non-ritual embraces called, I think, hogs?"

"Hugs?" Kara grinned. "Yep. One of the best parts of Earth. Come here!"

And they hugged each other hard, not the last two Kryptonians in the solar system, or the last two of their family, but close enough now to want to make every touch count.

//

Ruby was exhausted, but in a really good way. She had stayed by Lena's side while her mother was gone, and Lena had told her stories about her brother and mother, stories about the good times (mostly Lex) and stories about the... other times. Ruby had studied the Holocaust in school, so she knew what genocide was. She had never thought she would ever meet somebody related to anybody who had actually tried it for themselves. In comparison, Reign was... less horrible.
Lena had said, "You can pick your friends. You can pick your family of choice. Blood family is complicated. Blood family with alien DNA? Please. Can you imagine if my brother could deflect bullets?"

And Ruby liked Lena more for not trying to shield her from horrible things the way her mother and Alex sometimes had.

So when Sam and the others came back from the desert, Ruby had glommed onto her mother like a barnacle while Lena had taken yet more blood and done yet more tests. Sam told her the story of the fight, what Patricia had done in the Valley of Jiru and how it had allowed her to best her alter ego, destroying her forever.

Ruby was going to sleep much better from now on because of that, for sure.

And when the med techs had released Sam, they had made their way up to the command center, where Lena and Alex were talking very seriously about something, probably, thought Ruby, about poor Supergirl's dead mother. She wondered where Kara Danvers had gone, but assumed she would be with James at CatCo. Here were her two heroes. She ran up and hugged first Alex and then, to Lena's surprise, Lena.

And Ruby (like many of the other women in her life) never did things by halves.

"Oh my goodness!" said Alex, the badass agent.

"Oh, well, okay," said Lena, the superscientist.

Her mom said, "I came here to thank you, but I think Ruby just did that for the both of us."

"Yeah!" said Alex.

Ruby said, "You made me feel safe when everything was horrible. And you made me have faith that my mom would get better. And I don't know what I would have done without you."

Alex smiled, "Well, you were a pretty great roomie... So..." She turned to Lena. "You want to give the good news?"

Lena said, "Sam, all the blood tests came back and they are normal. There is no trace of any Kryptonian DNA. You are one hundred percent human."

Sam hugged Ruby and then pulled Lena in, and then Alex, who rested her chin on Ruby's head.

//

J'onn and M'gann had stayed in their Green forms, capes and all, to act as a ceremonial guard of honor for Alura as she was wheeled down to medical. Then M'gann had departed and J'onn had transformed back into Hank and returned for a little while to the command center. And Alex had, after helping Kara, followed. So she saw when his jaw stiffened and he quickly walked out of the room. She followed him down to the training room, where he sat cross-legged, tears streaming out of his eyes. She sat down across from him, her own mind awash with grief and pain and relief and physical and emotional exhaustion.

She knew that what he needed to hear was words of comfort, but she had been stretched just a little too far, especially not being at the fortress when her sister could have been killed, but also not wanting to leave Ruby. Not wanting to leave Vasquez.
"I don't know how much longer, I can do this, J'onn. I put my life on the line every day. And every day, I run the risk of losing it. And I feel like I haven't even had the chance to really live it yet. I'm afraid that if I don't make a move soon, that if I don't reach out and take a hold of my future, to what my heart wants, then I'm never going to be happy. So. That's it. I want to give notice. So that I can find my new beginning. And I can have love."

Instead of frowning, as she expected, J'onn smiled. He said, "You're a hero. It's in your blood. Baked in, as you said before. You can't resign. Because I want to promote you. This year, I have had the most priceless gift. I found my father. I lived with him. I learned from him. He reminded me that the Martian way is to live amongst the people, and to help them, not hiding behind walls like I have been here, but with open hands, compassion..."

Alex stared. "You're stepping down?"

"I am. But I'm not leaving you. I would never leave my family. Alex!" he took her hands in his. "I want you to run this place, be the Director. With you in charge, I feel that the DEO will stay on the right path, protecting this planet and helping those who cannot help themselves. And... being in charge, you won't have to put yourself in the field all day, risking your life. You don't have to deny any part of yourself to be complete. You can be with someone who loves you. All on your own terms."

He stood and pulled her up to standing. "Congratulations, Director!"

She shook her head. "That's not how I saw this going..."

He pulled her into a hug, laughing.
Supergirl watched as Astra shook hands with the DEO agents she had trained. It was weeks after the fight and the funeral, and she was still a little numb. Agent Vasquez stood next to her, on crutches and a little pale. But she had said that Astra was one of the best leaders that she had ever met and she wanted to see her off if she could, even if that meant that she would have to go back to medical and sleep for a week afterwards.

And when she heard that, Supergirl was even prouder of her aunt. Because Vasquez was only human, but she was hard as nails.

When Astra finished shaking hands with the agents, she turned back to her niece. "Kara Zor-El. Kara Danvers. I am so proud of you. I will miss you, my niece." She pulled Kara into an embrace, squeezing her hard.

"I love you," said Kara.

"I love you," said Astra. "I will bring Selena back with me. She will stand a just trial. You might be called as a witness, but..."

"Good."

Kara heard Lena's steps behind her and brightened at the sound. Lena handed a silver case to Astra. "It's the Harunel. Your niece asked me to make it. And the recipe to make more."

"Thank you," said Supergirl.

Astra nodded gratefully. "With this Harunel, Argo will survive, but I hate to depend on it. There's so many things we don't know about it: its uses, its powers, dangers... I'm so glad that none of it will be left on Earth."

In the periphery of her vision, Supergirl saw Lena look away, but she didn't take note of it.

Alex approached Astra with her arms outstretched. Astra, by now well schooled in "hogs" embraced her. "Thank you," she whispered, "for what you've done for Kara, for what you will always do. Thank you!"

Alex just nodded, trying to hold back tears.

Imra stood at the edge of the crowd of DEO agents, until Astra joined her, and then she straightened up. Astra said, "I swore I would get the other gladiators on the ship back to their homes. I do not regret the time spent with my family and new friends. But it is time I fulfilled my promise."

And Kara, Alex, J'onn, Winn and James, as well as a weak Vasquez on crutches, saluted Astra and Imra as they walked back to their ship, with Serenity in K-cuffs in their wake.
Kara was so relieved to get back to her apartment that she didn't even bother stripping off the supersuit before she pulled out the Starbucks coffee ice cream with the chocolate covered almonds. And she was a little surprised by the knock on her door, but her x-ray vision showed her Lena, so she sped to open the door and engulf her girlfriend in a very careful hug.

"Here's to saving the world!" said Kara. "Again..."

Callie Torres put together the skirt-suit she planned to wear the following day, when there was a planned all-department meeting at the alien clinic and she would need to speak. She hated public speaking, hated it. But she had been reading about the recent battles with the Kryptonian witches and the people she had learned to call the Superfriends. And fuck, if they could do that? She could totally do this.

She might still vomit the night before, but that was nothing. National City was a different kind of place than Seattle or Manhattan. It was a place for heroes. And she had completely rebuilt a woman's leg. A superhero's leg.

And that had made her feel the way she had the first time she had marched in a Pride parade. She had felt a little bit off the last few months before that. But once she had realized that she wasn't the woman she had thought she was? Once she had realized that she was... something else? The Pride festivities had made her realize that she was exactly where she needed to be. Moving to National City made her feel exactly like that.

She belonged here.

Alex called Kara. "Are you free tonight?"

"Duh. We just saved NC from Spring Chaos! Krypto is bouncing off the walls. C'mon over!"

"And Lena...?"

"Back at work. But in a good way. Plenty of space for you tonight, as long as you don't mind Krypto on your knees when you sleep...."

So Alex came over, relieved. She really liked Lena more and more, but she and Kara had not had a sister night in weeks. Maybe months. And that just wasn't right or good on soooo many levels.

They sat on the couch together. Kara said, "And how about J'onn? Leaving the DEO? I did not see that coming."

"Yeah," agreed Alex.

"And what about you? Director Danvers? Just so brave..."

"Yeah, look at you, okay? Your mom dies and you are bouncing back way faster than I would ever have expected."

Kara shook her head. "I grieved her before. For years. For more than a decade. And then I had her back for a few days? I just realized that everything that makes me me is here, with you. On this
couch. With this insanely huge pizza that we just downed.

"There's no pizza on Argo is there?"

"No!"

"That's a shame." She paused. "You have no idea how happy I am that you didn't go back."

Kara shook her head. "My life is here. And Clark is getting married in a couple of weeks, and then there's Pride. And I want to get back to writing about food again. Reporting the news is no fun when you have to live through the battles first and then a second time in writing."

"Food is better," Alex agreed.

//

Winn invited James over for an epic Call of Duty battle and pulled out his beer glasses and a box of blueberries. James took off his jacket and gave him a funny look.

"Dude, blueberries with the beer?"

Winn handed him a bottle of blueberry craft beer. "Wait til you see it. You throw some blueberries in and the fizz makes them rise to the top and then sink and then rise again..." He poured his own glass full of beer and then added the blueberries. "See?"


"Told you! And there's chips, too."

As they were setting up the game, Winn took his courage in both hands. "So, um, did you see the notes from Lois and Clark?"

"Yeah, the wedding is back on again. I should air out my good suit."

"Yeah, so do you have a plus-one?"

"How can I? All of our women friends are lesbians, including my ex. Aren't you going with Holtzman?"

"That was the plan..."

"What happened?"

"Well, you know that Kara is doing white tie and tails as Clark's Best Person, right?"

James frowned. For years, he had assumed that would be his role. He shrugged.

Winn pushed onward. "And that Maggie and Lucy and Alex will be wearing tuxes too? You know, to--how did Lucy put it?--to mess with Clark's 'little Kansas head.'"

James grinned. "Lena too?"

"Somehow I doubt it... But man, I would pay to see that. She would totally rock the Greta Garbo..."

They both fell silent for a moment.

James said, "Well, what about Holtzy? I assume she probably already has her own bespoke tux."
"Probably, but she said it might be funnier if you went with me, instead of her."

James laughed. "Oh my God. The look on Clark's face! She may have a point!"

"But not if you don't want to. I mean, Metropolis was your home too, for years, and there may be pictures that get out. I mean we'll be in a room full of journalists and photographers."

"And soldiers, because of her dad..."

"So I would totally get it if you felt like it would damage your reputation."

"What do you mean? Because folks might think I was gay or bi or something?"

"Yeah. That."

"Dude, it's 2018. Nobody cares anymore. There are enough gay football players and Marines. Only the crazy ultraconservatives give a rat's ass anymore."

"Um, like General Lane."

"All the more reason to do it." James loaded his plate with chips and salsa and picked up the Playstation controls. "I'm in. And thank Holtzy for me. I hate going to weddings alone."

"I can't imagine you've gone to many alone."

"My relationships tend to fall apart in the spring, right after I just spent serious money on a romantic dinner for Valentine's Day and right before I need a date for a wedding."

"Well, that sucks."

"Oh, yeah." James turned to look at Winn. "I have a question though. I've been thinking about giving up CatCo. Lena doesn't need me there, and I really miss Guardian. I've been thinking about going back to the DEO."

Winn grinned. "That would be amazing. We could work together again."

"I know, right? We could go back to kicking some righteous ass together!"

They high-fived.

//

In the weeks that followed, Kara started bringing Krypto to the DEO place with all the interesting-smelling humans. It was an exciting place. The center where everybody stood around making noises at each other was his favorite place, because that was where Kara and her sister, Whistler, were most of the time, and that was where Scruffy sneaked him the peanutbuttercrackers that made his muzzle orange. Krypto liked orange!

There was also the place for running obstacles and playing, and that was where he usually found Sparky, with her leg brace, and Salty with her crutches working to grow stronger, as Kara told him. That was also his favorite place, and everybody wore black there and smelled more interesting. Salty still smelled salty, but it was different, not sad, and he was happy about that because he really liked her, and he knew that Whistler really liked her too, although she didn't have a tail to wag when Salty and she were in the same room, which was unfortunate, thought Krypto. Humans really weren't built all that well.
But his favoritest thing was when Kara took him to LCorp. Then Very Serious fed him biscuits, and when Kara and Soft Hands and Beautiful Voice got done with their work, they would take him back to one of their Nests, and he would smell All The Things, and then they would feed him and then he would sleep at their feet, or sometimes in the living room if they were making noises, and sometimes if he was having bad dreams about the Phantom Zone, they would let him sleep between them.

And all in all, Spring Chaos aside, things were much better now than when it had been so cold outside. He didn't feel the need to run around licking everyone's face to make them feel better. He could just trot around the DEO or the different Nests (especially during the night of games), or jump up in people's laps and make them laugh.

The scary time was over. He was home, among his pack, and he never had to be alone again.

FINIS

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