The Lights That Guide Us

by jyou

Summary

Lena lives in a world of bright, indescribable colors. She walks calculated paths among webs of lasers radiating from every person she sees. She avoids large gatherings where the atmosphere becomes a dizzying mess of psychedelic flares and smoke, but she treasures every individual as the sum of their parts: the auras glowing tight around their wrists.

Her mother calls them “soul bonds,” a magical manifestation of the connection between souls that only their bloodline can see. Lena calls them “ribbons.”

This is about as S2 canon compliant as possible with the initial premise. M for language and intimacy.
Lena lives in a world of bright, indescribable colors. She walks calculated paths among webs of lasers radiating from every person she sees. She avoids large gatherings where the atmosphere becomes a dizzying mess of psychedelic flares and smoke, but she treasures every individual as the sum of their parts: the auras glowing tight around their wrists.

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Ribbons on the right wrist are always the most vibrant with numerous vertical bands of various colors contained within one broad ring, wondrous rainbows of other-worldly swatches symbolic of the connections forged with as many souls as one can meet in a lifetime. Some bands glow brighter and shift freely along the luminous bracelet as they hone in to the direction of their match. When the owner moves close enough to the loved one, a beam of colored light shoots from the identically-colored band and seamlessly blends with their partner’s.

A weak connection is frayed and dull, a tattered remnant from a love long lost or a freshly-sprouted thread that has yet to weave, and diffuses into a murky mist before meeting the other half. A strong connection is crisp with a nearly-tangible thickness that actively points in the direction of its match regardless of distance. Her mother says she’s seen bonds cross oceans and continents through jungles of wood and concrete just to be complete. Lena knows that will be the most beautiful thing she ever sees.

Regardless of however many colors the right-ribbon accumulates, its intensity can never match that on the left reserved for the one true soulmate bond, a single-hued ribbon flush against their skin. Lena was painfully blinded the first time she saw soulmates holding each other, their bond’s brightness amplified by their proximity. She cried loudly and furiously rubbed at her eyes before her mother had the chance to shield her. Lena never left the house without dark glasses again.

Her mother says Lena’s sight is the most powerful she’s heard of in generations. With a sly smile to her soulmate, she says it must be because she was born a Luthor. A powerful name with powerful blood can only produce a child as strong as Lena.

“But how come I can’t see my own ribbon?” Lena asks. “Everybody wears the ribbon of everybody else, but they never have their own.”

“Souls are but moons reflecting the light of their stars,” her mother answers wisely, her brogue accent strong in the centuries-old adage. “It’s not a perfect analogy because all the people a soul is connected to will have the same color for that soul which must mean we emanate an independent aura, but that’s what our family says.”

“Then shouldn’t I see my color on you?”

“The curse of the seer is the inability to be seen,” her mother recites. “We can see who is bonded to us,” she raises her left arm as evidence, a glowing green band shining an emerald beam towards the living room where Lena’s father rests, “but we have never seen the blend of our colors.”

Lena furrows her brow and holds her left wrist out as well. “But I can’t see anything at all.”

“That can be for any number of reasons,” her mother comforts with a smile. “Maybe they haven’t been born yet, or maybe they are on the other side of the world. Soulmate bonds are the strongest of
them all, but even they won’t show until you’re close enough. Your great-grandfather searched over 50 countries before he found his soulmate. He didn’t see as much as a photon until he was about 2500 miles close.”

Lena stomps her foot. “That’s so far! Mine has to be closer than that!”

Her mother takes Lena into her arms and squeezes her gently. “You’ll find them eventually. We always have. And, in the meantime, you have many other ribbons to weave.” She reaches for Lena’s right hand. Already, Lena has multiple wisps of various colors and intensities orbiting her wrist, not yet a complete ring floating and shimmering like translucent underwater flora suspended in the ocean. The same emerald green band is brightest and held fast towards the living room. Lena watches for a moment before shaking her head and looking back up at her mother.

“But what if I don’t have a soulmate?”

“Every soul has a mate,” her mother is quick to correct. “Although an unfortunate number of souls never meet, even the most distant bonds become white once their partner dies.”

Lena and her father wear matching white to her mother’s funeral.

Her father presents her with a large stuffed bear before announcing she would be meeting her new family. It’s soulless and hollow, but she clings to it all the same, and it cushions her head comfortably on the long trip to the Luthor estate.

He guides her through the heavy wooden doors and into a warm room of mahogany and burgundy occupied by a boy and an older woman. Their right-ribbons connect in a smooth gradient of amber to amethyst, still subdued from his young age but tightly wound together. Lena glances at her father’s wrist where a similar yellow-orange peeks out and meets his green from the woman. The ends barely touch, and the amber is threadbare with holes lacking any light at all. Lena compares it to the shadows of insects trapped in tree sap.

A dull orange thread settles on her wrist when her father introduces the woman as Lena’s new mother. When the boy calls out to her soon after, she finds a rich purple materializing quickly. He’s kind and teaches her with patience. Lena bests him in an hour, and he regards her checkmate with a smile.

Her new mother observes with a tighter smile, the same shape as Lex’s but stretched farther across her thin cheeks. Lena looks up hopefully.

“I really like this game.”

“Maybe you are a Luthor after all.”
The orange brightens a bit. That’s something her true mother might have said. Maybe the holes in this band are just the spaces where her true mother’s color would have been, and she needed this new mother to see it.

Her father often works late into the night, but he sits Lena on his lap every morning and holds the business section of the newspaper in front of them both to read. At first, he runs his finger under the headlines and helps Lena sound out the bold words. She gradually outpaces him and breezes through full articles. She doesn’t quite understand all of it, but he smiles and praises her when she says them correctly.

Lex stays at boarding school during the week and comes home on weekends. His mother keeps him busy for most of the time, but he makes an effort to eat dinner with Lena and ask how her week has been.

Her new mother frequently asks about her education. It manifests as a daily check-in of homework and tests, and Lena declares her perfect scores with pride. She adores school. She loves learning bathed in the sunlight from the large windows, a far departure from the dim offices and sitting rooms deep in the Luthor manor, but nothing ever compares to her first day of kindergarten. The teacher introduced each student to the class by presenting them with a name card and a seat assignment, and Lena marveled at the synchronous illumination of all of their ribbons with each announcement. In the span of 12 minutes, every person in that room gained 30 new colors from the softest of blues and pinks to the smokiest of greys and browns. She finds that even two of the most similar colors are always distinct (chartreuse and lime, thistle and mauve, orange and tangerine) and wears each band with pride.

Nevertheless, as her right-ribbon fills in, her true mother always shines brightest.

She’s ten years old when she sees the first glimmer of her soulmate bond on an otherwise mundane afternoon alone. It’s an inconceivably pure yellow, like Apollo gifted her with a ray directly from the sun, and it reaches a blinding luminosity in a flash.

She cradles her arm and cries.

They go on vacations timed with her father’s business trips. It’s the closest she gets to be with Lex who watches over her while their parents attend meetings during the day and galas late into the evening. They travel to Florence the summer after fourth grade, and Lena watches her left-ribbon disintegrate as they travel farther and farther across the Atlantic. She stares at a book for the entire
flight as her family sleeps comfortably.

Lex asks her what’s wrong when they touch down for their layover in Paris, but she shakes her head and says nothing. He holds her right hand and walks her around the terminal, but even the outstretched amethyst bond doesn’t comfort her. Her right-ribbon could carry all the auras of the entire world and it would never compare to her left.

They stop by a café for coffee, tea, and cookies, then peruse some of the shops. Lex offers to buy her gum, a new book, even an iPod, but her lackluster enthusiasm pushes him to insist they keep looking. It’s when they pass by a jeweler that Lena’s demeanor shifts. Lex doesn’t ask which one she loves: a delicate gold bracelet inlaid with tasteful swirls of channel-set white and canary diamonds. She slides it on immediately and crashes into her brother for a fierce hug.

Lena attends her first formal affair when she’s eleven. She takes pain medication in anticipation of a headache from all the auras in close proximity, and her palms sweat against her father’s. He tells her it will be fine through a hard face and tight lips.

“Just tell me everything you see.”

They never talk about the ribbons. Truthfully, Lena had forgotten he knew about them, but the extra pressure around her hand and wrist speaks more than his words. She nods solemnly.

“Yes, Father.”

She spends most of the evening by his side, and he proudly introduces her to all the attendees. She’s polite, and she thinks her right-ribbon will surely burst with how many bands she adds so quickly. She dutifully reports her observations after every encounter much to her father’s approval.

They sit at a table with Lex and Lillian for dinner, and they share the gossip garnered from their preliminary rounds. Lena frowns when her new mother dismisses Morgan Edge as an arrogant upstart running in circles he has no business with. Her father questions her immediately.

“He seems to know a lot of people really well…”

Lillian scoffs. “A puppy begging at the boots of the masters.”

Still, Lionel holds Lena’s gaze for one extra second in understanding.

Four months later, they celebrate a successful three-way merger. Lena doesn’t understand the details other than the name “Morgan Edge.”

She accompanies her family to every event afterwards, and even Lillian makes an effort to mentor Lena in corporate politics. Lena revels in it, finally feels useful alongside her big brother, and eagerly accepts her new mother’s sideways compliments and twisted praise. Lena finds herself thinking
tactically, like business is a chess board with hundreds of pieces tangled in ribbons ready for her manipulation. She joins her father in the evening as well as the morning, and their conversations evolve from following the headlines to predicting stories weeks in advance. Her emerald band glows almost as bright as her true mother’s had.

Lena leaves for boarding school in seventh grade. Lex and her father escort her to the dormitory and hug her tightly before they leave. It does nothing to stave off the sadness at seeing their (and her soulmate’s) bonds dim nearly to transparency.

She had never been surrounded by so many people for so long before. She wears her sunglasses between classes and claims susceptibility to migraines. It’s not a lie; the small classrooms and packed halls regularly overload her sight to the point of illness. Her physics teacher calls it “constructive interference.” She calls it annoying.

Her roommate chides her for faking an illness just so she can look cool. Veronica Sinclair disapproves of a lot of things about Lena, actually, but Lena learns that disdain doesn’t necessarily weaken a bond. Every day she shares with her roommate brightens the scarlet band around her wrist, and it nearly bleeds when she finds Veronica kissing the boy Lena gushed about the day before.

Lena notices that her soul bonds lag compared to her peers. Now older, her classmates’ ribbons tangle and blend not even halfway through her first year. She knows she will never see her ribbons actually connect with anyone, but she tries. She develops a schema of humor and scathing wit to decorate her frequent excuses away from social outings and always leaves with a laugh. She hides her disappointment when her ribbons don’t change and wears her collection of gold bracelets religiously.

She thinks maybe bonds need more than time and frequency. Maybe they require depth and understanding like what even non-seers could describe as a connection. Every name becomes a band, really more of an acknowledgement than anything else, that illuminates with proximity. The ribbon only extends and lengthens as the souls learn more about each other. Affection is irrelevant, and it explains the lopsided gradients where one soul understands much more about the other. It also explains why Veroni-cunt is her strongest bond at school and why the bitch has one of the most dynamic right-ribbons that Lena has ever seen.

“Know thy enemy” takes on a new meaning with this revelation, and Lena resigns herself to the fact that she will always have Veronica’s scarlet on her wrist.

She might be the only one who knows Veronica’s soulmate is dead.

Summer and winter breaks prove more challenging than her coursework. She welcomes the reappearance of her left-ribbon, but every comment from her new mother is either a provocation or a judgment, and her father is so busy with work that he doesn’t see her nearly as often as she wants. Lena makes unrequited efforts to meet with acquaintances from school, and all of her family’s social
circles consist of boring business associates. She busies herself with supplemental classes and engineering internships during the day, graciously appears at networking affairs in the early evenings, then rests her eyes on the unadorned wrists of television actors late into the night. She credits an incompatibility between magical light wavelengths and physical image capture for her inability to see bonds in pictures and videos, but she doesn’t ponder the phenomenon for long before falling into dreamless sleep.

Lex is her one reprieve even if he occasionally travels alone with Lillian and returns with a ribbon stronger than before. She tells herself that her bond with Lex is just as robust and that it’s the curse’s fault she can’t see it. She believes it when the purple band continues to shoot out a sharp laser even when they are on opposite sides of the mansion.

Her bond with Lillian strengthens as well, evident by the swiveling amber band following her movements with increasing precision. She notices the ribbon never grows longer than a couple centimeters despite how she tries to meet her new mother’s ever-rising expectations. Actually, she’s never seen Lillian connect with anyone other than Lex and her husband, her left wrist bare, but the myriad bands on her right-ribbon are distractingly mobile and curiously vibrant. Lena’s half-listening to her father lecture on the misfortunes of Wayne Enterprises when it suddenly clicks that Lillian must keep many close enemies.

Her father dies unexpectedly but slowly. He collapses during a meeting, then struggles in the hospital for hours before flatlining. The emerald band fades to the purest white in time with his soul’s departure, then joins Lena’s mother in drifting aimlessly around Lena’s wrist. Years of school and formal affairs dyed her ribbon into a turbid cloud of ill-formed and soon-forgotten connections. Lex’s scintillating amethyst darts between the other colors whenever Lena turns, always drawn towards its other half. Even Lillian’s ragged amber makes its moves, although it often slows and fades when (Lena assumes) she travels. The white is a stark contrast to all of them and burns into her vision long after she peels her eyes away.

She retires to her room early after the funeral and lies in bed for hours before succumbing to dreams of lighthouses. One rotates slowly and pierces through the tenebrous fog with a searing viridescent beam. Lena zooms over the water with her arm outstretched, racing towards it before the light can age to white.

She crashes into a jetty of rocks and tumbles under violent waves. She breaks the surface gasping for air and glares at the second, unilluminated lighthouse until it flicks on.

She wakes with indescribable rage and hurls her copy of The Great Gatsby into a wall. “What a damn cliché.”

She becomes somewhat of a classroom spectacle once Lex inherits the company. Her father’s passing doesn’t draw attention aside from the obligatory condolences she receives from the children
of corporate allies, but Lex’s very public and immediate rebranding keeps her name in the limelight.

He announces a new tactical division dedicated to extraterrestrial defense as well as multiple expansions into alien biological research. At his press conference, he claims that humans need to understand aliens if they are to protect the planet and the aliens themselves. Reporters immediately call foul and bombard Lex with questions. Rather than provide answers, he stands triumphantly and looks to the sky. Some reporters look up as well, but it doesn’t matter; they all miss the exact second when Superman lands on the stage. The hero straightens himself, smiles, and shakes Lex’s hand on his way to the podium.

Lena can’t hear Superman speak over the sound of her own scoff. She feels the gaze of the rest of the students in the mess hall as she calmly walks out to the beat of blood pounding in her ears.

“You could have told me you were working with Superman.”

He grimaces in what Lena guesses is guilt, but he only clears his throat in lieu of an explanation. Lena flicks a Cheerio into his coffee.

Before Lex has a chance to respond, Lillian strolls in and hums disapprovingly at a page of his newspaper without breaking step towards the kitchen counter.

Lena huffs with amusement. “Already? Usually it takes you a full second upon entering a room to find something you hate.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Lillian dismisses. The siblings share a soft laugh before Lex slides the paper towards Lena: Superman Thwarts Underground Alien Arms Deal

She scans the article quickly and finds that part of the stolen equipment was Luthor merchandise. “Why is this an issue? He stopped a huge illegal operation involving our tech.”

“Why do you think this happened in the first place?” Lillian fires back. “Thanks to Superman, we’re fending off alien invasions every other week, and that’s not even including all the small fry.”

Lena stares at her, jaw tight and brow furrowed. “What are you talking about? Thanks to Superman, we’re fending off invasions instead of becoming, I don’t know, enslaved by alien overlords.”

“None of this nonsense started before he showed up.”

“Are you seriously trying to say that Superman is the reason for that? When he’s the one fighting for humans?” Lena turns to Lex, who’s running his hand over his head.

“She has a point. Gotham doesn’t have an alien problem.”

Lena considers ripping her ears off. She thinks of the AHA (Alien-Human Alliance), of the ribbons connecting alien and human souls, of her classmates knowledgeable in sciences she could never fathom, of the alien amnesty movement, and of the ultimate symbol of truth and justice.

“Unbelievable,” she mutters. “We don’t know that. Gotham doesn’t have nearly the same press coverage as Metropolis nor a high-profile vigilante. And Superman operates worldwide; maybe he
helps Gotham but we don’t know about it. ‘Alien problem…’ You’re talking about aliens as if they’re all soulless anthropomorphs hell-bent on destroying humans.”

“They’re not, but,” Lex motions to the headline, “the ones that are have a huge advantage over us. We’re just lucky that the most powerful alien is on our side.”

“And what happens if he ever changes his mind?” Lillian quickly adds.

“Because he’s shown every inclination towards being evil, right? And we have to judge every species by the best of their kind’s most unlikely behavior?”

“No, we judge every species by the severity and prevalence of their worst behavior. I challenge you to find a story of a human committing more atrocious acts than an alien.”

Lena knows this is what heat vision feels like. “Accepted.”

Lena tries to stay away from the headlines, but it’s like nobody will let her forget her lineage. The hallways turn into black and white chess boards, and she feels her father’s hands tie her ribbons to every pawn.

Her new mother’s interest in school takes a turn. In addition to asking about Lena’s impeccable grades over the weekends, she sends emails casually yet regularly regarding current events and LuthorCorp affairs. Lena takes the subtle hints on how to play the game and feeds Lillian information garnered from peers of influential families. She tells herself that her classmates do the same, but she still feels dirty in her satisfaction when Luthors win. She spends more time than usual watching the drifting bands of her father and true mother on those evenings.

Lena forwards crime reports to Lillian as well. Lillian counters every human-perpetrator story with one of an alien within minutes. Lena invests in multiple external keyboards to make up for her repeated key smashing.

Lex and Lillian join Lena on college tours across the country: Caltech, MIT, Yale, Harvard, Stanford, Berkeley, and National City. In addition to supporting his sister, Lex seizes the opportunity to meet trailblazing professors and lay the groundwork for their future with LuthorCorp. Lena feels that her new mother just wants to ensure she picks a program suitable for the Luthor name.

The first tours go as expected (“Why would you even consider a UC? They’re just an expensive state school filled with public trash.”) and Lena finds a way to enjoy herself despite Lillian’s snarky comments.

They visit National City University last, and Lena wonders if it was a mistake. She can barely focus on anything their guide says because her left-ribbon glows brighter than she’s ever seen it. Her soul tells her that they’re here. She keeps her eyes wide behind her sunglasses (“Take those off. The sun’s
not even out.”) and neck loose to prevent any whiplash from looking twice (“Would it kill you to pay attention?”), but she doesn’t find the one. There are too many people and not enough time. Not now.

But they’re here, and she’ll gladly spend her entire inheritance tracking down every single soul present at NCU on September 3, 2010.

Lex, supportive of every college so far, pulls off an uncanny impression of Lillian and undermines NCU whenever possible: it’s too close to home, its engineering program doesn’t compare to the East Coast, the professors are all NCU alumni and haven’t experienced enough of the world to provide a decent secondary education, it’s a commuter school with a dead campus, and have you seen those unkempt hedges? Lena later blames the touring marathon and too much exposure to Lillian for their subsequent argument.

“What the hell is your problem? You didn’t even go to college!” she hisses. “It’s a reputable school, and it’s close enough to Metropolis for me to stay involved with the company.”

Lex crosses his arms and sighs. “You’d be safer somewhere else. There’s a lot of activity around here.”

Lena takes off her glasses to glare at him. “Seriously? Aliens? That’s what you’re so concerned about? It’s not like I’m in Metropolis.”

“There’s a reason we’ve considered expanding to National City, and you know that,” Lex defends. “Alien terrorism is spreading, and even Superman won’t be able to split his time evenly between two hot spots.”

“We’re doing good work,” Lena insists. “and we’ve countered every piece of weaponry they can throw at us. There’s no reason to try to restrict where I go for a reason as dumb as that.”

“It’s not dumb!”

“Is too!”

Lillian strides over, smacks them both over the head, and sends them each a sharp scowl. They leave shortly after.

She chooses MIT for its diverse minor programs. Lex gives her a new gold bracelet.
Lena wouldn’t say she goes crazy during her freshman year. Crazy is failing classes and skipping lectures, and she does neither.

She does, however, discover her new favorite beer and wine and gin and vodka and whiskey and scotch and tequila. She parties like a Luthor: responsibly in intensity, efficiently in frequency, and always strategically.

Now outside the fermenting cesspool that is boarding school, she also discovers she loves kissing. She selects her partners discriminately, of course, and always calculates the ROI when deciding how much she gives. The jade makes a promising lab partner. The oxblood will inherit her mother’s luxury hotel chain. The palladium just looks like fun.

She meets Jack Spheer, an unobtrusive coquelicot, at a kickback on the weekend before spring term finals. She hadn’t intended to speak with him long, just enough to work the room like a proper socialite, but he has soft eyes and a gentle voice that doesn’t do his philanthropic passion any respect. She twists her bracelet while they talk and finds it hard to break eye contact. He dreams of medical marvels, sketches out a rough design for new bionanotechnology, and earns her phone number by the end of the night.

She dedicates her summer break to LuthorCorp, dominates meetings, accelerates project schedules, and reconstructs Lex’s ribbon to full strength. She tells him about Jack and the nanobots over breakfast after a month of extensive texting and emailing, when the brightness of his orange band competes with Lex’s purple despite the distance.

“You’re going to make a fortune,” Lex notes.

“Well, yes, if my upbringing has any part to play in the matter,” Lena falters, “but we’re going to help so many people. Revolutionize medicine. Save millions of lives.”

Lex nods. “A noble cause, Lena. Let me know if I can help in any way.” He smiles at her and returns to the newspaper. Lena doesn’t understand why his purple ribbon shrinks slightly.

The city mandates a full evacuation three days before enemy spaceships darken the sky, but the government hires LuthorCorp for last minute weaponry support. Although Lillian evacuates, Lena and Lex rush to headquarters with their most elite chemists, engineers, and programmers.
They assimilate quickly into the task force (they don’t give a name, and Lena doesn’t ask) and receive a personal briefing from Superman. Lena speaks with the hero shorter than her admiration would prefer—his tornado of a right-ribbon makes her too dizzy to talk for long—but Lex converses with Superman like they’re best friends and possesses the broad, opaque ribbon of dazzling amethyst fused to rich garnet to prove it.

Two hours and several sonic grenade prototypes later, the task force informs the Luthors that the invaders are Kryptonian. They supply the teams with kryptonite on the conditions that the building be locked down for the remainder of the invasion and all personnel be subject to thorough sanitation upon release. They accept immediately.

The easiest ideas (infuse artillery ammunition with kryptonite fragments, disperse kryptonite into the atmosphere to make the planet toxic to Kryptonians, create missiles locked on to Kryptonian biological profiles, etc.) jeopardize Superman’s life in addition to the invaders and have to be scrapped immediately. It’s only after they shift their focus from destroying Kryptonians to protecting humans that they make any headway. Lex modifies military-grade body armor to include kryptonite components, and Lena concentrates kryptonite radiation into a powerful yet accurate ground-to-air laser beam.

The armor and laser work well enough to hold off the invaders with no casualties, but it isn’t until Superman comes back from an elaborate earthquake plot in California that the ships exit the atmosphere. The hero returns to headquarters after it’s properly decontaminated to thank every scientist individually. Lena again keeps her conversation short, but she observes Lex and Superman’s farewell with keen interest. No longer connected, they argue quietly behind public-practiced smiles. She watches with sadness as the purple light from Superman’s wrist retracts and disintegrates while the red from Lex’s wrist stays unchanging. She lifts her right hand and blinks several times to confirm that her purple ribbon is actually short and frayed as well.

Lena tries not to take it personally when Lex doesn’t want to celebrate the victory. He secludes himself to his room for weeks and goes as far as to text meal requests to the butler. She attributes his unresponsiveness to exhaustion and losing a true friend, but she still considers plowing down the door and forcing a bottle of scotch down his throat.

Lillian comes home from the evacuation with a refreshed arrogance that pisses Lena off more than usual. Lillian raves about those “barbaric aliens” and, once again, challenges Lena to show her a human who could compare. Lena (with the help of the scotch) provides her most eloquent argument yet:

“Hitler!”

The government commissions LuthorCorp to continue studying kryptonite for the military. Lena thought she was comfortable looking at zeros, but this hefty stipend nearly floors her. She texts a picture to Lex who replies with an underwhelming smiley, but he does emerge from his room the next morning. Lena hugs him tightly and teases that he wore in a few more wrinkles on his head during all those years buried in a cave. He stiffly reciprocates the hug, but Lena thinks she feels him relax into it. Just a little.
The following semester, Lena immerses herself completely in nanobot research with Jack. She maintains her pristine academic record with ease, scours her lessons for any new information that could help their work, and shoves her notes into Jack’s face after every breakthrough. They spend countless nights in his family’s garage hunched over microscopes and screwdrivers, convincing his parents that they are perfectly capable of soldering, and (for Lena) writing checks to cover the costs incurred by the occasional fire from said soldering.

Jack suggests they go to a biotech convention in National City for an extended weekend. Lena enthusiastically agrees and forgoes her collection of gold bracelets lest she interfere with the intensity of her left-ribbon. It glows almost as bright as it did during her NCU visit, but she doesn’t dare follow it. She isn’t good enough. She’s not ready. Not yet.

She finds that her panel interests differ from Jack’s and considers it a strength so they can soak up all that the convention has to offer. He watches the medical and ethical panels, searching for inspiration as well as new angles to present to investors. She watches panels specific to nanotechnology and polymer construction, the delicate interplay between organic and synthetic materials on a molecular level engaging her deepest engineering curiosity. They meet up between presentations (she has no problem finding him in the vast crowd) and discuss the lectures animatedly. They are going to save the world.

They stumble back towards the hotel after a networking happy hour at the convention center. They link their arms in a futile effort to walk in a straight line uninhibited by their spinning heads and run into a lamp post instead. Lena laughs and leans her back against it to catch her breath.

“Oh my god, I haven’t been like this since freshman year.”

Jack laughs along with her. “You mean when you were a recent boarding school escapee relishing the newfound freedom away from your family name? I’m sorry I missed those crazy months. Might’ve seen a Luthor actually enjoying themselves.”

She hits his shoulder. “Fuck off. It’s not our fault you can’t appreciate the simple pleasures of corporate espionage and ruthless takeovers.”

“I suppose not. I have to settle for alcohol and sex like the rest of the uncultured plebeians.”

She snorts and prepares her vehement agreement when she hears a snarl and a soft click behind her. “Hands up.”

Jack already has his hands in the air. Lena takes her time, rolls her shoulders back, raises her arms slowly, lifts her chin higher than her fingers, and turns away from the lamp post towards their would-be assailant. They wear a beanie and a bandana over their face, covering everything but their kaleidoscopic, compound eyes.

The fear drops heavy into her feet and nearly brings the rest of her down with it.

But, their barren, quivering wrist betrays the ferocity of their voice. They raise another barely-decorated hand to steady the firearm. Her blood turns to ice, and she imagines a sudden winter freezing mosquitos in sap wedged between pieces of tree bark.

“You know we don’t have anything, right?” she goads. “I don’t have a bag. His pockets are too thin to carry a wallet. I’m not even wearing my Jimmy Choos…”
“Shut up. Phones out. Jewelry too.”

She shakes her head and puts her hands in her pockets. “Really? You pull a gun for an iPhone?”

“Now!”

“Whatever,” she tosses her phone to him and gets to work unclasping her necklace, “but you know a Luthor always tracks their tech, right?”

Amethyst and citrine ripple throughout their eyes with every twitch. The gun droops towards the ground.

“...Luthor?”

Lena quirks an eyebrow.

Her phone clatters to the pavement and masks the echoes of the frantic, retreating footsteps.

She makes a show of dusting her hands off on her jacket and turns to face Jack. “Well that was—”

He pulls her in for a hug before she completely turns around. Her breath catches, and she shivers in his hold.

“You’re incredible,” he murmurs into her hair.

And then she melts.

“Veronica Sinclair runs an underground alien fight club in National City. She kidnaps them and forces them to kill each other all for the entertainment of sick, wealthy humans.”

“Mongul destroyed Coast City and almost made Earth into a human fight club.”

Lena flings the scarlet invitation into Lillian’s face and storms out.

Lex visits her in Cambridge after a conference in Boston. “I heard what happened to you in National City.”

Lena rolls her eyes and throws back the rest of her scotch. “If you’re about to get all ‘scary big brother’ on Jack, I can save you some time.”

“No, I mean the other thing.”

She sighs. “It’s no big deal, Lex. We’re—”

He slams his glass onto the table. “It is a big deal! Why can’t you see that? An alien could have
“But they didn’t! And what does their being an alien have to do with it? National City is huge, and crime is always denser in large urban settings regardless of species.”

“An alien could’ve killed you, and Superman wasn’t there,” Lex seethes. “He should have been there, and he wasn’t.”

“You should confess your love to him,” she suggests. “Maybe then he’ll stop seeing other people.”

“Alien street crime against humans has risen 40% in just the past eight months,” he barrels on. “Most of the cases go cold because we don’t have the tech to trace them. Our one defense is inconsistent at best.”

“Get to the point.”

“We aren’t being aggressive enough with anti-alien technology. Nobody is. I’ve been working with Superman for years, and it’s obviously not enough. So, I want you to come to LuthorCorp full-time after you graduate and help me get ahead of the curve.”

Lena laughs dryly. “That’s all?”

“I would think you’d understand the severity of the alien threat now that it’s happened to you.” He softens his eyes. “I know you’re busy with Jack and the nanobots, but I can’t think of anybody I trust and respect more than you. If I could get you to leave MIT, I would. How many more people have to die before we’re able to save them?”

She pours herself another glass and frowns at her dull purple band. “I’ll think about it.”

Lex is stupid and nanobots are stupid and how the hell is Lena supposed to see what she’s doing on their stupidly tiny hardware when Jack keeps moving around the room and twirling his stupidly bright ribbon with him? She endures the headache for 28 more seconds before chucking the microscope at Jack’s head. She instantly apologizes and cleans up the glass, but he’s so insufferably understanding that she almost throws the glass at him too.

“I’m sorry,” she mutters. “There’s something going on with Lex, and I don’t know what it is, but I think I’m going to spend more time in Metropolis.”

“I could follow you, you know,” Jack quietly offers.

Her heart stops, and she’s ashamed of the pathetic squeak that escapes her throat. He waits for her to dump the shards into the trash can before speaking again.

“Sometimes, it feels like I will never be able to reach all of you,” he begins slowly, “but I want to give you everything I have. I want to give you everything.” Lena stares at her shaking hands as he speaks and watches the colors around her wrist blur, her left painfully bare and the coquelicot overpowering them all.

“No.”
“No?”

“No. Don’t follow me.” She blinks until the colors come back into focus, then shakes her head and crosses her arms over her chest, hands tucked under her elbows. “Find an internship or something in Metropolis over the summer, but don’t leave campus. I’m not going to stay there full time, either. Move if there’s an opportunity and because it is the best choice for you, not because you want…” She breathes in deeply. “My family has private jets for a reason; I might as well use them.”

Jack pauses, then chuckles with a shrug, but the hurt in his eyes undercuts his mirth. “Ever the pragmatist. Alright then.”

To her credit, Lillian doesn’t make too much of a fuss over Lena returning to the manor more often. She says she’s always kept a room open for her daughter, but Lena doesn’t recall having such a penchant for the avian decorations she now finds on the drapes, duvet cover, hand towels, and wall ornaments. Lena mockingly lauds Lillian for coping with the empty nest.

“What do you even do all day? Was ‘refurnishing’ just a way to keep yourself busy and remove every reminder of your dead husband’s affair?”

Lillian laughs coldly. “I’m a doctor, board member, and socialite, dear. You owe me more than you know.”

Lena finds herself rolling her eyes during every subsequent conversation.

Over the next year, she manages a regular travel schedule with ease. She works in Metropolis from Monday afternoon through Thursday night, attends classes and office hours on Fridays and Monday mornings, and works with Jack on Saturdays and Sundays. She usually finishes homework in transit, but she always takes a break to check on her left-ribbon as she passes over National City. She breathes easier every time it reappears.

Even when she’s in Metropolis, Jack’s band shines brighter than her bond with Lex. She searches multiple rooms before finding him and has to ask his secretary for his meeting schedule. Lex seems to genuinely appreciate her company, though. He joins her on video calls with Jack, ruminates on scientific developments over glasses of wine, and smiles more often than he had during any of his visits to MIT.

After weeks of little progress, she decides to indulge in Lex’s passion for alien politics and assuage his fears over her safety. She’s already well-versed in gunmanship from managing LuthorCorp’s defense R&D labs but accompanies him on trips to the shooting range anyway. She follows crime news and watches extraterrestrial documentaries with him. She bites her tongue when he says something insensitive and ignores that his ribbon grows longer with every remark.

With Lena taking an active role in LuthorCorp, Lex shifts his free time to politics. Outside the
expected tax lobbying, he becomes an outspoken alien adversary but makes it clear that Superman is the only exception.

“For as long as Superman protects the humans of Earth,” he declares, “then we shall be allies.”

She yells at him extensively after the pointless and incendiary press conference, berates him for jeopardizing their precarious corporate neutrality, and threatens to terminate the military contract just to preemptively preserve their reputation. He absorbs most of the reprimands in silence, comments that fear drives many consumers to action, and walks away when Lena runs out of breath.

His ribbon unravels in time with each step.

She lingers in the building long after the rest of the staff leaves. She finished her immediate work a while ago, but her hands still shake from the press conference. She seizes the opportunity to delve deep into the LuthorCorp ERP and decompress with mind-numbing system organization. She cleans up the darkest recesses, archives old projects, and consolidates blueprints until she stumbles upon an encrypted folder with a moniker she’s unfamiliar with: MCKBRD.

Eyebrow raised, she inserts her master dongle into the computer to bypass the encryption only to receive an error code. Eyebrows now furrowed, she quarantines the folder and spends (in her opinion) too much time hacking her system. She cracks it open to find thousands of simple text files, hardly a file type warranting such protection. They denote a name, date, and two rows of numbers. She doesn’t recognize any of the names and begins Googling quickly.

She stops breathing.

They don’t all return results, but the ones that do bring up alien mugshots and crime reports: burglaries, assaults, drug deals, kidnappings, murders, and plots so elaborate she knows they’ll have documentaries in the near future. She even finds the team behind the California earthquake during the Kryptonian invasion.

Her fingertips hover over the keyboard at the unsolicited memory of a gun pointed at her face. She searches the folder for the date of the attempted mugging and retrieves four files. The second name brings up a photo of an alien with unmistakable compound eyes. They were arrested for a convenience store robbery committed one week later.

She remembers the recoil at the mention of her last name.

The files are protected beyond her security clearance.

The lines of digits match the format for routing and account numbers.

The amethyst sparkles clearer than it had in years.
She wants to kick down his door and punch his face in. She wants to print out all the obituaries, convert them into wallpaper, and cover his room with the faces and stories of all the souls that died thanks to him. She wants to drag him to every family so he can explain that their loved ones are dead because of him. She wants to make him face every living victim and try to justify their terror. She wants to make him write each person a check for quadruple what he paid his minions.

She attempts to push aside her compulsion towards revenge to make way for the cold, practical rationality she once thought was inherent to all Luthors. What if the only true Luthor gene is male pattern baldness? Does insanity live on Lillian’s side of his chromosomes? Maybe all bloodlines have curses.

She barges into Lex’s room with her open laptop anyway, supposed Luthor-rationality be damned. He turns from his desk and regards her with mild surprise. She shoves away whatever he's working on and slams her computer in front of his face.

“What the fuck, Lex!”

He glances at the open folder and smirks. “So you finally found out. I was going to tell you soon, though.”

“Tell me what? How you’re a psychopath that murders with money?”

“I never—”

“No, you did! You don’t get to say that you didn’t kill those people. They would still be alive if you didn’t hire those aliens.”

“They didn’t all d—”

“That doesn’t change that some did! Any death is a death too many, Lex. I thought you wanted to save people. How the hell is this saving people?”

He sighs, and Lena slaps him without a blink. “I’m going to ask again: what the actual fuck?”

He slowly realigns his face towards Lena. He purses his lips and taps his fingers on his desk, then abruptly rises.

“I want to show you something.”

Lex guides her through the manor to a nondescript office somewhere in the East Wing. He searches through a bookcase and pulls on the spine of a novel to uncover a switch. He flicks it up, and the adjacent bookcase sinks into the floor, revealing a descending staircase.

“If you’re trying to convince me that you’re not a villain, it’s not working.”

He grins and gestures for her to step forward.
Several stories and biometric locks later, they enter a large laboratory. Television screens showing news channels and security camera feeds cover one of the walls in front of a large control panel. Workbenches and shelves covered in diffractometers, geiger counters, furnaces, microscopes, crucibles, and spectrophotometers line the remaining two walls. Windowed cabinets under the benches display numerous tubes and beakers holding green crystals.

A massive mechasuit stands imposingly in the center of it all.

Lena gulps. “What is this?”

Lex saunters to a nearby cabinet and pulls out a beaker. “My research: synthetic kryptonite. It isn’t good enough to use yet, but why would I need to when I’ve been stockpiling real kryptonite from our military contract for months?” At Lena’s silence, he continues:

“The world needs to understand that we have to be more than Superman. I’ve ordered thousands of alien attacks, and do you know how many he stopped? Dozens. But do people care about the ones that slip by? No. They still think he’ll protect them from everything, but we can’t rely on him, and we shouldn’t have to. People need to take this seriously and fight for themselves, but they won’t do that if they think Superman will do it all for them.”

Lena finally chokes down enough bile rising in her esophagus to speak. “So, you want to kill him.”

“Exactly.” Lex smiles sweetly. "What better way to show humans they can fight than to take down the strongest alien of all? Humans are stronger than they give themselves credit for, but they need proof."

She drops onto a stray lab stool and rubs furiously at her temples. Hairs fall free from her tight bun, and she can’t find it in herself to care. “We could take down the strongest alien that tries to kill us instead of the one that’s on our side.”

“Our defenses are severely lacking from being swaddled with Superman’s cape. What if they succeed? Or worse, what if they kill Superman? Nobody believes we can fight for ourselves yet. Superman is their god, their ‘savior,’” he spits out the word with the cruelest sneer Lena could’ve never imagined. “He needs to be killed by humans so they can see that we are stronger than any alien out there. We’ll probably stop getting attacked when Superman’s gone anyway, so just killing him might be enough.”

With each word, her amethyst ribbon elongates and glows brighter until Lena swears it burns. She lowers her hands to her lap and wills them to stay still, brutally beating down the urge to claw at her wrist.

After a lifetime of craving their connection, she’s suddenly grateful that she’s never seen their colors mix.

“This is madness,” she mumbles.

“No, it’s brilliance,” he counters. “Aliens are attracted to Superman. It’s why all the attacks are concentrated in Metropolis. If we kill Superman, alien invasions will drop drastically, but people will still be terrified of street attacks. They’ll need equipment to protect themselves, and we’re the largest alien defense company in the world. It’s two birds—”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” She jumps to her feet and kicks the stool over. “It’s all a business plan? You’re killing a superhero and terrorizing the world for money? What the hell is wrong with...”
“It’s not just for money, Lena,” he clarifies calmly, as if explaining to a child. “The alien problem is out of control, and depending on an alien and the unorganized, bureaucratic nightmare that is our government isn’t working. How many more invasions do we have to endure helplessly? How long until we lose for good?” He sets the beaker on the table. “I knew you loved Superman, but I didn’t think you would be so blinded. I thought you could see reason.”

“I see so much more than you could ever understand.” It slips out before she has a chance to censor herself. “I love you, Lex, but,” she motions to the entirety of the lab, “this isn’t right.”

“Are you going to try to stop me?”

She looks up at the mechasuit. “Would I even have a chance?”

He snickers. “Nobody in the universe stands a chance against me.”

“911, what’s your emergency?”

“Lex Luthor plans to kill Superman.”

“Who is—”

Click.

She doesn’t cry on her flight to Cambridge, but she wishes she had. She wonders if she even can.

She pushes through the entryway and kisses Jack before he finishes opening the door. His beard scratches her cheeks, but his lips are gentle, and his hands lay soft against her back.

They leave the lights on, and she keeps her eyes closed. She tells herself it’s for comfort and practice even though it feels like cheating.

At least it feels like something.
I finally caught up on the show, and the Midvale episode totally threw off the canon status of my Lex timeline -_- oh well.

Hope you enjoyed reading! Next chapter concludes the prologue and has more background-Kara. She’ll be properly introduced in the chapter after.

Two deleted scenes from Prologue I:

Lena catches a press release about LuthorCorp, “the world’s preeminent technological innovator,” entering a “strategic relationship” with Superman. She texts a picture of the headline coupled with an appropriate “what the fuck???” to Lex and receives a winking face in return. It’s not the first time she’s thrown her phone into a wall, but it’s probably the hardest. Lex might actually be the death of her.

“Do you even care that I’m drinking?”
“If I had a problem with that, I’d need to have a problem with all of Europe. Bottoms up.”
She unceremoniously moves in with Jack and provides very little explanation, but he doesn’t complain. The headlines say more than enough the next morning.

The FBI tracks her down for questioning within hours. She tells them as much as she can about the alien files, synthetic kryptonite, and lab under the Luthor estate, but she can’t answer for anything further. She half expects to be arrested anyway, but they leave without even searching the property.

Lillian calls her later that night. Lena ignores it.

Weeks turn to months, and she monitors Lex’s progress by tracking each new white band around her wrist. She reads the obituaries every morning to refresh her memory of the names long forgotten and now lost but otherwise does not let herself fixate on his actions. She returns to school full time (remotely) and refocuses on the nanobots, tries to renew the passion she had just a year ago to no avail. The work does, however, take up enough space in her mind and her heart so the guilt can’t fit.

Through it all, she aches for her soulmate. Jack’s tender coquelicot feels like a dingy bastardization of her soulmate’s solar yellow, and she yearns for the vibrancy of the bond that her true mother described with wonder. But, still, he comforts her without judgment or pity, and sometimes she reciprocates enough to justify keeping him for herself.

Lillian shows up on their doorstep the day after MIT’s commencement ceremony. Lena rolls her eyes and leads her to the living room. “How can I help you?”

“I have a business proposition for you.”

Lena drops to the couch and crosses her arms. “That’s a new one.”

Lillian remains standing but crosses her arms as well. “I am a board member, after all. I’ve managed to keep our key accounts in good standing, but Pete Ross is a poor excuse for a CEO. It’s sinking without a Luthor at the helm.”

“Maybe it should,” Lena interrupts. “It’s a company based on Lex’s paranoid xenophobia. Without the military contract and defense divisions, it’s dependent on subsidiary revenue, and that will fall apart as soon as the media follows the receipts back to LuthorCorp.”

“And you’re willing to just let that happen? You’ll let the Luthor legacy fall without doing a single thing?”

Lena bites her lip hard and clenches her nails into her biceps. “If anyone has ruined the Luthor name, it’s Lex. Don’t you dare try to put that on me.”
“If you’re just a bystander and don’t do anything, then you’re just as guilty.”

“That’s rich, coming from you,” Lena growls. “You hate aliens as much as he does. Did you know what he was planning?”

“No,” Lillian replies quickly. Lena believes her for the slightest moment until she notices her amber band dimmed.

“Liar,” she accuses.

“Truly, I had no idea,” Lillian tries again. Lena’s steadfast belief in Lillian’s deceit keeps the ribbon strong. “He’s taken a dark turn, and even if his motives are pure, he isn’t the same Lex from before.”

Lena waves her hand impatiently. “This is going nowhere. If your only argument for me taking over LuthorCorp is saving face, then it’s not happening.”

Lillian settles deeper in her stance. “Alright then. LuthorCorp is one of the largest employers in the world. If it goes down, thousands will lose their jobs, hundreds in Metropolis alone. It handles the most delicate and powerful technology that could destroy the world if it’s in the wrong hands.” Lena flinches but says nothing. “You are the only one who can understand and wield that responsibility. You have enough stake in the company for a smooth take over, and you’re still in good standing with all its partners. You have the name, but you’re distant enough from Lex’s actions to have a chance at convincing the public we’re starting fresh. If the public doesn’t hate us, then other businesses won’t be ashamed of announcing their work with us, and we can rebuild—”

“Okay, I get it,” Lena relents. “You’ve thought it through, and you’re not wrong, but I have conditions before I consider it.”

Lillian smirks with satisfaction. “Fine.”

“One: step away from the company.”

“Deal.”

“Two: sell your stocks and donate the money to disaster relief. If possible, give it directly to the families of victims who suffered because of Lex.”

“Deal.”

“Three: admit that Lex’s crimes are worse than any committed by an alien.”

Lillian hesitates. Lena crosses her legs and sinks further into the couch cushion. “I’m waiting.”

Lillian’s gaze flicks between each of Lena’s eyes, but Lena blinks freely and serenely, confident in her victory. They stare each other down for another 38 seconds before Lillian finally clears her throat.

“Lex, a human, has committed crimes worse than any committed by an alien.”

Lena tilts her head and smiles. “Now we can talk.”
They work out details for another hour and a half until Jack returns home. He freezes in the doorway upon seeing Lillian, then scrambles to drop his bag and make a proper introduction. He hastily invites her to dinner, asks how her travel was, and offers to take her coat all at once to which Lillian declines politely yet emotionlessly. Lena smiles sadly at the exchange and nods a farewell to Lillian who steps out without another look. Jack releases a deep breath and collapses onto the couch next to her.

“Well, that was unexpected,” he breathes. “What was that about?” Lena reaches for his right hand and cradles it between both of hers. The band on her wrist glows bright enough to enclose their hands in a sphere of red-orange, and Lena wishes she could see how close their ribs are to touching. She keeps her gaze low and runs her fingers over his knuckles.

“She wants me to take over LuthorCorp,” she says gently. “I said yes.”

She feels the muscles in Jack’s fingers twitch, and she wonders if he’s fighting the urge to pull away or to stay put.

“I can still follow you.”

She tightens her grip to match the constriction in her chest. She glances at his other wrist and watches the hint of a ribbon twinkle sporadic photons so faint they appear hueless.

“I’ve already taken so much of your time,” she murmurs, “and it’s not fair to you. If I didn’t have this name or this family,” she pauses, “I think I could have loved you. Sincerely. There’s just so much more at play here, and I can’t make it work.” She shakes her head and looks up. Jack stares at the floor.

“And you don’t want to try?”

Lena inhales all the honesty and explanations and knowledge that might ease his pain and traps it deep in her lungs.

“No.”

Her return to LuthorCorp goes better than Lillian forecasted. Ross seemed relieved when Lena approached him and happily tossed her the reins. Lillian provided Lena the receipts of her charitable donations then boasted about the extended vacation she gets to take now that she doesn’t have to save the company.

Lillian doesn’t invite Lena to stay at the Luthor estate despite her travels, and Lena doesn’t ask. She lives primarily out of a hotel two blocks from the office, but she spends her first three nights sleeping at her desk.

Superman visits her on the balcony the night before her press conference. She doesn’t know why she’s surprised.

“Superman,” she acknowledges cautiously.

He keeps his fists planted firmly on his hips after he lands, but his shoulders slightly sag. “I’m sorry for what happened to your brother.”
Lena recoils. “What?”

“He was a good man when I began working with him. Aliens and humans need to cooperate for the planet’s sake, and I thought he understood that, but,” he steps to the side and looks over the balcony railing, “something changed during Zod’s invasion, and I couldn’t pull him back.”

Lena stands in stunned silence. She imagined threats, reprimands, lectures, and maybe even some property damage but not an apology. Superman turns back to her with a tight but amicable smile.

“I know you called in the tip about his plans. Thank you.”

Lena nods. “Of course.”

“I want to believe in you, Ms. Luthor.”

There’s the cynicism she was waiting for, but Lena senses the extra weight of hurt and regret behind every word and feels herself nodding again. “You can.”

She expects relentless reporters, and they do not disappoint. She wishes she had conducted at least one of her own conferences during her time with Lex as CEO. Her VP’s advise against taking questions, but she shuts them down soundly and asserts that they need to properly denounce a Luthor’s crimes if they were to salvage a company under the same name. Thankfully, she finds her answers come easily and quickly.

“What is LuthorCorp’s stance on the alien amnesty movement?”

“Alien refugees are no different from human refugees and deserve all liberties and resources as such.”

“How does LuthorCorp plan to recoup after the loss of the military contract?”

“LuthorCorp has scaled back alien and military R&D as mandated by authorities and has no plans to return to the market. We will return our manufacturing focus to civilian aeronautics, biotechnology, and pharmacology.”

“Will you continue research on alien physiology?”

“We believe aliens should have equal access to health care; however, we will invest in independent biological research rather than conduct it ourselves.”

“Can you speak on the rumors that you are leaving Metropolis?”

“We will keep an office space here to support rebuilding efforts and maintain employment rates, but we are strongly considering expanding to another location in the near future.”

“Why did Lillian Luthor leave?”

“As a Luthor, she needed to set the example of how we will apologize to the world.”

“Does LuthorCorp support Lex Luthor?”

Lena’s eyes harden. “Lex Luthor must be brought to justice for his abominable crimes. He abused
LuthorCorp’s resources for his destructive ideals, so LuthorCorp will be the entity that makes reparations to all the victims. I personally take it upon myself to atone for his actions.”

Her security detail all but forces her back inside lest she tempt Lex to retaliate.

One week later, the familiar purple band slowly reforms on her right wrist. She almost misses it from being deeply engrossed in a meeting with her lead aeronautical engineer, but, sure enough, a flimsy amethyst shard pokes out from her wrist due east.

She has the sickening thought that at least he’s the same brother from when she last saw him.

She excuses herself from the engineer after making plans to resume the conversation tomorrow, then rushes out of the lobby and takes a company car wherever her ribbon leads. She tells herself to slow down, that her ribbon could take her 2500 miles to the middle of nowhere before she catches a glimpse of him, that he could be flying and moving faster than she could ever hope to achieve in a Lincoln, but she knows that she would never forgive herself if she didn’t pursue him at every chance.

It takes a few blocks and U-turns until her finicky compass seems set on a course to the outskirts of the city, and she’s so fixated on her ribbon’s intensity that she doesn’t realize she recognizes the trees and scattered buildings until she stops at a light. She groans and pulls into the parking lot adjacent to her elementary school.

“Idiot.”

“911, what’s your emergency?”

“Lex Luthor is at the Luthor estate.”

“What—”

Click.

She locks herself in her office with express direction to Alana that she is not to be disturbed for any reason, then watches the arrest footage on repeat for an hour. He didn’t go down without a fight as evident by the blood and bruises marring his pale skin, and he still had fight to give when the police dragged him out of the house. He stumbled and resisted with animalistic fervor all the while shouting, “I am humanity’s savior! You will all die without me!”

She formalizes a quote for the Daily Planet a half hour into her viewing marathon. She knows it’s too long and that she could still expand it to a full essay if she had the time (she probably will), but she sends it to the head of PR anyway with a request to verify the final draft. She gives him a bonus after seeing his perfect revision.

She wonders if it should be harder to make herself resume the day as usual, if she should grieve over
her brother’s insanity instead of last quarter’s revenue, but the only hindrance is the delicate, unproductive conversations with well-meaning colleagues. She figures that they need more time to process her brother’s capture than she does and leaves three hours early.

She means to go to the hotel but finds herself driving back home instead. She thinks it’s the scientist in her that makes her want proof of her brother’s insanity but decides not to dwell on it farther than simple curiosity.

The manor looks exactly as it had when she left months ago. She narrows her eyes at the car in the driveway and parks beside it before strolling through the door and following her faint amber ribbon to Lex’s room. Cleaning products and bloody rags rest on Lex’s desk, and Lillian sweeps around his bed in silence.

“Isn’t that what housekeepers are for?”

Lillian continues sweeping. “Those flatfoots practically destroyed the floor. I’m going to need it redone anyway; no point in calling the help.”

Lena shifts her weight to one leg and crosses her arms. “How was your vacation?”

“As lovely as to be expected.”

“Convenient that you made it back in time for Lex’s arrest.”

“Indeed.”

Lillian bends down to scoop the dirt into the dustpan. A million accusations and swear words fly through Lena’s brain and die tangled in her vocal cords.

She turns sharply on her stiletto and doesn’t look back.

She keeps Lex’s trial on in the background but deems it unnecessary to testify against him. The night of his conviction, she toasts to the white bands around her wrist with an extra glass of chardonnay.

She wishes she could be proud of how close they are to being in the black. Recovering this quickly should have been impossible, especially with the remaining stigma around their name. It probably would have been impossible if ruthlessness didn’t come so easy to her.

She sends a memo to all employees with a comprehensive, personal message of gratitude acknowledging every department’s contributions. She also grants everyone an extra week of vacation, and it makes her feel a little better.

She just finishes her email when she catches a news story of a girl saving an airplane from crashing in National City. She gapes at the video, stunned by the unmistakable silhouette of a young woman drenched and gasping on the wing of a downed plane. She’s petite, but she exudes a strength palpable even through a smartphone camera. Lena can’t tear her eyes away until the woman flies off.

She leaves the TV on and pulls up the abandoned plans to relocate headquarters to National City.
Although outdated, she sends a copy to her market analysts for reconsideration. They already have a large, branded office space in the city that they share with a few other small companies, so shifting operations could be difficult but manageable. The corporate network fits her industry, and the existing workforce and college grads promise a never-ending wealth of talent.

More than anything, it’s a fresh start with a fresh hero, and, with a glance to her left wrist, maybe it’s where she’s meant to be.

Chapter End Notes

Thus concludes the prologue. I think I like updating Wednesday/Thursday as a little pick-me-up in the middle of the week, so I'll probably stick with that for now :)

Hope you enjoyed the chapter!
The move is a year-long logistical nightmare. It would be one thing to open a new subsidiary, department, or lab, but no, it needs to be headquarters, and she needs to provide more than “aliens and magic” as justification for the relocation.

On one hand, she welcomes the delay so she has time to develop tinted contact lenses. During her first visit to the National City building, the rapidly fluctuating yellow on her wrist made work maddeningly difficult. Poorly-lit, indoor meetings resulted in stabbing headaches no matter how much medication she took, and the other attendees became afraid of her twice as fast.

For the sake of morale, she sent preliminary drafts of the lenses to her optics lab that evening.

Meanwhile, the press can’t seem to decide if the relocation is sinister (The New Luthor Moves to Target the New Super?) or well-intentioned (LuthorCorp Seeks Redemption) but, regardless, Lena gets sick of seeing her name everywhere. She’s signing her name for the umpteenth time on another damn contract when she tells her marketing department to come up with a rebranding strategy.

She gets the green light to launch the rebrand a week into living in National City full time. Lena’s glad she has at least a little while to catch her breath, but it’s still a whirlwind of networking and paperwork that leaves scant time for anything else. She passes on opportunities both extraordinary (she submitted her last minute retraction from the Venture with incredible regret) and ominous (she tore up Veronica’s fight club invitation before even opening it) to prioritize the event.

She thinks she was much more patient with incompetent corporate idiots in Metropolis, but that was because she was farther away from the habitual amphetamine user that is her soulmate. That’s the only possible explanation for her left-ribbon’s occasional, erratic flashing, or maybe the soulmate bond just behaves differently than the others. After a painful, two-hour marketing meeting, Lena seriously considers severing her hand from her arm just to turn it off, but Alana hands her a tablet playing footage of the Venture exploding before she can make any firm plans. She tells Alana to prepare the company’s lawyers, and Lena personally reviews her subsidiary's oscillator blueprints for any manufacturing flaws.

On her drive to work the next morning, her left-ribbon ramps up brighter than she’s ever seen it. She puts on her sunglasses with the expectation that the intensity will fade soon enough, but even out of the car and into the building, the yellow only shines more vibrantly and glows beyond the diameter of her thick gold bracelet.

Once inside the elevator, she rips off her sunglasses and glares at her wrist as hard as possible, but she knows she only manages a pathetic squint and a frown. At the ding of the elevator reaching the top floor, she realizes that it isn’t just her soulmate ribbon brightening, but Superman’s deep garnet band as well. Her frown stays entrenched in her features when she hears a throat clear in front of her.

“Ms. Luthor?”
If her face hadn’t been contorted in a stern grimace by necessity, she’s sure she would have dropped her jaw.

Superman’s garnet band generated a ribbon pointed faintly yet directly at the well-dressed reporter in front of her. Even through her squinting, she makes out the unmistakable shape of his broad shoulders and chiseled jawline.

“Oh, you—”

“Clark Kent, ’Daily Planet,’” he interrupts.

She narrows her eyes just a bit more. Now she sees the thick glasses and gelled hair, but there’s no mistaking the jewel red reacting on her wrist.

Despite her growing headache, she begins the game.

“Ah, in the flesh. Yes, Mr. Kent?”

“Do you have some time for a few questions about the Venture launch?”

Lena huffs and begins fishing pain medication out of her coat pocket as she marches out of the elevator and through the doors of her office.

“There’s a perfectly reasonable explanation for why I wasn’t aboard the Venture yesterday.”

“Well, that’s why we’re here.”

Tylenol bottle in hand, she busies herself with hanging her coat and bag onto the rack on the far side of the room. “It was an emergency regarding the planning for a ceremony I’m holding tomorrow. I’m renaming my family’s company, and I had to cancel.”

“Lucky.”

Lena gives a humorless bark of a chuckle and spins around, seeing that another woman clad in glasses and conservative pastel pink is in the room. How did she miss her before?

“Lucky is Superman saving the day.”

And how does she have such a strong bond with Superman?

He returns the chuckle. “Not something one expects a Luthor to say.”

And why is her color so familiar?

“A-and Supergirl was there, too,” the woman sputters out. Lena stops, blinks just enough to make a show of regarding her, then steps to the water pitcher on the other side of the room.

“And who are you, exactly?”

“Um, uh, I’m Kara Danvers—”

Lena fumbles the pitcher and hears it shatter, eyes transfixed on her left-ribbon shooting a blinding beam of pure yellow through her gold bracelet, through her chest, and towards the woman standing behind her.

*Kara.*
“Shit.”

*Kara* and Clark move to assist Lena out of the glass and water, but she waves them off. “I’ll have someone clean it up.” Hands shaking, she walks behind her desk and dry swallows the Tylenol. “Just ask me what you want to ask me, Mr. Kent.” She flips open a folder, picks up a pen, focuses her gaze onto him, anything to keep her eyes away from her left wrist. “Did I have anything to do with the Venture explosion?”

Why do they have to be standing so close? How is she supposed to focus on anything else but that beautiful, bright sunlight?

“Did you?”

She remembers boarding school, all strategy and pride and praise and loyalty and survival and sunglasses.

“You wouldn’t be asking me if my name was ‘Smith.’”

But it’s so beautiful.

“No, but it’s not. It’s Luthor.”

And disconnected.

“Some steel under that Kansas wheat.” She leans farther back into her chair and grins, but her face returns to business at Superman’s unamused expression. “It’s also ‘Lena.’” She wills her eyes to soften and chances a glance to *Kara*. “Lex and I are only half-siblings, but, even after our father died, he made me proud to be a Luthor.”

It’s too much.

She swivels towards the window, the natural sun a welcome reprieve from the soulmate bond. “Then, he went on his reign of terror in Metropolis and declared war on Superman, committed unspeakable crimes…” She rubs the bridge of her nose, counts down from three, then swings back around. “I vowed to atone for Lex’s transgressions with the very company he abused, rename it L-Corp, make it a force for good.” At *Kara* and Clark’s shared look, she continues. “I’m just a woman wanting to make a name for herself outside of her family.” Lena keeps her pleading gaze heavy on *Kara*. “You understand that?”

*Kara* nods emphatically and whispers a soft, “Yeah.”

Lena pauses.

It’s still too much.

And so, so beautiful.

“I know why you’re here.” She rises from her desk and strides to the opposite wall. “Because a subsidiary of my company made the part that exploded on the Venture.” She pulls a thumb drive from a rack and hands it to Mr. Kent. “This contains all the information we have on the oscillator. I hope this helps in your investigation.”

He exchanges another look with *Kara* before nodding to Lena. “Thank you.”

Lena talks to him but speaks to *Kara*. 
“Give me a chance, Mr. Kent. I’m looking for a fresh start; let me have one.”

Superman already promised her one, anyway.

He nods and offers the same tight smile. “Good day, Ms. Luthor.”

*Kara* lingers a second longer, head nodding faster than she can speak. “Good day.”

The ribbon pulls taut for several moments after *Kara* disappears in the elevator, then unravels until what’s left glows around her gold bracelet. Lena watches until the aura burns behind her eyelids with every blink, then softly steps to her office doors and closes them gently. She rests her forehead on the heavy mahogany and shuts her eyes. Her mind conjures white and emerald and amethyst and amber and garnet and yellow, yellow, yellow.

She sees nothing.

Her chest expands and deflates with every deep breath. She can’t see air, but she lives off it, and that’s enough, right?

She sharply tilts her head from side to side, and her neck gives satisfying joint pops in return. Her shoulders slouch forward. Her hands slide down the wood until they hang limp in front of her, empty and slowly swaying to the beat of her pulse.

Her heart pumps oceans upon oceans of blood cells, a lifetime’s worth of waves and particles, but how deep does she need to cut for her heart to know what light is?

What does it even matter if light can’t be felt?

She gives herself two more minutes, then she goes back to work.

Chapter End Notes

Ughhhhh this chapter was harddd
It was supposed to be longer but I was tired of not having anything posted for the week
>.<

Thank you for reading!
Lena’s calendar reminds her to board the chopper in 20 minutes. She considers canceling the appointment—she doesn’t really need to impress these people anyway—but the pounding, five-hour headache tells her some fresh air will do her good.

Even with all the plane rides during college, she never really got over her distaste for flying since that trip to Europe. She isn’t afraid as much as she’s unsettled, and she lets her pilot know as much at his reassurance for a smooth flight. She haltingly lowers her clenched hands to her lap and looks out the wide windows.

They rise with a few bumps, and she instinctively glances at the pilot in uncertainty, but the small, dark mass beyond him snatches her interest.

“What the hell?”

Two drones fly into the air with the chopper. Rotating gun barrels drop from the drones’ bodies, and the red targeting lasers aim directly at them. Lena braces her arms against the chopper’s interior and sucks in a breath so deep that she feels herself already plummeting to the ground.

Her left-ribbon explodes to its full intensity in a flash. Lena slams her eyes shut and grunts, but the simultaneous gunfire drowns her out. More and more shots ring out, but the impact never comes. Head reeling, she peels her eyelids back just enough to see past her lashes at the two billowing, crimson capes silhouetted by ricocheting bullets blocking out the drones.

Her brows furrow deep into her forehead, and her eyes flick quickly between each cape and the ribbons reaching out to each of them. The garnet crosses over her torso from her right wrist to Superman, as expected, but Lena knows the bracelet on her left wrist isn’t capable of reflecting such an elongated glare from the sun towards the woman in the other cape.

Supergirl is her soulmate.

Kara Danvers is her soulmate.

Kara Danvers is Supergirl.

How cruel for magic to comply with mathematical law so readily.
She feels herself scream and hopes her throat constricts tight enough to hold back the acid boiling in her stomach. Helplessly trapped in a dizzying whirlwind of explosions and gunfire, she fights to stay conscious until the chopper touches back down on the roof. She yanks off her headset with a huff and runs her hand through her hair as Supergirl enters the cockpit.

“You’re safe now.”

Kryptonians must have a different concept of safety. Lena hopes her squinting reads as frustration and confusion instead of agony.

“What the hell was that?”

Supergirl presses her hand to the pilot’s chest and fixes Lena with a grave stare.

“Someone’s trying to kill you.”

How blue are her eyes when clear of smoke and trepidation?

“Who?”

Supergirl shakes her head without breaking her firm gaze.

“We don’t know. Are you okay?”

Lena jumps slightly when the pilot groans next to her.

“Better than him. What now?”

“Stay here. Let him know what happened if he wakes up. I’ll be back.”

Supergirl leaves the chopper, but her ribbon remains.

Lena shoves the heels of her palms into her eyes and rubs furiously to erase the residual color as she would clear her mouth of a bad aftertaste. All it does is worsen her headache. She removes her hands, checks on the pilot briefly, then rummages through her bag for more Tylenol. She knows Supergirl approaches before she hears the now-familiar voice.

“Hey,” the hero says softly as she watches Lena swallow the medication. “Paramedics and federal agents are on their way. The agents will have questions for you, but I think you should get checked out first.”

“I’m fine,” Lena hastily assures. “I’ll clear my schedule and answer everything I can.”

Lena clutches her bag and scrambles out of her seat faster than Supergirl responds. Her ankles threaten to give out upon standing, but her years of practice in heels prevail and keep her upright as she strides to the edge of the helipad. She pulls out her sunglasses and jams them on, pauses, then pushes them up to the crown of her head and slows her pace to a walk.

She scans her right wrist for any peculiar bands and comes up with nothing, no indication of any enemies who might be closer than usual. Lillian’s amber is as thin and faint as ever. Lex’s amethyst and Jack’s coquelicot continue glowing strong, as if distance is the only barrier between them, and only come second to Superman’s garnet now reinforced with the knowledge of his civilian identity.
Between them all, the ghosts of departed souls stumble and wander aimlessly.

She always thought the white bands would be the most striking, yet Kara (Supergirl, Lena bitterly reminds herself) effortlessly outshines them all. Lena doesn’t remember her father’s emerald green being anywhere near this vibrant on her mother, but maybe that’s because no color can compare to yellow’s natural radiance just as no earthbound fire can compete with the sun.

She swears under her breath at the growing whir of incoming chopper blades. Her sunglasses slide down naturally while she digs for her phone, but they don’t hide Superman’s garnet ribbon swiveling over her head and meeting with Supergirl’s yellow. She texts Alana the situation, then throws her phone back into her bag and stares out at the National City skyline.

It’s so refreshing to live among skyscrapers that she didn’t have to repair.

She turns at the call of her name and doesn’t bother restraining her compulsion to kick the remnants of a fallen drone on her way to the beckoning agent.

Still a proper, responsible Luthor, Lena waits until the evening to reunite with Bushmills whiskey.

Still a headstrong, impulsive 24-year-old, Lena gets shitfaced.

She really should be more concerned about the threat on her life, but what can she do other than hire more security? Probably stay alert in case someone makes another attempt. She takes another sip and figures her bodyguards can be sober enough for her.

Her first instinct is to Google the fuck out of Kara Danvers, but her paranoia tells her to wait, that the FBI wouldn’t hesitate to enact the Patriot Act on a Luthor obsessing over a human tied to Supergirl. Instead, she researches gemstones. Regrettably, canary diamonds are the only yellow jewels she knows, but where’s the poetry in that? Even if the color richness matches the ribbon, the name doesn’t carry any strength, and what’s wealth without a respectable name?

She snorts and swirls her drink before taking a sip more akin to a gulp.

She knows she shouldn’t hang herself up over inconsequential categorizations and semantics, but her work’s done, she’s drunk, and somebody tried to kill her. Twice. Most yellow gem names derive from an impurity of the original (yellow sapphires, yellow quartz, yellow tourmaline) and lack impact. She eventually settles on cymophane, a cat’s eye variant of chrysoberyl, as it embodies both the true yellow of Kara’s ribbon as well as its white-hot heat with its “milk and honey” pattern.

Lena repeats the word a few times in her head and fumbles spectacularly. She can’t take it seriously when it feels like a combination of cellophane and sycophant, and her mind conjures an image of Supergirl with a flimsy, plastic wrap cape.

She laughs despite herself. The entire situation is an absurd, unimaginable, scandalous, torturous non-irony worthy of Alanis Morissette’s pen: a Luthor and a Super with a dash of magic and murderous intent binding them together.

Fuck this.
Lena hadn’t even considered that different species could be soulmates, but maybe she just didn’t recognize the aliens. For all of Kara’s human qualities, she is still a Kryptonian. Lena has never seen a left-ribbon connect with animals even though they possess consciousness and souls, but what if all the people she has seen without left-ribbons are actually connected to animals? Sure, soulmates don’t have to be romantic or intimate, but for many of them...

She shudders and pushes her drink away for the night.

Still, the probability of encountering one specific, perfect human on Earth is so low that it’s nothing short of miraculous for soulmates to find each other. Then to include intergalactic beings? How is it not impossible?

Lena never considered herself religious—magic lights contradict most common dogmas—nor a believer in fate, but she refuses to believe the universe could be so wicked as to leave this to chance, to connect two souls separated by thousands of lightyears and never give them the opportunity to meet. At the very least, maybe there’s an outline guiding souls to their place within the bigger picture, and it’s up to them whether or not to color within the lines.

What if they have no color?

She reaches again for the drink.

Lena often wonders how her family acquired the magical sight, but, more importantly, she wishes she knew how it worked. The white bonds prove that they’re magic, but the interference with sunglasses and cameras tells her they’re physical. Where does the magic stop and science begin? It’s not like she can test it, either, without her sanity questioned.

Then again, insanity might have more genetic basis than magic.

She drags herself to bed as her spinning mind imagines the rods and cones in her eyes as magic wands and wizard hats.

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Chapter End Notes

Happy New Year! Thank you for reading ~

Also, the chapters should come more regularly once I’m done moving at the end of the week :)

Deleted line that I regret not finding a place for:
If it weren’t for the murder, Lena might have found the honesty refreshing.
To Live Among Shadows

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

All things (alcohol) considered, Lena should really be more hungover, but why question a good thing?

Armed with extra concealer under her eyes, she begins her day making rounds of the different labs. Her lead ocular scientist proudly announces that Lena’s custom tinted contact lenses are ready for a test run. Lena hardly contains her excitement when she promises to be back after the renaming ceremony to try them on.

She stops by her office to check on emails and give last minute directions to Alana but hesitates after standing to leave. She turns back to a locked, nondescript drawer behind her desk and pulls out the gun and holster stored inside.

She is a Luthor, after all.

Lena doesn’t bother trying to act surprised at seeing Kara leaning against a planter just outside the building’s doors. She musters as much confidence as possible behind her sunglasses and approaches the blond with head held high.

“Miss Danvers,” she greets. “Covering the press conference?”

“Oh, um, not really,” Kara stammers as she pushes herself upright. “I’m not a reporter, or… um…” she clears her throat, “I heard about the attack yesterday and wanted to see how you were doing.”

Lena motions that they should walk. “A couple bruises, but I’m alive.”

Kara matches Lena’s pace easily. Despite her hands casually resting in her pockets, her eyes are alert and her back is straight at attention. “Are you nervous?”

The concealed gun weighs heavy on her hip and rubs against her skin with every step.

“Maybe if there were an actual crowd,” Lena mutters. She didn’t even bring any notes. She scans the small gathering of people in front of the modest podium. “But, my brother is serving 32 consecutive life sentences. Guess I shouldn’t be surprised there isn’t a bigger turn out.”

Kara’s head twists around at the mention of Lex, but she waits until Lena finishes speaking. “You’re taking an awful risk going ahead with the renaming ceremony with your life in danger.”

“Won’t have a life if I can’t make this company into something positive,” Lena counters. “All I’ll be remembered for is Lex’s madness.”

Lena reluctantly abandons Kara at the base of the stage, pretends not to notice Kara watching after her by removing her sunglasses, and assumes her place at the podium. She rests her hands on the glass and breathes in deeply.
“I want to thank you all for coming,” she begins somberly. “My brother hurt a lot of good, innocent people. My family owes a debt not just to Metropolis, but to everyone… and I intend to pay that.” She stretches her lips into a smile and tells herself it’s only half-forced. “By renaming my company L-Corp, we will usher in a new age of cooperation and community. Together, we will tread a brighter future.”

She doesn’t have the opportunity to give her PR-polished eye contact to more than two attendees before the LuthorCorp statue explodes behind her. A flood of fear and confusion rushes through her for only a second before morphing into adrenaline. She tosses a glance over her shoulder to see the plaza erupting in fire, then dashes down the stairs and almost trips over a subsequent explosion hidden under the steps. She runs across the plaza, placing as much distance between herself and the stage while frantically looking for her security.

She hones in on an officer marching purposefully towards her.

“Officer! Thank god,” she cries out. Wordlessly, he raises his arm and the gun clenched tight in his fist. Her feet stutter to a stop, and she swears his hand squeezes around her throat as well.

A woman with short auburn hair rushes behind the officer and forces his hand towards the ground. He fires a round into the concrete and wrestles with the woman until they turn away from Lena.

Lena darts behind a pillar at the bottom of a short set of steps. She fumbles with her coat buttons until she can open them enough to unholster her gun. The fires and chaos make the air hot and suffocating, but the glock is cool in her hand. She thinks of the hundreds of shooting range trips with Lex and her brain switches to autopilot. She blocks out the deafening blasts, the erratic swiveling of her red and yellow ribbons, and the smoke filling her lungs.

Instead, she focuses on the texture of the pistol grip adhered to the grooves of her fingertips, counts to three, straightens up, then peers around the pillar. Her view is obscured by the back of the assailant. She shuffles closer until she sees his gun barrel aiming down at the woman.

Lena raises her gun and places her finger on the trigger.

Her left bond flashes and the attached ribbon falls from the sky to directly in front of her and the imposter, and Lena points her glock towards the ground instantly. Now squinting, Lena watches the man grab the woman and hold her against his chest, gun pressed hard to her temple.

Lena hears Supergirl shout for the woman’s release. She can’t make out the man’s answer, but Supergirl’s next words come through crystal clear.

“Lex Luthor hired you to kill his sister, didn’t he?”

Rage slithers up from the pit of her stomach and plunges its fangs deep into her heart.

She fires the gun twice.

In the aftermath, she recognizes some of the same agents from the chopper attack but can’t bring herself to do much more than nod with whatever they say. The anger continues gnawing at her insides and pumping her with a frozen venom. Icicles stick into the walls of her veins and catch on
every passing blood cell, causing her extremities to throb painfully. She flexes her fists and rolls her ankles before walking carefully through the scattered concrete, dirt, and blood littering the plaza. She tries to occupy her mind with repair cost estimates and fails tremendously.

The timing doesn’t make sense. Why would he wait so long? He had to be pissed about her turning him in to the police, right? Maybe he just found out and used the ceremony as a high-profile event to make a statement, but why would he need to make a public spectacle about it? Nobody except the police knows that she called in the tip.

Maybe Lena wasn’t the target. He did blow up the LuthorCorp logo, after all. The stage was secondary. When he targeted her with the alien attacks, he gave explicit instructions that she wasn’t to be harmed, and all of Lex’s terrorism had a larger purpose. The only reason she was involved was because he wanted her to join him.

Lena shuts her eyes and pinches the bridge of her nose, chastises herself for still wanting the best from her brother. He plotted the drone attack away from any crowds. He told the would-be assassin to target her specifically.

Lex hates her.

“Ms. Luthor?”

She rubs her eyes before turning towards Supergirl. Even before looking upon the hero, her concern is palpable through her voice.

“The agents are ready to take you home now.”

“No,” Lena declines. “I have more work to do. I’ll be fine walking to my office.”

Supergirl recoils slightly, but her gaze doesn’t waver.

“Alright. Please stay safe.”

Lena nods. “Thank you.”

Kara’s ribbon points skyward for the entirety of Lena’s short walk, a ray of sun shining on the snow-covered earth for the first day of spring. When Lena opens the heavy glass doors to the building and the bond lingers outside for several moments, she feels warm again.

Lena finally makes it to the ocular lab late in the evening.

“Dr. Châtelet, sorry for the delay,” Lena apologizes before she’s completely in the room.

“Not at all,” the scientist replies robotically in her thick, French accent. Without looking up from her computer, she gestures to the middle of the lab. “Your lenses are on the bench.”

Lena might’ve skipped if she weren’t so exhausted. Four lens cases in a tight row rest on the bench next to a small tabletop mirror and a flashlight. Lena opens the case closest to her as fast as her fingers let her. Inside, contacts with dark circles in the optic zone sit immersed in solution. She pops them in and blinks past the initial discomfort until she can look at herself in the mirror. In the dim lab,
her pupils are so wide that they encompass the entire tinted circle. She waves the beam of the flashlight over her eyes and watches her pupils contract. The tint extends slightly beyond her constricted pupils and adds a layer of maroon over the center of her green irises.

She subtly looks down to her ribbons. She can still make out each band despite the color shift and drop in perceived intensity, just like when she wears sunglasses.

“Do these have UV protection?”

“Yes.” Dr. Châtelet leaves her computer and stands tall next to Lena, her dusky, russet bond dissolving into a directional mist without taking the form of a ribbon. “These trials are for the shape and fit of the lenses. I gave you a sample of each line. You’re wearing the standard pupil-only, obviously. You also have the standard full-iris and the photochromic versions for each.”

Lena whips her head to gawk at the researcher. “You finished the transitions?”

The scientist smirks. “They won’t be as comfortable as the standards, but yes. They have inherent UV protection as well.”

“When will they be ready?”

“The standards are ready now. I want more data for the photochromics. We’re going back and forth with the FDA, too. A couple weeks, maybe a month.”

“That’s fine,” Lena smiles. “We won’t release any of them until they’re all done. I’ll keep you updated on how they feel. Good work.”

Everyone who isn’t afraid to make eye contact with her does a double take the next day, but they don’t ask about the discoloration. Lena decides not to care. She’s the CEO and she hasn’t taken a single painkiller all morning.

A timid knock on her open door takes her attention from the computer to the entryway.

“Jessica,” Lena greets pleasantly. “How can I help you?”

“Hi, um, here’s the mail, and I picked up the plaza damage report on my way,” the receptionist stammers as she steps to Lena’s desk.

“Thank you,” Lena says as she takes the papers. Jessica takes a few steps back but hovers while fiddling with her hands. Lena patiently watches her, eyebrows loosely knotted in curiosity.

“Can I ask you something?” Jessica finally manages. Lena nods instantly. “You… you said you’re going to help repair the buildings damaged in the plaza attack, right?” Lena nods again. “Does that include the children’s hospital?”

“Of course. It was minor compared to that skyscraper.”

Lena feels Jessica’s relief wash over her as her pink ribbon elongates. “Oh that’s great! When I heard Morgan Edge wanted to buy it I thought—”
“What?” Lena interrupts. At Jessica’s flinch, Lena softens. “Why does he want to buy it?”

“Well…” Jessica twists the hem of her blouse. “I heard the hospital was already in trouble, and Mr. Edge was considering buying them out anyway, then with the additional damage costs, there’s no way they would be able to stay above water, but…” She looks up at Lena with reddening eyes. “My brother is a patient there, and I don’t know where he could go if Mr. Edge would—”

“That’s not happening.”

Jessica chokes. Lena grabs a pen and rips open the closest piece of mail, then scribbles names on the envelope.

“Their emails are in the L-Corp database. I assume you have access to my calendar?” Jessica answers affirmatively, and Lena hands her the empty envelope. “Invite them all for a lunch with me next week. Do you think you can procure the contact information for the hospital management?” Jessica nods. “If you have difficulties, ask Alana or marketing to assist you. Copy me on all emails and send me notes on any phone calls. Keep me informed on any news you find on Edge’s movements, especially if it concerns the hospital. Do you have any questions?”

“No, Ms. Luthor.”

Lena grins. “Then let’s get to it. Let me know if there’s anything else, Jessica.”

The receptionist takes two steps towards the door, then turns back with a cautious smile. “I go by Jess, actually.”

“Really?” Lena questions with a breathy laugh. “Eight months and you’re just telling me now?”

“It never came up.”

Lena laughs again as Jess leaves her office, then looks at the mail she inadvertently opened in her haste. Three addresses and dates scrawled in gold sit delicately on the inside crease of a small, scarlet card.

She growls and shreds the invitation until her fingers can’t hold the scraps.

Her cymophane and garnet bonds brighten towards the end of her 9:30 AM meeting, and she exits the conference room with a text from Alana waiting on her phone announcing Kara and Clark’s visit. She looks down to her left wrist and smiles. Even with minimal distance, the contacts shield her eyes enough so she can look without pain. She lifts her chin and struts to elevator, ready to finally give her full attention to Kara Danvers.

Lena still catches herself reacting to Superman in civilian clothing, especially sitting in a stackable reception room chair and fidgeting with thick-rimmed glasses while making small talk with her soulmate. They both turn at the sound of the elevator and synchronously rise when her heels clack against the hard floor.

“Miss Danvers, Mr. Kent,” she nods to each of them.
“Ms. Luthor,” Clark jumps in. He holds out a copy of the Daily Planet. “Hot off the press. Thought we’d hand-deliver it to you.”

“You didn’t have to go that far,” Lena admonishes while taking the paper anyway. She continues walking into her office and hangs her bag on the rack before opening the article. Bold letters on the front page read *New Day for L-Corp*, and Clark Kent is listed as the sole author. It’s factual, detailed, and objective, much like his pieces on her brother, but her face falls into a frown. Superman was there, but Clark Kent the reporter was not. Why does he have the article under his name?

Regardless, it’s good, and it will do wonders for her reputation.

“Thank you, Mr. Kent,” she says as she folds the newspaper back down. “This is exactly the kind of press my company needs after yesterday’s attack, and thank you for including the part about me shooting the guy.” She crosses her arms and comfortably shares her attention between the cousins. “That’ll teach Lex to mess with me. He’s gonna be the laughing stock of Cell Block X.”

Clark chuckles. “Well, that’s not exactly why I wrote it. I wrote it because it’s the truth. I was wrong about you, Ms. Luthor. I’m sorry.”

Lena pushes her arms harder against her chest to hide her swelling pride. “Well, if I could make a believer out of,” *Superman*, “Clark Kent, then there’s hope yet.” The three share another smile, but Kara lowers her gaze to the floor at the first opportunity.

Supergirl should never feel less than Superman.

“What about you, Miss Danvers? I didn’t see your name on the byline.”

Supergirl should never be surprised by being addressed directly.

“Um, uh, well, like I said: I’m not a reporter.”

Kara Danvers is so much more.

“You could’ve fooled me.”

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Chapter End Notes

#sciencetime Tinted contact lenses (other than colored contacts) are a thing that I didn’t know about until writing this. Axonoptics’ migraine contact lenses are my main reference, and you can see pictures on their website. Photochromic/transition contact lenses kind of exist, but there isn’t a consumer-friendly product out yet for various reasons. I have ideas on how Dr. Châtelet could’ve achieved it, but that’s me being a plebeian nerd living in sci-fi >.<
It’s truly a shame that Kara’s glasses make it difficult for Lena to accurately compare the dark blue of her jacket to the brighter blue of her eyes.

When she falls asleep, she dreams of sleeping on beaches and sunbathing and warmth.
You Have the Strength to Break Your Chains. It's in Your Blood.

Lena leaves a television on at all times. She keeps two screens: one for world news and the other for local. The local news only plays at certain times (5 AM - 7 AM, 3 PM - 6:30 PM, 11 PM - 11:30 PM) which is probably for the best. Supergirl tends to dominate their coverage.

Nobody questions it. It’s reasonable for one of the most powerful people in the world to stay on top of current events, after all.

They don’t need to know she only watches for the red cape.

It’s no replacement for the ribbon. Not by a long shot. But at least she has context for whenever the yellow bond spontaneously flashes. It makes sleep difficult, and she invests in an eye mask.

Usually, this habit means she stays informed (the President’s upcoming visit presents a couple opportunities) and, maybe, a bit happier when her soulmate graces the screen.

On other days, it terrifies the hell out of her.

She had only known the identity of Supergirl since a few days ago. Lena doesn’t even want to fathom the extent of her worry had she been aware during the mind control disaster. She figures Superman’s presence, a safety net that Supergirl will never need to fall into, is a nice way to ease her into the anxiety.

That is, until the live-broadcast of their attempt to talk down a man from jumping off a bridge and he answers with blasts of kryptonite radiation out of his chest. She rips her tinted contacts out of her eyes to confirm the sickening green since the reporter expresses hesitation at defining the weapon, but no other substance on earth could possibly achieve that viridescence.

Her stomach heaves at the first punch that hurtles Supergirl across the bridge. Her hands press hard on top of her desk, just below her line of sight but close enough to keep tabs on any color change. They abruptly tighten into fists when Supergirl stands on top of the car, then slam down as the hero takes a direct shot to the chest. Lena uses the momentum to push herself up and walk in front of the screen. The shaky chopper footage doesn’t show anything more than the shadow of the attacker covering Supergirl, but Superman shoves the man off the bridge faster than it takes for Lena to gasp.

Her breath sticks in her lungs as Superman lifts Supergirl’s limp body, a pliable mass of blond hair and sagging limbs, and propels himself into the air and out of sight.

Lena falls back against her desk. Her skin crawls at the grating sound of metal on tile as the desk pushes away from her weight, or maybe it’s her teeth grinding in concentration. She keeps her head pointed low and towards her left wrist, fingers gripping the edge of her desk until her knuckles turn white. The bond fades with the distance, but the color remains the same like the yellow sun triumphantly shining through the wisp of a cloud.

She stays there, motionless, for minutes while her mind races away from replays of Supergirl’s defeat. For all the bullets that may ricochet off her skin, Supergirl isn’t invincible no matter how much Lena wants to believe differently.

Well then, fuck it. If Supergirl’s skin isn’t enough, then Lena will give her armor.
She returns to her laptop and pulls up LuthorCorp project archives. Although the government halted all their military and defense R&D, they didn’t remove the files from their servers, but Lena kept them encrypted for only her credentials regardless. She opens the blueprints for the armor Lex developed during the Kryptonian invasion all those years ago. He was able to harness kryptonite radiation for protective shields and vests; what if they were able to do the same with black-body radiation?

It’s a stretch, and L-Corp hasn’t spent any resources on black-body research. Maybe their early work on kryptonite radiation would be enough to help develop a black-body that could absorb it if the government hasn’t already.

She texts Alana to help her find a government contact that could hear out her proposal. She combs through her email contacts for anybody with any remote connection to the old military contract, but all of her messages bounce back, and her phone calls reach disconnected lines. She’s just about to fling her laptop off her desk when her screens turn to snow juxtaposed with a haunting, digitally-rendered face of a phantom.

She stares, transfixed and unblinking, at the abrupt footage cuts and grainy images, ears assaulted by the virulent hatred and arrogance and war, until the monitors snap back to the news.

Even with the phantom gone, the face floats behind her mind’s eye and melds with her memory of Lex: all pale, smooth skin and shifting shadows.

Her phone buzzes next to her left wrist. Her cymophane bond glows just strong enough to shine around her phone, and Lena dares to hope. She dials the number from Alana’s text immediately.

It rings once. “Smith speaking.”

“Hi, I have technology to offer for the recent kryptonite attacks. I might—”

“Who is this?”

Lena hesitates. “Lena Luthor.”

The man scoffs. “You’ve been barred from any defense operations.”

“I—I know, but the company—”

“What makes you think we will ever work with a Luthor?”

“I’m not my brother. I can protect Super—”

“You mean murder.”

“No, that’s wrong. We—”

“You Luthors will never change.”

The phone beeps to signal the end of the call. Lena gracelessly plops her arm onto the desk and stares at the white dial screen until it goes dark. Her right bonds drift and fluctuate, but her left stays constant with the tiniest wisp of a ribbon peeking out from the larger glow.

Her shoulders slump, and she reclines against her chair, her arms still outstretched in front of her. Her mind stops running and the faces catch up easily: Lex, the phantom, the shadow of the “jumper,” and the gunman from the plaza. They don’t even stop for breath before surrounding her and screaming
profanities and insults and her name—always her name—in the same voice from the other side of the call.

She snatches up a pen and makes a note to look into black body radiation. Then, she collects her things, turns off the lights, and leaves.

She drinks until she drowns and sinks far down enough to where the light can’t reach.

Not even in her dreams.

Lena leaves her hair down. She’s noticed that she’s less threatening, potentially because the frazzled ends soften her jawline. She forgoes her tinted contacts as well. The unnatural coloration tends to catch people off-guard, and she wants the hospital management to feel as comfortable as possible around her.

It must work, or maybe the board and C-suite are just that desperate. Lena invited Jess to the meeting in case they needed the extra pathos to sway them in their favor, to make them believe in a civilian if not a Luthor, but they only want numbers, and she has numbers in spades.

They end the meeting with handshakes and grins. As they part from the management at a fork in the hallway, Lena nudges Jess with her elbow.

“You did well.”

Jess shakes her head. “I didn’t really do much of anything.”

“Your demeanor was perfect, and sometimes that’s all you need to make a client feel at ease,” Lena reassures, “especially when coordinating something as delicate and high-stakes as bankruptcy. It doesn’t matter how good your proposal is if they won’t trust you.”

Jess smiles bashfully, but her eyes continue roaming the halls as they walk. “Okay. Thank you, Ms. Luthor.”

Lena smiles back, but her eyebrows furrow at Jess’ unease. “Is there something wrong?”

Jess slows down. “Is it okay if I visit my brother?”

“Of course. I’ll wait for you in the car.”

Jess nods and takes the next right into another hallway in the same direction a pale, lavender ribbon points from her right wrist.

“Fancy seeing you here.”
Lena turns back towards the voice and finds herself all too close to sharp, brown eyes. “Likewise, Morgan.”

“You know,” Edge begins, “I don’t appreciate your interference. I have great plans for this community.”

“Plans that would displace hundreds of sick children,” Lena fires back.

“Nonsense,” Edge dismisses. “There are plenty of alternatives to this hospital.”

“At least 40 miles away—”

“Just a short drive.”

“—without nearly as many resources—”

“Every hospital saves lives.”

“—and it would cause unnecessary stress for patients in critical condition.”

“They’ll live.”

Lena’s eyes widen incredulously. “What kind of twisted fuck do you—”

“Language, Lena,” Edge smirks. “There are children here.”

She seethes, but words can’t break their way through the tangled anger in her throat. She looks around reflexively, checking the proximity of young ears to their conversation, and the television in one of the rooms catches her eye. Superman and Supergirl stand amidst rubble in Metropolis, and the news ticker underneath reports another kryptonite attack. She watches just long enough to see the heroes shoot back into the sky.

She swallows and settles deeper into her stance.

“My family made you,” she growls, “and I can destroy you just as easily. You aren’t taking this hospital.”

“You might be surprised. The hospital board definitely will be once I tell them of the new CHIP restrictions. I wonder how they’ll be able to pay their bills if patients can’t pay for theirs?”

Lena shoves him hard with her shoulder as she storms past.

“You should really try to make it to Roulette’s tournaments,” he calls after her. “I know your brother had a great time.”

Lena reads news on the Metropolis attack until Jess climbs into the town car and gently shuts the door.

“How is he?”
“Still fighting.”

“Good.”

“Have you heard back from the black-body researchers yet?” Lena asks Alana when she returns.

“I’m sorry, Miss Luthor,” Alana apologizes. “Not yet. I’ve been swamped with the guestlist—” her phone chirps as evidence, “and more people have been wanting interviews with you since the rebrand. You’ll have a couple emails if you haven’t checked already.”

“No problem. Thank you.”

Lena leaves her office door half-open and turns on her TVs while her laptop loads. It’s barely noon, and she’s stuck with world news and stock tickers for three hours. At least her overflowing email inbox will be enough to occupy her time. They’re mostly mundane updates that she glosses over or project submissions that require her approval, but she spends extra time replying to the TED organization’s request for her to host a talk. She finishes just after 3, and she flips channels to the local news as soon as she realizes. Seeing that they aren’t playing anything interesting, she clicks through some web journals for black-body research. She already knows the wavelength of kryptonite (probably… *that* data might’ve been seized) so it would just be a matter of finding the right material and heating it up to emit matching radiation, then making it durable enough to withstand wars between gods.

Easy, right?

She drops her head onto her desk and groans.

Her ears perk at the newscaster announcing breaking news, and she jerks her head up immediately. Superman and the kryptonite-infused terrorist fight in the same destroyed park that the Supers investigated hours prior. She gasps when Superman takes another direct hit of kryptonite, and her jaw stays unhinged as the hero continues to stand at full strength. He flings himself into the enemy, and Lena thinks at certain angles she can see what might be a makeshift breastplate configured to negate the radiation. She wants to pause the footage and zoom in, but the resolution won’t give her anything better than this.

At least they have something.

The newscaster muses upon Supergirl’s whereabouts before Lena can think it, but Lena knows it doesn’t matter. Her left bond is bright and strong. Supergirl’s safe, even if she didn’t have anything to do with it.

The next morning, she wakes to a Google alert notifying her of Kara Danvers’ first article.
She stays in bed until she feels the sun.

Chapter End Notes

Black-body radiation isn’t my forte sorryyyy

Fun fact: the chapter titles are inspired by the Nietzsche concept of the abyss (per Wikipedia: “He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And if you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you.”) and Plato/Socrates’ Allegory of the Cave. Do with that what you will ~

Next chapter will be up Sunday at the latest as reparation for not having Kara here. As a preview... my average chapter length is ~2000 words. Next chapter's first Kara/Lena scene has over 1500 words. I hope this earns forgiveness >.<
Do You Dare Turn Your Head?

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

She wouldn’t be surprised if she got blamed for the attack on the president. Well, her last name, at least, will be thrown into the ring as a likely contender for the culprit. Why would a Luthor ever want alien rights?

Meanwhile, all she can do is wait for the damn radiation experts to get back to her while Supergirl gets scorched by actual balls of fire. Alana sent out the emails a week ago. Are they scared of the Luthor name too?

She huffs and pushes open the doors to the ocular lab.

“Dr. Châtelet, may I have a word?”

“You may have several,” the scientist responds from behind a microscope.

“Do you know anybody in black-body radiation research?”

The researcher pauses, then wheels away from the microscope and to her laptop. “I’ll send you the email.”

“Thank you,” Lena replies. She walks back towards the lab entrance but stops halfway. “The contacts feel great, by the way.”

Dr. Châtelet snorts. “But of course. FDA will approve them soon.”

Lena’s left-ribbon quickly weaves together in the mid-morning. At the realization that Kara is definitely coming to her building and definitely going to talk to her, she pulls out a gold bracelet from her desk and slips it on her left wrist. The familiar weight grounds her and takes her back to when the bond was her comfort, the physical representation of something real no matter how imaginary light may seem.

She swivels her chair towards the window. Her skin burns under the heat of the sun, but her tinted contacts help her look upon the illuminated skyline painlessly.

This isn’t Supergirl, all strength and steel and flight. This is Kara Danvers, all… glasses and ponytail and cymophane? Truthfully, Kara had hidden so much behind Clark Kent during their first meeting that Lena felt closer to the hero than to the civilian. She resolves to pay attention and take her time, to learn the woman that destiny decided she should know.

Jess calls to announce Kara’s arrival, and Lena mentally repeats a mantra of “human” over and over until the elevator dings open.

“Ms. Luthor,” Kara greets as she enters the office. “Ponytail” doesn’t adequately describe the neat French braids pulled from each side of her head and into a larger braid cascading down her neck.
The gray sweater and olive pants are markedly muted, and Lena wouldn’t have been able to
discriminate between the hues through her tinted contacts if she hadn’t spent a lifetime analyzing
colors.

“Lena, please,” she corrects as she stands from her desk. She gestures towards the chair for Kara to
sit. “It’s good to see you again, Miss Danvers.”

“Well, if I’m calling you Lena…”

“‘Kara’ it is,” Lena concedes. Human. “Um, if you have a parking ticket, I could have it validated
for you.”

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

Seriously?

“Well, I’m glad you decided to give reporting a shot.” Lena smiles encouragingly at Kara’s apparent
nervousness. “Although, if you’re here on the same day the President is in town to sign her Alien
Amnesty Act, then…”

“I must be here to ask the sister of Earth’s most notorious alien-hater her take on the President’s
executive order,” Kara completes while flipping open her notebook.

Lena subconsciously fixates on Kara’s wrists. Even though her left is empty, her right possesses a
vibrance Lena doesn’t often see. A few colors stand out—a dark blue-gray points off through a
corner of the room, and Superman’s garnet burns strong although the ribbon doesn’t extend—but the
sheer quantity of white staggers her. Not even Superman has experienced that much loss.

Then again, how could that farm boy know the loss of an entire planet?

Lena’s left-ribbon grows.

“The short answer? I support it.”

Kara’s fingers twitch around her pen, and she bites her lip. “What’s the long answer?”

“Nobody should have to live in fear because of where they come from. Granting basic civil liberties
should be just the beginning.”

At that, Kara writes some notes and reveals the barest hint of a smile. Lena feels the corners of her
mouth curl up as well. Kara holds the pen deep in her fist, and she keeps the notebook taut across her
lap, but her marks are light. What must it be like to have the strength to hold back your power?

It would be so easy to manipulate Kara, to unravel that gray sweater, drain the dye from the strands,
and paint black and white checkerboards into every conversation all because Lena already holds an
end of the thread. It’s inevitable, really. She was great at this game before her father first guided her
hands.

“LuthorCorp was pretty active in politics under previous management. Will L-Corp follow that same
model?”

“No.”

Kara stutters and taps her pen against her notebook. Maybe Lena is too terse, too defensive in
anticipation of the target most press outlets happily slap on her back.
“Sorry. Habit,” Lena brushes off with a wave of her hand. “You’re doing fine.”

Kara’s smile returns, but her tapping continues. “Do you think this will have any influence on L-Corp’s product lines or research?”

“Maybe,” Lena starts hesitantly. “Our civil and mechanical engineering will likely be unaffected, but I hope our biotech and pharmacological research can expand. Some of the company’s earlier innovations were ill-intended but can have life-saving applications, too. Actually…” she looks around the room for an example. “These tinted contacts I’m wearing. We started developing them a few months ago, not on the market yet. They have extra UV protection and work like sunglasses. What if we can customize them to wavelengths that aliens aren’t accustomed to because we have light not found on their planet?”

She pauses when she notices Kara watching her but not taking any notes. “Off the record? It’d be great pre-marketing if you included that in your piece.”

“Oh!” Kara breaks her reverie. “Right! Sure thing. Not a problem.” She scribbles furiously on the notepad. Even if Lena is proud of the contacts, she wishes she didn’t need them. She could’ve missed Kara’s blush.

“You mentioned earlier innovations?” Kara asks.

“Yes,” Lena exhales deeply. “LuthorCorp had a massive alien research department. I shut it down when I took over, but it could have done some real good eventually. They… they made an alien detection device. We could give it to paramedics and doctors so they can treat the injured according to their species.” She shakes her head and crosses her arms over the desk. “Like I said before, I want L-Corp to be a force for good, and that includes for non-humans, too.”

“Wouldn’t…” Kara coughs and twiddles her pen. “Don’t you think that device would force aliens back into the shadows the President is trying to shine a light on?”

Lena tilts her head to the side. “In the wrong hands. That’s why I scrapped the program.”

“Doesn’t L-Corp still invest in alien research?”

Even when asking tough questions, Kara’s face naturally falls into a smile.

“Yes, but only without taking a controlling interest in the work. There should be public records to back that up,” Lena recites. She pauses and consciously lowers her defenses again. “We invest in biological studies and drug trials. Sometimes we offer consultation. Healthcare is already such a mess in this country. Can’t imagine what it’s like without medicine tailored to your biology.”

“Does that mean L-Corp plans to enter a more… diverse market?”

Lena props her chin on her hand and fixes Kara with an unwavering stare. Maybe Lena doesn’t need to play the game.

Maybe honesty is enough.

“The goal beyond amnesty is equality. The President can make aliens citizens and say they have all the same rights as humans, but they will still be essentially second-class if the private sector doesn’t adjust.” She lowers her arm back to the desk and leans forward slightly. “That’s where L-Corp will come in. Morality comes first for me, but profitability comes first for the company. As long as we meet both requirements, L-Corp can do some real good.”
“What… ah…” Kara bites her lip and crosses her legs. They sit in silence for a second too long before Lena goads her with a wry smile and raised eyebrow.

“Go on. I can take it.”

Kara adjusts her glasses. “What happens if it isn’t profitable?”

“Not possible with me as CEO.”

Kara breathes out a soft laugh and scratches at her notepad. She flips through her pages and completes some notes in the margins, and Lena just observes. Kara has freckles that she doesn’t quite cover with her modest makeup. The small scar above the bridge of her nose fits perfectly in the groove of her knotted eyebrows, and the fainter divot in her cheek only stands out when she speaks or smiles. She—

“I think I have what I need.”

Lena blinks rapidly. “Oh. Great. Let me get you my card.” She pushes back from her desk and strides to her bag hanging on the coat rack. “Just email me if there’s anything else.”

She turns back to Kara clutching her oversized bag in the middle of the room. Lena sucks in a deep breath and walks towards her with as much confidence as she can muster. Although still a respectable distance away, it’s the closest she’s ever been to Kara, and her left-ribbon shines so bright that Lena has to squint even with the contacts. She attempts to mask her discomfort with a large smile that extends into her eyes.

She offers Kara the card from her left hand.

“You’ll let me know when the article comes out?”

“Yeah, of course.”

Kara takes the card with her left hand.

Did the ribbon just shrink?

It reforms just as fast with the end of the ribbon suspended at the midpoint between their wrists when Kara pulls her hand away. Lena’s eyebrows flicker for just a moment, but she refuses to look down completely. Instead, she holds Kara’s gaze and shrinks her smile into a smirk.

“Looking forward to it.”

Lena isn’t drunk. She paired her bottle of Riesling with a hearty helping of angel hair pasta and white sauce this time.

Well, she ate an hour and a half before she started drinking, but that won’t matter, right?

She misses the side table on her first attempt to set down her glass. She chooses to continue holding it instead.
The black-body researcher Dr. Châtelet recommended replied to her email within the hour. Lena almost offered her a job upon receiving the seventh response in the day but reeled herself in. A new department should at least be thought out while sober.

She has more important work to do anyway. Kara isn’t cymophane. It’s bright, but it’s cold, and it speaks nothing of her fight or her sincerity.

Is it diminutive to compare her to a flower? Jack was unquestionably coquelicot with his soft eyes and tender words, but for a woman, particularly a woman of such strength, it feels off. Old-fashioned. Clichéd. Inappropriate. Weak.

Whatever. If Kara can empower “Supergirl” over “Superwoman,” she can empower a damn flower. Besides, the plumeria is perfect. The gently-folded white petals complement the intense, central yellow and add just enough contrast without competing for the focal point. Apparently, it’s rare in this non-tropical region, but she found a florist between the office and her apartment that carries them.

Her email dings with a new message. Thankfully, she only spilled a little wine in her haste to open it when she saw Kara’s name as the sender.

It’s polite but cordial, just confirming L-Corp’s hyphenation and thanking Lena for her time, but Lena still cross-references her company name against four documents and triple-checks her grammar before sending a short reply.

She takes two more sips of wine and refreshes the page until Kara’s response pops in. Lena didn’t know it was possible to fit ten exclamation points in one line of text.

She smiles around the rim of her glass and closes her laptop.

She emails Kara an invitation to her office before she even finishes the article. It’s a fair profile and accurately balances Lena’s corporate interests with her philanthropic intent. She senses an undercurrent of disapproval when it comes to L-Corp, though, but she never expects anything different, especially when it comes to capitalizing on the desperation of the vulnerable.

Lex’s face flashes briefly in her mind’s eye.

Kara’s ribbon peeks out from behind her gold bracelet in the mid-morning. Lena paces for a few fraught minutes until her ankles threaten to bleed in protest, then curls up on the couch and flips through the entirety of the magazine (again) and periodically glances at the new flowers on the coffee table.

She hears Kara’s voice through the pages... or is it Supergirl’s? Lena imagines Kara in her glasses and cape punctuating each declarative sentence with her hands on her hips, and she finds herself smiling when she hears footsteps and small talk outside her office door. Kara thanks Alana for letting her into the room and launches into a slight ramble.

“Hi, I’m sorry to drop in unannounced, I just got the message you wanted to see me, those flowers are beautiful.”
“They’re called ‘plumerias,’” Lena says. “They’re pretty rare.”

Just like Kara.

“They remind me of my mother,” Kara shares with a small smile.

“Was your mother a writer, too?”

“No, she was, um, I guess, s-sort of a lawyer,” Kara stumbles.

“Well, you have a natural gift with words. The article’s amazing,” Lena compliments as she puts the magazine on the table. Kara looks down and fidgets with her hands inside the pockets of her burgundy dress.

“I knew you’d make a great reporter,” Lena continues, “and you asked some hard questions, but I get the feeling you don’t completely approve of L-Corp’s actions.”

Kara slides her bag off her shoulder and sets it to the ground as she lands on the couch next to Lena. It takes every fiber of strength in Lena’s facial muscles to restrain her instinct to squint from the bond’s brightness.

“I thought my boss cut out all of that,” Kara says while adjusting her glasses. “It’s just… hard to accept altruism being so closely tied to profit.”

“Good thing I’m great at my job,” Lena adds with a quirk of her eyebrow. “It’s not like I’m going to pull a Mylan.”

“I believe it.” Kara laughs softly and rubs her hands together over her lap. “I had to vet L-Corp for the piece, and everything’s been spotless since you took over.”

It doesn’t hurt, but the words reverberate in a chamber of her heart that hasn’t quite emptied completely. It must show on her face, too, because Kara’s halfway through an apology when Lena pivots towards her and places an arm over the back of the couch.

“You know, growing up, I adored Lex,” she starts slowly. “When he showed his true colors, I was crushed. We debated alien rights and morality all the time, but, at some point, he refused to believe aliens could be anything other than bad. I didn’t understand how he could go from best friends with Superman to believing he was Earth’s greatest threat, saying aliens wouldn’t attack Earth if he weren’t here, and that it was just a matter of time before he attacked, too.”

Lena would have missed Kara’s wince if she hadn’t been paying such close attention. Did her ribbon just shrink again?

“I disagree,” Lena hurriedly clarifies. “Alien or human,” we all have souls of light, “I think we’re all fundamentally the same, but our experiences and relationships shape who we are. The ‘bad’ souls,” she regrets the word as soon as it slips out, “only seem that way because they don’t know how to heal from pain, like a broken bone without a splint. So,” Lena attempts to shrug off the weight of her speech, “I’ll do my part to help them get another chance.”

Kara grins wider and wider until the corners of her eyes crinkle. “That’s… really good to hear.”

Despite the shorter beam from Lena’s wrist, their bond shines brighter.
Even the global news captured footage of the final assassination attempt on the President. It was an attack Lillian would’ve sent her in less than a heartbeat: a fiery show from a senseless scorcher shooting at every human in attendance.

Lena finds herself on hold before she processes dialing the unfamiliar number. She closes her eyes and focuses on the low buzz of static coming from the other end, almost hoping he doesn’t take her call. She sharply breathes in when the buzzing stops.

“Yes, Lena?”

“Did you order the hit on the President?”

“Not even a ‘hello’ to your dear brother after all this time?”

“...hello, Lex.”

“Hello. Now, if you aren’t too busy bending over for that Kryptonian scum, go fuck yourself.”

Click.

Chapter End Notes

Deleted lines:

Maybe Lena doesn’t have to worry if Kara continues encouraging honesty.

It definitely doesn’t look like an egg yolk.

“Go ahead. Hit me with it, Ace.”

“Congratulations, Kara Danvers. You got your long answer.”

“I think, ultimately, he was just afraid.”

“I want to believe that there’s always a chance for redemption no matter how far gone they seem.”
Handshakes, Lena supposes, hold a heavier meaning for her than for most people.

It’s the closest that the bonds will ever get. They take an almost tangible opacity and blend so completely that she can’t tell the difference between the individual colors.

Therefore, only when someone has her entire attention will she offer her hand. She will always begin a meeting with a handshake, as is polite, but the outcomes of said meetings determine whether the other attendees receive one on the way out.

She wonders if it’s become her trademark. Somewhere along her ascension in the business world, she noticed people's nervous hesitance when leaving conference rooms, some even watching her hands to see if she will extend it in their direction, and their giddiness when they make contact.

That’s why, when she makes sure to clasp each hospital administrator’s hand with both of hers at the end of their final discussion, it is indeed a very big deal that only Jess can appreciate.

“You seem happy,” Jess comments.

“And you aren’t?” Lena challenges. Jess laughs, but her tense shoulders and small steps undercut her joy.

“I am, but…” she looks anywhere but at Lena, “would you like to meet my brother?”

Lena stops mid-stride and tries not to show as much distressed surprise as she feels.

“Yes, if you’re sure.”

Jess nods and leads Lena down another hallway following her pale, lavender ribbon.

“I read the article about you,” Jess mumbles. “It makes me happy to have you as a boss.”

Lena straightens up and suppresses a smile. “Thank you. That’s very kind to say.”

Jess’ lips twitch, but she knocks on a patient room’s door and slowly turns the handle before she says anything else.

Lena hears the television playing first, some cartoon that she isn’t familiar with, then scrunches her nose at the stench of concentrated iodoform and isopropyl alcohol.

“Hey, Joey,” Jess calls softly from the entrance. “Can I introduce you to somebody?”

Lena barely makes out a detached “sure” from deeper inside the room before Jess opens the door wider and beckons her inside.

“This is Lena,” Jess introduces.

Lena hopes her smile isn’t too sympathetic. A young boy with an orange complexion and dark hair sits upright in the bed propped up by thin pillows, his pupils dilated so wide that his eyes look black. An IV connects his right arm to two bags, and his white left-ribbon matches his sheets and hospital
wristband.

“Hi Joey,” she says. “It’s nice to meet you.”

“Hello.”

He continues staring at her with blank eyes for a few moments before shifting his attention back to Jess. “Is that all?”

“Actually, I was wondering if she could take a look at your chart. She knows a lot about medicine.”

Lena’s jaw clenches, but she manages to keep her face otherwise neutral.

“Sure,” he answers in the same robotic tone.

“Thanks, kid. I’ll be back in a bit.”

Lena backs out of the room with Jess following close behind. Jess pulls the chart out of its wall-mounted holder and hands it to Lena before shutting the door.

“Sorry, I don’t mean to impose, I should’ve asked you first, I’m sorry—”

“It’s fine,” Lena cuts her off, already analyzing the metabolic screen. She expected his bilirubin levels to be high, but they’re absolutely stratospheric. The rest of his chemistry is just weird, numbers erratic in every direction. “Does the hospital need new equipment? His results are everywhere.”

Jess slowly shakes her head. “I’m going to say goodbye.” She disappears back into the room while Lena continues scanning his files. Even his x-rays and MRI’s are odd with random masses that Lena would have thought were tumors if it weren’t for their strange placement on organs that…

She taps her fingers on the back of the chart, then returns it to the hanger when Jess reemerges. Jess can’t look her in the eye, opting to shut Joey’s door and begin walking to the exit instead. Lena trails behind silently, turning off her phone during the walk, until they are both in the car. She rolls up the partition behind their driver.

“What species?”

Jess crosses her arms. “Dyrlian.”

“Are you as well?”

“Yes. Are you angry?”

“Not at all. You must be desperate.”

Jess shifts beside her. “Yes.”

“Then tell me everything.”

“…thank you.”

Lena holds Jess’ hand until her tears dry.
They only leave the car after Jess reapplies copious make-up to hide her true complexion. Then, they speak in Lena’s office for less than a half hour. Jess starts with her escape from Dyrlia, the viral plague, and their species’ plan to abandon their organic bodies in favor of mechanized vessels.

“They were so stupid!” Jess laments. “The virus attacks something like the Dyrlian equivalent of a neural system until we’re unable to feel anything. Emotion, too. The dead didn’t even realize they were dying. So what did they do? Put themselves in a cold body that might as well be dead. They just did the virus’ work themselves. What the fuck is the point?” She squeaks. “Sorry, I didn’t—”

“It’s fine,” Lena brushes off. “They were able to transfer their consciousness to a robot but they couldn’t develop a cure?”

“No, our mechanical engineering was way better than our medicine,” Jess quickly recovers. “They tried to figure out what was going on for, like, a light cycle until they gave up. All they did was look at it, really.”

“What did they find?”

“That it was tiny. I don’t know too much about it. Something like it coagulates really easily and that’s how it ends up blocking our feelings.” Jess groans. “That sounds so lame, but that’s basically it. We had the tech to look at it, but we didn’t know how to eradicate it.”

“Did Dyrlia have any medicine at all?”

“Kind of…” Jess furrows her brow. “Prosthetics were easy, so if something specific was hurting, they’d just chop it off. There were some synthetic drugs, but I really don’t know anything about them. I’m sorry.”

Lena stills her tongue before she asks her next natural question. She already knows the answer, anyway. The pallor of her new lavender bond speaks magnitudes.

“I’ll need a sample from him” she says instead. “I want to see what I’m dealing with. I’ll reach out to some start-ups or pharmas who have anticoagulants or dispersants specific to alien physiology.”

Jess gives her as much of a smile as Lena thinks she can manage and stands up from her chair. “Thank you, Ms. Luthor. Please let me know if I can help with anything. I…” she picks at imaginary lint on her skirt. “He keeps those obnoxious cartoons on so he can try to hold onto feelings, but, I mean, you saw him…”

“I’m on it,” Lena states resolutely.

Jess nods and shuts the doors again on her way out.

Lena makes a note to look into the start-ups on her computer, then returns to her email. She’s on her third unread message when she finds herself typing out a new draft.

It’s only two sentences, but she works at it for ten minutes.

‘Thank you, again, for the article. It’s been well-received.’

Kara responds immediately.

‘You’re welcome!!!!!!!!’
“Dr. Safronova, can you hear me okay?”

“Yes, crystal,” the young professor on the other side of the webcam replies. She speaks softly and rapidly, and Lena adjust her headset over her ears anyway. “It’s good to finally meet you.”

“Likewise,” Lena reciprocates with her business-smile. “Did you have a chance to look over my most recent email?”

The professor ties her hair into a low ponytail. “Yes. So there are two ways we can approach this: traditional black-body radiation, or a new metal alloy.”

Lena pulls a notebook out of her drawer and starts writing.

“Kryptonite radiation is particle radiation,” Dr. Safronova continues. “We can’t make a traditional black-body because it isn’t technically electromagnetic radiation. It’s unfortunate you don’t have the older data, but knowing the approximate radiation wavelengths helps immensely. Kryptonite emits predominantly gamma rays which is why lead is so effective at containing it.”

“Why don’t the Supers just wear lead-lined outfits then?” Lena interjects.

“I don’t think it’s that simple. There might be something else in the radiation that affects them. If it were just gamma rays that weakened them, they would have more problems with their x-ray vision.” She pauses for a breath. “That being said, we won’t be able to create a protective alloy without studying kryptonite.”

Lena opens her mouth to say something, but the researcher barrels on. “However, as you know from constructing your kryptonite laser a few years ago, weaponized kryptonite needs a power source to project that radiation. So, you might be able to use a black-body field generator that would negate the power source instead. If you can determine the thermal radiation wavelength of the power source, you can heat a black-body to the same temperature and create an electromagnetic field at equilibrium with that wavelength.”

“You think it’s possible?” Lena manages to slide in.

“Yes.”

“Then let’s do it.”

She brainstorms with Dr. Safronova until the sun sets and she needs to take out her tinted contacts in the dim light. She told Jess to go home hours ago, but she refused, claimed hospital field trips don’t constitute as work even if her boss comes with her. She languidly moves her pencil across a scratch paper, letting her hands do their own form of musculoskeletal-storming for the generator’s design, until her yellow bond zooms down from the sky and to the entrance of her building. Lena shuffles
her papers around to hide her preliminary design and unsuccessfully rummages for new contacts before both the plumeria and rose bonds rise from the floor level. She stands from her chair and briefly wonders if Kara actually made Jess run up all the stairs to her office until the voices reach her door.

“Excuse me, you can’t go in there! Stop—”

Kara pushes through the doors with Jess scurrying in tow. Lena might’ve laughed if Kara weren’t so serious.

“I swear, I just blinked and she got right past me—”

“Lena, I’m sorry, this is my fault—”

“She’s so fast.”

“—I just need to talk to you.”

Both women cease speaking at the same time. Lena doesn’t even think they breathe.

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

Jess’ irritation shows clearly on her face with a final glare to Kara as she exits the room. “Yes, Ms. Luthor.”

“Really?”

Kara’s bewilderment catches her more off-guard than she expected, and she can only manage a miniscule smile. How is this the same woman as the superhero?

“Thank… you?”

Lena only finds her voice again when Kara looks away to Jess closing the doors.

“Now,” she says as she sits back into her chair, “how can I help?”

“I…” Kara rubs her hands together and utters a few syllables until she can resume eye contact. “I think a friend of mine has gotten involved in something shady.”

“A friend?” Lena challenges instinctively.

“No, an actual friend.” Kara immediately releases her hands and approaches Lena’s desk. “And now he’s missing. Do you know of a woman named Veronica Sinclair? She caters to people in your… um, your circles.”

Lena’s disgust overpowers her potential to be offended. “Tight dresses, tattoos like Lisbeth Salander? Yeah, I know—" V eronic unt , "—Roulette. We went to boarding school together. I never liked her.”

“I need to find her.”

So. She doesn’t need the cape to speak with steel.

“Well, that’s the trick, isn’t it?” Lena voices drops low under the weight of Kara’s intensity. “Her little fight clubs stay mobile.”
They hold each other’s gaze for a silent second. Are Lena’s pupils as wide as Kara’s in the low lighting? She never did find those replacement contacts. Kara clears her throat and talks more to the desk than to Lena.

“But do you know where she’s holding the next fight? I wouldn’t ask if I had any other option.”

Lena sighs and writes out the last address she knows of on a Post-It. “I’m a Luthor.” She swears she can taste her own venom. “Of course I’m invited to her little pop-up, not that I’m interested in her type of entertainment.” She peels off the paper and walks to the side of her desk to give it to Kara from her right hand. She squints instinctively when she sees Kara’s left hand raise.

“Thank you,” Kara breathes out. “I owe you. Big time.”

Lena forces her face to relax. “Not at all. Go get the bitch.”

Kara purses her lips and nods slowly before walking away.

Lena doesn’t move until her ribbon disappears in a blink.

Speeding away from the L-Corp building, Lena decides that she needs a plan.

She needs to construct a hypothesis and design a method to test it directly and reach a conclusion. Then, she needs to create a standard operating procedure based on the results of her study.

She needs to know how the bonds work.

Her right-ribbon theory is solid and supported by a lifetime of observations and analysis. The ribbons are reactionary, not preexisting or preordained, and subject to the actions and circumstances of both individuals. They do not exert force upon the relationship and are objectively symbolic of the connection between souls.

The left-ribbon could be different. Rather than formed by the will of the individual, it is given to the individual from birth. All Lena had to do was learn Kara’s name for her ribbon to become a compass when it took years for Lex’s ribbon to even come close. It’s possible that the left-ribbon isn’t as passive as the right, that it ties two souls together and twists tighter and tighter until they touch. There might be a larger entity that—

Lena cuts that thought short. The purpose of this study isn’t for the “why” but for the “how.” She doesn’t need constant news feeds or multiple Google alerts for Kara Danvers and Supergirl. She doesn’t need to build a black-body field generator for the sole purpose of deactivating kryptonite weapons.

Except she does.

Lena has inherent cognitive bias. She can’t ignore the bonds nor act independently from them. Therefore, she isn’t interacting with Kara in an isolated system, not really, and she can’t draw any accurate conclusions from her own behavior.

It will have to come down to Kara, but how can she possibly study that? Even Lena isn’t bitter
enough to believe she (or her name) is irreparably repulsive, so all of Kara's behavior could be completely within the bounds of reality and unaffected by magic.

Oh.

Her tires squeal as she brakes hard into the driveway, and she fumbles her keys twice before successfully turning the lock to her front door.

There might not be any reciprocal bond at all.

She kicks off her shoes, sheds her bag and coat in the hallway, and meanders to her living room.

Lena has no color.

She drops onto the couch, briefly regretting not opening a new bottle of wine, and starts a movie.

For all of her connections, she might as well be a ghost.

She makes it past the opening credits before snatching the remote from the coffee table and hurling it against a wall. She flexes her empty hands in time to the batteries rolling across the tiled floor’s grout lines, then settles back on the cushions and rests her eyes on photons that actually exist.

Lena thinks there should have been more complications with taking a blood sample from a patient, but the hospital either handled all the paperwork, turned a blind eye, or didn't care.

She straps the tourniquet around Joey’s forearm at Jess’ instruction and disinfects the insertion site.

“This shouldn’t hurt, okay?”

He regards her with large, vacant eyes.

“I know.”

Her phone buzzes with a new email from Kara on the trip back from the hospital. She tilts her screen away from Jess and breathes out before tapping the notification.

Kara didn’t include a subject line, but she placed a ‘thank you’ in front of a 700-word article on the shutdown of the alien fight club, complete with a quote from Supergirl herself. Lena smirks triumphantly until she reads that Veronica was released on bail hours after her arrest. Her hand tightens around her phone, and she hastily types out a reply.

'Tell Supergirl to call my lawyers next time. They’ll make anything stick.'

Kara responds within seconds.
Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!! Sorry, as always, for the sporadic updates, but thank you for your patience!

I'm considering writing a drabble for anyone who can guess how Lena got her power. Is that kind of thing allowed on AO3??
'Hey do you like Chinese food?? I still owe you!!!!!!'

The forwarded restaurant coupon would’ve never passed Lena’s spam filters if the email hadn’t been sent from kdanvers@catco.com. The sporadically-capitalized subject line and gaudy banner ads scream “computer virus,” but, more than judging the low-budget marketing, Lena wonders if Kara realizes Lena could buy that restaurant in a snap. It’s also far from the type of unsolicited repayment she had expected. Her cynicism tells her Kara is beating her to the punch so she can’t ask for anything substantial or sinister.

Her optimism sends an email confirming her approval of Chinese food and her personal mobile number.

Maybe Lena has grown too accustomed to Kara’s speedy responses. Even this offer for food appeared a day after the fight club closure. To be fair, Supergirl got called to four emergencies in half as many hours, and that was only what the local news picked up.

But, when Lena finds a cordial text with perfect punctuation from an unknown number asking when she would be free for lunch, she fears even Supergirl might have her limits.

Dinner would really work better, but something about it seems too soon, too personal and informal, whereas a lunch has the vague air of professionalism expected from work acquaintances.

Lena replies with a potential day after consulting her calendar, and Kara returns to old habits with an agreement almost immediately. It’s still subdued with, what feels like, a half-hearted smiley at the end in lieu of any exclamation points. She taps her fingers against the side of her phone before holding her left wrist in front of her.

“Kara Danvers had a horrible day.”

Her yellow ribbon doesn’t change. Probably too vague of an accusation.

“Kara Danvers often has better days than the one she had today.”

Brighter. She can work with this.

She regrets her next text as soon as she sends it: a final confirmation followed by a couple of custom emojis. Her father taught her that any advantage is fair game as long as it’s legal, but this feels wrong. Something so beautiful shouldn’t be manipulated.

Maybe honesty is tricky.

Her phone buzzes with a new message before she can follow that thought farther.

‘YOU USE EMOJIS!!!’

Lena smirks despite the guilt settling in her gut.

‘I am a millennial, after all’
Kara responds with a string of various surprised and shocked emojis.

If Lena happens to look at her left wrist while she texts a peace sign emoji and thinks Kara Danvers is in a better mood than she was five minutes ago, that’s just a happy coincidence.

Their first attempt at lunch gets interrupted by a minor explosion and a prolonged staff meeting.

Lena begrudgingly tells herself that accidents happen and that scientists shouldn’t be fired over one mishap. It stayed contained to one lab anyway, and it wasn’t anything that her insurance won’t cover.

She texts an apology to Kara and jokingly asks for a literal rain check to put out the flames. Kara responds absurdly fast with news of a last-minute extended staff meeting as well as an image of the This Is Fine meme.

Lena replies succinctly: ‘Accurate.’

Their second attempt at lunch has Lena three steps out of L-Corp’s doors before her phone buzzes twice. Kara asks to postpone for an hour because of a “last-minute errand.” Lena searches Google for any breaking news in National City and finds a livestream of a hostage situation downtown. She sighs and returns to her office with a request to move it to tomorrow instead. Kara replies with a thumbs up.

Their third attempt at lunch is actually an impromptu breakfast. Lena leaves her apartment at 7 AM instead of 6 after an extensive, in-home video conference with European business partners leaves her stomach rumbling and body itching for caffeine. She usually gets by with the kitchens in L-Corp, but the thought of finishing her walk to work without anything to fuel her makes her pity anyone who stops her before she reaches the coffee maker.

The nondescript hole-in-the-wall is the only place not bustling with the workday morning crowds, possibly because its lunch is advertised much more heavily on their windows, but the smell of freshly-roasted coffee beans makes her yank open their door with vigor. The man behind the counter laughs at the violent clanging of their door bell and promises to make her the strongest coffee he has to offer before she says a word. She smiles graciously and approaches the counter to pay, but he waves her off.

“We don’t charge the desperate.”
Lena pulls out $20 and puts it in the tip jar anyway.

She leans against a wall by the pick-up counter and pulls out her phone. She has unread emails mostly from her international firms that, thankfully, consist largely of status updates and don’t require a response. The barista calls for her with a tall mug of coffee, and Lena makes a small noise of surprise.

“Sorry, can I have this to go?”

The barista doesn’t have a chance to answer before the entry bell clangs again.

“Lena?”

She must have been more tired than she realized to not have noticed her ribbon growing, but, sure enough, standing in the doorway is Kara Danvers.

“You’re a friend of Kara’s?” the barista infers with a slight tease in his voice.

“Oh, not—” Lena stammers.

“I’ll grab you something with sugar; you need it to keep up with this one,” he interrupts with a wink. “Kara, I’ll have your order ready in a sec."

“That’s really not—”

“Thanks!” Kara calls after him over Lena’s dissent. When did she get so close? “Are you staying long? I try to wake up here before going into the office.”

Lena looks back to the ceramic mug containing her order, then glances at her phone. “I can.”

Kara’s grin is enough to warrant a second layer of tinted contacts. “The square table by the window is the best. Take the chair with the cushion!”

Lena’s proud of her wrist for not trembling under the weight of the mug and her knees for not buckling on any of her steps to the table. The other scattered patrons show no notice of their antics, but they shuffle away accordingly when she squeezes through on her way to the window.

Her phone buzzes in her hand again, but she only looks at it once her mug rests on the table and she’s settled into the chair with the cushion as directed. She received six more emails during her interaction with the barista and Kara in addition to the newest arrival, but they’re all newsletter updates from business and science journals. She tucks it into her bag and stares out the window.

It’s the same street she walks down every morning and again every evening, but it’s a new perspective. She can’t remember the last time she passively watched bonds twirl between pedestrians or lazily untangled the clusters of ribbons emanating from buses as they bumble through traffic.

How wonderful to find comfort in her magic again.

Lena turns to the sound of her phone persistently vibrating through her bag and begrudgingly pulls it out once more. She scrolls through the notifications quickly, the only message of interest consisting of notes from Dr. Safronova, but she raises her head at the movement of a muffin placed in front of her.

“You don’t have to stay,” Kara says softly. Her own mug and full plate of a croissant sandwich balance precariously on her arm as she pulls out her chair.
“No, no, it’s fine,” Lena reassures. She completely silences her phone and shoves it into her bag. “It’s nothing that can’t wait twenty minutes. My staff will appreciate that I’m coming in caffeinated.”

Kara shifts in her seat with a small smile. “Have you been here before?”

“No.” Lena begins picking at the muffin, and Kara takes a bite of her sandwich. “It’s nice, though. The barista understands that free coffee is the way to get me to come back.”

“Yeah, that’s George,” Kara says with a sip of her drink. “He used the same tactic on me. Even if my sister hadn’t brought me here, I probably would’ve found it eventually.”

“Are you and your sister close?”

Lena only has a second before Kara begins happily chattering to wonder what is brighter: Kara’s right ribbons or her smile.

In the fourteen minutes they talk in that café, the borders of Lena’s left ribbon sharpen to a razor edge. It still tapers off to a mist, and the hazy outlines of the objects behind it show through, but it’s enough to convince Lena that the vivid yellow won’t necessarily intensify as she learns more about Kara. Every fact is another thread—most notably that Kara grew up within 2500 miles of Metropolis in a town called Midvale—and every mannerism is a stitch that strengthens the ribbon’s durability.

Maybe it’s because Lena has known Kara’s color for over a decade. Her soulmate was always the idea of a person summarized in a brilliant yellow, and now the figment is becoming a reality with corporeal opacity.

Lena shares more of herself than people usually care to ask for (not even Jack knew her favorite movie in every genre) yet the bond remains severed at the halfway point. Lex’s purple made it at least 75% of the way to his wrist before dropping off, and Jack’s orange made it even closer. Maybe it’s because they didn’t have superhero alter-egos to unpack. She plans out two phases of her reconnaissance strategy until she bitterly remembers her resolve and decides it’s time to leave.

“Thank you, Kara,” she says while pushing off from the chair. “This was lovely. Did you still want to try for lunch today?”

“Yeah!” Kara gathers Lena’s mug and plate with hers before Lena can protest. “Lemme take these to the counter; I’ll be right back.”

Lena nods and reflexively reaches for her phone. East Coast operations are now in full swing, and the flood of emails almost buried Dr. Châtelet’s email confirming FDA approval for the contacts.

“Good news?” Kara asks upon her return.

Lena looks up with a raised eyebrow and a smile she didn’t realize she was wearing. “Depends. Are you asking as a reporter?”

“I’m asking as a friend.”

Lena feels a hard kick to her chest, and it delays her enough for Kara’s hand to beat hers to the door
handle. “Then yes. Fantastic news. I’ll text you when we send out the press release. But,” she clicks off her phone screen and keeps it in her hands, “I definitely need to run now. My scientist will cuss me out if I keep her waiting too long.”

“She’ll what?”

Lena could laugh at Kara’s appalled expression. “Don’t worry. She only gets away with it because she thinks I can’t speak French.”

“You speak French?”

“Enough to know what she thinks of my mother on a bad day.”

Kara follows her closely out of the café with her laughter drowning out the bell banging on the door behind them. “Well, I hope to hear more about it later. Sounds exciting!”

Lena falters as she does quick time calculations in her head. Between the press release, additional marketing and legal meetings (probably), and regular operations, she can’t fit in an extended lunch without working until 9. “I’m sorry, the announcement throws off some of my other work for the day. Tomorrow?”

“That’s fine,” Kara brushes off. “Maybe come by the café more often. I’m usually here in the morning.”

“I’ll—”

Lena’s phone screen lights up with an incoming call from Dr. Châtelet. The women hover by the café door for the second ring, and then the third. Lena’s left-ribbon tells her Kara wants to hug goodbye, and it would be so, so easy to give Kara everything she could ever want.

“I’ll try,” Lena finishes with a smile. She picks up the call on the fourth ring and waves to Kara in farewell. Kara smiles and nods as she pulls on her jacket, and Lena walks away.

She dreams of lighthouses on a windy night, just as she dreamed as a young girl. She stands on a jetty protruding far from a coastline she can’t see, and rocks under her feet dig into her skin painfully. Two lighthouses standing tall in the dark waters shine upon each other and Lena—one white, one green—in even intervals as the lanterns inside the towers rotate slowly. Another lighthouse in the middle flashes yellow at her intermittently but never at the two behind it.

The wind carries the sound of buoy bells over the crashing of turbulent waves, and a powerful gust pushes Lena backwards. She steps back to break her fall, but her foot catches on the coarse stone of a lighthouse behind her.

She doesn’t bother looking at the tower. She knows the lamp isn’t on.

She leans back against the lighthouse and waits. The rocks beneath her corrode into sand, and she sinks just a bit with each wave breaking against her feet. She holds her head high but winces with every yellow flash that shines into her eyes. She slowly breathes in the salt and the sand and, finally, the water.
Lena wakes and kicks off her comforter before turning over away from the clock blinking on her nightstand. Four-light systems are useless for navigation anyway.

Lena returns from her board meeting to three missed calls, one voicemail, and seven texts. All the calls come from the hospital director, and his voicemail transcription conveys enough of his frantic distress even through the typos. She has two texts from Alana—a link to a video of a bank robbery and a supplemental report—and five texts from Kara.

‘Hey I’m so so so so so so sorry I have to cancel lunch
‘Boss wants all hands on deck for the robberies
‘ Might have to happen next week :( 
‘Is that okay?
‘ I’m sorryyy’

Lena doesn’t type more than a letter before the hospital calls again.

“Ms. Luthor, the damage—”

“It’s okay,” she interrupts calmly. She enters the elevator and begins the ascent to her office. “I’ve fixed worse. Are the children and staff okay?”

“A few injuries from the broken glass, and we had to move around some patients, but nothing too serious.”

“Okay, I’ll call you again when I have a plan, and you can call me if there are any more developments. I just got out of a meeting, so I need to catch up on what happened.” The elevator doors open, and she walks urgently to her desk, flipping open her laptop and turning on her televisions before sitting.

“But what about—”

Loud static cuts through the line, and Lena yanks the phone away from her ear in pain. She grimaces and looks up to her television to see electronic snow and the same digital phantom from the attacks on the President.

“You were warned,” the deep, distorted voice declares over more choppy, militant images. “The alien invaders are dangerous. Their intentions, malicious. They possess power we cannot hope to match, and their technology, brought from other worlds, is falling into the wrong hands.”

Lena sits in front of her laptop intending to find news on the attacks only to see her computer hacked as well.

“We should not be opening our arms to them. We should be locking them up and taking their
weapons away. You did not heed us, but you will heed the chaos that amnesty has brought.”

Her heel taps under her desk. No one should be able to hack the Luthor servers.

“You will pay the price in fear and blood. And you will beg us to save you. We are Cadmus.”

The phantom lingers in her sight even when she returns to her restored computer and pulls up news stories. From what she can tell, aliens didn’t perpetrate the robbery despite what their firepower suggests even though they could be just as humanoid as Kryptonians.

She decides their species doesn’t matter. If they didn’t use any extraterrestrial powers in a fight against Supergirl, then the weapons are their greatest strength. Therefore, if she disables the weapons, then they won’t be a threat.

Who knew she would find an application for the black-body field generator so soon? It’s not ready, but maybe a few sleepless nights and long Skype sessions with Dr. Safronova could get it in working condition. It would be faster if she had help, but after her last phone call with the police, she deems it extremely unlikely to have any assistance.

Alana knocks on the open office door while holding a tablet.

“Come in, Alana,” Lena acknowledges.

“Ms. Luthor,” Alana responds. “Did you see my texts regarding the robbery and children’s hospital?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“The guests for the fundraising gala saw it, too,” Alana says while scrolling on the tablet. Usually, Alana speaks briskly and decisively, but here she speaks delicately. “I know it’s not until next week, but they’re nervous with the attacks, and some want to cancel their RSVP’s. I already contacted the vendors to see if there was any flexibility with moving the event back, and most of them would make us forfeit the initial deposit.”

“What about pushing it up?”

Alana raises her head and blinks. “I’m sorry?”

Lena’s phone buzzes on her desk with another call from the hospital director. “I need to take this. You can stay,” Lena says as she picks up her phone. She hears hectic clamor and beeping in the background of the other line before she can begin speaking. “This is—”

“Ms. Luthor, I’m sorry to call again, there’s just so much going on and I don’t know what to do—”

“You can begin by breathing,” Lena suggests. The director catches himself on the next syllable and releases his breath in a laugh. “Now, do you have an appraisal for the extent of the damage?”

“The city inspector is looking at the building now. Oh, hold on.” The director shouts something away from the phone. “We’re reviewing our insurance policy, and we should be covered if we can convince them that this was a natural disaster, but those insurance checks take weeks if not months to get here, and that won’t cover all the devices—”

“Another breath, please.”

The director deliberately sighs into the receiver. “We might be okay recovering in the long-term with
our insurance, but we need to rebuild those rooms and replace our equipment as soon as possible.”

“Agreed,” Lena affirms. “I want to hold the fundraiser as soon as possible and open it to the general public, not just our guest list. Might lose a few vendors, but I’ll get something together.” Alana stares at her incredulously but remains silent. Lena nods with a grim smile.

“But what about the gang?” the director asks.

“I’ll take care of it.”

“How?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Lena states firmly. “You have my word that the guests will be safe.”

Alana sighs deeply and resumes scrolling through her tablet on her way out.

By midday, Lena owes a lot of favors and cashes in on quite a few. She doesn’t like being in debt, no matter how immaterial it may be, but she knows she has one more favor she needs to lose.

She puts a gold watch on before she leaves the office. She tells herself it’s to detract from her left-ribbon’s shine and not to give herself an excuse to look at her wrist every so often.

She tells the driver to go to Catco despite not knowing for sure if Kara will be there. Periodic glances to her “watch” confirm Kara’s location. She doesn’t have a plan, and she makes a mental note to work on her impulsiveness. She hopes she can come up with something on the way to the skyscraper across the city, but with each passing block her mind remains blank.

She just needs to ask for a meeting with a Supergirl. She needs the fundraiser to happen, and Supergirl will be the only way she can convince people outside of her circles to support the cause. It’s reasonable and plausible and oh shit she’s through the front doors. She had never been inside Catco before, and she thinks she might never return. The lights from all of the bustling media staff swirl and twist between each other like intricate webs spiraling in a tornado. It takes immense concentration for her to ask the front desk for directions and even more concentration to calm her breathing in the suffocating elevator until the doors open. She shuffles out of the way of the other passengers and follows her left-ribbon to a back corner.

She sees Kara’s intricately braided hair first, and she wonders again just how super Kara must be to put her hair into ornate styles every day. As she moves closer, her lips curl into a wry smile at Kara’s obvious exasperation, her arms gesturing widely to the sitting man’s workspace and brandishing a licorice stick in his face.

“Look, it… it’s gonna be fine,” Kara says with a clap of her hands. “It’s still gonna be great.”

“Kara?” Lena speaks before she meant to, but she masks her surprise with a smile she hopes is genuine. Kara whips around at the sound of her name and falls into a slight panic.

“Lena! Did I forget to text you? I can’t do lunch today, I’m sorry—”

“What? No,” Lena shakes her head and waves it off, then tucks her wrists under her arms. “Sorry, I
thought I texted back. It’s fine. The robberies have me running around, too.”

“Oh,” Kara pushes up her glasses and matches Lena’s posture. “Then, what brings you to Catco?”

Lena looks into Kara’s blue eyes and decides she’ll forgo the contacts and risk the migraine just to see them sparkle in the natural daylight.

“I’m here to see you, actually.”

Apparently, she’ll forgo her sense as well.

“You are?”

Lena blames the sun and Catco’s tall windows and whoever made Kara’s damn glasses.

“Yeah, L-Corp is hosting a party this weekend. It’s for a gala fundraiser for the children’s hospital after that horrific attack on their new building.” Lena sucks in a deep breath. “I was hoping you’d come.”

“Gala?” The man sitting at the desk now stands holding a Red Vine. “Is that like a party?”

“No. No, it’s not.” Kara interrupts immediately with an arm shooting out to the cubicle partition, effectively creating a barrier between him and the conversation. Lena sneaks a look at their ribbons. Their respective colors shine on each others’ wrist—the man’s a softer hue that matches his shirt but is indiscernible through Lena’s contacts—but they don’t come anywhere close to each other. His right wrist has a comparable volume of white to Kara’s but nowhere near as many colors. Lena chooses to ignore him for now.

“You are literally my only friend in National City. Most people wouldn’t touch a Luthor with a 10-foot pole, but...” The memory of their departure from the café replays in her mind. She bites her lip and holds it with a shallow breath at Kara’s open expression and soft, encouraging smile. “It would mean a lot to me if you were there.”

“Oh, well, of course your friend can come,” Lena attempts to placate. Kara drops her head, but Lena still feels the uncomfortable reluctance emanating from the woman. Maybe this is the opportunity to give her an out. “But, maybe on one condition?”

The man bites into his licorice but doesn’t look away, and Lena briefly wonders how he can still consider this conversation to be his business. Kara raises her head back up with mild curiosity.

“I know we were making other plans, but,” Lena scratches at her blazer, “I was wondering if I could use that favor for something else.”
Kara’s eyebrows scrunch together, and Lena wonders if it’s disappointment that flashes across her face.

“I… need to get in touch with Supergirl. About the fundraiser. If that’s okay?”

The man apprehensively stops chewing and looks to Kara with wide eyes.

Lena needs his name.

“Um, yeah,” Kara nods her head and adjusts her glasses. “Yeah, I’ll see what I can do.”

“Thank you. So, in that case…” she turns back to the man and blinks a few times, “what’s your name?”

“Mike,” he recites with stilted emphasis, “of the interns.”

His ribbon materializes faintly on Lena’s wrist as nothing more than a blurry wisp of a band, and Lena knows immediately that he gave a fake name. His attempt at being human is so stereotypical of an alien; she’ll remember to laugh about it later.

“Well, ‘Mike of the Interns,’” skepticism sneaks into her tone despite her efforts, “find yourself a nice suit, and I’ll see you there.”

“Mike” grins around his newest mouthful of licorice, but Kara stays motionless with agony behind her forced smile. Lena’s eyes soften with pity.

“Bye,” she offers in slight apology. Lena swears Kara relaxes infinitesimally.

“Bye,” Kara breathes out. Lena turns around and walks stiffly out of Catco.

Lena got what she wanted, and it was only because Kara offered it to her. It wasn’t a manipulation or an ultimatum. Kara had a choice, and she had every reason to refuse Lena’s request, but she decided to help.

Right?

Chapter End Notes

Guess who's married? :P

Thank you for reading! Please let me know if there are any glaring mistakes in this update. Most of this was written through Google Docs on my phone.

<3
Lena kneads the back of her neck as she walks down the hospital corridor to one of the communal play rooms. They swept up most of the glass, but she still stumbles every so often on stray shards when she pays too much attention to the piles of broken equipment stuffed into the hallway corners. The equipment will be easy but expensive to replace, and the structural damage to the window and walls will take extra time.

She hears the children halfway down the hall, but it still doesn’t prepare her for how packed the playroom is. She wonders if that’s due in part to the extra monitoring equipment and bags interspersed between the toys, but there’s no denying the energy of all the children together in one room. She hovers by the entryway and scans the room until she finds Joey close by playing with a small girl. Lena waves to him, and he nods in response.

His lavender ribbon becomes less saturated with each day. She makes a mental note to expand her search of CRO’s.

Jess’ bond slowly brightens and extends to her side. “Hi, Ms. Luthor.”

“Hello, Jess. How are you?”

“Nervous.”

Lena can feel Jess’ stressed energy even without looking at her. “Don’t be. Things are progressing well.”

She hears Jess make a noise as if to speak but decides against it. They fall into comfortable silence when they see a nurse approach Joey and the girl. She beckons the girl to come with her, but the child shakes her head and clutches onto Joey’s hand. Joey blankly looks from the girl to the nurse.

“What’s happening?” he asks flatly.

“An MRI. We just need to take some pictures of her stomach,” the nurse replies with a soothing voice. Even still, the girl looks like she’s about to cry.

“Oh, I’ve had that before. This shouldn’t hurt, okay?”

Lena blinks. Joey recites the echo of her platitude with the same intonation she did when she took his blood sample.

“It’s really loud,” the girl mumbles.

“This shouldn’t hurt, okay?”

The girl sniffs softly a few times, but eventually nods and shuffles with the technician past the women and out of the room. Jess leans against the door frame.

“He has a tendency to repeat what he’s heard,” she explains softly. “He’s so smart. He knows why people say stuff and the intention behind them. I like to believe this means he still remembers what it’s like to feel.”
Lena stays silent until another child invites Joey to play.

“Are you okay to stay here?” she asks Jess. “The director is driving me up a wall, and he might leave you alone if you’re with Joey.”

“Yeah, I’m fine.”

Jess sounds exhausted, but Lena listens, nods, and leaves.

It’s only an hour before the gang attacks again. This time, they rob a jewelry store, and they only get away with it because they launch a police car into the atmosphere with a passenger inside. It confirms that their weapons are their greatest, if not only, strength.

Lena locks herself in a lab downstairs with some rations and tells Alana to direct any inquiries to the other members of the C-suite.

She formally commissions Dr. Safronova with her personal funds and uses it as a valid reason to stay on Skype with her as she pieces the generator together. The specialist doesn’t seem to mind, and she works on her own projects when Lena isn’t asking her questions or confirming the components. Lena’s left-bond tells her Kara checks in fairly frequently, even if the ribbon doesn’t extend farther than an inch from her wrist while pointing directly at the ceiling. She wonders how much Kara sees, how thoroughly she searches the building before leaving again, and if she knows anything about Lena’s back-up plan for the gala.

Kara finally texts her at 8 confirming that Supergirl can visit later. Lena thanks Dr. Safronova excessively until the professor hangs up on her with a yawn. She examines her generator once more and tightens another wire before heading into the elevator.

Lena taps her fingers against the elevator railing on the way up. The most she can test is the electromagnetic field detector, and that’s only because she integrated pre-existing L-Corp tech. She won’t know if the absorption or transmission or even heating elements will work until she needs it to.

She grips onto the railing and corrects herself: *if* she needs it to. The gang won’t necessarily attack, and if they do, Supergirl could defeat them before they get their fingers on the triggers. This is just a tertiary back-up plan. She briefly considers telling Supergirl about her device until she remembers the kryptonite attacks and “Mr. Smith’s” scoff at her offer to help.

She marches out of the elevator and throws open her office door. She ignores the instantaneous slam against the wall and the sound of plaster falling to the floor.

She sits at her desk for several seconds and rubs the bridge of her nose. Her hours in the small lab under strong artificial lights already gifted her with a headache festering behind tired eyes. She rummages through her desk and finds Tylenol but no contacts. She sighs, swallows the painkillers dry, and logs on to her laptop before she texts Kara.

‘*Ready whenever she is. I’m in my office. Thank you.*’

She flicks on one of her TV’s but shuts it off as soon as a preview for the 11 PM news advertises a scathing analysis of her gala. One Luthor already weaponized aliens for the sake of profit. Why
wouldn’t another Luthor do the same? And if it’s under the guise of charity, maybe they’d think they can get away with it.

Lena doesn’t blame them. Even if she can convince Supergirl to stand guard at the gala, Lex set the groundwork for his terror with corporate lobbying and similar fundraising events with Superman by his side.

The assumption still pisses her off.

She plops her head into her palms and massages her temples in a futile attempt to soothe the headache bursting through her skull. Why would Supergirl agree to meet with her if not to stop her? Yet again, she set up a meeting with her soulmate but didn’t come up with any sort of goddamn strategy. An objective, yes, but a strategy? No.

Her yellow ribbon brightens slowly and points through the window. Lena resumes idly clicking through emails while pretending not to notice the hero floating outside. She marks the time by how many e-newsletters she discards (she saves the reminder from the people at TED that she’ll give a talk in a few weeks) and she’d be lying if she said she didn’t get impatient.

She swivels around towards the window when she hears boots touch down on her balcony, and her breath stops in her throat.

After spending more time with Kara Danvers, the sight of Supergirl with wind-mussed hair cascading in loose curls around her muscular shoulders catches her off guard, especially when Lena’s unprotected eyes soak in the sunbeam almost connecting their wrists.

Almost.

“Supergirl,” Lena manages to say as she rises from her seat. The hero plants her hands on her hips, and strolls stiltedly into the office.

“You wanted to see me?” Kara’s voice is louder, like she puts effort into projecting it, and her fists slide slightly off her hips with each stiff step until she shrugs them off completely.

Is Kara nervous?

Lena rests against her desk and tucks her hands behind her back. Still, she sees her yellow bond glow just that much more.

“Yeah, thank you for coming.” Lena hopes her acting is as good as her brother’s. “I wanted to invite you to my party.”

Kara strides past the CEO and farther into the office until all Lena sees of her is blonde hair and red cape. “Kara Danvers told me you were going on with the fundraiser,” she says haltingly. “You can’t. It’s definitely going to be a target for this gang.”

Lena feels herself bristle at the complete reversal from Kara’s attitude at Catco.

But, Lena supposes, that was Kara.

“Well, that’s why I need you there to protect it,” she flounders. “With Supergirl in attendance, I know my guests and I will be safe.”

It’s a guilt trip with an itinerary that would make Lillian proud.
“You like to take risks, don’t you?” Lena freezes under Supergirl’s fierce stare. “When Corben was after you, and now this. Why?”

It’s neither an accusation nor an interrogation, and her tone doesn’t convey anything more antagonistic than a strongly-worded solicitation for answers, but the questions slap Lena on the face and dare her to duel.

“Well, you can’t live in fear.” Her unintentional growl of a response rumbles deep in her chest. She stands, then deliberately crosses Supergirl’s path from the balcony as she moves closer with her chin held high. “You, more than anyone, must understand that. Time and again, you risk everything to see justice done. Is it so hard to believe that I feel the same way?” She pauses and collects the venom shaken loose in her veins. “Or are you one of those people that thinks there’s no such thing as a good Luthor?”

Lena wonders if she should regret those words. Everybody crumbles at the mention of her surname, and she specifically saves it as her last resort for every question of her character due to that fact. But to throw it at Supergirl? Lex wasn’t her fight, but he is her villain. Supergirl has every right to hate the Luthors just as much as Superman does.

But, rather than answer with vitriol or poison, the hero’s gaze softens and falls. She crosses her arms in thoughtfulness and shifts her weight to one side.

“I believe everyone should be judged on their own merits.” When she resumes eye contact, it is fearless but open, just like her partial concession.

“Then judge me on mine.” Lena exhales as she settles into her victory. “This party must happen, and I am asking you for your help.”

“I guess I have no choice,” Supergirl shakes her head while she says it, but she breaks into a smile, too. Lena, however, can’t hide her alarm.

“You always have a choice,” she sputters. “I just… there’s more than money at stake.”

The hero’s smile disappears. Lena doesn’t see her breathe, and she briefly thinks Kryptonians only feign breathing for the comfort of humans. Her shoulders rolled back and her emblazoned chest proud, Lena wonders if Supergirl would be the immovable object or the unstoppable force.

And what would that make Lena?

Lena holds her head high and back straight—a business woman’s reflex in the presence of a threat—but Supergirl just keeps staring. Her intense blue eyes scrutinize every microexpression, searching her face for something.

Well, Lena did ask for judgment.

Maybe honesty is necessary.

Lena rejects fear. She lives through anger and passion and indignation and determination and competition and ambition and other emotions she acknowledges but doesn’t dare define, but she staunchly refuses fear. It takes a kick to her gut to force it out, and, even then, she would rather choke on it than ever let it escape.

But when she thinks of why she needs Supergirl, why she needs Kara, all she feels is sheer terror. Her plan could fail, and then people could die. Morgan Edge could win, and then children could die. She could run out of time, and then Joey could die. She could fuck up so massively and
unforgivingly, and then she could lose any dream of—

“I’ll support you.”

Lena refocuses on Supergirl and swallows. Something in her expression must have changed, because Supergirl absolutely beams.

Maybe this is what it feels like to earn the benevolence of a god.

Lena clears her throat.

“Thank you. Guests should start arriving at 6.”

Supergirl walks quickly to the balcony. “I’ll be there. Stay safe.”

Lena nods, and a tear falls from her cheek to her palm. She looks down in shock and only raises her head once she hears Supergirl’s cape fluttering in take-off.

She sleeps dreamlessly, but she supposes it’s because she didn’t give herself any time to conjure up anything imaginative. Two hours later, she wakes groggy on the couch in her office. She rises quickly and fights through the head rush to grab a spare set of clothes from the drawers behind her desk and go back to the lab.

She thinks she finishes the generator at 6 AM. No, she’s certain of it. Kind of. Well, she will be certain after Dr. Safronova reads her email and gives her approval.

Kara texts her an hour later asking if she’ll make it to the cafe. Lena declines but asks if Kara will still be at the fundraiser.

‘Wouldn’t miss it!!!!!’

Lena lets herself feel guilty for four seconds. Then, she sends the marketing team her approval on the latest press release assuring the safety of the gala.

Hiding the generator is as hard as Lena hoped it would be. It’s not even the most inconspicuous of places, but it’s inconvenient enough. She does make a note to remember the name of the security detail, though. She only got away with it because she ordered them to go somewhere else.
Guests begin trickling in at 5:30, and Lena plays the part of the gracious host. Jess arrives with the director who babbles excitedly about the whole affair. All worry aside, he gushes about the slightly-tacky oversized thermometer at the entrance representing how much money has already been collected. With pre-donations alone, they raised over $55,000.

“It’s still not enough,” Lena tries to play down, “but it’s a good start.” Still, he vigorously shakes her hand and continues staring around awestruck at the venue as Jess escorts him away. Lena declines a glass of sauvignon blanc from a passing server, then turns to greet the next guest.

Dozens of handshakes and names and refurbished ribbons later, Lena is ready for a break. She went without the tinted contacts in case they’d be a hindrance in the dim lighting, but she underestimated National City’s business network. Metropolis had its own corporate den of snakes, has drawn allusions to them herself once or twice, but National City always seemed so much cleaner than that. As she weaves through the ribbons and traces their luminescence to the source, she almost can’t withstand the nostalgia. It’s the closest this city has ever felt like home.

She doesn’t begin to worry until the third person asks her where Supergirl is. She checks her phone for the umpteenth time (still with no email notifications) and it displays 6:23 PM. At least by the fourth person inquiring about Supergirl’s location, Lena’s left-ribbon has completely extended.

“Lena!”

She excuses herself from whatever-his-name-is and turns to the woman she already knows is smiling widely behind her. Lena’s far from disappointed, and actually pleasantly surprised and immensely grateful that Kara finally appeared, even if she was slightly hoping for the hero instead.

“Kara, it’s really great to see you. I’m glad you could come,” Lena emphatically welcomes, but she can’t stifle her impatience for long. She taps her foot and crosses her arms. “Have you seen Supergirl?”

“Oh, um,” Kara scans the crowd. “I’m sure she’s on her way.”

Lena doesn’t get to ask another question before a man knocks his glass into her shoulder. “Oh, I am so—did I spill this on you?” Lena looks down at her completely-dry arm and immediately tries to stop him from bringing attention to them.

“Does anybody have some seltzer?” he calls out.

Lena prepares to tell him that’s unnecessary when she hears boots land on the pavement.

“Supergirl, I’m glad you could make it.”

“I still think this might be a bad idea,” Supergirl chastises as she swaggers up to Lena.

“Well, why don’t we wait and see how the evening pans out?”

If Supergirl catches on to anything, she doesn’t show it, but she does retreat the few steps she used to get closer to Lena. “I’ll check the perimeter for any activity, and I’ll be back at the first sign of danger.”
Lena watches Supergirl ascend, giving Kara plenty of time to return, and turns back to Kara once she hears a disheveled sigh.

“Kara!” She might as well play the part of the awestruck civilian. “You just missed Supergirl.”

“Did I?” Kara sighs. “Golly.”

“‘Golly?’” Lena teases. “Didn’t know we were back in the 40’s.”

“Uh, I mean,” Kara gestures wildly with her hands. Lena takes note of the bright yellow clutch, and it reminds her of a Seussical interpretation of Kara’s ribbon. “What else are you supposed to say about Supergirl?”

Lena chuckles and decides not to push her further. “Cute dress, by the way.” That neckline shows off all the—

What?

“Thanks!” Kara smooths the front of her dress unnecessarily. “And you’re just as gorgeous as always. I-I mean—”

Kara makes a few more incoherent noises of exasperation before Lena saves her with a friendly, half-formed smirk. “Thank you, Kara. Did you end up coming alone?”

“Oh, no,” Kara breathes out with obvious relief. “I’m with a friend of mine. I haven’t seen Mike yet.”

“Hm, so you set up that favor for me and didn’t get anything out of it. That’s unfortunate.”

“What are you talking about? Look at this food!”

Lena laughs at Kara not-so-inconspicuously eyeing the servers’ trays.

“Have at it. There’s more by the wall.”

Kara tilts her head to the side. “Do you want me to—”

“Ms. Luthor?”

Lena and Kara look towards the voice and find Alana standing next to them with a headset and clipboard. “It’s time for opening remarks.”

“Right.” Lena checks her phone again to no email notifications and clicks it off again quickly. “This shouldn’t take long.”

Kara gives her a thumbs up. “You’ve got this!”

Alana leads Lena to the stage and motions her up once the band pauses between songs.

“Thank you all for coming,” Lena says into the microphone. “I know this wasn’t an easy choice for
all of you, but your courage and generosity will save lives.

“I also want to thank all the staff and vendors who put together a lovely event on such short notice. It looks fantastic, and the food is amazing. And finally, thank you to the hospital management team.” Lena takes a moment to nod to the various board members scattered in the crowd. “It’s been truly rewarding to work with you and see the direct results of your efforts first-hand. With that, I am pleased to introduce you all to Director Derek Hearns.”

The guests clap appropriately as the director ambles to the stage. Lena shakes his hand and politely steps to the side of the microphone.

“Thank you,” he starts as his hands tremble holding his notes. “I want to echo Ms. Luthor’s sentiment. The children at our hospital are strong, but they struggle for their lives every day. Tonight, you raised almost $600,000 so that we can give them a fighting chance.

“I want to especially thank Ms. Luthor who has been working on this fundraiser for weeks, for allocating L-Corp resources to sponsor the event, then scrambled everything so it would happen even sooner. She also personally donated $50,000 and has worked with us extensively to keep our beds open.”

Lena nods her head once in acknowledgement and struggles to keep her face stoic even though she hears the soft noises of surprise through the applause. She notices her rose ribbon shift towards the stage, and she spots Jess coming up the stairs holding a large, rolled banner.

“It’s for this reason,” he says while taking a corner of the banner from the Jess, “that we think a change is in order.”

Jess shoots a wide smile to Lena, then steps away from the director and unfurls the banner between them. “Lena Luthor Children’s Hospital” reads boldly yet plainly in the middle. Cameras flash and the audience claps, but all Lena can focus on is her name printed without a demonizing predicate of a headline following it.

There’s zero chance that the press photos will be flattering. She doesn’t catch her gaping jaw until the director raises his arm for a half-hug. She knows it’s probably more professional to shake hands, but she throws her arm around the director’s shoulder anyway with an ecstatic smile to match.

“And with that,” he says while Lena releases him to give Jess a hug as well, “let’s have a party!”

“Thank you so much, Ms. Luthor,” Jess says as the band starts up again. Lena pulls away and smiles.

“None of this would’ve happened without you. Thank you for trusting me.”

“Literally? Anytime. Go dance!”

Lena doesn’t dance. She doubts it surprises anyone. It’s the only way to turn a party into something productive.

She spends the next half hour with potential investors and distant corporate allies with her wrist
expertly guiding her to the most important connections. She finally catches a break and finds an empty spot at the bar, and the server quickly passes her some water in a whiskey tumbler while she waits for her phone to load. She intends to sip it slowly (at the same agonizing pace that it’s taking her cell service to initialize), but she throws it back as if it were actually whiskey when her green-brown bond, a repulsive combination of bile and swamp water, begins glowing.

“Fifty thousand? That’s a little excessive for a tax deduction.”

Lena scoffs and sets her glass delicately on the table, deliberately contrasting with the fervor she threw it back. “Had to make up for your greed somehow.”

“It will take more than a children’s hospital to absolve you of guilt, Lena.”

“Fuck off, Morgan.”

“Lena?”

Even though Lena’s eyes burn from the brightness of her left ribbon, Edge breaks their unspoken glaring contest first to turn a tight, smarmy half-smile towards Kara.

“I don’t believe we’ve had the pleasure of meeting. Morgan Edge.” He holds out a hand to Kara’s right where a new, muddy bond begins to glow.

“I’m—”

“Don’t deny a woman a drink, Morgan,” Lena interrupts with a gesture of her hand between theirs. “Make some room.”

Edge looks up and down the bar to find no other space. He grimaces momentarily, but he nods and walks away without further hesitation. Kara looks after him with obvious disgust.

“Who was that?”

“No one important.” Definitely no one worthy enough to hold the sun. “Drink?”

“I’m fine.” Kara slides easily back into her smile. “I just wanted to congratulate you for the… on the…” she motions widely to the venue, “everything.”

“Thank you, Kara.” Lena dips her head in acknowledgement and taps on her unlit phone. “I’m just —”

Lena almost doesn’t hear the explosion over the gasp forcibly expelled from her lungs when strong arms jerk her away from the stage. She barely has a moment to stabilize herself against Kara’s torso when a second blast rings out and Kara tightens her hold. Kara doesn’t let go until sparks stop flying and the ground stops shaking.

“Sorry,” she quickly apologizes and pushes Lena away but doesn’t take her hands off Lena’s shoulders. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” Lena puts her left hand onto Kara’s as leverage to twist her neck and look back at the stage. A trio of men holding oversized guns walk out of the smoke and begin yelling at the crowd. “I need to go.”

Out of the corner of her eye, she catches a flash of yellow.

She whips back to Kara and doesn’t bother trying to avert her gaze from her wrist.
The glow of Lena’s soulmate bond encapsulating their hands rhythmically pulses from bright to brighter.

Maybe Kara takes it as a sign of fear. Her fingers gently squeeze Lena’s shoulders.

Lena blinks and drops her hand. Kara synchronously releases Lena and steps back. Lena snatches her phone from the bar counter and marches towards the intruders without another glance to Kara.

“Oh,” she says to the leader with a smirk. “You picked the wrong party to crash.”

Her phone won’t load and her ribbons won’t stay still and the ground keeps shaking and she probably shouldn’t have put the generator under a table when she’s wearing a dress but, damn it all, why won’t this fucking thing work?

A man tumbles under the table with her and nearly makes her drop her flashlight.

“Do you mind?” she snaps, but her hands don’t stop working, twisting wires and tightening connections that could have possibly gotten loose in transport.

“Oh, is… is that a black-body generator?”

At another time, Lena would have been impressed with his deduction. “It will be if I can get it working.”

“This whole party…” the man continues slowly, “you set a trap for these guys!”

Lena huffs. “Yeah, a trap that will fail unless I can get this operational.”

“Okay, so,” he straightens up as much as he can under the table, “if the black-body is at equilibrium with the alien weapons, then it will absorb the electromagnetic radiation and shut them down. This is genius!”

“I know,” she slips before she has a chance to censor her hubris, “but the frequency and the wavelength… they’re a match… so…”

It’s at equilibrium. It’s just not being transmitted. There’s nothing creating the field. So it’s gotta be...

She looks over to the man with relief. “The induction coil,” they say together.

Their hands fumble over each other in their frenzy to fix the coil, but Lena ends up slapping him away so she can focus.

“Hey,” he whines, “careful with the money-makers!”

She ignores him while he watches on, but she revels in the satisfaction of his excitement when he realizes it’s ready.

“Punch it!”

She presses down hard on the button and braces herself for a potentially huge influx of static.
Instead, it’s more akin to a series of feathers continuously brushing against the grain of the fine hairs on her arms: unsettling, but gentle and nearly imperceptible.

Something crashes outside, and the generator deactivates with the status “wavelength not detected.”

“That was awesome!” the man exclaims with a fist pump. “Come on!”

Lena finalizes the power-down sequence for the generator, then emerges from under the table with slightly more grace than the man. She brushes her dress off for any dust that might have settled on it and observes the surprisingly-minimal carnage around the venue.

“Oh, we weren’t under there, so…” the man awkwardly tries to explain. Lena cranes her neck to see who he’s talking to and finds Supergirl and James Olsen, ever the recognizable Super-buddy, grinning broadly. His parallel bonds of solar yellow and shimmering platinum blend smoothly into chartreuse upon their wrists. “We stopped it!” he proclaims with a double thumbs up.

“The gig’s up, huh?” the leader of the gang asks Supergirl. Lena catches the eye of one of her security guards and motions for him to apprehend the thieves.

Her phone buzzes in her hand, and she sees a notification for an email from Dr. Safronova. She sighs deeply and clicks it off.

“If anybody is missing any of their belongings, please see me or one of our security staff members.”

Lena looks up to the stage and watches Alana switch off the microphone.

“Alana,” Lena calls out. Alana nods and approaches the edge of the stage. “You don’t seem too surprised.”

“It’s my job to know you, Ms. Luthor,” Alana answers simply. “You wouldn’t put this together without a plan.”

Lena spends the next half hour personally seeing off as many guests as possible with the hospital director while the police and Supergirl detain the gang. 18 minutes in, she looks around the venue to approximate how many attendees remain and catches Supergirl watching her. The hero tilts her head to the side and briefly furrows her eyebrows inquisitively.

Lena takes half a step towards the hero when a flash of yellow materializes in her memory. Supers have powerful hearing, right? “Later,” Lena whispers. Supergirl gives her a decisive nod, and they both return to work.

She collapses onto her bed a little past midnight. Even if it isn’t that late, she knows the exhaustion won’t let her be on time for work. She grabs her phone to text Alana as much and finds multiple texts from Kara.
Hey are you okay?
‘Sorry I had to run off
‘I'll have a good report in the morning though!!!’

Lena smiles despite herself. She checks the time stamp on the texts and sees they were sent a few hours ago.

‘Just got home. Hope you’re sleeping now.’

Kara’s text bubbles show up immediately.

‘Nah I still have a couple words to write. Glad you’re okay!!!’

As always, the texts are peppered with appropriate emojis. Lena feels her eyes weighing down heavier and heavier, but she searches for an “ok” gif anyway. She sends the first one she finds, and her head hits the pillow before she can turn off her phone screen.

Chapter End Notes

Finally got these 4800 words to the point of "good enough" :D

Thank you, as always, for your patience. This is my longest chapter so far, and I’m so excited for where the rest of the story is gonna go. Hope you liked it!

Also I made a thing - refractallize.tumblr.com

<3

Deleted lines:

They say it’s better to ask for forgiveness than permission, and she’s spent the past two years practicing her plea. What’s one more?

How many times can someone shoot themselves in the foot before a doctor recommends amputation? Trick question: the gang’s weaponry already took off the whole leg.
If the Monster is Behind You, What are You Fighting Now?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

‘Lolololololol Lena are you sure you’re okay????
That’s not the gif of somebody who is okay
‘...I hope you’re sleeping
‘Goodnight!!’

Clicking on her phone while still waking up in bed, Lena wonders if she should’ve been more cautious in sending that gif. Rather than something actually reassuring, her phone determined that the epitome of “okay” is Leslie Knope claiming that everything hurts and she’s dying.

‘Yes, I was sleeping.’

Lena leaves her phone at its charger and gets ready for work. In addition to incoming e-newsletters, she returns to a simple text:

‘Meet me at the café?’

Her body feels heavy with every movement, and her eyelids threaten to close with every blink, but she can’t think of anything more rejuvenating than a hefty mug of Ethiopian coffee and an easy, silly conversation with her soulmate over brunch. She’s already late to work anyway, and the emails that Alana copied her on excuse her from any meetings.

She texts Kara a confirmation and mentally records the inclination as empirical data for her study of magic.

She elects to leave her apartment with sunglasses instead of the tinted contacts, convinced her dry eyes wouldn’t be able to keep up the valiant fight against sleep while supporting the thick film. She wonders if maybe Dr. Châtelet spoiled her as the once-comforting weight of sunglasses resting on the bridge of her nose and gently pressing behind her ears now feel cumbersome and clunky.

Lena finds Kara already sitting at her favorite table engrossed in her laptop by looking through the window before entering the café. Upon hearing the bells clanging against the opening door, Lena watches Kara look around then stand way too fast and her hips jostle the table. The mugs of coffee on the small table immediately tip over, and Kara angles her body awkwardly to save her laptop. Lena snatches napkins from the counter and rushes over, immediately wiping down the brown leather messenger bag that wasn’t nearly as lucky as the computer.

“Thanks,” Kara says dejectedly as she shuts her laptop and grabs more napkins.

“Don’t worry about it.” Lena hands back the bag, and she grimaces as heavy drops of coffee fall from the seams and splatter onto the floor. Kara peers inside the bag and groans.

“At least the croissants float,” Lena teases.
“I’ll get us more…”

Kara stomps off, furiously stuffing her handful of napkins inside the bag, and Lena quietly finishes sopping up the coffee. On her way to throwing out the napkins, she catches George laughing heartily at Kara and the blonde not-so-discreetly shushing him. She pulls out her phone and sits back at the table, nonchalantly scrolling through unimportant emails until two mugs clink in front of her. She looks up at Kara with a smirk.

“You know I can pay for my own coffee, right?”

“But how often does someone buy it for you?”

Lena finds it nothing short of miraculous that she doesn’t choke on the air she breathes in. “Touché. Have you been here all morning?”

“Um, yeah, I had to redo my report.”

“I’m sorry. I can leave you alone to finish?”

“No, no! I invited you here.” Kara nearly misses her chair in her hurry to sit down. “I sent it off a couple minutes ago, actually. How are you?”

It feels like a lie, but the question catches Lena off-guard before she has the chance to throw accusations. Maybe it’s not so much the question as it is the tone and soft expression. Does Kara’s head naturally tilt at such an endearing angle?

“It’s nice not having any meetings today. I get to focus on some side projects.”

“Oh… Well, I guess that’s good. Anything you can share?”

Lena racks through her neverending mental ‘To-Do’ list. “I’m giving a TED talk in a couple weeks. I finally have a chance to write it now.”

Kara readjusts in her seat and shimmies her shoulders. “About what?”

“I’m not sure. I haven’t thought about it with everything going on. Probably something about quantum sensing? It’s timed well with a product launch, so it might be the most interesting and marketable…” she pauses and realizes Kara hasn’t blinked in a while. “Sorry. I’m rambling.”

“No no no! Well… yeah, you were, but in a good way! You can tell me more! Did you use that with the black-body generator?”

Lena’s lips slowly twist into a smirk. “Who told you about the generator?”

Kara crushes her croissant in her hands. “M-my friend was under the table with you. I know n-not like that!” she quickly corrects as the crumbs fumble to the plate. “He helped with—his name’s Winn—he told me he did the thing with—”

Lena cuts her off with a laugh as a chartreuse band materializes on her wrist. “He knew his shit. Could use him at L-Corp if he ever needs a job.” She isn’t sure if Kara’s subsequent stammering is in response to the curse word or the prying. She saves her with another laugh. “Yes, the generator had a quantum sensor. It was the only way to pinpoint the frequencies of the weapons.”

“That’s so cool! When’s the talk?”

“Two weeks from Thursday.”
“I’ll see if I can make it. Depends on the newsroom for the day.”

“What if I get you a press pass?”

What if indeed.

“Well, I mean, I would still need to run it by my boss, but I could try.”

“I’ll forward the confirmation to both of you when I get it,” Lena decides. “Text me his email?”

Kara grins and rubs the croissant crumbs off her fingertips before scrambling for her phone.

This time, Kara doesn’t hesitate. She’s as courteous as ever, removes their dishes with a flourish and opens the door with a smile, and she pulls Lena in for a hug like it’s the most natural action in the world.

Maybe it is. Maybe it’s as natural as the sun welcoming a new planet to its gravity.

Without the rumbling of the gang attack, Lena can appreciate how one of Kara’s arms wrap around her shoulders, soft yet still reminiscent of her instinctive shielding during the gala, but the other stops short of encapsulating her completely in favor of keeping her close.

It’s simultaneously an acknowledgment and a promise to return, and Lena’s grateful that her father’s devotion trained her to hug back on reflex.

Distantly, Lena feels her phone vibrate through her bag. Whether Kara hears it or feels it, too, she releases Lena and steps back immediately.


“No problem.” Kara grins and sticks her hands in her pockets with a shrug. “I’ll text you later.”

Lena smiles in return, but it quickly disappears as she answers her phone.

“Yes, Alana?”

The fallout from the gala is as brutal as she expected. The regular pundits lace up their gloves and beat her name against the ropes with the same combinations as usual. Lena tells herself that anticipating the bruises makes them ache less afterwards.

“She says she wants to save people—children, even—but then she shows utter disregard for the lives
of the good samaritans who actually believe in that mission,” Morgan Edge argues on one of her televisions. “She believes in pushing her own agenda, whatever it is, at the expense of the American people. Now: who does that remind you of?”

The gracious news outlets also play sound bites from the hospital director or some footage of repairs on the hospital, though she finds those to be few and far between. At least the papers give a more objective account of the gala, Kara’s article included, and she briefly wonders if any news stations could just play a transcript of the local papers for hours on repeat. She begins to tune them out altogether until a breaking bulletin announces the sudden death of the gang members and its leader, Chet Miner, during their transfer to the county jail. The petite cop giving the press conference refuses to release specifics on their deaths and exits the conference gracefully after giving her statement. Lena guiltily appreciates that the pundits turn their focus away from her and towards the shortcomings, assumed or real, of the American justice system.

She listens to them casually while sifting through emails until she hears a knock on her door.

“Ms. Luthor?”

Lena raises her head to see Alana poking her head into her office.

“There’s an Otto and Linda Plastino from Rhodos requesting to see you. They mentioned the RFP regarding an experimental viral treatment—”

“Did they have an appointment?”

“No. Would you like me to send them away?”

Lena drums her fingers on her desk. “Please tell them to wait outside. I’ll hear them out in a second.”

Alana nods and leaves the office, and Lena returns to her computer to quickly search for more information on Rhodos. She never received an answer to the email Alana copied her on, but she did just send it to them yesterday. They’re a small group, fresh out of academia with a handful of recent graduates helping the married ex-professors with their atomic research. Lena found news of the researchers receiving several public grants for their work in virology and radiation therapy, but funding became scarce two years ago when they shifted their application to alien physiology.

She pushes back from her desk and walks briskly to the lobby. The middle-aged couple dressed in argyle and khakis stands out quite noticeably amidst L-Corp’s sleek, monochromatic decor, and their nervous whisperings clash with the confident background conversations filling the rest of the building.

More importantly, Lena notices the shimmering, opaque ribbon of silver-to-gold connecting their left wrists.

“Dr. and Dr. Plastino?” Lena calls out. The couple immediately falls silent and whip their heads towards her. She finds herself endeared by their sincerity (if not their fear) and waves them towards her office. “Please come in.”

Awkward introductions and handshakes aside, the scientists speak about their work with a passion
Lena hasn’t experienced since meeting Jack. She could see why they would want the contract with her, too: they have great ideas, and L-Corp would expedite them exponentially.

“So, specific to this patient, how would you want to proceed?” Lena asks.

Linda’s eyes light up, but she squirms in her seat. “Well, um, we think,” she coughs nervously but continues, “we think that the first step is to uncoagulate the viruses from the cells in vivo. We noticed the virus is already denatured in the images, but it isn’t killed, maybe...” She coughs again and looks to her husband who nods encouragingly. “We have a rhodium isotope compound that could act as an alternative binding site for the viruses. If the viruses bind to the isotope instead of the host cells, then they’ll disperse enough for us to get a better look at them. So... um...” she trails off and looks again to her husband.

“Once you can see the viruses, you can get a better idea of how they act,” Lena follows, “and then how to kill them. But if the virus works by coagulation, shouldn’t dispersing them be enough to cure the patient?”

“Maybe,” Otto says simply, “but that could mean continuously administering the isotope to the host if the virus replicates fast enough, and the isotope ain’t cheap.”

“Then what’s the second step?”

“Finding out what kills it,” Linda answers. “We think something in our atmosphere gets close to it, but either the coagulation is a very strong defense or the killing agent isn’t naturally strong enough.”

Lena hums. “What’s the probability of success?”

The professors look to each other for a moment. Then, Otto places a hand on Linda’s knee and nods.

“It’s too early to tell... About fifteen years ago, I was on a team that deactivated a virus with nothing more than a rhodium compound and light, which is why we use rhodium as our base element,” Linda explains. “The only difference between that virus and this one is that ours originated on Earth. Otto started as an astrophysicist, and he...” She coughs and pats his hand.

“All the elements in the universe are fundamentally the same,” Otto continues. “It’s the naturally-occurring isotopes that make planets so different. We add over 400 neutrons to an atom to make our isotope; it wouldn’t survive on Earth without our matrix. So, if Earth-rhodium helped kill an Earth-virus, couldn’t a non-Earth rhodium isotope help kill a non-Earth virus?”

“We aren’t saying that the isotope will be the cure,” Linda adds, “but we think it will get us past step one. Step two could be as easy as finding what exists in Earth’s atmosphere that already hurts it.”

Lena taps her fingers on her desk. It’s a stretch. A long, long, long stretch. Definitely not one she would take on her own.

Maybe it’s just enough of a stretch to reach across the galaxy.

“Can you give me a moment, please?” She doesn’t wait for them to give their assent before reaching for her cell phone and shooting off a text. When she looks back up, she sees them holding hands, his left hand in both of hers and resting on her knee.

Their metallic soulmate bond pulses rhythmically in a large orb of light with a radius extending from their palms to their forearms. Lena forces herself to focus on their eyes and not their hands, but she would swear that the light flashed to the cadence of their synchronized heartbeats.
“It’s an interesting approach. Other proposals only focused on blind eradication,” she comments.
“With that said, I want to be clear on something: did you make any conclusions about the identity of
the host?”

“They’re a refugee, right?”

Lena blinks at the lack of hesitation and startles at the soft knock on her door. She’s already on her
feet by the time Jess peeks her head in.

“Ms. Luthor?”

“Come in, Jess. I want to introduce you to Otto and Linda Plastino. They have a promising proposal
for the virus study.”

The researchers stand at the mention of their names and shake Jess’ hand, all three grinning widely.

She wants to leave. She truly does. She’s ready to fall asleep in the middle of her descent to her bed
and not remember touching the sheets.

But there’s so much work, and she didn’t work at all this morning, so the only option is to make it up
tonight.

It has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that Kara’s yellow ribbon has swiveled overhead six
times in the past two hours. It has nothing to do with her promise to talk to Supergirl ambiguously
later and that later could mean tonight.

Except, at 6:47 PM, the yellow ribbon circles the building for the seventh time, and a headache joins
the fatigue behind her eyes in its protest for rest. She shuts her laptop with a huff and marches out to
her balcony, methodical patience and objectivity be damned. She admits to herself that the fresh air
feels good, and maybe it could’ve staved off the headache for a little while longer.

Her left-ribbon slowly swings around her right side, but Lena doesn’t turn her head until she hears
the soft fluttering of a cape in the wind.

“Supergirl,” she greets.

Supergirl nods her head in recognition as she hovers just beyond the railing. “Do you have a moment
to talk?”

“Certainly.” Lena waits for Supergirl to touch down on her balcony before leading her into the
office. “Here to chastise me for the gala?”

“No. I mean…” Supergirl places her hands on her hips and fixes her posture. “You took a great risk.
Why didn’t you tell me what you were up to?”

Lena smiles and drops her gaze to the floor. “I doubt you would’ve believed that a Luthor just
wanted to see justice done.”

“Well, I couldn’t have stopped them without you.” The hero’s hands fall, and she takes a deep breath
as she crosses the threshold into the office. “Thank you.” She turns abruptly with a soft smile.
Lena’s breath catches. The cape and sigil remind her of the last time she was thanked by someone who landed on her balcony, someone who apologized for something that wasn’t his fault, someone who thanked her for stopping her...

Lena swallows. He thanked her for making amends. For making promises that she’d already kept. For helping humans and aliens alike.

And Supergirl is doing the same.

“I hope we can work together more in the future.”

The hero’s eyes crinkle at the corners as her smile spreads into a grin. “Me too.”

“Oh!”

Lena looks past her soulmate and instantly feels her body stiffen. Her blood congeals in their vessels and makes her skin go rigid despite her loudening, quickening heart pumping out what few cells return to it.

“I didn’t realize you had company.”

It isn’t the frustratingly-flawless fake smile or the deceptively-friendly words or even the offensive white turtleneck that drives Lena to anger.

It’s the amethyst ribbon tethering Lillian’s wrist to a soul hundreds of miles away from National City. Her lungs continue breathing, strong and slow against unyielding ribs, and compel her to speak.

“Would you excuse me, Supergirl? I have to take this.”

“Of course.”

Lillian observes Supergirl’s hasty exit with less interest than Lena would have assumed, but she doesn’t have time to dwell on it before Lillian’s attention shifts to her.

“Sorry I missed your party.”

“What else is new?” Lena realizes, now, that she’s no longer thinking of her actions or words, her body falling into the practiced survival schemas from boarding school that she polished in the boardroom. “So, what can I do for you?”

“I’m in town and thought I’d stop by,” Lillian says casually. “Is that so hard to fathom?”

“Yes. Why are you really here?”

Lillian’s eye twitches. “You seem to be holding up better than expected.”

Lena scoffs. “If you expected something different, you had no reason to want me here.” She strides across the room and sits on her desk. “The company is in the black, our stocks keep rising, we have multiple high-profile contracts, and the Luthor name isn’t in bad press nearly as often.”

“Only because you renamed the company. But even then...” Lillian nods towards the muted television playing recaps of the earlier gala commentary.

Lena crosses her arms and shakes her head. “Did you come here to say something constructive? I believe I set the terms of my takeover quite clearly in our agreement.”
“Familial banter aside,” Lillian drawls as she begins slowly circling the room and surveying the minimal furnishings, “I am happy that you are doing well, Lena. Supergirl wouldn’t have been able to take down those weapons without you.”

Lena smirks. “You know they were humans, right? The gang? No need to get comfortable,” she interjects before Lillian can move closer to the couch. Lillian sighs but remains standing regardless.

“Humans didn’t make those guns.”

“They would if they could.”

“You know, for someone who claims to want to save the world, you’re quite cynical.”

“What can I say? You inspire it in me.”

Lillian’s smile, still present, softens. She walks towards Lena but maintains a respectful distance. “You changed your number.” She pulls out a business card. “I’ll be in National City for a while. I truly do want to reconnect with you, Lena.”

Lena takes the opportunity to look down in “thoughtfulness” at her right wrist. The amber bond solidified infinitesimally, and it’s enough to make Lena hold out her hand.

“I’ll think about it.”

It must satisfy Lillian. She nods and places the card delicately into Lena’s palm. “Hope to hear from you soon.”

Lena remains hopefully inscrutable as Lillian leaves her office. Her tattered amber bond disappears before she even closes the door.

Chapter End Notes

Science? Meet fiction.

Please bear with me on the virus storyline. I promise it’s one of the most important storylines for Lena. You can also Google “Bright idea could doom cancer and viruses” to see the study with the rhodium-based compounds!!! I took some liberties with the mechanism but ughhh it’s so cool!

Thank you for reading! Hope you’re having a lovely summer!

Talk nerdy to me - refractallize.tumblr.com

Deleted lines:
The couple smiles simultaneously. “That’s the plan.”
Lena hums. She can’t tell who said it first.

In earlier years, Lena might’ve stayed angry. She might’ve set fire to the business card and thrown alcohol on the flames just to make sure even the ashes burned.
Lena restocks her alcohol the night after Lillian visits. She tells herself it’s because she needs to finish her TED talk in the next week and a half, and it’s about time she tried the “write drunk, edit sober” approach.

She quickly remembers that drinking is much more fun than writing and abandons the latter for a night curled up in a blanket on her couch. Approximately one shot of whiskey, two glasses of wine, and 45 minutes of My Cousin Vinny later, her phone buzzes:

‘What your favoritism color??’

The typos surprise her. Although hyperbolic, Kara doesn’t leave spelling up to autocorrect very often.

She’s slightly more surprised that she doesn’t have an easy answer to an otherwise basic question. Then again, her favorite color is essentially choosing her favorite soul. In that case...

‘Maybe green or yellow. Why?’

Kara sends her a link to a Buzzfeed quiz: Can we guess your personality based on your favorite color? Apparently, green and yellow deems her “Loving” and “Logical.” Kara’s next text pops in as Lena taps through the rest of the colors.

‘That that fits’

‘Really now? I’d think most assume my favorite color is black, according to this site Also, are you okay? You sound drunk’

‘NO WAY YOUR NOT THAT SERIOUS But green and yellow perrrrfect’

She wants to ask why, the question half-typed onto her phone already, but Kara beats her to the next message.

‘Purple work too’

She flicks back to purple and reads the “Helpful” description with a snort.

He was a humanitarian in his own way, she supposes.
She deletes her previous text and opts for something mildly safer.

‘What about you?’

‘I like lots of colors!!!
Maybe the light blue
But i like yellow to
Pink
Green is good
None of them describe me tho’

The texts pop through in a short span of two seconds, and Lena silently applauds her mobile carrier for keeping up with Kara’s speed. She waits a moment longer for Kara to continue rambling, but nothing comes. She takes it as her opportunity to respond.

‘Maybe you’re too complex for a single-question Buzzfeed quiz. Bits and pieces describe you. The idealism, responsibility, and kindness for sure, but I don’t see how the green applies’

(at least not to the only Kara whom Lena is supposed to know)

‘What are you drinking?’

The text bubbles rise and fall multiple times, long enough for Lena to finish her third glass of wine and settle into the rekindled warmth spreading from her stomach to her head and to her toes, until she receives a message typed in too fast for the bubbles to pop up.

‘Run
Oh golly
#ominious
Run’

‘Must be strong’

‘Stronger than me!!!!!’

That earns a hearty laugh that echoes throughout Lena’s apartment. She can’t think of any direct response that doesn’t reveal knowledge of Kara’s identity, so she sends multiple laughing emojis instead.

‘Hard to believe straight-laced ace reporter Kara Danvers drinks on Monday nights. What’s the occasion?’

‘He made me :( But
It’s fro the greater good!!!!!!!’

The warmth stays in her face but swiftly dissipates from the rest of her body, her lips and fingertips particularly numb. She rereads the messages several times and busies herself with adjusting the blanket until she comes up with something remotely witty.

‘Sounds like something a responsible idealist who sees the best in people would say’

She silences her phone and tosses it to the other side of the couch even though the screen lights up immediately with a new message. She ignores it for an admirable four minutes before she huffs and rises for another shot of whiskey deliberately empty handed.
She definitely doesn’t wonder about the color of the soul who pressures Supergirl to drink the kind of rum that makes her drunk off her ass.

It takes her far less time to pour her drink than she hoped, and she finds herself back on the couch and picking up her phone much sooner than she anticipated.

Kara sent back six hearts: one yellow, one blue, and one pink in the first message, followed by one green, one yellow, and one purple in the second.

Lena stares and stares and stares even after her screen goes dark and her movie ends. Only when her eyes begin to close of their own volition does she remember the glass in her hand, her luminescent wrist steadily sagging towards the floor.

She tilts the glass against her lips and savors the burn slowly sliding down her throat and filling her chest, willing the whiskey to reach her mind before it can consider nonsense like purpose and meaning and futures.

She wakes up sober and would consider it a curse if it weren’t so damn redundant.

Rhodos’ facility is about as small as Lena expected, if it could really be considered theirs. The Plastinos lead Lena and Jess through a maze of cleanrooms and cubicles in a communal lab space close to the university until they end up at a double row of benches on the second floor. The sparse scientists at each station pretend not to stare at her, and Lena pretends not to notice.

“Can you do the clinical work here as well?” Lena asks.

“Some,” Otto answers. “Room’s around the corner.”

Lena turns to tell Jess as much and catches Jess smiling at her phone. She clears her throat to get her attention. Jess looks up to Lena’s knowing smirk and rolls her eyes.

“Don’t get any ideas.” Jess clicks off her phone. “He’s fun, but he’s a total ass.”

The exam room is as clean and quaint as the rest of the facility, just the essentials and enough square footage for the most efficient number of people, but with two hospital beds instead of one. When Lena questions the doctors about it, they hesitate and look at each other.

“We don’t know how much blood we’ll need,” Linda slowly begins with a cough, “or maybe ‘serum’ is the better term. We’ll be testing in vivo, and ideally we’ll have extra serum in case…” She coughs again, and Lena’s face falls into a frown. “We would like to try having a donor… because his will still be contaminated…”

Silence overcomes the scientists, and Lena looks to her employee expectantly.
“Jessica?”

Jess throws each of them a two-second disbelieving glare, annoyance palpably emanating from her small frame, before she throws her hands into the air with a groan. “Just don’t tell Joey. He knows I fucking hate needles. He’ll feel so guilty if he finds out.”

Lena can’t help but smile. She tells herself it’s a flare up of sadistic Luthor humor brought on by the reemergence of Lillian.

“That’s the plan.”

She finishes another paragraph of her speech later that night, sober, and considers it a weak victory.

She’s more impressed when she finishes off a bottle of wine and still manages to get herself to bed with dignity.

It’s more on a whim than with conviction that Lena turns down the street towards the café four days later. She hadn’t heard from Kara much, and Lena attributed it to the slight uptick in small crime that Supergirl fought and Kara reported. She has her hand hovering over the coffee shop door handle, her left-ribbon aiming inside, before she sees Kara sitting at her favorite table with another woman occupying the seat opposite of her.

She freezes. Although her vision is largely obscured by the bodies and lights of the other patrons, she spots a solid blue-gray ribbon attached to Kara’s wrist sewn seamlessly to the yellow shining brightly on the other woman.

Her fingers retract, her arm falls limp, and she walks away without another glance.

She only makes it a third of the way down the block before she hears the familiar clanging of heavy bells on wood.

“Lena!”

She breathes in before she turns around to the blonde jogging after her, but deems it pointless in retrospect when all the air leaves her lungs in her reciprocal greeting.

“Did you want to come inside?” Kara motions behind her, the same blue-gray ribbon still reaching the interior of the café. “I haven’t seen you in a while. You can meet Alex! And we haven’t started eating yet, so I can—”

“Kara,” Lena cuts her off with a light laugh. A similar blue bond, illuminated by Kara’s numerous anecdotes and factoids, appears on Lena’s wrist. “It’s okay. I should be getting to L-Corp.”

Kara’s answering pout nearly shatters her resolve. If it weren’t for the threat of facing Alexandra
Danvers, she would have been dragging Kara up to George with a demand for croissants.

“Maybe next time, though?” she offers instead. At Kara’s deepening frown, she adds, “I’ll buy?”

“That defeats the purpose,” Kara grumbles good-naturedly, but she tugs Lena into a hug anyway. “Text later?”

“Yeah, of course,” Lena answers into Kara’s shoulder, leaning into the reporter’s warmth. “I can use the morale boost.”

“Oh!” Kara springs away. “I’m so sorry for that night. I got carried away and it definitely wasn’t how that was supposed to go and I was a total idiot and—”

“Did you at least accomplish the ‘greater good’?”

Kara chuckles nervously and adjusts her glasses. “I beat him up a bit afterwards, so maybe.”

Lena grins. “Sounds like ‘good’ to me.”

Presenting the Rhodos pitch to her Board of Directors and department heads goes easier than anticipated. She expected reservations about the size of the lab, the publicity, even the ethics of testing on a child refugee, but the only question is much simpler:

“Where’s the profit?” one of the members asks. “It’s still too soon to play a direct part in these clinical trials, and we don’t have proof that the market will be… viable.”

Lena can’t fault him. Not entirely. “If the trials succeed, we will have an exclusive production contract for their isotopes,” she recites. “Completely behind the scenes. We already have the necessary equipment and staff. We will not conduct the trials nor will we market or sell any treatments that come from their research. If anything, we can leverage their isotope creation method for other nuclear-powered industries and pay them IP royalties.

“This is more than a contract. We could play a part in developing the first mainstream astrobiosimilars. One of the greatest hurdles in alien healthcare is the instability of extraterrestrial pathogens, if not the alien’s entire genome. If Rhodos’ isotope theory is correct, if we can replicate the chemical conditions of an alien’s home planet just by adding neutrons, then we will be on the absolute cutting edge of alien healthcare.”

She looks around the room and appraises the murmurs, approximately 80% assent and 20% hesitation.

Good enough.

‘How’s the word count???’
Lena abandoned the inebriated approach days ago and churned out pages upon pages of notes for the talk. They aren’t bad, but even she would admit that it somehow developed into a dissertation. She sheepishly types out her response and braces herself for Kara’s reaction.

‘6382’

‘THAT’S TOO MANYlena’

‘Try fitting the nuances of quantum sensing into 3000 words and let me know how it goes’

‘How about 3? “It’s really cool”’

‘This is a TED talk, not a Vine.’

‘Tomato <-> potato. Same thing’

Lena finds a Vine of a potato swinging around the room on a ceiling fan and sends it without further context. She considers the argument won when Kara can only answer with four gifs of enthusiastic laughter.

Lena takes advantage of her first meeting not starting until 10 and sends out her morning emails from her apartment, Dr. Châtelet’s latest developments in the infrared spectrum and a brief update from Rhodos easily the most intriguing in a sea of newsletters and middle-management bickering. When she comes into the office at 9:30, the building already thrums with energy, and she can’t wait to get to her top floor away from the rapidly swirling ribbons. She quickly strides towards the elevators, passing Jess at the reception desk on her way.

“Good morning,” she greets Jess on her way to the elevators.

“G’morning, Ms. Luthor,” Jess returns quietly. Lena instantly halts, surprised by the lackluster response from her usually-expressive employee, and snaps her head to look at Jess. Her makeup is applied to perfection, as always, but her movements are sluggish and delayed. Even her attempt at a smile falls flat.

Then, Lena spots the cotton ball taped to Jess’ forearm and relaxes.

“Did you give blood today, Jess?” Lena asks casually.

“I’m... sorry?”

“Did you give blood?” Lena repeats patiently with a pointed nod to Jess’ arm. “L-Corp offers donation leave if you need to take the day off. We can make schedule allowances for those with rare blood types as well.”

Jess follows Lena’s gaze to her arm. “Oh. Yeah, I did.”

“Good. Are you able to send an email before you leave?”

“I think…” Jess blinks slowly and tries to raise her head. “I’m sorry... I’ve never given blood before. I didn’t know…”
“It’s okay. Just leave me the—” Lena’s phone begins vibrating with a call. She glances down and scrunches her eyebrows in confusion. “Leave me the name of your superior, and I’ll tell them you’ll be out for today and tomorrow,” she finishes.

She rests against the front desk and answers her phone while waiting for Jess to fish out a Post-It.

“Kara? Are you okay?”

“Yeah, Lena, ugh, just,” either the phone cuts out or Kara lets out an inhuman growl of annoyance, “you know those people who have so much potential to do good, but instead they squander it on being selfish?”

“Did you mean half my board?” Post-Its acquired, Lena watches Jess continue to search her desk helplessly.

Kara barks out a sharp laugh. “If they literally shake people down for money on the behalf of others, then yes.”

Lena offers Jess a pen from the holder on top of the desk, which she accepts with a weak smile. “Sounds about right. What happened?”

A frustrated sigh crackles through the phone line. “I found out somebody I knew is working as a ‘loan enforcer,’ but he could be helping people! Instead, he’s beating people up in alleys and justifying it because he was hired to do it. It doesn’t make any sense! How can you say hurting anybody is okay? If you have that kind of power, why would you waste it on hurting people when you could be helping them?

“And then he had the absolute audacity to say that Supergirl was selfish and only helped people because she wanted, I don’t know, fame and recognition and money. He’s the one who’s selfish! Supergirl isn’t helping people because of the fame, and it’s not like she’s getting paid, but even if she were, at least she’s helping people!” She pauses for a heavy breath. “Right?”

In the time Kara spent ranting, Lena managed to get a company car to take Jess home, ride the elevator to her office, and boot up her laptop. “He’s definitely in the wrong, and I’m sure Supergirl does a lot of good that the public doesn’t know about, but I imagine Supergirl wants at least a little recognition.”

Lena slaps her palm to her forehead and painfully bites her tongue. The prolonged, uncomfortable silence that follows confirms that it was the worst thing to say, and Lena would’ve thought Kara hung up if it weren’t for the noise of cars in the background.

“What?”

Lena sucks in a deep breath. “She had to go public because of her first rescue, so it’s not like it was her choice. Still,” she readjusts in her chair and feels her palm sweat onto her phone, “if she doesn’t get recognition, then she doesn’t get trust. I have no doubt that she would do good even if she weren’t in the public eye, but it certainly helps. Probably helps motivate her, too. Keeps her from being a lonely bat in a cave.” She hears Kara laugh softly on the other end of the line, and she catches herself smiling in relief. “Then again, I’m hardly one to comment. My PR team has the highest salaries in the state for a reason.”

“What are you talking about?” Kara immediately interjects. “I researched your company, remember? You’re exactly the type of person who uses their power for good. And you’ve probably done even more that isn’t public record.”
“NDA’s help.”

“Really though,” Kara insists. “I still don’t agree with business politics, but you’re doing so much good with it. That’s more than I can say for 90% of the other companies in the world and definitely more than I can say for that jackass-who-must-not-be-named.”

Lena looks down to her glimmering left-ribbon and smiles.

“Thank you, Kara.”

Lena pours herself a glass of Oban to congratulate herself on completing the TED talk. It's still a little lengthy, but she knows she’ll talk a bit fast from nerves. She’s just about to settle for a movie when her phone buzzes with a Google alert. Apparently, Supergirl made a monster explode downtown by stuffing it with plutonium. Business as usual.

She quickly closes the notification and shoots off a text to Kara.

‘Guess who finished at a respectable 3180 words’

‘That's great!!!!!! Are you feeling good???’

‘Yeah, I really am. See you Thursday?’

‘Definitely!!!!! Even Snapper can’t stop me!!!’

She delivers her speech perfectly. The few jokes that she can make about quantum technology land gracefully, her voice comes through the microphone crisp and strong, and Alana cues the presentation images with precise timing.

But of course it was easy. She didn’t have any ribbons stretching into the audience to distract her.

‘Lena are you awake?’

The message pops in just after the 11 PM news. Lena, curled up on the couch and buzzing from her second cup of Irish coffee, manages to type a letter before Kara decides to call instead.

“H—”

“Lena! I am so sorry! Can you send me your address?”
“What?” Lena jerks upright and immediately regrets it when the headrush knocks her back down. “What for?”

“I’m bringing you dinner!” Kara shouts into the receiver. Lena holds the phone a few inches from her face, but the yelling and background buffeting wind still grates her ears. “Or dessert! Or… whatever you want!”

“Kara, you really don’t have to,” Lena replies loudly, “but where are you? Sounds really windy out.”

“Oh, that’s just—that’s just—the window’s down in my Uber so the wind’s just—sorry, the driver says they can’t roll it up—can you still hear me okay?”

Lena rubs the bridge of her nose. Maybe increased circulation will get her intoxicated blood moving out of her face and to literally any other part of her body that can help her get ready for a surprise visit from a flying Kara Danvers. “Yes, I can hear you, but you don’t need to—”

“I want to! You worked so hard on the talk and got me a press pass and I need to make it up to you! And I already have the Chinese food so I just need to know your address and what your favorite dessert is!”

“If you already have the food, but you know neither where I live nor where to get dessert, then where is your Uber going?”

“Lena! That’s not the point!”

She negotiates Kara down to one pint of ice cream, but the real victory is in the extra five minutes she gains from keeping Kara on the phone. Not only does she clean up her kitchen and pick up some stray pillows, she has an extra two minutes to appreciate that she never added to the minimal furnishings that came with the apartment. Less clutter means more time to finish wiping off her makeup from the day, apply fresh mascara, change into nicer sweats, and brush out her hair before Kara requests to be buzzed in.

If only it meant more time for the whiskey to leave her system.

She leans against her kitchen counter and chugs a tall glass of water until her left-ribbon finishes its ascent from the ground and she hears four sharp knocks against her door.

She forces herself to walk to her entryway calmly but finds it futile to stop herself from wringing the hem of her shirt in her sweaty palms before reaching a trembling hand to her door knob and twisting.

Maybe it’s the whiskey. Maybe it’s the fact that it’s a little after midnight and she woke up at 5 this morning. Maybe it’s Kara’s super speed. Regardless, it isn’t until Kara’s body presses flush against her own and the arms wrapped around her shoulders pull her up enough so her heels don’t touch the floor that Lena realizes she should do something. She gently places her hands on Kara’s back, and Kara squeezes her tighter.

“Are you okay?” she asks quietly.

Kara nods into the crook of her neck. “I’m just… really sorry.”
Lena begins rubbing her thumbs over Kara’s soft cardigan, and she feels Kara sink into her just enough for Lena to understand how heavy the cape weighs on her shoulders. The news didn’t report anything, but she doesn’t even need to see her bond to know the apology extends beyond the TED talk and anything else she could possibly fathom.

Holding the hero in her arms, Lena realizes she never finished her hypothesis. She constructed her study of soulmate bonds for the sole purpose of understanding their mechanism, relying on objective data collection with no attempt at predicting an outcome or planning future applications.

She should have known better. In its purest form, science is just a system of questions and answers, and there’s no way to ask for the “how” without stumbling into the “why.” Standing in the doorway with the only soul who insisted upon coming inside, only one reasonable answer exists:

She is going to fall in love with Kara Danvers.

Chapter End Notes

In case you missed the beginning notes, here is the Buzzfeed quiz for the first part of the chapter: https://www.buzzfeed.com/katieheaney/can-we-guess-your-personality-based-on-your-favorite-color?

Quickly approaching the final act of the fic, and hot damn is the shit gonna hit the fan. The next chapter might take a while because I'm taking a lot from canon, and the research for that is surprisingly time-consuming. Thank you, as always, for your patience and for reading!!

Please let me know if you find any formatting errors. I tried something a little bit different in the upload, and I'm nervous that some stuff got moved around.

Talk nerdy to me: refractallize.tumblr.com
Kara stays for an hour. She brought an impressive spread of potstickers, which she keeps close to herself and Lena doesn’t reach for, and crab rangoons and chow mein and fried rice, and they don’t even get close to finishing half. Kara demands to hear all about the talk and nearly convinces Lena to give the whole speech again, but Lena adamantly refuses on account of the alcohol still laying heavy on her tongue and the fact that the talk will be on Youtube in a few weeks.

She wants to believe that Kara cheers up and that her smiles and laughs come easier by the time she leaves, but she periodically fixes Lena with a stare so intense that Lena feels it even with her back turned. She wants to ask, wants to know every emotion swimming in the deep sorrow that those honest eyes can’t conceal, but she settles for walking Kara to the door and initiating their hug goodbye.

It’s odd to have her arms over Kara’s shoulders for once. Maybe it’s odd for Kara as well. Although she instantly crouches down and holds Lena’s waist, Lena doesn’t feel her relax until several seconds pass.

But she does, eventually, and she simultaneously burrows her face into Lena’s hair.

“Ready?” she mumbles.

Lena’s eyebrows furrow, and she pulls away slightly. “What?”

She feels Kara grin, and she has the slimmest millisecond to tighten her grip around Kara’s neck before the blond hoists her into the air and spins her around effortlessly with a laugh.

Lena vehemently denies that she made any sort of utterance, but even her stoic boardroom demeanor starts to crack at how hard Kara laughs at the alleged “squeal.” She playfully shoves Kara out of her apartment and yells goodnight before slamming the door shut.

She hears Kara cackle all the way to the elevator, and it’s enough to make her fall asleep with a smile.

The Plastinos practically vibrate with excitement when Lena enters their cleanroom. She barely even says “hello” before they eagerly ask her to get Jess on the phone. Lena grins and dials Jess’ number.

“Hi, Miss Luthor. How can I help you?”

“Hi, Jess. The doctors have some news for you,” she announces.

She moves to hold the phone out to the Plastinos, but they burst out talking before she can get close:

“We’re moving on to the next stage of the trial! We found the matching isotope! ‘Rhodium 454!’”
Jess sputters several oh-my-god’s and incoherent syllables, maybe a different language, and she babbles happily with the scientists. Lena, for the most part, stays silent and basks in their energy until they all calm down minutes later.

“I’ll see you at the office in a bit,” she tells Jess.

“And about that,” Jess starts hesitantly, “the reporters are already here.”

Lena frowns. “Hold on.” She nods to the Plastinos with a promise to discuss the details later, takes Jess off speaker, and begins her march out of the building. “What do you mean ‘the reporters are already here?'”

Her day abruptly turns to shit and Edge is a publicity-starved prick and there’s no reason for another damn oscillator to fail so massively when she personally reviewed the assembly line and terrified the living fuck out of the head of her subsidiary. His only saving grace was his eloquent press conference assuming responsibility and promising to make appropriate reparations.

She might’ve written it for him, but at least he delivered it like he meant it.

Still, the day definitely warranted the half bottle of wine that accompanied her leftover vegetable lo mein, but she almost doesn’t pick up her buzzing phone lest she see another stupid headline about her. She audibly sighs when she sees Kara’s name on her lock screen.

‘Hey I’m in the area!! Any ice cream left????’

‘Yes, let me know when you’re here’

...wait.

She swears loudly and scrambles yet again to make herself presentable, but she deliberately leaves her unfinished wine clearly visible as an excuse for anything she misses. All too soon, she buzzes Kara into the building and opens the door and leads her inside after a quick hug. If Kara notices that Lena can’t quite walk in a straight line, she doesn’t say anything.

“I saw the news,” Kara begins tentatively. Lena groans and retrieves two bowls from her cabinets.

“Don’t get me started. Let’s just say I fully intend to finish my wine, and I don’t even regret it. Something to drink?”

“Water’s fine, thank you.” Kara places her bag and jacket on a dining chair, then returns to the kitchen and rests on the counter. “I’m sorry that happened.”

“Not your fault they rated the oscillator for a higher capacitance without making any modifications to actually earn the higher rating, nor is it your fault that somebody trusted said rating.” It takes all her restraint not to slam any of the dishes onto the counter. “Tell me about your day?”

Thankfully, Kara has enough anecdotes to get her mind off work. She just finishes scooping out more ice cream when Kara mentions that the girl Alex likes doesn’t reciprocate her feelings, and it’s been frustrating trying to figure out how to help her.
“Is this new for her?” Lena asks.

“Oh. Um.” Kara quickly grabs her water and finishes it off with a gulp. “Yeah. It’s been a little hard. She’s still not great at talking about it, but the most I can do is be there for her when she’s ready, I guess.”

“Does it bother you?”

“No no no, not at all! No,” Kara punctuates with vigorous hand motions. “She was scared that it did, but, no, especially because I, um,” she sputters incoherently with a laugh and adjusts her glasses, “I can relate?”

Lena lets the silence hang between them while she finishes her bite of ice cream. Maybe Kara coming out to her should be more revolutionary, but when her first thought is of course you can and her left-ribbon barely brightens, she’s more surprised by her own hubris.

Still, she feels her heart beat a little faster and the corners of her mouth twitch upwards.

“I’m glad that you could connect on that. Must’ve made the conversation easier. More water?”

Kara nods her head without making eye contact, and Lena takes the glass to the water dispenser integrated in her refrigerator. Between the water splashing into the glass and the television still playing in the living room, Lena almost doesn’t hear Kara’s next whispered words.

“Does it bother you?”

Lena laughs loudly, amplified by the wine that still hasn’t filtered through her system. “That would be incredibly self-defeating.”

When she turns back, Kara still can’t look her in the eye, but Lena makes out the flushed cheeks and small smile that Kara quite obviously tries to hide.

Kara visits every day for the rest of the week with advance notice ranging between hours and minutes. Lena considers reducing her alcohol consumption for all but two seconds before determining that maintaining an inebriation level directly proportional to her work stress is the only responsible way for her to drink.

Some days, Kara joins her for lunch at L-Corp, too. She considers it an atrocity that Lena rarely leaves the building for anything other than networking and quizzes her regularly on various restaurants that Lena absolutely must try. These visits never last long, usually interrupted by Alana notifying her of a new crisis, but it doesn’t faze Kara. She just packages her leftovers and promises to text later.

And she does text later. She also supplements it with a house call and food from the eatery of the day. Lena learns to anticipate it and orders the food beforehand, calls Kara out for spending way too much money on food for both of them when Kara dares to challenge her, and enforces a “you fly, I buy” rule that Kara begrudgingly accepts.

(Lena enjoys believing Kara interprets the rule literally)
They spend the nights with movies and TV shows depending on when Kara arrives and if either of them still have work to do. Lena expects Kara to dash off abruptly, citing an emergency with her sister or her boss, but the interruptions never come, and the morning news validates the quiet nights. Still, Lena compiles evidence that something is indeed wrong. The stares don’t stop, nor do they lose their intensity.

On Wednesday night, after Lena finishes reviewing reports and Kara finishes her article, they share a blanket on the couch and talk over commercials during *Catfish* reruns. Kara suddenly turns bashful at the end of an episode, voice so small that Lena hardly believes she speaks, and asks if she can bother Lena with a question.

“What’s your mother like?”

“Lillian or my true mother?”

Kara only shrugs. Lena shifts on the couch and rubs her right wrist.

Even though she can’t name the white bands anymore, she knows her true mother always shines brighter than Lillian.

“She died when I was four,” she answers simply. “Not much else to say there.”

“I see.” The next episode begins, but Lena can’t focus on account of Kara’s fidgeting fingers and nervously bouncing leg.

“Did you have another question, Kara?”

There’s the stare again, heavy and laden with so much that she won’t explain. She adjusts her glasses and shakes her head. “It’s okay. We can keep watching.”

Lena sighs deeply and mutes the television. “Just ask. Neither of us are going to focus on anything when you’re this curious.”

Kara smiles sheepishly and turns to face her fully from the opposite side of the couch. “You never talk about Lillian. So I just… I dunno…” she exhales and tucks some stray hair behind her ear, “curious?”

Lena hums and reclines against the couch cushion. “How to explain the 60-year culmination of narcissism, hypocrisy, and entitlement that is Lillian Luthor,” Lena muses aloud as she takes a slow, dramatic sip of wine. “I did everything she could possibly want from perfect grades to cold-blooded corporate espionage, but I always seemed to fall short. I was never her daughter. I think she only tolerated me because I have a stronger claim to the Luthor name than she does. I don’t even know her maiden name.” She meant it as a joke, but Kara’s delayed, sympathetic smile informs her it’s not funny. Lena clears her throat. “We could never agree on anything.”

“What sort of things couldn’t you agree on?” Kara asks. “Was it with the business, or…”

Lena breathes out a laugh. “She actually convinced me to take over the company. Said it was sinking without a Luthor at the helm.” Lena finishes off her wine and shrugs. “Our biggest fights were over politics, but, honestly, everything she said was a variation of ‘we’ll agree to disagree, but I’m right and you’re wrong.’”

“That sounds awful. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Lena dismisses. “I did learn a lot from her, so I don’t think she outright hated me. She
just had no motivation to care about her husband’s bastard daughter when she had her own ‘precious boy’ to fawn over.”

“Do you ever talk to her?”

Lena thinks of the business card buried in her bag. “Haven’t had a reason. Maybe I’ll consider it when she stops being a bitch.”

Kara plays with the edge of the blanket. “Thank you for sharing that with me.”

Lena shrugs and unmutes the television. “No problem.”

Kara invites her to Thanksgiving before she leaves. Lena naturally declines, but Kara’s resulting pout doesn’t make it any easier. She takes Kara’s hands into her own and squeezes gently.

“We’ll hang out this weekend, okay?”

Kara’s pout instantly turns into a grin, and she nods her head. “Definitely!” She pulls Lena into a hug, and Lena swears that she feels lips skim her hairline before Kara darts down the hallway.

The holiday passes uneventfully, just a couple corporate mixers for the other ambitious who’s who of National City, and Lena’s ready to return to work by the time the weekend comes around. She takes advantage of the largely-vacant office to make rounds of the different departments, and she treats all the employees to a catered lunch for working on a holiday weekend.

She receives an email from Rhodos in the early afternoon informing her that they produced enough of the isotope to begin treatment. She copies Jess and asks when would be a good time for their first appointment, and Jess responds with an emphatic “Tonight!!!!!”

Lena laughs when she reads the email and tells Alana to shift any later meetings to Monday.

Lena meets Linda, Otto, Jess, and Joey in the exam room a little after 6 PM. She immediately notices the addition of multiple IV bags and a peculiar dialysis machine with odd auxiliary components in the corner, making the room feel more cramped than the first time she stepped inside. Jess ushers her in and implores the scientists to start explaining the next steps.

“We’ll administer the isotope intravenously,” Linda says while motioning to one of the IV bags. “Then, we’ll send his serum through the dialysis machine and irradiate it with light.”
“What?” Jess blurts out incredulously. “Just light? What’s that gonna do to it?”

“It should rupture the capsid wall,” Linda replies through a cough. “We think there’s a wavelength that passes through Earth’s atmosphere but not through Dyrlia’s. It would explain why the virus is denatured outside of the body but not killed: the light isn’t concentrated enough to break through the coagulation.”

Lena takes another look at the dialysis machine and realizes that the additional modules affixed to the tubing are lasers.

“What wavelength are you using?” she asks.

“Low-energy infrared,” Otto answers. “We aren’t sure what kind of light the virus is weak to. We wanna start at the low-energy end of the spectrum for less risk of destabilizing the isotope, but micro and radio waves might be too—”

Shouting erupts outside the door, and frantic, stampeding footsteps follow soon after. Lena looks around the room at the similar quizzical expressions she’s sure reads plainly on her face as well.

Then, her left-ribbon zooms from the sky to the floor below, and the building rumbles with the force only a fight between aliens could produce.

“We need to leave. Now!”

The fight finishes before the group makes it down the emergency escape. Lena presses the police for answers, but they remain tight-lipped. She manages to convince an officer to take Jess and Joey back to the children’s hospital, but Otto and Linda refuse to leave until they can confirm that all their equipment is safe.

Supergirl spends time with an officer being loaded on a stretcher and into an ambulance, but it isn’t long before she spots Lena and quickly makes her way over.

“Can I speak with you?” Supergirl asks urgently. Lena agrees, and Supergirl leads her to a side of the building away from the police lights and remaining scientists. Following the billowing cape and the hero taking powerful, confident steps, Lena abruptly and explicitly remembers that she’s talking to Supergirl, not Kara.

Then, Supergirl turns to face her, and she wears the same worried, heavy stare that Kara carried every night for the past week.

“I need help finding Lillian Luthor.”

Lena recoils. “What for?”

“Lillian Luthor…” Supergirl pauses and swallows hard, “is behind Cadmus. She’s their leader.”

The amber bond on Lena’s wrist immediately elongates farther than it ever has and points out in front of her. Although still riddled with holes, Lena would swear that it shines brighter, too.

She crosses her arms in front of her chest and leans against the building. It doesn’t stop her hands
from trembling violently against her body, nor does it hide the weaving ribbon growing longer and longer.

“Fuck.”

“I’m sorry,” Supergirl says as she starts pacing. “She kidnapped me—”

It makes too much sense. Her sudden reappearance just slightly offset from Cadmus’ first attack to mitigate any suspicion, and her honesty in wanting to “reconnect” with Lena is perfect.

“—and now she possesses a virus—”

She opposed aliens ever since Lena could remember, and she has enough resources and connections to fund an operation as large as Cadmus. Hell, she probably indoctrinated Lex with all her anti-alien views and pushed him into launching Project Mockingbird in the first place.

Both her amber and amethyst bonds brighten outside of her arms at that thought, and her shaking hands tighten into fists.

“—that could wipe out the entire alien population in National City.”

She was a board member when LuthorCorp got the military contract. She could’ve made sure they got the deal with regular kryptonite shipments and helped Lex hide the missing inventory.

“I need you to help me find her—”

Why this laboratory? It’s a low-profile, shared university space that doesn’t do anything significant enough to be a target for a terrorist attack, and it’s not like its research has any applications to…

“—so that she doesn’t hurt any more innocent people.”

Lillian has a virus.
Rhodos has an isotope.
Lena needs a plan.

“Please, Lena.”

Lena blinks several times and refocuses her sight on Supergirl.

Maybe honesty is dangerous.

“I’m sorry,” she chokes out. “I don’t know where she is. I haven’t spoken with her in weeks.”

She captured Kara.

She wants to kill Kara.

She tried to kill Kara.
She *will* kill Kara if Lena doesn’t stop her.

“Okay.”

Lena follows Supergirl back to the police and scientists in silence, and, after a moment’s hesitation, they part ways with curt nods. Lena watches after her briefly, then meets with the Plastinos huddling with some of the other professors.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, we’re fine,” Otto replies. “You?”

“Same. Can I ask you for a favor?”

Lena sits in the back of the cop car with her bag and a silver briefcase heavy on her lap. She half-expected Supergirl to follow her, but Kara’s yellow ribbon aims behind her for the entire trip until it shrinks and coils tight around her wrist.

The ride to her office gives her plenty of time to think. There has to be someone inside of L-Corp that works for Lillian. Rhodos just finished the isotope, and Cadmus attacks on the evening before they use any of it? They would have to be someone fairly high up the corporate ladder to know so much about a project barely out of its infancy, someone who works with Lena closely enough to know her schedule.

Someone whose job is to know her.

Lena rubs the bridge of her nose. It has to be Alana. Lena depends on her for practically everything, and there were so many opportunities for her to run interference in Cadmus’ favor. She let the Plastinos in without an appointment. She never followed through with finding a black-body radiation expert during the gang attacks. Lena could never find the source of the hack when Cadmus took over all of L-Corp’s computer screens and televisions, but that was probably Alana, too.

The phantom flashes in her mind’s eye, now fully merged with Lex’s features. Of course Lillian would haunt the world with the face of her pride and joy.

The car stops in front of the building, and Lena politely thanks the officer for her time. She shuts the door carefully and makes her way through the lobby and into the elevator.

Maybe she should be more upset. With Lex, fury rushed through her body and flooded out her sense, compelling her to blindly confront the most dangerous human to ever come from Earth.

Now, rage slithers slowly deep in her gut, its tongue lapping at the acid and its teeth grazing her insides, content with seething until the opportune moment to strike. Perhaps Lena’s anger has refined with maturity, or perhaps she knows she needs a strategy to grapple with such a devilish beast. Lillian is indeed narcissistic, hypocritical, and entitled, but she’s also cunning, methodical, and less
apt to make snap judgments. She probably constructed contingency plan upon contingency plan just like she did with Lex’s intricate schemes.

Lena can’t count on her to make a mistake like coming back to the family estate when thinking the coast is clear. Lena needs to be smart, needs to dust off her chessboard and arrange her pieces just like her family taught her.

And she needs to do it alone.

She marches into her office and places the briefcase on her desk as she plops into her chair. She runs her hands over the thick locks and lets her bag slide into the crook of her elbow, all the while staring at her wrists. The bright white bands meander through the other colors she’s accumulated over her short lifetime, but her eyes keep drifting to Kara’s glowing yellow on her left. She remains unmoving for several more seconds before she yanks open a drawer and digs out a gold bracelet, the same one she wore the first day she met Kara.

It does nothing to hide the ribbon. All the late nights and early breakfasts with her soulmate rendered any bracelet useless against the bond’s brilliant shine.

Still, the friction of the bracelet sliding along her wrist distracts her from the sharp edges of Lillian’s business card as she unlocks her phone and starts dialing.

It only takes Lillian fourteen minutes to show up. Maybe Lillian expected her to figure it out.

If that’s the case, then maybe this will be easier than she could’ve hoped for.

She waits by her window and watches her amber ribbon swivel from the street to the elevator and, finally, to her office door.

“Well, this is a lovely Thanksgiving surprise.”

Lena takes a deep breath. No point in mincing words now.

“Isotope 454,” she states. “That’s why you sent your goon to the university lab. You need it for the virus.” She turns from the window and tries not to show any reaction to Lillian standing in the doorway. “You’re in charge of Cadmus.”

Lillian shoots her a smug smile. “Is this the part where you lecture me like you’d lecture Lex?”

“No.” Lena fidgets with her hands and looks down humbly. “Leading L-Corp has taught me a lot. Opened my eyes.” She bites her lip and approaches the briefcase still resting on her desk. She firmly clasps her hands together and raises her head to meet Lillian’s puzzled gaze.

“Ask me for my help, and I’ll give it to you.”

Lillian hesitates, her eyes full of suspicion. “It’s that easy?”

Lena nods and opens the briefcase, revealing two thick cylinders marked as Isotope 454 and filled with red liquid. Lillian’s jaw goes slack, and she regards Lena with a newfound awe.
“I didn’t think you believed in the cause.”

Lena frowns. “I sincerely doubt that you would delude yourself into thinking I did.” She closes the briefcase and gathers her bag. “I believe in helping people, but I’ve learned that I can only help those who will accept it. If there’s no more aliens, then there’s no more reason to deny me. Think about how much good I’d be able to do if I wasn’t constantly battling those bleeding hearts.”

“Lex told me you once said ‘any death is a death too many,’” Lillian says with a raised eyebrow. “You do understand this will be more than one death?”

Lena shrugs to disguise the shiver that rattles her spine. “What’s a successful acquisition without some layoffs?”

Lillian’s thin lips stretch into a tight, contorted smile, and Lena thinks this is the first time she’s seen her truly happy.

“I believe it’s time I got to know my daughter a little better.”

The drive to the harbor is littered with quips slightly less vicious than when Lena was in high school. She attributes it to the fact that Lillian seems positively giddy, her fingers drumming rhythmically on the steering wheel, and that she’s channeling her frustration into squeezing the suitcase on her lap. She learns that the virus, Medusa, came from a Kryptonian self-preservation initiative, and Lillian edited it to target Kryptonians as well. The isotope functions just as Lena and the Plastinos intended: to stabilize the virus in Earth’s atmosphere.

Lena thought it would be more difficult to assimilate into her role as the nationalistic, snarky, merciless stepdaughter, but she finds she has plenty of material to draw from. She responds to Lillian’s insensitive speciesist comments with turns of phrase that deflect the topic of conversation to something more general, just like she did with Lex in their last few months together. More often than not, they shift to the public perception of the Luthor name, something that comes much easier to Lena.

“He would be proud of you,” Lillian comments abruptly. “He thought there was no hope after the last time he saw you. We’ll pay him a visit when we’re done.”

Lena wrangles her anger down from an indignant scowl to a meek smile. “That sounds nice.”

They park next to a covered truck, and Lillian eagerly pops open the trunk with a grin.

“Hurry up, Lena.”

“I know—”

Lena’s phone starts ringing. She purses her lips, then hands the suitcase to Lillian and grabs the bag from the floor of her seat.

“Let me see what it is. I’ll meet you out there.”

Lillian snatches the suitcase and slams the door closed before Lena finishes her sentence. Lena pulls
her phone out of her bag, and her face relaxes at seeing one of the board members’ name on the screen.

Apparently, Lena didn’t need to go that far. Who knew Lillian would be so trusting?

She exits the “Fake Call” app and dials the three familiar digits.

“911, what’s your emergency?”

“Lillian Luthor is launching a bioweapon from National City harbor.”

“Wha—”

Click.

She meets Lillian on the other side of the truck, and she watches Lillian tear off the tarp to reveal a massive missile pointed towards the sky.

“Some mothers wear lockets with pictures of their children,” she comments as Lillian removes a necklace with a key. “You wear the keys to a bazooka.”

“It’s a rocket launcher,” Lillian corrects as she punches in a few more buttons, “and it’s yours.” She turns and holds out the key and its chain to Lena, her eyes sharp and lips tight. “Take it. Prove you’re with me. Unleash Medusa, and end Earth’s alien menace once and for all.”

“We’re only going to have one shot,” Lena reminds her as she gently takes the key. “All the virus is in there, right?”

“Yes. Go on.”

Lillian backs away from the control box with the same, tight smile, and Lena takes the two short steps forward to push the key into its lock.

A gust of wind and rumble of cracking asphalt to her side makes her head whip around.

“Don’t do it, Lena!”

Although a man lands next to them as well, her eyes immediately latch onto Supergirl’s, pure concern and determination and Kara, and her hand grips the key tighter.

You’ll be okay.

Lena swallows thickly and turns the key.

She doesn’t hear the launcher fire. She doesn’t see the rocket zoom into the sky. She doesn’t smell
the smoke lingering in the air. How can she when Kara looks at her like the rocket shot straight through her chest?

“Go!” the man commands. “I’ve got this!”

Kara disappears in a blink, though her ribbon remains, and the man marches purposefully to Lena and Lillian.

“You two are finished.”

“You’re wrong about that,” Lillian retorts. Lena blinks again and the man is gone, a crash sounding off to her side. She watches in horror as an identical man wrestles him to the ground, guttural growls and sickening, bone-crunching punches resounding throughout the harbor.

Meanwhile, her new mother types away on the control box unperturbed. “We’re almost done. Another few seconds and we’ll have saved the world.”

Is this what the fate of the world depends on? The success of one woman against the might of monsters and the self-righteous insanity of humans?

Lena decides that Kara is the immovable object. Protecting Earth isn’t a burden. It isn’t a heavy load to be passively carried. It’s a constant battle against evil fought on a tightrope hundreds of miles in the air. Sometimes, Kara convinces the evil to turn around, her compassion overcoming their madness. Sometimes, she stares evil in the face and fights back until she wins.

But sometimes, like when Lillian pushes the final button and the rocket combusts into a cloud of smoldering embers and scorched poison, Kara falls, falls, falls to her knees and clutches onto anything she can to hold her position, to withstand the blows upon blows that evil deals upon her so that the world remains untouched.

Lena’s left-ribbon drops from the sky, and her lungs collapse with it until the yellow speeds towards her, over her head, and into the figure pummeling the man—alien, now—who arrived with Kara. The shimmering viral particles drift down and disappear before touching the ground, and she breathes in again.

It’s over. The alien, transformed back into a human body, is still standing. The virus is gone. The police sirens in the distance grow louder and louder.

Kara is safe.

“They should be dead.”

Lena turns to look at Lillian, and her rage slides back into its corner, ever vigilant but now relaxed. She feels the corners of her mouth pushing up into her smirk, but something holds it back. She expected to feel happy, victorious, proud, anything, but instead she feels hollow.

It’s over, but she’s not done.

“All aliens should be dead,” Lillian continues muttering. Lena walks behind her, emphasizing the snappy click of her stilettos against the pavement.

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

“I did,” Lena confirms coolly, “and I called the police.”
The squad cars pull into the harbor with their flashing lights, and Lillian looks over her shoulder briefly before turning back to Lena with a sneer.

“I was wrong. You are nothing like your brother.”

Lena feels something in her chest twist uncomfortably but painlessly, like wringing the last drop of blood out of a sopping rag.

“Thank you, Mother.”

Chapter End Notes

A few things -

1. I sped through this, so I might make minor revisions after posting. BUT I'M EXCITED FOR THIS CHAPTER and I wanted it out :D

2. Lillian's first line to Lena as a child, from their initial meeting in 2x12, is "Maybe you are a Luthor after all." Fucking brilliant, and I think I've unconsciously developed her whole character around that line.


4. My wife wanted me to let you know that she vetoed me referring to Morgan Edge as a personified dick pic because "I honestly don't think lena luthor receives many dick pics."

Deleted lines -

“How should I let you know if I find anything?”
“Say my name,” Supergirl answers quietly. “I’ll be there.”

refractallize.tumblr.com
Eclipse

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lena’s statement to the police consists of her name and address. Anything further, she reiterates to multiple officers, will be submitted in writing upon consultation with her attorneys, and if she is not being detained, then she will take her leave.

Some officers are more gracious than others, but they all feel the need to question her. Even if she’s the one who called in the tip, there’s no way that the last Luthor could be innocent when she was at the scene of the crime, was the last person seen with the suspect, and (allegedly) fired the missile.

She’s just so tired. The attack on the university lab seems like ages ago, but her phone tells her it’s only been a couple of hours. Her shoes, although fantastic for theatrical exits, were not made for the prolonged standing that foiling a villainous plot entails, and if she has to suffer through one more cop’s disgusted glare and pompous pseudo-interrogation, she might just explode.

It doesn’t help that Lillian looks so damn smug in the back of a patrol car. She accepted the handcuffs and Miranda rights in silence, her sharp eyes scrutinizing all of Lena’s movements and details until the officer ducked her head under the roof of the car and slammed the door shut, but Lena could still see her smirking through the windows.

"Done?"

Lena startles and turns to the sound of Supergirl’s voice. The word strikes an abrupt staccato out of place from the regular, measured cadence Lena has come to expect from the hero, but it matches the set jaw and narrowed eyes nicely. "Yes."

"Good. I’ll fly you home."

“What?” Lena takes an immediate step backward, almost tripping over her heel. “You’re not taking me anywhere. What the hell is wrong with you?”

"We need to talk."

Lena barks out a laugh and feels her anger stir. "And you think the best place for that is miles above ground? No. We can do that here."

"Fine.” Supergirl plants her hands on her hips. “What were you thinking? Something could’ve happened to you."

"I knew the virus would die if I switched out the isotope. Everything wor—"

"But what if I didn't get here in time? What if the virus didn't work, and then the cyborg decided to attack you?"

"Lillian won’t let anything happen to a Luthor if she can help it. I would've saved millions of lives, and your friend wouldn’t have been hurt."

Supergirl roars and throws her hands in the air. "You should have told me! I asked you directly if you knew what was going on, and you denied it. This wasn't a gang attack; this was biochemical warfare!"
“What should I have done, then?” Lena snaps. “Told you, and then what? Wait for you to come up with a plan guns blazing and let Lillian get away again?”

“But—”

“No, Supergirl.” Lena’s voice simmers to a low growl. “Only a Luthor can stop a Luthor. Your cousin couldn’t stop Lex. You couldn’t stop Lillian. Hell, even my father basically killed himself. I wasn’t going to stand by and give her a chance to kill more people in one shot than Lex ever did in his entire reign as a supervillain.”

*I wasn’t going to let her kill you.*

Lena catches her breath before that thought can escape. She pauses for a beat in case Supergirl wants to respond, but nothing comes. “Thank you for coming to me first,” she continues. “Sincerely. But, my family has always been my fight.”

“You don’t need to fight alone,” Supergirl says, softer. “I’m on your side. Please, Lena. You can trust me.”

Lena can’t suppress her scoff, all of the police’s skepticism fresh in her mind. “Just as much as you trust me?”

“Yes.”

Lena freezes and feels her blood stop moving. Supergirl’s eyes widen as if surprised by what she just said, and it’s just so *Kara* how she reaches for glasses that aren’t there, but she doesn’t apologize. Instead, she clears her throat and straightens her posture.

“I’m a pretty good judge of character,” she continues, “and you are nothing like Lex or Lillian Luthor. They are cold and dangerous, and you are too good and too smart to ever follow in their paths. I believe in you. I trust you.”

The immovable object indeed.

Lena’s eyes sting at the outer corners, and she grits her teeth to try to stop her knees from buckling.

“Thank you.”

She is so, so beautiful.

“Can I take you home now?”

Lena shakes her head. “I’m not a fan of flying. I’ll find a way back.”

Crammed in the backseat of a patrol car and twisting the heavy gold bracelet on her wrist, Lena makes a checklist of all the damage control she’ll have to do in the morning. She doubts that Kara would release the story on her own, so the news shouldn’t come out for a few hours unless a reporter catches Lillian on her way to the station. Regardless, Lena needs to alert her attorneys as soon as she’s out of earshot of someone who can and will hold any of her words against her. She needs to set an emergency board meeting and draft a press release, and she should also comb through her
employee directory with a watchful eye on her bonds to weed out whoever had any knowledge of Lillian’s plans. The proof can come afterwards.

Then, there’s all the project schedules that will need rearrangement depending on how many managers she has to fire. She doubts that Lillian would have targeted anyone too low in the company, but that just means there’s more opportunity for her to promote those who stayed loyal to L-Corp.

She releases her bracelet and rubs the bridge of her nose. That thought and all her easy conversations with Lillian err too far in the realm of “mob boss” for her to be comfortable. Maybe the only difference between her and a kingpin is that she maintains pristine, enforceable contracts for all her endeavors.

Considering who she learned from, maybe the similarities aren’t so coincidental.

She doesn’t remember leaving the car (Lillian’s was larger) or pressing the elevator buttons (Lillian pressed harder on the final switch) or turning the key in her front door (it’s lighter without a chain attached) but she finds herself changed into pajamas and falling onto her mattress before she knows it.

She just plugs in her phone to her charger when a Google alert pops up on her lock screen:

_Lillian Luthor in Custody After Foiled Astrobioterrorism Plot_

She dismisses it quickly with a brief thought to destroy the life of the slimy paparazzo waiting outside the police station and sets a timer for one hour. That’s all she needs: one hour to rest her eyes and mind and heart in darkness.

She spends the early morning on her couch sipping tea and reviewing her employee directory. She leaves the lights off and her laptop dim, and she systematically accuses each band she recognizes of colluding with Lillian Luthor. She limits herself to National City and Metropolis, and she doesn’t go past middle management with the rationale that anybody farther removed wouldn’t have been a target, but it still takes her two and a half hours. Admittedly, it would’ve been faster if she remembered to investigate Project Mockingbird involvement in addition to Medusa from the beginning so she didn’t have to review half the list twice.

She prints out the list of conspirators and, for once, finds herself more disappointed than angry. In her first interview with Kara, she truthfully explained that she didn’t believe in evil people. Every soul is a light, and even dastardly villains like Morgan Edge and Veronica Sinclair shine pure and bright on the wrists of their closest confidantes.

Lillian Luthor does not have a pure soul. Despite how much she shared with her son, he never wore her color brighter than anyone else did. Maybe Lena’s amber analogy holds true, and every empty patch in her ribbon is a soul that got trapped in her evil.

Dying insects or not, the holes in Lillian’s soul bond wouldn’t exist if she had enough of a soul to fill them with light.

She pauses and reviews the printed list. Lack of light doesn’t need to represent lack of soul. Animals
are sentient, and they don’t have any bonds. Lack of light could just be lack of color. It doesn’t have to mean anything. It could simply be a matter of functionality. It’s easier to see other lights when you don’t have one shining behind you, like driving at night without the overhead cab light on to better see obstacles in the road.

Lack of light doesn’t necessarily represent evil, but, if anything, Lillian proves that evil exists. Evil almost drained thousands of souls of their color.

Kara’s expression during the rocket launch flashes once more in her mind.

Evil taught Lena so, so much.

Smoothing out the edges of the list from where her hand subconsciously tightened into a fist, she tells herself that seeking justice isn’t the same as seeking revenge and works at her laptop until dawn.

The anger returns with a lethal vengeance when she arrives at L-Corp.

It isn’t the reporters and paparazzi. The dark windows of the company car help keep the obnoxious camera flashes out of her sensitive eyes.

It isn’t the tension headache that starts ten minutes upon entering the building. She keeps a spare set of tinted contacts close by and a bottle of ibuprofen even closer.

It isn’t the strained conversation with every single employee that attempts to talk to her. Even if their efforts only stem from fear or ambition, they aren’t malicious.

What pisses her off is that only one conspirator had the decency to go into hiding.

One.

She always knew Alana was smart.

The rest of the traitorous bonds brighten in sync with their arrival at the building. By the time her lawyers arrive in her office, she’s completely devoid of any regret she might have harbored about turning in the poor, susceptible, unrepentant souls who fell prey to Lillian Luthor.

“Trust me,” she insists as she shoves the list into her lawyers’ hands. “If you investigate these people, you will find evidence of collusion. Have I ever been wrong before?”

They take the paper without further comment.

They deliberate over her statement for only a half hour. Although her actions caused no harm, she could be indicted as an accessory, and she would prefer to stay out of the courtroom as much as possible. She tasks them with sending the draft of the statement to her by the end of the day, and she’s out the door for a board meeting before she hears their assent.

The four security guards waiting outside her office follow her into the elevator and down three floors without direction. She’s pleased to discover that all the invitees sit inside the elongated conference room five minutes early, and it’s enough to have her gently pull the door closed behind her rather than slamming it shut as she is so naturally inclined to do.
Maybe it does nothing to hide her anger. Nobody so much as twitches as she takes her seat. Maybe they can’t under the weight of the tense atmosphere.

"For those of you who have the audacity to show your face to me after conspiring with Lillian Luthor,” she mutters, “I will give you one chance to leave the building with whatever scraps of dignity you managed to cling to."

Again, nobody moves. It’s not like she expected anything different. She sighs, then plants her hands on the table and counts down the criminals by color.

Lovat.

"Bishop.”

Teal.

“Blake.”

Opaque couché.

“Donaldson.”

Filemot.

“Espinosa.”

Gridelin.

“Graham.”

Puce.

“Goulding.”

Burgundy.

“Heaton.”

Cyan.

“Kim.”

Taupe.

“Lacey.”

Mauve.

“Lauva.”

Ochre.

“Martin.”

Copper.

“Yang.”
She pauses for another moment and taps her fingers on the table. “That was your chance. Security is waiting for you outside the door.”

She leaves her head lowered as several seconds tick by. Finally, one of the ousted board members stands abruptly from his chair and slams his fists on the table.

“You can’t do this! You don’t have—”

“Donaldson,” Lena interrupts. “You embezzled L-Corp assets to fund Cadmus initiatives. You acted on Lillian Luthor’s behalf even when at odds with the wellbeing of the company.” She raises her head and meets his frantic eyes with a fierce, level gaze of her own. “You are dismissed.”

It takes less than a second for the rest of the named conspirators to gather their belongings and file out of the room. She continues staring into space until she hears the door shut behind them. Then, she scans the room at the three people remaining: the Director of Marketing, the Chief Scientific Officer, and a single board member. In a jolt of clarity, she realizes it’s the same 20% of her upper management that expressed concern over the Rhodos proposal.

She stands from her chair at the head of the table and begins writing an agenda on the wall-length white board.

"Let's get to work."

She didn’t expect Kara to check in on her after their argument. Even though they came to an understanding fairly quickly, Lena had never seen Kara so furious.

Yet, at 10 AM and 3 PM, Kara’s yellow ribbon makes an appearance. She never lingers for more than a moment, just a brief check-in while respecting her space like any hero would do.

At 6 PM, while Lena is still trapped in her silent office, Kara makes another visit, but this time she supplements it with a text that vibrates loudly on her desk.

‘Are you ok?’

‘Just busy’

‘I’m always here for you. Just call’

‘Thank you, Kara’

When Kara’s ribbon swivels overhead once more at 9:15 PM, she decides she’s done enough work for the day and gathers her things.

Rationally, Lena knows she shouldn’t be nervous to set up a meeting with Jess. She’s her boss. It’s
She just happens to be her boss who was also implicated in attempted genocide. No big deal.

Apparently, it really is no big deal as evident by how Jess confidently knocks on Lena’s open door and announces her arrival.

“Thank you for making time to see me, Jess,” Lena welcomes warmly. “Please shut the door.”

“Sure,” Jess replies. The door clicks shut, and she settles into one of the swiveling chairs in front of Lena’s desk. “What’s this about?”

Lena drums her fingers on the manila folder in front of her. “First, I wanted to check in with you. It’s unfortunate we didn’t have much time to talk after the lab incident.”

“Don’t worry about it!” Jess quickly assures. “Joey’s fine. We have an appointment with Linda and Otto tomorrow. You’re welcome to come!”

“That’s kind of you.” Lena smiles, and she thinks it’s the most relaxed her face has felt in the past 48 hours. “I’m going to visit Rhodos later today, and I’ll discuss it with them as well.”

“Sounds good!”

Jess reciprocates Lena’s smile so easily, and Lena thinks maybe this will be okay.

“Second,” she starts as she slides the folder across the table, “I wanted to know if you’re interested in becoming my executive assistant.”

Jess’ hand reaching for the folder instantly freezes, and her wide eyes flick to Lena’s.

It takes several moments, long enough for Lena to consider running a system scan on the short-circuited woman, but Jess finally resumes functioning and lets her hand lower itself to the table.

“What?” she squeaks.

“That’s the official job description,” Lena nods to the folder, “list of responsibilities, compensation agreement, extensive non-disclosure agreements, and some extra resources about the position. It’s essentially the same role as the front desk but under my direct supervision and with some corporate projects.”

Jess flips through some of the pages, and her eyes widen with every paragraph. “I really don’t think I’m qualified for this,” she murmurs.

“I wouldn’t offer this to you if I didn’t think you were qualified,” Lena counters. “Your resumé probably doesn’t match the description, but I’ve seen you do all that I need. You screen phone calls and visitors at the front desk. You manage calendars for lower management. You supported me for the hospital board presentation. You helped organize the gala fundraiser. The rest is time management, and you just need to ask me if the priorities aren’t clear.

“Most importantly,” Lena waits until Jess looks up again, “I trust you. Everything else can be learned. I understand if you need time to think about it, and there won’t be any repercussions if you decline the offer, but please have an answer for me by next week. Does that work for you?”

Jess nods solemnly.

“Okay.” Lena would be lying if she said she wasn’t the smallest bit disappointed at Jess’ reaction,
but she hides it under what she hopes is a calm, neutral, professional demeanor. “Do you have any questions?”

Jess chews on her lip and runs her fingers over the edge of the folder. “No, Ms. Luthor. Thank you for the opportunity.”

“Of course.” Lena rises from her seat, which Jess mimics, and holds out her hand. “I look forward to hearing from you soon.”

Jess shakes her hand weakly and offers a small smile. She turns to leave with the folder, and Lena returns to her laptop, but Jess barely touches the doorknob when she spins back to face Lena.

“Can I just say something?”

The words rush out of Jess as if she’s afraid to say them, and Lena’s eyebrows twitch. “Sure?”

“The media is bullshit,” she declares. “I hope you aren’t paying attention to the news because it’s seriously not worth it.”

“The televisions are off for a reason.”

“Yeah, but,” Jess huffs, “I mean on Twitter and stuff, too. Every alien I know knows that you saved us. There’s just a bunch of trolls and bots that try to say otherwise, and those are the ones who get quoted on Fox. Humans can be such idiots! And it’s not fair! So, just…” her arms flop to her sides, “ignore them. I know how lucky I am to work with you, and that’s with me only knowing a tiny tiny tiny bit of how much you’re trying to do for our community.”

The words ricochet painfully in Lena’s mind until they land dull and heavy and useless into her memory of Kara’s pained expression during the rocket launch. She smiles anyway. “Thank you, Jess. I’m glad to hear it.”

'Lunch?'

'I'm sorry, not today'

'I can drop something off if you don’t have a chance to get anything’

'It’s okay, we have kitchens here, but thank you’

Kara sends back a green heart.

Lena clicks off her phone.

Lena makes it to Rhodos a little after 3 PM. She expected some reporters outside of the lab, but it’s
deserted. She keeps her sunglasses on until she’s in the Plastinos’ workspace just in case.


“Hello, Ms. Luthor,” the scientist replies from her chair. “He had an errand to run. Did you want to wait until he’s back?”

“It’s okay.” Sunglasses off, Lena notes the readings on the computer monitor and the laser set-up sprawled over one of the lab benches. Curiously, there’s also a case of two dozen water bottles on the side table next to the computer. “Last minute tests?”

“Yes. I think one of the detectors was failing. It’s minor but worth looking into.”

“Would you like me to come back another time?”

“Not at all,” Linda assures. “What did you want to talk about?”

Lena exhales and rolls one of the chairs out from under a bench. “With everything that happened, I want to make sure that you’re comfortable proceeding with the trials.”

“Absolutely.”

Lena blinks, the confidence in the otherwise uncertain scientist catching her off-guard. “Do you have any questions or doubts that you want to clear with me?”

“That’s not necessary,” Linda answers just as forcefully. “We gave you the fake isotope. We knew your plan from the beginning. We know why you started investing in Rhodos in the first place. You are not at fault.”

Lena’s mouth goes dry, and her tongue sticks to the roof of her mouth. She hoped for an understanding, but she expected to fight for it. “Thank you,” she croaks out.

Linda tilts her head to the side inquisitively. “Would you like some water?” Lena almost declines, but Linda shoves a bottle into her hands before she can utter a syllable.

“Thank you,” she murmurs as she twists open the cap. “Please continue your testing. I would like to give Otto the same opportunity to clarify anything with me if you’re okay with me waiting.”

The professor hesitates and gives her an odd look of apprehension for long enough that Lena almost leaves, but she eventually nods and swivels back to her computer.

Lena breathes out and extracts her phone from her bag. The ambient whir of the equipment and faint chemical smells remind her of the days she spent in the labs at MIT and LuthorCorp before things turned to shit, and she—

A green light flashes in her vision, and she instantly snaps to attention. Linda stifles a cough and waves her hand dismissively.

“That’s normal,” she manages to say. “The laser is powerful enough to sometimes hit your photopigments with two photons. The wavelengths interfere constructively, and it appears green.”

“Oh.” Lena resettles into the chair and resumes scrolling through emails. The laser continues to discharge intermittently, sometimes with a flash and always with another worsening cough from Dr. Plastino.

“Are you okay?” Lena asks after the fifth round of coughing. The scientist chugs half a bottle of
water before answering, and she refuses to look anywhere other than her computer screen.

"Sorry, I'm... really sensitive to infrared..."

Lena’s eyebrow quirks up, confused and intrigued. She subconsciously rolls closer to Linda and begins analyzing every physical detail, particularly her eyes. It’s very slight, but Linda’s blue iris cuts into the sclera with rough edges, and she catches a hint of violet at the juncture of the top and bottom eyelids.

"Can you look to the side for me?" Lena asks softly. "Please don't move your head."

Linda coughs again, Lena suspects more from nerves than illness, but shifts her gaze to the side as requested. The violet is revealed to be the start of sprawling, inhuman vasculature covering the back of Linda’s sclera.

Oh.

"Does Otto know?"

Linda nods immediately. The laser fires again with an accompanying green flash, and Linda succumbs to another coughing fit.

"Yes," Linda wheezes, "and Jessica."

"Is the sensitivity only from your eyes?"

"Yes."

Lena tentatively rubs her hand over Linda’s back.

"Have you ever worn contacts?"

At the end of the day, sober and nestled under her sheets at a respectable hour, Lena opens the last message from Kara and finally texts back a yellow heart.

Kara responds with three grinning emojis immediately.

Although it’s the most sleep she’s had in 72 hours, Lena still wakes with tense shoulders and dark bags under her eyes. She goes through the motions of getting ready for work with heavy limbs, and she never lets her coffee leave her sight. Her phone buzzes just as she moves to the kitchen to refill her mug.

‘George’s asking about you!!
He’s wondering how much free coffee he needs to make to get you to come back’
 Tell him his coffee’s too perfect not to pay for

‘He says he’ll give you croissants then’

‘I’m sorry’

‘It’s ok :)’

The majority of her day passes quickly and quietly. The Plastinos and Jess agreed to postpone Joey’s treatment by another day until they all received the infrared contacts, and that eliminated the only meeting on her schedule. Despite some setbacks in sourcing new board members and moderating minor project crises, she would almost qualify the day as “boring.” At least, she would if it weren’t for Kara’s hourly check-ins. Rather than comfort her, they convince her that there’s something she’s missing, that something on the horizon is about to make her life much more difficult.

She finally gets her answer late in the afternoon coincidentally in time with another of Kara’s visits. She thought she turned off all her Google alerts in her self-imposed media isolation, but the notification she receives proves otherwise:

Exclusive! Tonight at 7 - Interview with Lex Luthor: Thoughts on His Estranged Sister, His Incarcerated Mother, and the New Super

Her heart pounds faster and faster, and the blood furiously rushing through her arteries and veins makes her twitch. She doesn’t even care if Kara sees. There is no reason to solicit an interview with him just as there is no reason to comply with his request for an interview. How the fuck could his commentary possibly further the public discourse? It’s pointless, sensationalized, provocative, and controversial for the sake of being pointless, sensationalized, provocative, and controversial. Her fingers grip around her phone tighter, and she’s at a very high risk of “misplacing it” by chucking it off her balcony when another text from Kara comes through.

‘Hey do you want to get dinner?’

Lena sighs and loosens her fingers enough to reply.

‘I’m sorry, not tonight’

‘But there are at least 8 different places you still need to try!!!!!’

‘Another time, Kara’

‘Promiseeee?????’

A small smile creeps onto Lena’s lips. She sends back a serious, black and white gif of Emma Stone shrugging. Kara promptly responds with a gif of Sadness from Inside Out sobbing excessively, then Stitch sniffing in the rain. A breathy laugh supplements Lena’s smile, and she sends a final gif of Gru rolling his eyes and conceding.

Another text from Kara pops in before she sets her phone down, and Lena contemplates if soulmates are truly worth it. Surely there are better representations of happiness in gif form.

‘Never send minions to me again’

‘Understood’
Lena opens a new Bushmills for the evening. If she’s going to be miserable, she rationalizes, she might as well do it with some good liquor in her belly. Besides, the only way her television will remain in her apartment by the end of the night will be if her limbs are too uncoordinated to hurl it out the window.

She takes her second shower of the day after a couple swigs of the whiskey, vigorously scrubbing off all of her makeup but just barely rinsing out her hair, and slips into dark, tattered sweats and a t-shirt. She refuses to turn on the TV until 7:02 PM, after she filled herself with half of the bottle and some bread crumbs.

It isn’t one of the standard news channels, but the program opens with the typical two-newscasters-with-a-top-story sitting at their shared desk anyway.

“Tonight, we go behind bars with the world’s most notorious alien hater.”

Lena chuckles dryly. That was the same title Kara gave him. Is it his unofficial nickname in the inner circles of journalism?

“The state of California does not permit us to have an in-person, on-camera interview with a life-sentence inmate, but we do have the full audio and transcript of the interview conducted over the phone. Stand by for more.”

The camera lingers for an additional second before cutting to grainy footage from Lex’s trial with a voiceover synopsis of his past. Lena takes a swig at her characterization: his half-sister, the child of Lionel Luthor and his unnamed mistress, and the current President and CEO of L-Corp under investigation for an attempted terrorist attack. She suddenly regrets not coming up with a drinking game. Maybe drink every time they use a photo portraying her as a commandeering bitch? Might get her drunk faster.

Her ears perk at an abrupt cut of static, and she realizes that she tuned out the rest of the preamble.

“Thanks for having me.”

His voice is just as thin and gravelly as it was on their last phone call. Maybe it’s just the connection of the prison phone. Maybe it’s something contagious. She takes another gulp of whiskey, but it does as much good as a handful of hot sand.

The interview starts with a few mundane introductory sentences, but they jump into politics with a quick mention of the rocket launch.

“I’m glad the world can see where I got it from,” he comments with pride. “She’s going to be found guilty, so I don’t think she’ll mind me saying that.”

“Do you care to elaborate?”

“Not particularly. I really liked her plan though. She just trusted the wrong Luthor.”

“Do you believe Lena Luthor shares any of your opinions about refugees?”

“You mean ‘aliens,’” Lex hastily corrects. “They aren’t ‘refugees.’ They’re invaders. You’re just as idiotic as Lena.”
“So you don’t believe she assisted your mother—”

A shrill censorship beep interrupts the reporter. “—no,” Lex’s voice continues. “My mother was a fool to trust her.”

“If it was so obvious that she wouldn’t help, then why did Lillian Luthor approach her?”

“She didn’t approach her.”

“What makes you so sure?”

“Gut feeling. You know what? I take back what I said about my dear sister. She’s blind, but she’s not an idiot. Somehow, she figured out what Mother was up to and then tried to stop her.”

“Do you believe the attack on the university was related to the launch?”

Lex sighs deeply and clears his throat. “No comment. I will say that it was a pretty crude attack, though. No finessé.”

“What ab—”

“Maybe it could’ve gone better if that bitch stayed out of it. She was—”

“Can you speci—”

“She’s sloppy. Rash. It’s unfortunate there’s no video footage of the fight. I could prove to you how much of a—” another beep rings out, “—show she is.”

“She—”

“She’s been working with my sister. I would think her cousin would’ve warned her how dangerous we can be. If Lena outsmarted my mother, she’s downright deadly to anyone else. The bitch is lucky Lena is such a sap.”

“What ab—”

“But, she should know something about Lena: she won’t solve a problem that doesn’t benefit her. If you go through all of her charity projects, you won’t find a single one that doesn’t help her reputation or profit the company. She’s hypocritical and selfish just like our father. If she were truly noble, she’d be working in soup kitchens or volunteering at shelters. Instead, she’s selling water purification systems to Flint. Putting her name on a hospital. Pricing her medications on the same inflated scale as every other big pharma. Hell,” he chuckles darkly over the crackling phone line, “do you wanna know why she invests in alien clinical trials? They don’t have the same federal oversight as human trials. The market’s smaller, but it’s cheaper and faster to produce. Plus, if the drug doesn’t work on the alien, she can always say it wasn’t intended for that species. It’s brilliant.”

“In an interview—”

“Sometimes, she’s such a Luthor.”

“In an interview with Catco magazine,” the reporter loudly repeats, “Ms. Luthor was quoted as saying ‘morality comes first for me, but profitability comes first for the company.’”

“That’s ridiculous,” Lex hisses. “We’ve both invested too much of our lives in LuthorCorp for there to be a difference. She is the company, and the company is her.”
“Speaking of LuthorCorp, there were rumors that you were involved with the bombing during the renaming conference. Are they true?”

“Now, why would I want to take credit for work I didn’t do?” he drawls.

“You technically didn’t do a lot of the ‘work’ last time, either.”

Lex laughs heartily. “Touché! I might’ve put a word out. Corben still gets this one, though. I didn’t do anything.”

“Is there anything you would like to say to Ms. Luthor if she’s listening?”

There’s some shuffling over the phone line, and he releases a dramatic sigh into the receiver.

“I hope you took my advice, Lena. You look like you could use the stress relief.”

“Is there anything you would like to say to your mother?”

“Call me tomorrow. Let’s do lunch.”

The reporter thanks him for his time, but it’s barely audible over Lex’s self-indulgent, roaring laughter.

The camera returns to a wide-angle shot of the newsdesk, and Lena stops listening. She holds the bottle up to the light and, even through her blurry vision, sees that only a third remains. She sniffs and wipes her palm against her wet cheek. She doesn’t remember when she started crying, but that’s reasonable. How can her mind retain any information when all she hears and sees and feels is he’s right?

She lays motionless on her couch until the program shifts to curated social media posts about the launch. They are relentless and vicious, of course, and Lena wonders why she’s still watching this trash.

There has to be someone she can sue.

She doesn’t come to that conclusion with any strong motivation. It’s more of a conditioned response to an event that should make her angry. She knows it would make no sense to sue Lex. Suing the news program or its parent company would take months if not years to settle, and she’s already going to be dealing with enough lawyers because of the launch.

Besides, he’s right.

She stumbles to her feet slowly and clumsily, briefly stabilizing herself on the coffee table until she can stand up straight. Nausea overcomes her, but she fights through it as she goes through each room in search of her phone. She eventually finds it in her bathroom, silenced but with Kara’s name and number lighting up the screen for an incoming call.

She grabs some tissues from the counter and blows her nose as she lets it go to voicemail. When the call ends, the last notifications stay illuminated on her home screen: four texts and three missed calls from Kara in addition to some unimportant emails.

‘It’s been so longggggggg Lenaaaaaaaaa
Do you want to come over?
You’ve never seen my place!!!!!!!
I have food for daysssss’
Did Kara check in on her tonight? Maybe Lena wasn’t paying enough attention to her ribbons to notice.

‘Sorry bot tonight’

Lena fully intends to put her phone back down, but the next message pops in before the typing bubbles appear.

‘Can we talk or call or something???
Or I can come over’

‘It really not good time’

Rereading her messages, she mentally kicks herself in an attempt to get her brain to catch up to her typing fingers. She’s drunk, not dumb. Hopefully, Kara doesn’t care.

‘I’m sorry
I’m worried
I know you can take care of yourself and you’re a total #boss but yeah
That’s all’

‘S you heard the interview’

‘Yeah’

Lena leaves her phone screen on and grabs another tissue to dry off her eyes and cheeks.

‘I’m shitfaced as duck’

‘I’ll bring you water’

She preemptively grabs a bottle of ibuprofen from her medicine cabinet and carries it with her back to the living room.

‘My apartment is a disaster’

‘I don’t care’

Lena sighs and falls to the couch a little harder than she meant to. She almost loses her phone and the medicine bottle in the descent.

‘I look like hot mess’

Kara sends a gif of Vizzini from The Princess Bride yelling “Inconceivable!”

Lena groans and drops her head into her palm, and her fingers scratch into her scalp painfully.

It’s not like Kara really needs her permission to see her.

‘You’re not going give up this time are you’

‘Only if you really want me to
I don’t know what I can do
But I’d like to be there’

‘Why?’
She didn’t mean to send it, but she’s glad she did. It doesn’t make any sense for Kara to want to comfort Lena. They still haven’t reconciled properly after their argument. Maybe they reached something of an understanding, but—

‘I care about you’

Who said magic needed to make sense?

‘Let me know when to buzz you in’

‘Already on my way’

Kara, apparently, doesn’t fuck around when it comes to water. She arrives with three gallons in one arm in addition to a bag full of Vitamin Water, Gatorade, saltines, cereal, and ice cream in the other.

“That one’s for tomorrow,” Kara clarifies, pointing to the pint of cherry garcia. “A reward for putting up with me tonight.”

She dumps the bags and water on the kitchen counter (which is a damn shame since Kara makes carrying them look so fucking effortless) and races to the living room to change the channel still playing interview coverage. Lena only manages to put the ice cream away before Kara returns and pushes her out of the kitchen.

“Lena, you can barely stand,” Kara chides. “Go sit on something low to the ground.”

To her credit, Lena only bumped into two inanimate objects on her way to the couch, but her head throbs painfully when she tries to lie down. She sits back up, and it’s even worse with the added bonus of the room spinning and resetting like a record skipping on a phonograph. She closes her eyes and takes a heavy breath to settle her nausea.

It doesn’t work. The quiet clink of glass-on-glass in front of her makes her stomach constrict in surprise, and her eyes pop open to see a cup of water on the coffee table. Then, Kara lands next to her, and the liquor threatens to come back up from the motion.
“So… do you wanna talk about it?”

Lena would shake her head if it weren’t so disorienting. “Not much to talk about.”

Kara stares at her with gentle eyes and head tilted against her shoulder, and her hands play with the fabric of her jeans. “I can tell you’re upset, though.”

“There’s no point in being upset about the truth.”

Lena’s breath hitches in her chest, and she bites her tongue hard. She can feel Kara’s confusion from the other side of the couch. She reaches for the water on the table and holds it tight in her hands.

“What?” Kara eventually asks.

“He was right. About everything. So, there’s no point in being upset.”

“What are you talking about? He’s obviously insane and doesn’t know you at all.”

“He knows my upbringing. He knows my family.”

“We aren’t defined—”

“I looked into my father’s dealings while I was waiting for you,” Lena interrupts. “Lex was right about him, y’know. All his charity initiatives resulted in tax breaks or future big deals. If they didn’t, he didn’t help that organization again.”

She knows she’s slurring. She knows she should be embarrassed.

But she can’t stop when Kara’s silence and heavy gaze compels her to keep speaking and the gears in her mind are too slick with alcohol to catch on the brakes.

“Wikipedia said his mantra was ‘what’s best for the company is best for the employee.’” Her hand cramps from tightening around the glass, and she gracelessly puts it back on the table without taking a drink. “That’s such a fucking lie. It’s best for the employees who get arbitrary raises after arbitrary layoffs, not for the ones who lose their jobs or take on double the work after their co-worker gets fired. Cutting manufacturing costs and using cheaper materials is better for the company, but it’s not better for the employees who also happen to be consumers.

“The worst part is I followed his example.” She’s louder now, feels her throat constricting and lungs heaving with every word. “I fucking idolized him. I still question everything with ‘is this what Father would do?’ and I’ve made billions for L-Corp. I thought I modeled myself after the good Luthor, but it turns out that good Luthors don’t exist.”

“Lena…”

“Everything I’ve done over the past year has been for nothing. How can I be a force for good if I’m not even good to begin with?”

“You’re amazing,” Kara insists.

“Then why didn’t I turn in Veronica Sinclair?”

Kara blinks at her several times. “What?”

“It’s something I can’t get out of my head.” Her eyes sting, and she sniffs involuntarily, but she does everything in her power to keep her voice low and steady. “Why didn’t I turn in Veronica Sinclair? I
received dozens of fight club invitations even before I moved to National City. Each one had the
date, time, and location. I never did a fucking thing even when I had all the information that the
police could need. I gave Lex up to the police with less information than that.” She sniffs again, and
she hurriedly wipes at her eyes and nose in case there’s moisture accumulating that she can’t feel. “A
good person would’ve turned her in. A good person would’ve at least tried to stop her. But there was
nothing in it for me. If it got out to the press that I called in the tip, their first question would be ‘why
didn’t the Luthor stop her earlier?’ or ‘how many aliens died before the Luthor got bored enough to
stop the tournaments?’ It wouldn’t matter if I was the one who stopped it. I was also the one who
didn’t. And they would’ve been ri—"

The rest of whatever Lena is about to say dissipates into air as her face collides with Kara’s
collarbone.

“Sorry,” Kara apologizes as she readjusts around Lena. She slides her arm over Lena’s shoulders,
and she tugs on Lena’s hand until it rests on the couch on the other side of her torso. “Is this too
much? You’re just… so…”

Against all her weak, internal protests, Lena feels her muscles relaxing into the loose embrace. She
shakes her head, and she already feels a wet spot forming under her cheek. “Might ruin your shirt.”

“I’ll make you buy me another one.”

Lena coughs out a laugh. “Don’t know if I’ll be able to afford it after all the lawyer fees.” She hears
a sigh above her head, and Kara pulls her in closer. Lena curses her alcohol-addled brain for fixating
on their proximity and the glorious feeling of Kara’s poly-cotton blend meeting all of the contours
of her face, and it’s distracting enough that she can’t say when her fingers tangled themselves in the
hem of Kara’s shirt.

“I’m going to say this now, but you might not remember in the morning so I’ll say it again
tomorrow.” Kara’s voice enters her head muddled and booming, and it fills enough space for no
other thoughts to fit. “You are Lena. You are a good person. You make hard decisions everyday,
and you always analyze the consequences for every decision. It’s not easy. Bad outcomes are
inevitable, but I have full confidence that you always choose the best path. Always,” she firmly
repeats at Lena’s scoff. “I don’t know anything about business, but Veronica Sinclair? That
information wasn’t enough to go off of. She’s slimy and slippery and probably would’ve pinned
something on you if you went up against her alone. I think you knew that even if you weren’t
consciously aware of it.”

Lena shakes her head again, and it only pushes her face deeper into Kara’s shoulder. “There could
have been a way, but I didn’t even try.”

“If you gave yourself away early on, Alex and I wouldn’t have been able to stop her when we did.
You did the right thing.” Lena starts to protest, and Kara immediately shushes her. “You will never
be able to convince me that you’re a bad person because I don’t believe in lies.”

“You believe pineapple belongs on pizza.”

“Everything belongs on pizza!”

“Yet another delusion.”

“Lena!”

Lena giggles softly, something else she plans to attribute to the alcohol, but it soon dissolves into a
yawn. “Sorry,” she apologizes. “I’m not ready to sleep. It’s just…” she trails off and begins detaching from Kara.

“It’s okay. Did you want me to leave now?”

“No,” Lena punctuates with a lazy hand falling onto Kara’s knee. “We can watch something. I’ll get you a new shirt.”

They watch the first episode of *Friends* from separate sides of the couch while Kara tries to keep the freshly-washed MIT shirt as clean as possible and Lena dilutes the whiskey with water, saltines, and Gatorade. For the second episode, Lena grabs a pillow and uses it to cushion her head on Kara’s lap, and Kara runs her fingers through Lena’s hair.

“Can I ask you something?” Kara says during the opening credits. Lena hums in affirmation. “What was his advice to you?”

“To go fuck myself. He’s not wrong. I could use a good lay.”

Lena would swear that she could hear Kara’s heart hammering harder. The hand sifting through her hair stills, then shoots up and away at the same time Kara begins stammering nonsensical syllables. Lena laughs and blindly reaches up for Kara’s hand, most likely fussing with Kara’s glasses, to bring it back to her head.

“Oh, calm down, Kara. You’re an adult.”

She glances at her brilliantly sparkling yellow ribbon and smirks before returning to the episode.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is finished. Looking at posting it on Monday. Hope the 7500+ word update makes up for the delay, heh.

Please forgive any formatting errors; I'll try to catch them all! It's like Pokemon but for editors #swag

EDIT: Forgot to link to the paper about the infrared pulses turning green. It's a thing! - https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/12/141201161116.htm

Thank you for reading!!!!!! <3

Deleted lines -
Supergirl takes a step forward, but Lena halts her with a hand pushing hard against her chest. Even if it had the same physical effect of a gnat on concrete, Supergirl retracts her step.

Numbed, her mind returns to Supergirl. To Kara.

She forces herself to sleep before she gives herself a chance to feel.

She’s never seen a color change. Only the connections and ribbons tied to their wrists.

Evil deeds are only committed by souls that don’t know how to heal from the ribbons shredded from their wrists. They are not forgivable, but at least they can be explained.

How can she redeem her name if she herself is just another tarnish?

Fifteen minutes to remind herself that she did the right thing. Fifteen minutes to quiet the echoes of Kara’s declaration of trust. Fifteen minutes to cleanse her mind of the anguish in Kara’s eyes as she turned the key. And fifteen minutes to rest in darkness.
Lena wakes slowly to Kara gently shaking her arm and calling her name. She groggily cracks an eye open and sees the television off, then looks up to Kara.

“Did the power go out?”

Kara chuckles softly and pokes Lena’s cheek. “No. You fell asleep, and the soundwaves of your snoring interrupted the signal.”

Lena groans and covers her face. “Sorry,” she mumbles. “What time is it?”

“A little after 10. I should get going.”

“You sure?” Lena pushes herself up off Kara’s lap and happily discovers that her liver filtered out at least half of the alcohol. “You can crash on the couch if you want.”

Kara shakes her head with a smile. “It’s okay. I need to meet Alex in the morning.”

Lena escorts Kara to the entryway, her legs slightly more steady than they were a few hours before, and hugs her tightly. “Ice cream tomorrow?”

“That’s yours,” Kara reminds her with a laugh, “but I can bring my own.”

“Okay. Thank you.”

Lena locks the door behind Kara but leaves her left hand on the frame. She watches her yellow ribbon descend and fade then zoom away, and she doesn’t stop smiling until she falls asleep.

Lena meets the Plastinos and Jess in Dr. Châtelet’s lab as soon as she gets to L-Corp. Despite only Linda having the significant adverse reaction to infrared, they agreed that prolonged exposure wouldn’t be good for anyone and asked for multiple sets.

Linda puts her contacts in first. Dr. Châtelet warns her that the best reaction is to have no reaction and that she won’t necessarily see any difference, but it doesn’t stop the sigh of relief that passes through the group when she announces that they feel great. Already wearing cosmetic lenses, Jess pockets her pair with Joey’s and promises to put them in before the first treatment. Next, Linda helps Otto with his pair, and Lena puts hers on in front of the same tabletop mirror from her first set of experimental lenses. The first contact slides on easily, as expected, and any discomfort disappears after a few blinks.

“Feel good?”

Lena turns to the voice of her scientist and nods. “Of course.” The scientist leaves for the Plastinos, Otto still having difficulty, and Lena looks down to the bench to find the next lens.
She frowns at her right wrist.

Dr. Châtelet’s bond, normally a rich, russet brown, seems off as it circles around her in the lab. The ribbon doesn’t stretch much farther than an inch out of Lena’s wrist, as appropriate for a cordial, professional relationship, but Lena makes out a blurry, green fringe around the edge of its glow. Puzzled, Lena closes her eye with the contact. The bond reverts to its solid, smooth brown. Lena then covers her eye without the contact and looks at the bond again, this time through the infrared-blocking lens.

Although more pronounced at its edges, the tint of the entire ribbon has definitely shifted towards a dark green.

But that should be impossible.

“Doctor?” Lena calls. Dr. Châtelet hums absently in her direction. “Can humans see infrared?”

“Some see near-infrared. Deep infrared not so much.”

Maybe the bonds aren’t soul colors.

Maybe they’re wavelengths.

Maybe the wavelengths can radiate outside the visible spectrum.

“Can you make something to let humans see infrared?”

“Night vision goggles already exist.”

“No, s-something organic.”
It won’t work if there’s electronic interference.

She could never see anything through a television or in photos or on a computer screen.

Cameras can’t capture magic.

Dr. Châtelet turns on her heel and stares through Lena, eyes looking at her but her mind obviously somewhere else.

Lena’s hands tremble at her sides, and the tips of her fingers go numb.

She becomes light-headed, and she focuses all her energy on listening and calming her rapid breathing.

After a few seconds, Dr. Châtelet laughs.

“Finally! A challenge!”
Magic shouldn’t exist, but it does.

Humans shouldn’t see infrared.

What if they could?
Her soul shouldn’t have a color.

What if it just can’t be seen?
What if she could have proof?

Chapter End Notes

;) 
refractallize.tumblr.com
There's a New Set of Rules Up Here

Chapter Notes

Hi lovelies,

Joey’s treatment starts in this chapter. I don’t want to alienate (can’t think of a different word -_-) anybody who started this fic with the understanding that graphic medical scenes wouldn’t be included, so I'm putting it in a different work as part of the series. The essentials from the before and after are in this chapter, but the actual scene is not. The placement is designated by the horizontal line. It’s mostly side-character development and is not necessary for the core plot. There are more details in the work’s tags and description. Please message me on Tumblr (refractallize) if you have any questions or reservations. I would prefer to keep the AO3 comments clean as well.

Fanfiction should be a safe space completely within your control, and far be it from me to jeopardize that for you.

Hope you enjoy the (very belated sorrysorrysorry) update<3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Lena Luthor becomes a woman obsessed.

She doodles diagrams of lines and arcs and midpoints on Post-Its while answering phone calls. She researches the light spectrum and eye physiology in-between answering emails at a rate of one email per three webpages. She bookmarks 38 white papers for later reading, and she saves one extraterrestrial study per four Earth studies. Seeing any part of the infrared spectrum could suggest alien lineage, after all.

She momentarily rules out the potential of ultraviolet bonds. None of the ribbons change color outside what’s expected when she wears UV-blocking sunglasses or contacts, a fact she laments when she discovers reports of humans seeing ultraviolet after eye surgery, but it doesn’t rule out the possibility of bonds existing in the wavelength range that her corneas already filter out. She’s part-way through sketching designs for an artificial cornea when she decides risking eye damage isn’t worth it if she has another plausible lead.

Not yet, anyway.

Her search for infrared sight comes up surprisingly empty. The closest she gets to humans seeing infrared is the green flash phenomenon she experienced at Rhodos, but that isn’t really reacting to infrared. It’s positive interference (she still prefers “annoying”) tricking the eye into perceiving green. Her search for infrared contacts comes up empty, too, except for an amusing story of a man cheating in casinos using specially-pigmented ink and infrared-filtering contacts to mark cards. She forwards the story to Dr. Châtelet who replies six minutes later with a succinct “Amateur.”

Even if she can’t see infrared, she can still revise her bond theory through comparative observational evidence. All her life, she considered her bond mechanism to be the exception, the only one-sided, isolated system in the universe, but now she looks for the similarities. She judges ribbons on five criteria: length, intensity, opacity, directionality, and definition. The strongest bonds are bright,
distinct, opaque, and connected over great distances, just like Jessica and Joey’s, Otto and Linda’s, and, Lena thinks coldly, Lex and Lillian’s. They also blend in a smooth gradient equidistant from each wrist.

How can Lena gauge that for herself? For the rest of the day, she compares the interplay of the lights on her wrist and her supposed understanding of the other person with the assumption that there is an invisible ribbon on the other side. Her results are… disappointing, to say the least. She didn’t expect much from most of her colleagues since strictly professional relationships don’t need to venture much further than the length of a conference room, but even Jess’ rose ribbon dissolves into mist before reaching the halfway point. Her bonds have only ever been good for manipulation; it never mattered what could be on the other side. The most successful connections were always the longest, and now she realizes it’s only because she maintained a balance of power and knowledge in her favor.

A Luthor indeed.

She reflects on her past relationships and similarly concludes nothing useful. For most of her life, Lex’s amethyst reached between 30-50% of the way to his wrist, undoubtedly a consequence of personally knowing what it’s like to grow up as a Luthor, but she doesn’t remember what the end of the ribbon looked like. His ribbon only started unraveling when, Lena guesses, he hid his growing hatred and insanity. When she went to college and made a concerted effort to bond with him, tipped a toe into his horrifying world of alien fixation, she patched up the ribbon to the longest it’d ever been. Was that a reflection of her knowing him more, or of him knowing her less? How would she be able to tell?

She dives into work for an admirable three minutes before she finds herself tapping the end of her pen on her latest Post-It again, the nauseatingly fluorescent yellow making her stomach sick and eyes tired. Kara is her best chance to finalize her bond theory, ribbon chirality be damned. It’s not like it’s a bad thing.

She’s the only one that matters.

Lena has never seen the conception of a soulmate bond for anyone other than herself and, so far, she has never seen anyone’s established left ribbon behavior contradict that exhibited by right ribbons. It’s only the formation and preliminary reactions that make the left bond different from the right. Lena could’ve followed the brightness of her yellow bond to Kara ever since she was ten, and she didn’t even know what Kara looked like. Then, when they finally met, their ribbons instantly connected.

She hits the end of her pen hard against the Post-It, and it ricochets to the edge of her desk. That’s too far of an assumption. The yellow ribbon on Lena’s left wrist shined in Kara Danvers’ direction upon Lena learning her name. The movement and intensity fluctuations, although observed prior to their meeting, positively correlate with Lena’s relative distance and knowledge of Kara. The definition and opacity aren’t as transient, perhaps indicative of immutable or long-term knowledge or understanding of the fundamentals of Kara’s soul and experiences. It explains her revelation weeks ago that her ribbon doesn’t necessarily brighten with everything she learns about Kara. Her actions and words and opinions become more predictable, like Lena can guess Kara’s moves from two steps ahead.

She pauses, then hurriedly gathers the Post-Its and stashes them in the bottom of her desk drawer, the array of squares over a white surface suddenly resembling a chess board. That was exactly the kind of thinking she wanted to avoid, her reason for keeping an arm’s length away from Kara, far enough that Lena can’t reach the pieces.

But, she thinks with a smile, Kara’s the kind of soul that holds the hand trying to push her away.
Kara would sweep away the pawns, shatter the checkerboard, then sit next to her adversary and rearrange the splintered marble into a mosaic. She would make pieces of her own and turn it into a puzzle to solve together. It would be frustrating if she weren’t so...

Lena sucks in a deep breath and pinches the bridge of her nose. No, it’s definitely frustrating.

Before she knows it, she’s on her couch eating popcorn and alternating her attention between emails, science journals, and campy sitcoms. Lena’s reinstated Google alert for Supergirl informs her of a string of alien attacks on the other side of the city, and she half expects Kara to text her a request to reschedule.

It never comes. Instead, she receives a gif at 7:58 PM claiming she will be there in five minutes.

She also receives four more gifs in five minute intervals until Kara asks to be buzzed in at 8:23 PM.

“See?” she says with a grin at her door. “I was only five minutes away!”

Lena rolls her eyes with a small smile and leads her inside. “What kept you?”

“Snapper,” Kara answers simply. “Do I smell popcorn?”

“Yes. Good thing, too. You forgot your ice cream.”

Kara’s jaw drops in disbelief, and Lena laughs over her profuse apologies.

Waiting on the next bag of popcorn slowly spinning in the microwave, Lena and Kara stand on opposite sides of the kitchen island catching up on each others’ day. Lena sticks to the boardroom politics and how she reached out to old classmates through LinkedIn to refill her C-suite, and Kara regales her with enough anecdotes to convince anyone else that her lethargic movements are due to a tyrannical, distrusting boss as opposed to six alien muggings and a fire in the span of an hour and a half.

“I almost forgot!” she exclaims in the middle of another story. “Alex got the girl! She’s with Maggie now!”

“Oh, that’s great!” Lena pauses, then turns and begins rummaging through her liquor cabinet. “Does she drink?”

“Like a fish,” Kara answers with a snort.

“What’s her favorite?”

“I’m not sure.”
Lena peers over her shoulder and sees Kara texting. “Are you asking her?”

“Yeah, just a sec.”

Lena pulls out two bottles of scotch, two of tequila, and another of merlot and puts them on the kitchen island anyway. “Make sure to take these home with you.”

Kara looks up from her phone, and Lena almost laughs at her comically wide eyes. “All of that? What are you left with?”

Lena retrieves an additional bottle of champagne and sets it next to the merlot. “I’m going dry for a while. I still have a headache from last night. Don’t let her try to give any of them back, by the way. You can tell her I didn’t pay for them.”

Kara grins as she aims her phone camera at the array of bottles. “That won’t happen. She’ll probably raid the rest of it.” Her phone clicks, and her smile turns shy as she sends off the photo.

“Speaking of last night…” Kara turns the phone over in her hand, and Lena notices it’s much more clumsy than her usual fidgeting. “Do I really have to remind you how amazing you are?”

Sass prepares to launch off Lena’s tongue, but she holds it back when she regards Kara’s sagging shoulders, a noticeable contrast to her regular pristine posture. She doesn’t doubt that all her Snapper stories also happened earlier in the day, so on top of the alien attacks?

“You’re exhausted,” she states, but it comes out softer than she expected.

“I can rally!” Kara insists. “And it’s easy saying all the great things about you!”

Lena chuckles, a fortunate side-effect of her lungs rejecting all the air they hold when Kara aims that pout at her. “Trust me, I’ll take you up on it later. Just not tonight.”

After some more protests and mild finagling, Lena manages to settle Kara on the couch, head on her lap and body curled around the bowl of popcorn in a reversal of last night’s arrangement. On her third instance of reaching just outside her arm’s length for the popcorn, Lena scrutinizes Kara’s positioning.

“Can you lay on your back?”

Kara acquiesces without taking her eyes off the TV. Lena reaches forward for the bowl once more and sets it on Kara’s stomach but quickly removes it as the blond promptly begins laughing.

“Is that all I am? A coaster?”

“What can I say?” Lena answers with a smirk. “I’m an engineer. Gotta make everything functional. What else are those abs supposed to do?”

Kara chokes on her next laugh and hastily pulls down her blouse. Through some mumbled stuttering, Lena thinks she makes out a very quiet “…things.”

After the popcorn runs out, Lena spends the greater part of the evening sifting her fingers through
Kara’s hair free from the braided half-ponytail, and she splits her attention evenly between the television and her left-ribbon. With every stroke, the yellow ribbon stretches and contracts so that the end fades halfway between her wrist and Kara’s. She experiments a little further after Kara returns to her side, runs her hand down from Kara’s head to her shoulder to her forearm, always shy of her wrist. Touching her hand during the gala was an accident, but reaching for it now would be meaningful. Definitive.

Selfish.

Lena holds fast to her reaffirmed resolve with each breath that catches in Kara’s lungs when her fingertips pass over an untouched inch of skin. She realizes that, despite laying down and resting, Kara’s shoulders and neck remain tense, and Lena once more considers the weight of the cape.

Supergirl’s devastation and rage during the rocket launch replays in Lena’s mind, and it takes every ounce of consciousness to stop from digging her nails into Kara’s shoulder.

Selfish indeed.

“Kara? Can I ask for a favor?”

“Sure.”

“Can you arrange another meeting with Supergirl?”

Kara curls her knees slightly closer to her chest and clears her throat. “What for?”

“We had an argument after Medusa. I think I need to apologize. Well,” she looks down to Kara staring up at her with eyebrows raised, “at least as much as a Luthor’s pride will let me apologize.”

Kara’s eyes crinkle at the corners as a small smile pushes up her cheeks. “Yeah. I’ll see what I can do.”

Kara turns her attention back to the television and sometimes her phone, and Lena resumes trailing her fingertips along Kara’s skin. When Kara takes a moment to stretch out and place a hand delicately on Lena’s knee, Lena believes the hero might be finally relaxing.

If Lena’s ribbon exists, it already meets Kara’s halfway, she determines by the time they hug goodnight. The gradual but solid transition from yellow to nothing occurs exactly at the midpoint between their wrists, and the length doesn’t fluctuate on any condition other than distance.

The intensity appeared to change according to temporary knowledge, as she suspected, but she notes that this isn’t completely proven. Admittedly, their conversation about their days didn’t last long since they didn’t speak much on the couch, another symptom of Kara’s fatigue, and Lena had been preoccupied with observing the ribbon length. It didn’t change that much anyway.

She didn’t see any difference in definition or opacity either, but how could she when it already seems tangible? She knows it hasn’t always been this way, that they’ve sewn and patched the ribbon together over the past few months, but she can’t place exactly when it became so strong. Maybe somewhere between breakfasts and texts and villainy, they learned to understand each other even
Lena doesn’t know Kara’s favorite color (she has too many to name) or her favorite food (it depends on the restaurant) or her favorite animal (she mentioned having a cat), but she must know enough, and Kara must’ve wheedled out some personal information without Lena realizing.

Despite the limited data acquisition, this doesn’t mean the night was unsuccessful. She also learned that Kara’s hair, once she combed through the tangles expected from flying at super speed, is impossibly soft, and Kara’s snoring is equally as cute as her subsequent embarrassment upon waking.

“Fuck.”

Lena’s left hand twitches, and she looks wistfully at the liquor cabinet.

What a night to choose sobriety.

Lena sleeps easy for the first time in weeks. She doesn’t pass out with a head heavy with alcohol or exhaustion but calmly slips under the covers and sinks into the mattress as she drifts into a dreamless sleep. She gets ready in half her usual time, and she stops by George’s café before making it into the office. When she finally checks her phone after finishing one of her four croissants (he insisted on an extra for every week she hadn’t visited), she already sees a message from Kara waiting for her.

‘Supergirl wants to know when you would like to speak with her’

‘Give me an hour, I have a quick morning meeting’

The meeting runs longer than anticipated, her Operations Director obviously hungover and asking unnecessary questions, but it doesn’t sour her mood. How can it when she gets to follow her left-ribbon to Supergirl sitting on the railing of her balcony?

Lena pushes open the heavy glass door and leans against the door jamb.

“You know, this isn’t really an entrance,” she comments with a smirk.

“Fooled me.” Supergirl gives a small smile over her shoulder before lifting herself off the railing and landing a respectable distance away from Lena. “Kara Danvers said you wanted to talk to me.”

“Yes. We probably should’ve talked earlier but,” Lena motions vaguely to her office, “fires and whatnot.”

“I know what that’s like. I put one out last night. Literally.”

They stand unspeaking for a moment, and Lena shifts her weight from one leg to the other before joining Supergirl on the balcony, standing even with the hero’s shoulders as they both look out at the city. Without the cape and crest filling her vision, Lena lets herself feel more of Kara’s unassuming presence ordinarily overpowered by Supergirl’s indomitable aura.

“Look,” Lena crosses her arms over her chest and shakes her head, “I’m not sorry for what I did, and, if I had to do it all over again, I would probably do the same thing, but I’m sorry for not telling
you. It’s not that I don’t trust you. Just… family.”

Kara releases a heavy breath next to her. “I get it. My family made the virus for the exact purpose Cadmus used it for: to get rid of alien invaders. And, last year, it was my family that put all of National City under mind control.”

“You make my family sound like the Cleavers.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean it like that,” Kara hurriedly backtracks. “I just understand where you were coming from. There’s nowhere to put the sins of your family other than your shoulders. I might’ve done the same thing if I weren’t working with the government.”

“I guess that’s something I don’t have to worry about,” Lena remarks with a dry laugh. “The police made it clear that they don’t want my help.”

“Well, I do. We haven’t really worked together yet, but I think we should.”

“What about—”

“The gala doesn’t count. You didn’t tell me your full plan. So,” Supergirl holds out a hand to Lena, “to working together? Honestly?”

“Deal.” Lena extends her hand in return, and she fears it might fling off with how enthusiastically Kara shakes it. She unconsciously flexes it after Kara lets go, and she cuts off the apology by going back into her office, grabbing the bag of remaining croissants, and shoving it into the hero’s arms.

“The offer to fly you home still stands, by the way,” Kara says with a grin, already rummaging through the bag.

“I’d rather risk a bus.”

The remainder of the morning passes uneventfully to which Lena is grateful. The lack of an executive assistant left her with more emails and appointment management than she anticipated, and she hadn’t found time to peruse more profiles or applications yet. Her phone buzzes with a call from Jess, and her stomach flips in the hope that she’ll finally accept the job offer while she frantically clicks through her calendar for confirmation of Joey’s appointment time.

“Jess? Do I have my times wrong?”

“No, Ms. Luthor,” Jess answers quietly. “I have someone named Jack Spheer downstairs asking to see you. He doesn’t—”

“He can come up.”

Lena clicks off her phone and sticks her right wrist out in front of her. It takes a moment, but she eventually spots Jack’s coquelicot, blurred and dim and short, pointing to the ground floor and slowly moving to the side of the building with the elevator. She mentally hurls accusations at the bond—he has a project he wants to work on together, he needs an investor, he wants to join the L-Corp board—but nothing sticks. She googles his name and finds harmless articles of successful
funding rounds, an announcement of a press conference in a few months, and YouTube videos of biotech panels. If he’s already successful, then why is he—

“Lena?”

Her gaze flicks up to the door, and she starts to smile from reflex. Those kind eyes framed by his soft features whisk her back to late nights drinking and saving the world. He grew out his hair and trimmed his beard, and he traded in his t-shirt for a simple but refined long sleeve. Has she grown up that much in just a year, too?

She rises to embrace him, perhaps a cruel kindness, and it’s only then that she realizes he holds a bouquet of his ribbon’s namesake supplemented by white flowers that she can’t name.

Maybe that’s why she doesn’t see his white left-ribbon until after she thanks him.

Guilt punches her heavy and hard and cold in the teeth, and she mashes her crumbling smile back into something friendly and inquisitive.

“How have you been?”

“Good, good,” he breathes out. “I finally figured out how to get investors on board for the nanobots: slice myself open and let them do the talking.” He shows off the faint blood stains on his shirt sleeve with a tremulous chuckle.

“You always were a bleeding heart,” Lena comments.

“Yeah,” he agrees with another laugh. “It was only a matter of time before it became literal.”

Lena roughly twists the skin on her left wrist, wishing she had a bracelet to ground her instead.

“What brings you to National City?”

It’s a redundant question when the fear and hope are so clear in his eyes.

“I thought you could use a friend,” he answers softly. “You changed your number, and the front desk said you weren’t accepting calls. I’m sorry I didn’t come sooner.”

“Don’t be,” Lena lightly reassures. “Things have been so crazy, I’ve barely had a chance to catch my breath.”

“Hopefully not too crazy to eat?” Another laugh escapes his throat, but he doesn’t smile. Not really. “I’d like to treat you to lunch. Give you a break from everything.”

“Jack…”

“No agenda,” he promises. “Just a break.”

Silence hangs between them, dead and stagnant, and all Lena sees is white. She could say she still thinks about him. She could say she wonders what would have happened if she renounced her claim to L-Corp and stayed with him. She could say so many things and more that would make him feel better.

Lena decides he’s lying enough for both of them.

“We both know that isn’t possible.” She fixes her posture and crosses her arms over her chest but tries to keep her voice gentle. At least he’s used to being turned down by investors. Maybe discussing it as a business proposal will take the sting out of it. “Or maybe you don’t know yet.
Nothing will come of this, Jack.”

“I don’t want anything but for you to be happy.”

“Even at the cost of your own happiness?”

“I can decide what makes me happy. But,” he shakes his head and takes a step towards her, “that’s not the point. I don’t—”

“You’re blind to it.” Her red-orange ribbon brightens, and she projects her voice with even more certainty. “I believe your intentions are pure, but I’m not going to let you waste any more time on…” her hands begin to gesture between the two of them, and she changes it immediately to a wider motion to nothing in particular, “this. You deserve more than what I will give you. You deserve more than me.”

*You deserve more than what I’ve already taken, and I’m sorry I can never give it back.*

She turns away to her window before she finishes speaking. With Jack behind her, the coquelicot ribbon nearly disappears though the bond remains bright, and she can’t see his transparent reflection in the glass broken up by the skyscrapers of National City. If it weren’t for the tension, the quiet could be tranquil.

“I love you, Lena,” he finally murmurs. “No matter what you may think of yourself or what either of us deserve, that will not change. I hope that whoever gets to love you realizes they are the luckiest person in the world.”

She doesn’t move until she hears the door click shut.

Lena personally drives Jess and Joey to the university from the hospital. Jess chatters away from the moment she enters the car, Lena responds intermittently to keep any nervous tension at bay, and Joey sits quietly in the backseat. His orange complexion has steadily lightened over the past few weeks, and his gaunt features thinning with each day make his black eyes all the more striking.

She drops the siblings off in front of the lab, and she only slightly regrets her offer to drive when walking from the parking lot to the building in her heels. It does, however, give her the chance to finalize some emails and see Kara’s last minute text.

‘It’s Friiiidayyyyy!!!!!!!!!
Do you wanna go out somewhere????’

‘I have one more thing to take care of. It might take a while, and I don’t want to hold you up if you could have other plans’

‘I had brunch with Alex and Winn
James and I mutually acknowledge that work was enough for us today
We were thinking of game night but that’s probably moving to tmrw
(which you should totally come to #justsayin)
So in the name of justice and equality, we should totally do somethinggggg bc you get first dibs’
‘Thank you. If I get out in the next 3-4 hours, I’ll let you know’

‘A 4 HOUR MEETING??!!??!
The 4 was supposed to be in caps but I forgot caps lock doesn’t work like that’

Lena sends a gif of a shrug, any potential wit stifled by the gravity of the trial, and turns off her phone as she enters the incubator space. Now in winter session, the university lab is empty and still, but she doesn’t think anything of it until she startles at the sudden noise of a bathroom door opening. A sheepish Jess apologizes and carefully closes the door behind her.

“Don’t worry about it.” Lena continues walking to the elevator and Jess follows closely behind. “Everything going okay so far?”

“Yeah, it’s good. He’s good.”

Jess doesn’t look up from the ground, and her voice shakes on the last syllable. It’s enough to make Lena soften once they step inside the lift. “And you?”

“I’m sorry?”

“How are you?” Lena reiterates. “There’s still no—”

Her next words falter in her throat when Jess finally looks up at her. Rather than the dark brown Lena has grown accustomed to, Jess’ eyes now consist of surreal, iridescent irises that shimmer emerald to amethyst to amber to cymophane to garnet and every other gemstone imaginable around a pupil of pure white. Around the iris, Lena can see a faint green circle that she’s sure shows on her as well.

“I’m glad you’re wearing the infrared contacts,” she acknowledges.

“Thanks for making them.” Jess only holds her gaze for another second before flicking to the side. “They’re way more comfortable than the cosmetics. I wish I could wear them all the time.”

“You’re welcome to.”

Jess coughs out a small laugh and rubs her hands together. “Maybe someday. Hopefully.”

Lena doesn’t know when she parks her car or how long she walks, but she finds herself one shot deep into inebriation by the time she takes in her surroundings. Her forearms rest on a sticky counter in a musty college bar, and she deems it worth her disgust if it will make her McQueen blouse fit in with the stained fraternity hoodies.

And why shouldn’t she be disgusted? If anything, it’s just consistency. Not only did she single-handedly destroy a man’s chance of finding his soulmate, she just dragged a child to hell and left him there until he can wake up and go through it again. She orders another finger of whiskey over the raucous yelling from the pool tables and digs her phone out of her bag.
Her stomach drops as she scrolls through multiple notifications from Kara. Now five hours since the dinner invitation, Lena swears under her breath and texts a quick apology. In true Kara fashion, she calls before Lena has a chance to take another sip of her drink.

“You’re alive!” Kara exclaims into the phone.

“ Barely.” Lena tilts the glass against her lips and takes a determined, undignified gulp.

“That bad, huh?”

She breathes out heavy, relieved it doesn’t come out as a scream. “Let’s say the sound of your voice is the best thing I’ve heard all day.” Something shatters behind her, and Lena doesn’t cover the phone receiver in time to hide the sound from Kara.

“Where are you?”

“Some college bar.”

“Bar? I thought you weren’t drinking anymore.”

Lena spins her tumbler around on the countertop. “Getting there.”

“How are you getting home?”

“I have my car.”

“What? No. Send me a pin, and I’ll pick you up.”

“I’m not leaving my car on campus, Kara.”

“I’m close to the university. I’ll just drive yours.”

Lena looks to her left-ribbon. With it being as short as it is, Kara must be halfway across the city.

“Kara, I’m not even—”

“Don’t say you’re not drunk. Your tolerance is ridiculously Irish, but I’m not letting you drive through downtown with anything in your system.”

“I don’t have to go through downtown.”

“You were going to stop by L-Corp to pick up some stuff for work, right?”

“You’re not wrong.” A gust of wind blasts through her speaker, and Lena yanks the phone away from her ear. “Fucking shit, Kara, what the hell was that?”

“Wind draft from opening the door,” Kara’s voice answers behind her. Lena jumps and spills the remaining whiskey over her hand, and Kara’s already cleaning up before Lena can scoff.

“I wasn’t done,” Lena mutters.

“And now you are,” Kara finishes for her. “How much was it?”

Lena shrugs. “Are you really going to make me leave?”

Indignation passes over the blond’s face, but it’s quickly replaced with resignation and a sigh. “That was the plan, but,” she settles onto the stool and grabs the small pop-up menu from in front of Lena,
“I guess it depends on how good their food is.”

“Probably shit.”

“Sounds perfect.” Kara gives her a weak smile, then flips the menu to the other side. Lena watches Kara’s eyes run down both sides of the menu twice until she rolls her eyes and gathers her purse.

“You win. Let’s go.”

“But—”

“Any establishment that repulses Kara Danvers’ palette could only be forged by demons.” She throws some cash onto the countertop and takes Kara’s hand. “We aren’t safe here.”

Kara’s laugh follows her as she drags her out of the bar and into the night. She shivers once in the crisp breeze and begins to retract her hand, and Kara’s fingers tighten around Lena’s just enough to be felt. She pauses, looks to Kara who can’t quite meet her eyes, then tugs gently until Kara walks next to her, hands still clasped.

Her bond doesn’t pulse, but it does shine bright enough to make Lena look away.

“I’m not parked far. How’d you get here?”

“Bus,” Kara answers quickly while bouncing lightly on her feet. “What do I get to drive?”

“The Cayenne, and you don’t get to drive it.”

“Why not?” Kara whines. “You’ve been drinking so it’s only reasonable that I be your designated driver.”

“Because I’m not drunk, and you’re not getting behind the wheel of my six-figure car.”

“You didn’t even buy it!”

“I pay for the insurance.”

“That’s why I’ll be careful!”

“If you call Alex as a reference, I’ll consider it.”

“Alex works in law enforcement. Any argument trying to convince her that someone with alcohol in their system should drive will be considered null and void.”

Lena pauses behind the trunk of her midnight blue Cayenne with keys in hand. Maybe she is, in fact, impaired if Kara beat her in an argument so easily. She sighs and shrugs.

“I guess we’re calling an Uber.”

She barely finishes her last syllable when Kara snatchtes the keys and runs to the driver’s side. “At least you get shotgun!”
If it weren’t for knowing Kara has superhuman reflexes and that Porsche prides itself on performance that can keep up, Lena would’ve called the cops for an attempted car theft minutes ago.

“No, Kara, the key goes into the left side,” she instructs.

“Well, that’s silly.”

“Don’t yank the gear shift down so hard!”

“It’s fine, Lena!”

She pulls out of the empty parking lot with no difficulty and, to her credit, she does drive without using all of the 400 horsepower at her disposal.

It’s much more control than Lena has. She doesn’t let her left-ribbon out of sight.

“Why do you usually walk to work when you have a car?” Kara asks.

“I don’t,” Lena answers. “L-Corp couldn’t get a parking garage close to the building, and the lot underneath is reserved for company cars and guests. Do you need directions out of here?”

“Not when you could be telling me what happened.”

Lena looks out her side window and fidgets with her hands. Her yellow bond stretches past the center console to the halfway point between her and Kara’s left wrists, and Lena feels the words bubbling up with her lingering frustration.

But how does she start justifying her experimentation on an alien child to Supergirl?

She clears her throat and steadies her voice. “Rough clinical trial.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“No.”

It’s quiet save for the turn signal as Kara completes a left. When the signal clicks off and the wheel returns to its forward position, Kara reaches over the console for Lena’s hand.

“Can I ask you something?” Kara blurts out.

“Always.”

“Are you okay with me barging in all the time? Like,” Lena’s hands clench when Kara takes a stop a little too hard, and Kara rubs her thumb lightly over Lena’s knuckle, “I know you’re really busy, and it’s not like I give you a lot of choice sometimes, so I just want to make sure that I’m not imposing when you could be doing other things or being with other people.”

Lena can’t help but snort out a laugh. “Not like anyone’s kicking down my door to hang out. I’m more surprised that you have so much time to spare for a walking crisis.”

“You’re not a crisis. You’re super smart, strong, funny—”

“Sarcastic.”

“Funny!” Kara reemphasizes. “And I feel better when I’m wi—when I talk to you.”
“Because I threaten to ruin the life of anyone who inconveniences you?”

“Maybe. Are we going to L-Corp?”

“No, just the apartment, please, unless you want to pick up any food.”

“Okay. But, like, seriously though, I feel like I don’t need to worry about anything—”

“Because I threaten to ruin the life of anyone who inconveniences you?” Lena reiterates.

Kara laughs and squeezes her hand. “I don’t doubt that you can and will follow through on that promise, but you’re a good person, Lena, and I like that about you, too.”

Lena hums and watches the streetlights and pedestrians passing by her window. “That all applies to you, too, by the way.”

“What does?”

“Your reasons. You could’ve been describing yourself except for the vindictive part.”

“Oh, psh, you just haven’t given me any names.”

Kara the Vigilante Super Reporter pops in to Lena’s imagination, complete with glasses and a cellophane cape, and Lena feels a smile tugging at the corners of her mouth. Kara’s fingers drum softly on the back of her hand, and she spies the blonde also smiling in the driver’s seat.

“So other than being everything short of a goddess, anything else you like about me?” Lena teases.

“The free food.”

Lena’s smile bursts out into a full-bodied laugh. “Fair enough.”

Lena almost doesn’t let Kara park the Cayenne, but she gives in when Kara points out that she hasn’t as much as swerved in the entirety of her drive. It still doesn’t stop Lena from tightly gripping her armrests when Kara sharply pulls into the driveway.

“They say any landing you can walk away from is a good landing?” Kara offers with a shrug.

“False,” Lena deadpans. “You’re lucky I already like you.” She unbuckles her seatbelt and gathers her bag, but she stops short when she realizes Kara hasn’t moved. “Kara?”

“Do you want me to come up?” Kara asks quietly. “You seem like you’re doing a lot better, but I know you had a hard day, so I—”

“I owe you dinner,” Lena dismisses. “It won’t be much, but come on.”

They take two steps into the apartment building when Lena’s phone begins buzzing in her bag. She mutters an apology and pulls it out with a frown. The email notifications zoom down her screen faster than her eyes can follow, although she catches a subject line starting with “URGENT” fairly frequently.
“Do you need to take it?”

Lena shakes her head and silences her phone before hitting the elevator call button. “I turned off data for emails. Must’ve connected to my Wi-Fi from here.”

“It sounds like a lot.”

“If it was really urgent, they would’ve called. I swear, you’d think they’re used to PR by now…”

The doors open, and Lena steps inside the lift alone. She turns and raises an eyebrow at Kara.

“Are you sure you don’t need to take it?” Kara asks. “It’s really no trouble for me to leave—”

Lena jams her hand between the closing elevator door and the wall until it opens again. “Okay. What’s going on? Did I upset you?”

Kara’s eyes go wide, and she scurries into the elevator rambling denials. “It’s nothing like that! I promise!”

“Then give me a name. I’ll have them taken out within the hour.” Lena punches the button for the top level, then crosses her arms and leans against the wall.

Kara covers her face with her hands and groans. “Please don’t kill Alex.”

Lena’s eyes narrow. “A falling out?” she tests.

“I guess?” Kara huffs and lets her hands flop to her sides momentarily before gesturing widely. “It wasn’t anything big, and we ended it on good terms, but still? It wasn’t like we got mad at each other. She just said some stuff that messed me up. I don’t know.”

“What did you talk about?”

Kara’s hesitation and worried glance to Lena gives her all the answer she needs. The blond launches into more stuttering nonsense, empty adjectives and vague allusions to what maybe-possibly-could’ve happened amidst so many glasses readjustments that Lena wouldn’t be surprised if some screws popped out. Of course, Lena promptly ignores it all. Kara’s newfound doubt and insecurities revolve around their time together and whether or not the time spent has been mutually appreciated. It’s unclear if it’s limited to Lena, but if the conversation involved Kara’s very protective, works-in-law-enforcement sister, a last name or two probably came up. Kara hasn’t retreated at all, though. If anything, she only seems assuaged by...

Her eyes twitch at the strain of not looking at her left-ribbon. It was different in the car. Inconsequential. But now, it would tell her everything she needs to know and exactly what to do.

Lena closes her eyes and shakes her head. At this point, it would just be redundant.

She already knows far too much.

She pushes off from the wall and catches Kara’s right hand mid-wave. Kara shuts up instantly, and her eyes snap to where Lena’s fingers make contact. In her slowly failing effort to remain neutral, Lena struggles to keep her attention on Kara and away from their bond as she lowers their hands together and entwines their fingers.

Even in the harsh fluorescent light of the elevator, finer details washed out and ridges accentuated by their underlying shadow, Kara truly is beautiful.
“This helps, right?” Lena asks softly, but Kara’s head whips up as if her voice were a gunshot.

Yes, her eyes, too, even when half-obscured by the rims of her glasses, are also beautiful.

Kara nods briefly when the elevator beeps, alerting them they reached their destination, and Lena tugs her outside before she can consider silly things like actions and their consequences.

It doesn’t work. Her mind races faster than their slow walk to her door, and their shared silence serves as little distraction.

In any game, there are three possible endings: win, lose, or draw.

For puzzles, there are only two: fit the pieces together, or don’t.

And it’s Lena’s move.

She feels her hand begin to sweat inside of Kara’s. It’s selfish. There is so much she needs to talk about, so many secrets she needs to explain and motives to clarify, and it’s enough to make her want to wait until they can both be innocent. She knows too much, and she’s too good at getting what she wants, and Kara’s thumb rubs the knuckle of her index finger, and maybe it isn’t selfish at all. If Kara wants something, and Lena has the capacity to give it to her, then who is Lena to get in the way? It’s only logical. Kara is patient, caring, genuine, beautiful, radiant, and deserving of everything good in the universe. She doesn’t deserve to be punished for magic outside of her control, and, if it weren’t for this fucking curse, they would already be so much more.

They finally arrive at her door, and, rather than extract her hand to retrieve her keys from her purse, she turns on her heel and faces Kara.

“You need to know that I’m not drunk,” Lena declares. “I had one shot before you called, and then only another half of a shot before you showed up.”

“O-okay,” Kara replies cautiously.

“So you were very lucky to drive my car.”

Kara blinks at her, and then laughs softly. “I wish I could’ve taken it on the freeway.”

“Never happening. That being said, I know I promised you dinner, but I’m going to use the rest of the night to recover from cardiac arrest.”

“Did I really drive that bad?” Kara uses Lena’s hand to pull her into a tight hug before Lena can read her expression. “I’m sorry! I was careful!”

Lena chuckles and gracelessly lets her bag fall to the ground. “No damage, so we’re fine.” With Lena’s modest heels and Kara’s raised loafers, her chin catches Kara’s shoulder as she returns the hug, but she’s still able to see the glow of their bond from her hand placed on Kara’s back.

*Kara wants this.*

She sees the bond brighten before she can close her eyes. She sighs in mild defeat and, once again, considers redundancy.

At least she definitely confirmed that it isn’t selfish. Something like this is given as much as it’s taken, right?

Besides, Kara needs to know, too.
“Thank you,” she whispers.

“What for?”

“Everything.” She loosens her hold around Kara’s waist and takes a fourth of a step back, enough room to pull her face away from Kara’s shoulder and place a soft kiss on her soulmate’s cheek, glancing the corner of her mouth.

Then, she waits because wanting something and being ready for it are two incredibly different things.

Chapter End Notes

I've spent over a year on this damn story. Even if it takes me two months to update, I promise I'll finish. Can't leave you on that cliffhanger forever ;)

Please let me know if you find any errors. Also, let me know if there are any loose ends you’d like to see tied up. I might not be able to hit all of them in the story, but I can try.

Edit: I’m slowly finding more errors, so you may need to refresh to see the latest fixes. That’s what I get for publishing before my wife can proofread -_-

refractallize.tumblr.com
(yup, still there lol)
Heat

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lena always considers herself a woman of science no matter how much her eyes reveal. She observes, tests, and analyzes over and over again until she can claim understanding, but she isn’t so noble as to acquire knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Any pursuit without purpose is meaningless.

Nature, on the other hand, doesn’t need purpose, especially one assigned to it by the short-sighted ego of academics and romantics. For all of the algorithms, theories, and laws of the universe ever “proven” by rationalists and empiricists alike, even a Luthor’s vanity recognizes that nature answers to no one but itself and exists only for the sake of existence.

So where does magic fall?

It’s an impossible question with an unknowable answer just like so many facets of nature that simply exist, but there must be a reason for it to be bequeathed upon beings so susceptible to folly and darkness. What is she supposed to do with this power other than impose a purpose upon it?

If the purpose is to guide Lena to this moment, standing in an apartment hallway between Kara’s arms where time can only be measured in heartbeats, then maybe that’s good enough.

It feels like so long ago that Lena met her soulmate and locked herself in her office and tried to believe that the bonds didn’t matter, that magic and light can’t be felt so it was pointless to think otherwise. She tried to define them with foolish comparisons to earthly gemstones and flowers, tangible but ultimately tangential to what’s really important. Light is the heat burning her eyes and scalding her skin, and it is so much more.

Light is the abstract delineation of a soul’s beginning and end with both substance and Form.

Light is the quickening expansion and contraction of the torso held against her own.

Light is the presence and loss of lips against her forehead, and then again on the tip of her nose.

Light is the caress of fingertips brushing past her cheeks and behind her ear and along her jaw.

Light is the gentle pressure under her chin and the fleeting breath of a question gracing her lips.
Light is the fire that ignites every atom in every cell as she dares to be the moon that kisses the sun.

Distantly, a heart beats, and Lena feels her feet return to the ground as gravity clicks back into alignment. She begins to pull away, but Kara reclaims the inches between them and presses into her again. Then, a heartbeat, and a palm on the side of her face gently keeps her in place. A heartbeat, and her hands slip down to Kara’s hips. A heartbeat, and the lips against hers pull taut into a smile.

A heartbeat, and Lena sucks Kara’s bottom lip between her teeth because a smile takes away too many points of contact.

Then, a breath from her own space because she learns light is also the sound of a whimper, and it comes too close to burning.

She feels Kara’s fingers twitch under her hair, and Lena gives in to the suggestion of ‘closer’ by nudging the bottom rim of Kara’s glasses with her nose.

“You’re sure I can’t come in?” Kara whines.

Lena can’t help but smirk, and her thumbs innocently find their way to Kara’s belt loops. “And do what?” Kara freezes, then jerks back while sputtering sentence fragments and grabbing at her glasses. Lena laughs and retracts her hands. “Sorry, but I’m sure. Can you get my bag?”

Kara leaves with another kiss and a promise for lunch tomorrow. She only gets the extra kiss because Lena can’t come up with a reason for why they can’t get breakfast other than “work,” and she admits it’s a poor excuse when tomorrow is Saturday. She gets ready for bed quickly, and she catches herself smiling more times than she can count even when tucked in and scrolling through her emails. Her yellow ribbon zooms overhead several times, maybe does a loop at some point, and Lena goes to sleep (dare she think it) happy.

She dreams of lighthouses, every size and color passing under her as she flies over oceans and seas around the world. She blinks, and her bare feet sink into soft sand at the edge of a shoreline. Small raindrops sporadically fall from the grey clouds and bounce off her skin and join the water lapping at her toes. Her ears strain for sound—buoy bells or waves or birds—and hear nothing but the faint, cyclic creaking of the unlit lamp in the lighthouse to her left. Another lighthouse in the distance flashes green at her in a slow cadence.

“It’s the rain that makes the green,” says a voice to her right. Lena’s breath catches in her throat.
It’s been so long since she heard her mother.

She feels gentle fingers lift her right wrist towards the distant lighthouse.

“What about the sun?” Lena asks. Her voice is high and sticks on the consonants just as it did when she was a child. Her hand continues to rise in the edge of her vision, surrounded by white light, until it points to the sky.

“That’s where the magic is,” her mother answers.

The rain stops, the distant lighthouse flashes yellow, and everything explodes into color. The ribbons around her outstretched wrist blossom into their vibrant hues and shoot out in every direction. The granules of brown, gray, and black sand melt into smooth gemstones, amethyst and emerald and pearl and cymophane, reflecting the ascending sun and tumbling over themselves as they’re pulled in by the receding waves. The base of the far lighthouse is a deep cerulean, somewhere between the bright blue of the sky and the swirling blue of the water, just like Kara’s eyes.

Lena wakes with a start to the solid off-white of her ceiling tinted gray from the light of the streetlamps filtered through her curtains. She lays there for several minutes as her mother’s voice continues to echo in her mind, perhaps an incomplete part of the dream:

What is the earth but a moon to the sun?

Lena arrives at work in the late morning and powers through the mess of emails that accumulated the night prior. Thankfully, they primarily consist of the one chain claiming urgency which, truth be told, could’ve used her attention earlier. She spends the rest of her time reviewing project reports and updating her calendar with end-of-the-year parties recently announced in various newsletters. She notices her yellow ribbon zoom past the office at a quarter to noon, and her phone buzzes two seconds later.

‘Is Chinese okay???’

‘Of course, but you really don’t have to come out here on a Saturday’

‘I want to see youuuuu
But if you’re in the middle of a thing maybe you can come to game night?’

Lena's finger hovers over the notification. Game night would mean Kara’s sister. Game night would mean Kara’s friends. How many of them freely knew Supergirl’s identity?

How many of them hated her?

‘It’s okay, I can take a break. I’ll put in the order’

It’s a deliberate non-answer to Kara’s real question, and she doesn’t know what she would say if Kara called her out on it, but she only receives a gif of Garfield throwing pancakes into his mouth. Lena smiles and sends her a screenshot of the order confirmation but hides the extra order of potstickers. It’s worth the extra $7 when Kara practically bounces into her office half an hour later with the bag of food and a wide grin.

“So, I’m not complaining at all, but why’d you get extra?”
“Because I could. You can shut the door if you want.”

Lena rearranges the magazines on the coffee table to make room for the food and, when she looks up again, Kara hasn’t moved from the doorway. Lena looks to her with an inquisitive tilt of her head, and Kara jumps to close the door, then hurries over and puts the bag on the table. Kara doesn’t make a move to sit down, so neither does Lena.

“So, last night,” Kara begins instead.

Lena feels her mouth pull into something between a smirk and a smile. “Last night?”

“We should talk about it, right?”

“If you’d like.” Lena fights the urge to clasp her hands together or cross her arms or sit at her desk or jump behind her couch or anything to put a barrier between herself and Kara. “We also don’t have to. I know where I stand.”

“Where’s that?”

She should’ve anticipated that one. Her breath catches in a short, noiseless laugh, and she steps slowly into Kara’s space until she stands half an arm’s length away. “Here, if that’s okay.”

“Yeah, that’s okay. More than okay. Good. Perfect.” Kara readjusts her glasses and shakes her head. “But, what does that mean? Or what do you want that to mean? Or…”

“I want the chance to make you as happy as you make me.” The words leave Lena with an unexpected certainty, but she doesn’t feel the need to retract or excuse them.

Maybe honesty can be easy.

“You say that as if you don’t already make me happy.”

“I know I don’t. Not like… you don’t know…” Lena swears her left-ribbon constricts around her wrist tighter and tighter until she feels her pulse throbbing through the entirety of her arm. Maybe there’s a ribbon squeezing her throat, too. It would explain why it takes conscious effort to prevent every inhalation from becoming a gasp. Fingers twitching, she surrenders and wraps her arms around herself, her left on top and supported by her right. It does little to hide their bond despite her wrist tucked into the crook of her elbow.

As if anything could hide it now.

“This can be whatever you want,” Lena finishes softly and evenly. “I only ask that it’s slow.”

Kara tips her head to the side with a growing grin. She delicately reaches out and untangles Lena’s arms. “Was last night slow?”

“Yeah. Last night was…” Lena forgoes words in favor of a smile that replaces any words her lips could possibly form.

“So,” Kara places Lena’s arms over her shoulders, and her hands slide to Lena’s waist, “we can do it again?”

Lena huffs but lets Kara move her anyway. “You don’t get to force me to talk without talking, too. Feelings,” her face scrunches into a grimace, “don’t come easy to Luthors. It’s a privilege to know them.”
“Fair enough,” Kara answers with a chuckle. “I think you’re absolutely amazing. Like, it shouldn’t 
be allowed for you to be so amazing because it probably throws the world out of balance or 
something. And you’re so good. You don’t expect anything of me. It’s like I’m enough just by being 
me.”

Kara stills for a moment, then shrugs and continues smiling. Lena lets her arms follow the downward 
slope of Kara’s shoulders until her hands rest on Kara’s collarbone. Her soulmate bond shines 
brilliantly, and she would swear that it glows in time with their heartbeats even without their hands 
touching.

“As sweet as that is,” Lena comments, “you didn’t tell me what you want.”

Kara moves even closer with a slight sway to each small step, and her gaze flicks between Lena’s 
eyes and her mouth. “I really, really, really like you. I just want to be with you in any way that you’ll 
have me, and this is already more than I thought was possible.” Lena’s breath catches in her chest, 
and Kara begins lightly rubbing small circles onto her lower back. “Now?”

Lena can only nod.

Although her words are eager, Lena would best describe Kara as careful. Her lips ease onto Lena’s, 
and she opts for a sequence of small kisses, each one with incrementally more pressure than the next. 
This wasn’t what she intended when she asked for “slow,” but Lena patiently follows her lead until 
finally—finally—Kara’s lips part enough for Lena’s to fit between them. Lena instantly slides her 
hands up along the back of Kara’s shoulders until her finger tips press into her bottom hairline, but 
even that isn’t enough to keep Kara from kissing just as softly as the start.

It would be maddening if it weren’t so lovely.

Lena pulls back for a breath and calls Kara’s name. She gets a hum and another kiss in lieu of a 
proper response.

“The food’s getting cold,” she mumbles.

“So?”

“So,” Lena dodges Kara’s mouth and kisses her cheek, “I don’t want to suffer through another 
lamentation on eating reheated potstickers.”

Kara groans and pulls away. “Fine. But just know that I was not the one to make this decision!”

“That’s okay. Oh, wait.” Lena stops Kara before she can get too far and regards the lipstick smeared 
over her face. She bends down and grabs a napkin from the take-out bag, then rubs at the red streaks 
on Kara’s lips.

“What are you doing?”

“Hold still, unless you want people knowing you kissed Lena Luthor,” she challenges with a raise of 
her eyebrow.

“Uh, I-I-I-I mean—”

“That’s not holding still, Kara.”
Lunch passes quickly, and Lena’s sure it’s because she spends half the time swooning. What used to be fleeting gestures emphasizing silly anecdotes become lingering touches, and the shy glances she thought she imagined out of the corner of her eye become unabashed, affectionate gazes. Maybe Kara notices. The touches and looks increase in frequency, and Lena’s convinced that’s how Kara tricks her into leaving the office for the day.

“It’s Saturday!” Kara playfully argues. “You haven’t even gotten one email or call since I’ve been here.”

Lena hadn’t received a call for the entire day, actually, but she wasn’t going to let Kara have that satisfaction. She sighs with a flourish and makes a show of rising from the couch and sweeping her laptop into her bag. Kara rambles on behind her about things they can do for the afternoon, and Lena’s about to retort when her phone vibrates on the desk.

“No! Don’t answer it!”

“It’ll only take a second,” Lena reassures, but then she sees the name on the phone and almost drops her bag in her rush to answer it. “Jess? Is he awake?”

She hears loud rustling and metallic clanging on the other side of the receiver before she hears Jess’ voice. “He’s not. There are so many cops here. I don’t know what to do. They’re going through everything—”

“Cops?” Lena interrupts. She apologetically looks to Kara, but the reporter is already typing on her phone.

“Yeah, they say they have a warrant.”

“A warrant for what?”

“Evidence? I don’t—” another bang drowns out her next words, and, between that and Kara’s muttering, Lena feels the start of a headache.

“Send me pictures of the warrant. I want to know what they’re looking for. Can you do that?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I can.”

“Good.” Lena leans against her desk and rubs the bridge of her nose. “Is anybody with you?”

“Eve’s here. She’s calling Linda. Hey,” Jess’ voice turns muffled, but Lena makes out a request for the search warrant, “I’ll get the picture to you now.”

“Thanks.”

Lena snaps off her phone and crosses her arms. Kara, turned away from her, now speaks loudly and with clear irritation that she tries to keep civil.

“Maggie, I just want to know what it’s for.”

Lena frowns, and her phone vibrates with multiple pictures from Jess in quick succession. She skims over them briefly until she reaches the second appendix of items to be seized. She zooms in, and her eyes go wide.

“Kara, who are you talking to?” she demands. She strides over before Kara finishes turning back
around.

“A detective working this case.”

“Please let me speak with her.”

Kara lowers her phone and switches it to speaker, and the similar rustling from what she heard on Jess’ call comes through.

“I don’t have time for this,” a woman says. “I need—”

“This is Lena Luthor. Are you conducting the search in the Rhodos lab?”

The woman sighs. “Yeah. What now?”

“I reviewed the warrant, and you will not find admissible evidence there,” Lena states. “The solution at the lab contains the real isotope which was not created for Lillian Luthor. All of the fake isotope solution was surrendered at the missile site.”

“We have clearance to seize all assets—”

“You are only taking away the life-saving treatment for the boy comatose on that bed.”

Kara breathes in sharply next to her, and the detective falters in her next words.

“I don’t want to interfere with your search,” Lena continues. “I’m asking that you wait until myself or a Rhodos staff member can willingly give you what you need without jeopardizing the life of a child. We can make an identical solution and give you copies of the data used to create it. We intend to fully cooperate and help you keep Lillian Luthor in prison.”

The detective exhales deeply but doesn’t say anything. Lena hears Jess in the background snapping at an officer, then another crash.

“It can’t be you,” the detective says.

Lena’s nails snag on her blouse as her fingers clench into fists. “Understood. Will a Rhodos scientist be acceptable?”

“Yeah.”

“They’re already on their way and will assist you.” Lena pulls out her phone and begins crafting a text with directions to Jess. “Are any of the other occupants being detained?”

“No. You owe me, Danvers.”

The phone beeps signaling the end of the call, and Lena sends off the text. Her shoulders sag as she releases the breath she didn’t realize she was holding. It doesn’t stop her from jumping at the faintest touch to her elbow. Her eyes snap open to Kara looking at her, head tilted and mouth turned up into a small smile.

“Thank you for the connection,” Lena starts. “It really helped.”

“No problem.”

Lena shakes her head and crosses her arms. “You must think I’m a monster.”
“Were you listening to me at all before lunch?” Kara asks softly. “I think—”

“This is an alien clinical trial,” Lena interjects. “L-Corp isn’t taking a controlling interest. An employee went out of her way to ask for my help, for her little brother, and—”

She’s cut short by Kara engulfing her in a hug. She starts to shake her off, but Kara just holds on tighter.

“You don’t have to explain. I know you just want to help. And… it’s possible that Alex brought it up yesterday.”

“Part of your argument?” Lena slowly unravels from herself, and Kara loosens her arms to let Lena’s under them.

“Yeah. I don’t want to get into it, but it doesn’t bother me. I get why you didn’t tell me.”

Lena rests her cheek on Kara’s shoulder and breathes out deeply. “Thank you.”

Sirens greet them outside the building, and Kara gets a phone call that she claims is an Alex-work-emergency. She’s gone before Lena can cite Saturday as, apparently, the perfect justification to ditch all professional obligations, but she promises to text later as she dashes off.

She does text, either purposefully or conveniently, right before game night, and Lena wracks her brain for an excuse when she gets a call from Jess.

“He’s awake!”

“Is he okay?”

“He’s great! A little tired for sure, but he’s doing really, really well!” As if on cue, giggles ring out through the receiver over the sound of a cartoon. Lena smiles and grabs her bag by the door.

“And you’re okay?”

“Yeah. We were a little shaken, but we’re fine now.”

“Then I’ll be there in twenty.”

It really only takes fifteen minutes, but the walk from the parking lot evens it out to twenty. She shoves open the incubator door and marches to the lab, and the students and faculty working at their stations stare at her. She pauses in front of the treatment room, takes a deep breath, and knocks before turning the doorknob.

She’s greeted by an enthusiastic hug that makes her stumble in her heels, and she clings onto Jess for stability more than reciprocity.

“Howdy to you, too?”

“Sorry!” Jess immediately releases Lena and steps back, but she holds her arm and brings her closer to Joey’s bed. He sits propped up by pillows watching a cartoon playing on the laptop resting on his feet. A blond woman in the chair next to him ruffles his hair, then stands up and sticks her hand out to Lena.
“I’m Eve!” She snatches Lena’s hand and shakes it twice before gesturing animatedly. “Eve Teschmacher. Jess told me a lot about you. Not that she needed to. You’re kind of a big deal.” Eve squeals, and Lena hopes her expression comes off as confused instead of rude. The ribbon between Eve and Jess’ right wrists doesn’t connect, nor does it shine very bright, but the two ends appear almost identical shades of pink. It’s uncanny enough for Lena to do a subtle double-take, and she isn’t even completely sure they’re different until she sees both colors next to each other on Joey’s wrist.

Otto and Linda arrive soon after, and Lena squeezes into the corner next to the head of Joey’s bed. She watches on as Eve and Otto proceed with their introductions, and she reaches into her coat pocket for her phone.

“Hi.”

Lena turns to the quiet voice and finds Joey looking up at her with a small smile. His long, dark bangs obscure his eyes, but she can see that the black fragments that dispersed during the treatment mostly returned to where his irises and pupils should be. She can make out bits of his rainbow irises shimmering through, though, and it’s enough to make her smile back.

“Hi. How are you feeling?”

Joey holds his hands out in front of himself and inspects them closely. “My hands and arms are a little cold. Maybe from the air conditioner. My feet are warm because of the laptop. I think I’m happy, but I don’t know. I want to smile. That usually means ‘happy.’” His hands fall back onto the bed, and he sinks deeper into the pillows. “It’s hard to move most of the time. I want to move, but it’s hard.”

“You’re probably tired,” Lena suggests softly. “Best not to move too much.”

“Okay.”

His body relaxes, and his head lands on Lena’s hip as he lists to the side. She feels herself stiffen, shoulders and neck tense as she looks anywhere but down at her employee’s little brother undergoing an excruciating experimental medical treatment at her hand. He chooses to lean on her of all people. It’s unprofessional. Personal.

His screams echo in her mind and his contorted body fills her vision, both amplified and sharpened in the way only a cruel, guilty memory can do.

She attempts to hide her shiver by carefully maneuvering her hand out of her pocket and pretending to pay attention to the chattering of the scientists and young women. She runs her fingers through Joey’s thin, scraggly hair but, when she feels her hand become tangled in the strands pulled out by her movements, she settles for cradling his head. He shifts against her, and more of his weight rests on her hip and into her palm.

She tells herself that he senses her apology. Something tightens in her chest, but her shoulders loosen.

“Ms. Luthor?”

She blinks rapidly and focuses on the faces now looking to her expectantly. She nods, unsure of what she’s agreeing to, but it must be the right answer from the relief that sweeps the room.

“Great!” Otto pulls out his phone. “I’ll send you a revised treatment timeline, and we’ll take Joey back to the hospital in the morning if he feels up to it.”
Jess comes around to the other side of Joey’s bed and bends down to his eye level. “Sound good, kid?”

He nods but doesn’t detach from Lena’s side. Jess squeezes his hand and rises. “Can I talk to you, Ms. Luthor?”

Lena taps her thumb on Joey’s head and waits for him to straighten up before giving Jess her assent and following her outside the room. She hears Eve start talking animatedly with Joey before she closes the door, and a smile starts to creep onto her mouth until she sees Jess standing with arms crossed in front of her.

“Is everything okay?” Lena asks. Jess shifts her weight between her feet, and her iridescent eyes dart around Lena without looking at her directly.

“Yeah. I just wanted to talk about the EA position. I don’t think I can take it.”

“I wouldn’t offer it if—”

“It’s not the right time for me, and I’m still figuring out what I want to do. The front desk job was supposed to be a part-time thing until Joey…” Jess’ eyes widen as she stops herself, and she shakes her head. “This became a lot more than I anticipated. I think you should have someone who can be fully invested in the position.”

“It doesn’t have to be that intensive,” Lena dismisses.

“But what if I found someone else?”

“And who would that be?”

“Eve.”

Lena’s eyebrow quirks up with a smirk. “Convenient she’s here.”

“Right?” Jess breaks into an excited smile. “She’s really great! She works at Catco right now as an EA already, and she has a degree in nuclear physics—”

“She what?”

“Yeah! I forget if it’s a Master’s or Doctorate’s, but she just told me about it. So, she’d fit right in with all those meetings and presentations and stuff.”

“Have you happened to ask her if she wants to do it?”

“Not yet, but I can’t imagine her saying no!” Jess bounces lightly on her feet. “So you’ll think about it?”

Lena struggles to keep her laugh down. “Give her the job description, and have her send me a resume and cover letter. Send her the NDA for the trial, too. If she doesn’t have all materials for me Monday morning, she is no longer a candidate.”

Unfazed, Jess nods emphatically. “Understood!!”
The next week is bliss.

Nothing changes too much in the frequency of Kara’s visits. Sometimes, she brings Lena something to eat in the middle of the day. Sometimes, she dashes off with a work emergency, and Lena turns on the local news to see what menace requires the attention of a superhero. One day, Kara gets called four times in the same 24 hour period, and Lena considers herself lucky for being alone when she sees the exasperation on the hero’s face in the later news footage. Her inelegant laughter probably woke up the entire building.

She enters Kara’s apartment for the first time, too. Kara asks her to come over with a blush despite the forced nonchalance, and it really shouldn’t be a big deal when Kara’s spent so much time alone with Lena in the penthouse already. Still, the gravity of Kara’s invitation compels Lena to bring a small bouquet of plumerias in a vase that tastefully hints at its cost. She’s glad she did, in the end. She’s welcomed into the spacious, colorful studio by the aroma of lemon and garlic accompanying a spread of freshly-cooked salmon and stir fry, and she soaks in the dim lighting and warmth with the realization that Kara made this into their first proper date.

“You didn’t have to go this far,” Lena gently chides.

“And you didn’t have to bring flowers.” Kara takes the vase with what will probably be as close to a smirk as Lena will ever see. Her eyebrow rises in an uncanny imitation of Lena, but her smile is much too wide to be smug. Lena follows her inside, compliments the wide windows and array of half-finished paintings, then catches a whiff of smoke. She must make a face because Kara pops open her trash can and unveils a heap of burned… something before she can ask about it.

“I tried to make dessert,” Kara mumbles. “I have ice cream, but—”

Lena cuts her off with a kiss. “This is lovely, Kara. All of it. Thank you.”

The week after, Lena feels Kara pulling her for more. She doesn’t say it explicitly, but it’s in the way that she invites Lena to breakfast with her sister, lunch with Winn and James, and dinner at the nearby Italian spot and all the other restaurants she still hasn’t tried because she never had someone to go with. Lena has plenty of reasons not to—meetings and reports and holiday networking events—and dodges each outing successfully. Kara never questions it. Maybe she’s just testing the boundaries. Maybe she knows that Lena isn’t ready.

Maybe she forgets because Lena deliberately kisses the absolute fuck out of her after every excuse.

Their movie nights devolve into make-out sessions on the couch, and Lena wonders why she wasted a single second of her life kissing anyone else. The first time, on Lena’s second visit to Kara’s apartment, she climbs onto Kara’s lap with acute awareness of the bed only a dozen or so yards behind her. She knows they won’t get there any time soon, not when she has to guide Kara’s trembling hands to her hips and pull away to ask if she’s okay, but she dares to hope when Kara takes the initiative to kiss down the side of her neck with the barest hint of teeth. Lena weaves her fingers into Kara’s braided hair and holds her close, and her left-ribbon flashes bright and blinding with their accelerated heartbeats.

It’s slow and natural and easy and beautiful and perfect.

Too perfect, maybe. Her paranoia stirs after a flawless interview of Miss Eve Teschmacher who is severely overqualified as an assistant but a stellar candidate as Lena’s protege. Lena hammers out an offer letter and sends it in less than 10 minutes of her leaving, and she receives an enthusiastic acceptance not three minutes later. Then, a message from Dr. Châtelet pops in, alerting her that she’s ready to present her infrared proposal. Lena immediately gathers her bag with every intention to
march down to the optics lab and interrogate her favorite researcher, but she pauses when she points
the remote at her televisions. One plays a droll recap of the stock market’s fluctuations for the day,
and the other shows a live feed of a car chase downtown, Supergirl’s cape nothing more than a blur
on the helicopter camera.

What will she do if she sees her ribbon around Kara’s left wrist?

There would be no reason for her to hide her magic anymore. Her father knew about the ribbons,
and it wasn’t a big deal. She would have definitive proof that they were soulmates.

Her gut twists, and her body heat ascends from her extremities to her face. She swiftly turns off the
TV’s and forgoes her bag in her haste to leave the office. She makes it as far as the elevator and
punches the call button when another question occurs to her:

Why hasn’t Kara told her about Supergirl yet?

Of course, she couldn’t tell Lena in the beginning, not when they first met and Lena was under
suspicion for sabotaging a commercial aircraft. She couldn’t tell Lena as they were getting to know
each other, either. It was still too early to determine if Lena could be trusted or if Lena was worth
trusting.

She winces from the sting of that thought.

Regardless, Kara trusts her now, said as much and undoubtedly acts like it, so why? What does Kara
have to gain from hiding it?

Maybe she doesn’t know how to bring it up. Maybe she’s afraid of how Lena will react after being
lied to for so long. Wouldn’t that mean Lena already solved the problem? If anything, Lena is the
one lying to Kara, and, at this point, Lena really only hides her power to respect Kara’s secret. She
could try telling her about the bonds without acknowledging Supergirl’s identity, but that would
immediately undercut her claim, and why should she avoid it when it would help? It can’t be easy
juggling a double-life, so revealing her magic and getting everything out in the open could take a
huge burden off of Kara.

Her wrist itches at her side, and she has half a mind to run back to her office for a bracelet. She could
demand the answers from her bond, but it seems too soon. It’s ultimately Kara’s secret to tell.

Right?

The elevator doors open, and Lena hangs her head briefly before stepping inside. She’ll hear out Dr.
Châtelet first. Making a decision now would be like planning five moves ahead in a new game
before the pieces are even out. There’s no reason to rush anything if Lena will never see her color
anyway.
Sorry if this chapter is a bit boring, and sorry about upping the chapter count from 19 to 20. This turned into a good stopping point, so I decided to split it up into two chapters before this became 10k words lol

Quick thing: I'm going to revise the earlier chapters to match the tone and style of the later chapters. I won't add any scenes or change anything too crazy; it's just format consistency and readability edits.

Thank you for reading!<3

refractallize.tumblr.com
Lena walks into Dr. Châtelet’s lab with significantly less enthusiasm than when she initially left her office, but her determination remains strong. Neither of them wastes their breath with a salutation; Dr. Châtelet merely gestures to the lab chair opposite of her and launches into her proposal.

“This will have to be a combination of protocols,” she begins.

“Really?”

“Yes. In the simplest sense, the photoreceptors in our eyes aren’t built to see infrared. When light hits the receptor, a molecule inside the protein changes shape, and that starts the signal transduction pathway to create sight. Infrared doesn’t have enough energy to make the molecule change shape, so nothing happens, and we don’t perceive anything.

“If we want to see infrared in its natural state, and we can’t use electronics, then we need to manipulate the receptors. I want to create a priming solution that helps the receptors activate with less energy: weakening the bonds that need to break for the protein to change shape, or making it easier to change polarity, or…” Dr. Châtelet pauses, then snatches up a pen and scribbles something down in her notebook. “We also need to limit all the atmospheric interference. I’m already developing long-pass contacts to filter out different ranges of high-frequency light; they’ll be useful. Heat could have an effect, so tests will need to happen in a cold room until—”

She speaks quickly, and Lena considers taking out her phone to record their conversation. She brushes off the inclination knowing that she can review the written proposal afterwards. “What’s the timeline?”

The confident scientist turns weary for a moment, shoulders drooping, and Lena blinks in surprise. “A while. I can’t find literature on anything like this. On molecular primers, sure, but not on making humans see infrared. You’ll have whatever I can find in the proposal.”

“What are the roadblocks?”

“Primarily risk assessment, but also delivery and targeting. Human corneas evolved to block high-energy ultraviolet wavelengths. There’s no such inherent protection against infrared. This could mean we didn’t need this evolution because there’s no risk of harm, or this could mean that it hasn’t come up because we’ve never been able to perceive infrared.” Dr. Châtelet runs a hand over her face and takes a sip of water from the mug on her desk. “Eyes are both resilient and fragile. They tend to recover from injury quickly, but they also get injured easily. Blindness is usually related to irreparable, long-term corneal or retinal damage. This treatment would act directly on the retina. It needs to be temporary and precise but not too powerful.” The scientist pauses, then scoffs and rolls her eyes. “And don’t get me started on which receptors I have to target.”

Lena frowns and taps her fingers on the bench beside her. “Sounds like you’ll need a larger team. Do you have any other projects at the moment?”

“Nothing out of the usual.”

“Please make the proposal your new priority for now.”
“Understood. Don’t underestimate how long it can take, if it can happen at all. A lot of resources will have to go into this. Better to invest in a start-up already researching it.”

“No other company has you,” Lena says with a smile. “They’d be a total waste of money.”

Dr. Châtelet shrugs without missing a beat. “True. Just don’t blame me when the research doesn’t turn profits next year. Now,” she swivels away to a lab bench with a laptop, joystick, and camera apparatus, “picture time.”

Apparently, claiming to see near-infrared wavelengths makes Lena the perfect test subject. Dr. Châtelet bullies her into retinal photographs and every other eye exam that doesn’t require pupil dilation (that will be the next visit), and she’s surprised she doesn’t receive a prescription for glasses before she’s ushered out of the lab. She should’ve expected this. Why wouldn’t her most ambitious scientist take advantage of the closest specimen that has the best chance of supporting her research even if that person happens to be a Fortune 500 CEO?

If it also happens to put a tinge of gray on the boundaries between data and investor, it’s good to know that they share the same perspective on the bigger picture.

Although her ambition and competitive nature drag her thoughts back to the research more often than she’d prefer, she resigns herself to the dismal research timeline with more grace that she anticipated. It just means she can maintain the status quo with Kara. She can surprise Kara with dessert when Supergirl duties prevent her from making it to L-Corp for lunch with little reasoning beyond “you must’ve had a hard day.” She can wash the dishes after dinner (because the cook shouldn’t have to clean, she reminds Kara more than once) with extra appreciation for Kara’s effort on those nights. She can curl up on Kara’s couch with a book that Kara insists that she should read and steal glances at the blond painting silently in the corner. If Lena has any inkling of hurt when Kara breezes over a part of her day that can’t be disclosed without revealing Supergirl, it’s easy enough to tuck away when she considers the greater good.

At least, that’s how she imagined the night progressing when she picked up a couple of fruit tarts on her way to Kara’s apartment after work. Instead, when Lena crosses Kara’s threshold with a quick kiss and embrace, she spies the take-out containers on the high-set dining table and frowns.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were picking something up? I could’ve paid.”

“Sorry, I lost track of time and was already nearby. I got your regular though!” Kara scurries over to the table and opens up the take out boxes, showing off the honey-walnut shrimp before piling the orders of fried rice and lo mein into larger bowls.

Lena gives her a disapproving look but leaves the fruit tarts in the center of the table regardless. “You must’ve had a hard day,” she recites. “What kept you so busy?”

“Ah, it’s my fault, really. I had breakfast with Alex, and that set me back for an article I forgot Snapper wanted today.”

Lena’s frown deepens, and she turns on her heel to enter the kitchen. “Well, sit down. I’ll get you some water.”
“It was nice seeing Alex,” Kara rambles on behind her. Lena hears something clatter, and she grabs some napkins in addition to the glasses of water. “We’re getting drinks with Winn on Saturday. Maybe James and Maggie, too. You should come with us.”

She turns back to a fumbling Kara wiping rice and soy sauce off the table, and her frown softens into a smile. She sets the glasses on the table and passes over the napkins, then comes around to Kara’s side when the table’s clean again. “I have a CFO candidate flying in from Metropolis. Saturday was the only day she could get away.” She cradles Kara’s face in her right hand and answers the blond’s saddening expression with a stroke of her thumb along her cheek. “Maybe next time?”

It’s a script she’s nearly perfected. Kara’s next line is “okay” with a small, dispirited smile, and then Lena kisses her deeply until she sighs. This time, however, Kara shakes her head and takes Lena’s hand into her own.

“Why don’t you want to meet my friends?”

“What do you mean?”

Kara’s fingers find their way between Lena’s, and they pull her back the several inches that Lena didn’t realize she retreated. “I mean, we’ve known each other for months, and you still haven’t even met Alex. I get that you’re busy, and I know that sometimes we can’t see each other because something comes up with either of us, but it’s just too much of a coincidence now. And, ever since we started… we’re…” Her fingers squeeze Lena’s hand gently and purposefully, and Lena thinks she finally sees a hint of a smile. “I know you wanted slow, but this feels like reverse. We haven’t even been to George’s in forever.”

Lena sucks in a breath. She wants to deny it, assert that everything’s fine, but an apology tumbles out of her before she processes herself speaking. “I’m sorry. You’re right.”

“Can you tell me why?”

You terrify me.

The thought strikes through her like lightning. The ends of her frayed nerves burn and sting just under her skin, and she would’ve jumped at Kara squeezing her hand once more if her muscles had any capacity to move. Her jaw, however, apparently has no problem filling in for her short-circuiting mind.

“I wouldn’t say I’m famous, but I am high-profile,” she says with a miraculous calm. Kara’s head tilts to the side, and the smile that bravely peeked through not a minute earlier disappears. It’s an unwelcome change that spurs Lena to regain control of her senses and settle onto a stool lest lightning strike twice. “If anything wrong happens, reporters are on me in a second, as you and Mr. Kent are aware. That means cameras, and that means you also become high-profile or…”

Exposed.

“…implicated. I want you to understand what going public with me could mean.”

Lena admits that it’s a believable argument. She probably should’ve considered it in extensive detail before she started things with Kara in the first place. She begins to carefully piece together her next words, something to clarify her supposed concerns as it relates to a non-corporate civilian, but Kara interrupts her with an easy chuckle.

“Meeting my friends isn’t the same as going public.”
“That’s true,” Lena concedes. “I wanted to be discreet, not closeted, but maybe I took it to the extreme.”

“You’re just being you,” Kara replies lightly. Lena shoots her an indignant glare, but Kara just grins. “You said this could be whatever I want as long as it’s slow. I decided I want it to be real, and that means sharing my life with you.”

_But not your cape._

As planned, Lena parries that thought away before it can stick, but something must show on her face. Kara’s eyes widen, and she begins stammering immediately.

“Slowly! I said ‘slow,’ right?”

Lena smiles. “Yes, you did. Sometimes, I forget that people can have lives beyond work and television. Must be exhausting.”

“More exhausting than work?”

“Infinitely.”

Kara gives her hand one last squeeze with a smile, and she raises from the stool with a slight bounce. “So… drinks with Alex and Winn on Saturday?”

Lena gathers some of the entrée containers and makes her way over to the couch. “Are you sure you’re okay with them knowing you’re seeing a Luthor?”

“You say that like they don’t already know.”

“Really now?”

“Of course!”

Lena sighs and settles on one of the cushions, honey walnut shrimp with rice resting in her lap. “I suppose I’ll go, even though it means I have to share you.”

Kara plants a kiss on Lena’s cheek, then hops onto the other side of the couch with her own food. “It’ll be great! And, if anything happens with the media, we’ll just be gal pals!”

The hospital front desk doesn’t require Lena to check in to the building anymore. The nurse or intern of the day greets her with seldom more than a nod, and the security guard calls the elevator before she finishes crossing the lobby. The director welcomes her with a friendly handshake and speaks animatedly of all the positive changes resulting from the fundraiser. The repairs become renovations with cutting edge medical technology and accessibility upgrades, he proudly reports that staff, patient, and family morale has noticeably improved even with the ongoing construction, and Lena solves any hiccups with a single phone call.

“Consultants in Metropolis like staying on my good side,” she reminds him with a wink.

With Joey’s new treatment schedule, she ends the meeting with a request for directions to his room.
but stops the director short of a complete escort. She fakes a text from Jess offering to meet her in the lobby just to get away, and she asks the next available nurse for better directions as soon as she can.

Lena can’t hear anything outside the door, a jarring contrast from the last time she saw the siblings, and waits for Jess to answer her knock before entering. Joey sits in his street clothes with his legs over the side of the hospital bed, staring vacantly at the laptop on the overbed table playing a cartoon, and Jess gathers her bag in the corner with shaking hands.

“I need to sign some papers outside before we leave,” she says. “Mind waiting here for a sec?”

“Sure.”

Jess gives her a small smile and softly shuts the door behind her. Lena moves next to Joey and looks over at the screen.

“What’re you watching?” she asks casually. Joey shifts his gaze to her instead, irises overtaken by his pupils, and holds silent for a second longer than comfortable before speaking.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Sure.”

“Are you a human?”

Confused but amused, Lena quirks an eyebrow. “Why?”

“You don’t really act like a human.”

Lena pauses, then shakes her head with a shrug. “I’m just a Luthor.”

“Oh.” Joey blinks slowly, then shakes his head and shrugs as well. “What planet are Luthors from?”

A bark of a laugh escapes Lena before she can stop it. “Sorry. If you knew my family…” She shakes her head again and stifles another laugh. “Earth, but… I guess… As far as I know, I’m human. Why do you ask?”

“You don’t really act like a human,” Joey repeats.

“How so?”

“You don’t get scared, but humans are usually scared. They don’t say it, or maybe they don’t know it because they’re feeling something else, too. Their eyes open wider, and they don’t blink as much. They breathe different, so they speak different. Their voices and hands shake. Their shoulders slouch. I haven’t seen you do that.”

“Then what am I usually feeling?”

“I don’t know. You show some things that are easy to read, but I don’t think it’s what you really feel because you’ll mix different expressions.” Joey’s eyes scan her face, flicking over every inch and feature, and Lena fights the urge to squirm. “You can be twitchy. It’s like you feel something and then something gets in the way. I thought maybe you were like me.”

Lena’s eyebrows scrunch momentarily, but her face quickly returns to neutral. Joey mirrors her movements immediately, then tilts his head to the side.

“Surprise?”
Lena’s lips pull back into a gentle smile. “I suppose, but there’s more to human emotion than fear.”

“If they’re happy, they’re afraid it will end,” Joey explains through his identical smile. “If they’re sad, they’re afraid they won’t be happy again. If they’re angry, it’s because they’re afraid something bad will happen. If they’re confused, they’re—”

“I think you spend too much time in hospitals,” Lena interrupts. She gives in and shifts her weight to one foot. Joey’s eyes follow the movement, but he doesn’t say anything or show any further scrutiny. “People here are afraid because they feel powerless, but if you can do something, you have no reason to be afraid.”

Joey takes a deep breath and, much to Lena’s relief, turns his head away to look at the wall in front of him. Lena’s relief dissipates as quickly as it appears, though, as Joey’s shoulders slump and his hands grip the stiff hospital sheets. “What if you can’t do anything?”

“Try something anyway.” The words come out harsher than she intended, but she ignores it and crosses her arms. “Anything you can think of. If you’re focused on the fight, then there’s no time to focus on the fear.”

Jess swings open the door and launches into a rant about a very rude sequence of texts she just received from her coworker before she’s even fully in the room. Lena isn’t sure if Jess even really looks at either of them before stopping mid-sentence and pivoting back around.

“I forgot the wheelchair,” she grumbles. “Be right back.”

The door slams shut as abruptly as it opened. Lena lets out an incredulous breath and looks to Joey, his hands now relaxed and posture straight, then retrieves the wheelchair from the other side of the bed.

“Jess is afraid,” Joey says quietly.

Lena pops open the chair and maneuvers it in front of him. “It’s why she got me involved.”

They fall silent for another moment. Joey stares at Lena again, and Lena forces herself to maintain unwavering eye contact until he finally moves. He shuts the laptop, then stands and crosses his arms.

“I’m not afraid.”

“Damn right.”

Kara said it’d be casual. She said there wouldn’t be an interrogation. She said it’d just be drinks (non-alcoholic, too) and chicken wings and pool. Kara said maybe Lena could actually have a good time.

The image in Lena’s mind of the stoic, enigmatic, protective Agent Alex Danvers elbows-deep into the gunshot wound on an assassin she disarmed 20 seconds prior screams the contrary.

She drives alone to the bar in a quiet part of the city, attention split between the road and her left-ribbon, and pulls into the modest parking lot with the inclination to pregame in the adjacent liquor
store. That’s what 24-year-olds do before bar-hopping, right? Drink to make the purpose of going to a bar redundant and, paradoxically, fun?

She ultimately bursts out of her car with her purse jammed under her elbow and stomps to the bar in defiance of the churning in her gut. The dull padding of her boots’ leather soles aren’t nearly as satisfying as the snappy click of her corporate stilettos, but her heavy steps crushing the gravel gives her a different sense of power. She deliberately leaves her arms free to swing at her sides and holds her chin high enough so her eyes can’t drift to her ribbons.

It’s too dark for her to make out Alex’s midnight blue anyway.

“Hey! Lena!”

She turns in the direction of the voice and finds a man jogging towards her from the bus stop. The dim lighting stops her from immediately remembering his face, but the chartreuse band slowly brightening on her wrist eases her scowl to a welcoming smile. “Winn, right?” she acknowledges when he stops in front of her.

“Yeah! I, ah, almost didn’t recognize you without the impending doom. Oh, but,” he clears his throat, “you recognize me, right? From the table at the—

“Gala, yes,” Lena finishes for him. “Not everyone would’ve known it was a black-body field generator, and I can’t recall anyone else referring to their hands as ‘money-makers.’”

“Girl, you haven’t seen these babies work.” He wiggles his fingers with a flourish before reaching for the door. “Oh, is it okay for me to call you that? Or should I stick to ‘Ms. Luthor’? Or should—”

“‘Lena’ is just fine.” She finds that her smile is now genuine, and it even persists when a wave of dense, stale air rolls through the entryway and washes over her. The room is as small as she expected with the majority of the space occupied by tables and stools, but it’s made even smaller by the myriad lights emanating from the wrists of the surprisingly numerous patrons. Her hand automatically burrows into her bag for a bottle of Tylenol, and she’s done dry-swallowing the pill by the time Winn leads her to the bar.

“I don’t see them,” he says loudly into her ear. “We might as well get drinks first. What’re you having?”

“Club soda.”

Lena only waits behind Winn for a second before a hand lands on her lower back. The action is unfamiliar—Jack never took the risk to touch her in public—but she turns into Kara for a full hug instantly. Kara murmurs a greeting into Lena’s hair, then softly kisses her on the cheek as they pull apart. Lena stiffens but doesn’t flinch, and she would consider it a triumph if Kara didn’t look so concerned.

“Was that okay?”

Lena’s instinct screams at her that it shouldn’t be okay. She’s a Luthor, and they’re in public, but there isn’t a 10-foot pole anywhere in sight, much less wielded by Kara. Although her muscles stay tense, her breathing comes easy, and the hand that reaches for Kara’s is steady.

“Whatever you’re comfortable with.”

She watches as the concern on Kara’s face snaps to surprise and then morphs into a small smile, and the breathing that she thought so effortless stutters. She masks it with a jump when Winn nudges her
drink against her shoulder and yells to Kara. She doesn’t catch the exchange, a fact she regrets when Kara’s smile explodes into a laugh, but then they’re walking in the direction of Kara’s blue ribbon, vibrant even despite the dark hue. Lena’s head buzzes with white noise to the point that she can’t tell if she’s thinking or not, and, fuck, Kara must know because she turns, and her eyes cut through the fog like beacons.

Lena has one second to assess Alex Danvers sitting alone under a single overhead light, scrolling through her phone and sipping at what could either be whiskey or scotch, before Kara announces her name and her hand extends of its own volition. Maybe it’s for the better. It gives her less time to fixate on any comparisons between the overhead light and an interrogation room.

“It’s good to finally meet,” Alex says through a warm smile. She stands and shakes Lena’s hand with more care than Lena expected from a federal agent, and the visible brightening of her ribbon on Lena’s wrist eases some of the tension in her shoulders.

“Agreed. Kara speaks highly of you.”

“I’ll be sure to remind her the next time she tries to steal my food.”

Kara pulls out the stool next to Alex and motions for Lena to sit while sticking her tongue out at her sister. Lena thanks her as she takes the seat, and Kara kisses her shoulder before turning her attention to Winn on her opposite side. Lena barely catches an inscrutable flick of Alex’s eyes, slight enough to not disrupt her smile but notable nonetheless.

“Kara never told me what you thought of my liquor stash,” Lena says.

Alex gives a soft laugh. “She didn’t ask, and I wasn’t going to go out of my way to tell her.”

“A bit of a shame that she doesn’t appreciate anything without an unhealthy amount of oil or sugar.”

“I appreciate you!” Kara interjects from her side. The same unreadable look briefly passes over Alex’s eyes, and Lena finds herself responding with snark out of reflex.

“What’s that supposed to say about me, Kara?”

“Nope!” Winn cuts in. “I don’t want to know. Too many food references here for this to be anything but scarring, and a pool table just opened up.”

Kara latches onto Lena immediately and begins pulling her up, but Winn swings around the back of her chair and slaps lightly on the back of her hand.

“I call the genius! This is my chance to take down the Danvers sisters.”

“I’m probably atrocious,” Lena warns. “I can’t remember the last time I played.”

Winn scoffs. “Angle of incidence equals the angle of reflection. Add in some allowances for friction and spin, and you’ve got it.”

“You forgot the part where I have to hit the ball.”

“It’s okay,” Kara says with a kiss to her cheek. “We’ll go easy on you. Right, Alex?”

Alex answers with the thud of her now-empty glass on the table top. “I make no promises.”
The first game goes abysmally for Team Genius, and Winn insists on three out of five to truly determine the winner on account of Lena just getting warmed up. Kara graciously concedes, even claims that the first game doesn’t count despite Alex suggesting that they switch the teams up rather than keep score, and soon vocalizes her regret. Lena and Winn take the next two games in large part due to Lena successfully experimenting with spin shots. Kara scrambles through billiards rules on her phone to find ways to slow their momentum, anything from etiquette to contacts, but abandons them when they’re more of a hindrance to her own performance.

“No wonder the games are so boring to watch,” Kara grumbles. “The players aren’t allowed to have fun.”

After two attempts at small talk fall flat, Lena decides not to force anything with Alex. The Medusa investigation turns any common ground into a minefield, and tip-toeing around topics quickly becomes exhausting. Alex gives her enough space for her to believe that the feeling is mutual, and Lena verifies with her ribbon that it’s without malice. She spends most of her time talking with Winn instead; his infectious enthusiasm over both the game and L-Corp technology makes Lena enjoy her time far more than she thought she would. He supplements his conjecture with puns and objectively ridiculous exclamations, and Lena’s helpless against her laughter when Kara joins him in his antics.

Lena can’t seem to go more than five minutes without being in contact with Kara in some way. If Kara notices that Lena never initiates it, she doesn’t say anything. Instead, she alternates between leaning casually against Lena’s side, inconspicuously holding her hand, or, less frequently, delicately resting an arm around her waist. Even when they aren’t physically touching, Lena swears she feels Kara’s eyes on her. She confirms as much during her solo conversations with Winn or shared silence with Alex, and, to her absolute delight, when she turns back from bending over the table for a particularly difficult shot. Kara’s gaze lingers below Lena’s belt long enough for Lena to catch it out of the corner of her eye as she takes the shot, and Lena wouldn’t have been able to hold back the smirk even if she tried. She high-fives Winn and passes off her cue while he playfully taunts Alex, then saunters over to a blushing Kara.

“Don’t be shy,” she whispers into Kara’s ear. “Your ass looks great, too.”

Kara coughs and laughs at the same time with her hand knocking her nose on its way to her glasses. Lena takes a long sip of her soda and nonchalantly watches Alex and Winn fussing over angles while she waits for Kara to recover by her side, and she finishes her drink by the time Kara says something.

“You just…” Kara mumbles. She exhales, then clears her throat and starts again. “You’re just really beautiful.”

If Lena hadn’t already swallowed her final gulp, she’s sure she would’ve choked. Her neck strains as her head whips to the side, and her breath catches at Kara’s small smile, the same one from earlier in the evening that hides easily when Kara looks down at the floor.

What does it mean to move slow, anyway?

Lena finds a surface for her empty cup and wipes the condensation in her palms off on her jeans, then gently calls Kara’s name. She waits again until Kara raises her head and looks her in the eye before cradling her cheek and kissing her soundly. She doesn’t linger, just presses them together until she feels the soft breath of Kara’s sigh, and doesn’t pull away completely until Kara returns her
smile.

“Kara! You’re up!”

Lena springs backwards at Winn shouting at them from across the table, and she’s only saved from bumping into an innocent stranger by Kara’s arm around her waist.

“Where’s Alex?” Kara asks.

“Said she’s getting another drink.” Winn holds the spare cue over the table to Kara. “Will you just shoot so the geniuses can get back to kicking your butt?”

Kara taps her fingers against Lena’s side. “I’m gonna get something, too.” She looks down to Lena. “Refill?”

Lena shakes her head. Kara detaches herself and wades through the other patrons in the direction of the bar. Winn laughs and meets Lena on her side of the table.

“Think we can get away with moving stuff around?”

“Knowing Kara? Absolutely not.” Lena analyzes the positions of the balls on the table and chuckles. “It’s not like we could make it any harder for them anyway.”

“So true.” Winn holds his beer bottle up to the light, then knocks back the remaining dregs. “Man, I wish we had witnesses. Do you know how rare it is for the Danvers sisters to be defeated?”

“Probably because Kara cheats.”

Winn groans and leans his weight on one of the cues. “I’ve never been able to prove it! She cheats by following the rules. There’s gotta be a penalty against that somewhere!”

“Does that mean the rest of us are cheaters?” Lena asks with a smirk.

“No. We’re the traditionalists who play according to the spirit of the game. Rules were just put in as technicalities in the event of a dispute between lesser players. It’s blasphemy, honestly.”

“Disrespectful at minimum.”

“We should rewrite the rule book.”

“We really should. It’s the only way to make games fair again.”

“That’d be a great slogan to put on a hat. What’s your opinion on the color red?”

Lena snorts ungracefully with her next sassy remark ready at the tip of her tongue when Kara stiffly re-emerges from the crowd alone, arms crossed and lips pursed.

“Are you okay if we go?”

Lena’s eyebrows scrunch together briefly at the annoyance in Kara’s voice, but she nods and reaches for her bag under the pool table. She doesn’t catch what Winn and Kara say to each other, but whatever it is leaves Winn sporting a grimace. Lena ends up saying goodbye to Winn with a shouted promise to hang out again soon while rushing out of the bar, Kara’s hand tight and scalding in hers.

The crisp winter air floods her lungs the instant she steps outside, and her eyes relax in the blissfully empty parking lot, but she doesn’t get the chance to appreciate either when she has to match pace
with Kara storming to her car.

“What happened?”

Kara pushes out an irritated huff of air and keeps her head forward. “Alex is being frustrating.”

“Really? She seemed fine to me.”

“That’s what I thought, too!” Kara releases Lena’s hand and throws her arms into the air as they approach the Cayenne. “I don’t get it!”

“I’d offer advice, but, the last time I fought with my sibling, I had him arrested.” Lena leans against her car and watches Kara begin to pace. “What do you want to do?”

“Kiss you.”

Lena braces herself for the inevitable back-track, the stuttering and embarrassment and fidgeting, but none comes. She quirks an eyebrow and smirks. “What’s stopping you?”

Kara pauses and tosses a glance back to the bar entrance, and Lena’s smirk deflates into a soft smile. It’s a fair reason, after all, and definitely not one Lena has any hope of arguing against, nor should she even try. She shrugs and rummages through her bag for her keys which she promptly drops when Kara steps into her space and pins her flush against the car with her hips. Lena lets out a noise of surprise somewhere between a grunt and a whimper when the door handle digs into her back, and she pulls Kara’s face to hers before Kara can utter a single syllable of an apology.

Lena drives the collision of their lips and sets the frantic pace, but Kara accelerates until it takes everything in Lena just to keep up. She licks her way into Lena’s mouth and slides her hands under Lena’s shirt, her fingers settling in the grooves of her spine. Lena arches up instinctively, anything to get more contact and heat and pressure, and Kara shuffles closer, and Lena dares to want friction when Kara’s thigh is just shy of—

Kara jerks her face away, and Lena collapses onto her car as much as Kara’s strong hands will allow. Lungs heaving, Lena remembers with a jolt that they’re out in the open, illuminated by street lights and exposed to the night breeze with only a thin row of cars poorly obscuring them from view of a raucous group exiting the bar, but, explosions absent and Kara close, all she feels is calm. Kara looks after the people for several moments, and it isn’t until their voices grow faint that she turns back to Lena and returns her hands to somewhere visible.

“Sorry,” she says quietly. “I wasn’t really thinking.”

“I wasn’t really complaining,” Lena shoots back. She stands up straight and inspects Kara’s face for any lipstick, a purposeless task considering they were halfway to something scandalous. “Feel better?”

Kara nods but avoids her gaze. Lena validates the sentiment with the glow of her ribbon, and Kara breathes easy enough for her to be satisfied with the answer, but the deep furrow of Kara’s frown and the crinkle between her eyebrows unsettles her.

“So you want me to take you home?”

Kara slowly shakes her head.

“So you want to come home with me?”
Her yellow ribbon flashes bright.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay; I'm psyching myself out trying to get the ending perfect. This is only half of what I had in mind for this update, but I figured it was a good stopping point to show you that I'm alive and productive. Posted this in a rush, so please let me know if you see any errors.

<3

refractallize.tumblr.com
This was supposed to be harder, right?

This night was supposed to be a fight for the center: tactical and defensive without so much as a touch executed without calculation. Instead, despite her best efforts, Lena had fun, and she spends a good portion of the drive to her apartment convincing Kara as much. She promises to try the chicken wings on their next outing, the sole acceptable course of action to rectify such an oversight, but only on the condition that they also order potato skins per Winn’s suggestion. Kara agrees with a broad smile, and Lena can’t tell if it’s due to the greasy food or to an assured next time.

All siblings considered, their conversations flow easily, and Lena lets a laughing Kara into her apartment with the promise of ice cream.

“Oh.” She pauses with her hand hovering over the freezer door handle. “Do you want a change of clothes first?”

Kara’s jaw snaps shut, and Lena’s sure she can hear the crack and sizzle of Kara’s brain short-circuiting. She gives Kara a few seconds before calling her name, and Kara’s hand shoots up to her glasses in a race against the blush spreading across her cheeks.

“Sorry! I forgot, um… Yeah, if you’re okay with it! I—”

“I invited you to stay the night, Kara.” Lena takes Kara’s hand and leads her into the bedroom. “I’m not going to make you sleep in jeans.”

“Yes,” Kara manages to croak out. “I just… only if it’s not too much trouble! I really don’t mind—”

“Shorts or sweats?”

Lena sincerely believed the ice cream would help Kara cool off. She even keeps a relative distance between them while they eat on the couch: no contact, but close enough to be more-than-friendly. Nevertheless, Kara’s blush rages in full force for the entirety of an episode and a half of *Friends*. Then, just when Kara’s complexion begins to return to normal, Lena surrenders to her yawns and heavy eyelids and asks if Kara’s ready to sleep. The blush returns, and Lena can’t help but poke Kara’s cheek on her way up from the couch.

She lets Kara take the bathroom first with an open invitation to any of its contents, including the spare head for the electric toothbrush, and busies herself with making the bed. It’s then, with Lena placing a spare phone charger on the side closer to the door, that the reality of spending the next eight hours entangled with her soulmate sinks in. She prepares herself for the heart palpitations, sweaty palms, and every other absurd sympathetic nervous system response that she battles on a regular basis, but they don’t come. Actually, all the subsequent steps from the bar to her bed have been
surprisingly easy. Sure, Kara is in an adorable state of mild panic, but it isn’t uncomfortable, nor are there any mismatched expectations commonly affiliated with a few college after-party sleepovers.

It’s slow and natural and easy and beautiful and perfect. Still.

They eventually settle under the covers, and Lena puts on her long-forgotten eye mask and asks Kara to turn off the light. She hears some more shuffling, presumably Kara removing her glasses and letting down her hair, then the click of the lamp switch. Lena expected this part to be awkward, a stilted jumbling of limbs until neither of them are completely comfortable, but Kara immediately pulls her into a loose embrace with her chin on top of Lena’s head. Lena chuckles and drapes her arm across Kara’s waist.

“What’s so funny?”

“Nothing.” Lena’s nose tickles against Kara’s sternum with every syllable, and she scratches at it with her left hand before tucking it between their torsos and out of sight. “I suppose I thought you’d be more shy.”

“About cuddling you?” Kara drags Lena in closer and flings her leg over Lena’s hips. “Never!”

Lena buries her face into Kara’s neck and breathes deeply. She knows she’ll kick off the covers in the middle of the night from how much heat Kara radiates, but, for now, she stretches her legs as much as Kara’s weight will allow and succumbs to the warmth. “You’re ridiculous.”

Kara giggles above her and kisses the crown of her head. “You’re welcome.”

Lena shifts again, enough to angle her face towards the open air but leave her forehead against Kara’s chest, and rubs light circles on Kara’s lower back. She hadn’t intended to ask about the conversation with Alex, but now, in the darkness with Kara’s glasses off and Lena’s eye mask on, it feels safe and almost necessary.

“You’re sure you’re okay?”

“Yeah. You made it better.”

Kara says it so simply and honestly with another kiss to the top of her head that Lena actually believes it.

“Glad to hear it. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.”

Lena feels her muscles begin to sink into the mattress one fiber at a time, and, if she were crazy, she might think her breathing falls into cadence with Kara’s.

That is, until her chatterbox wiggles her toes and taps her fingers on Lena’s shoulder.

“Hey, Lena?”

“Hm?”

“What do you want for Christmas?”

“From you? A full order of potstickers to myself.”

“...you might need to ask Santa for that one.”
Lena wakes to an empty bed, one of her legs bare and dangling off the side of the bed, but the limbs still covered rest in the warmth remaining on Kara’s side. Her eye mask slipped off as well, and she squints when her eyes open to the bright, jarring white of her walls and ceiling. They don’t compare in the slightest to the yellow ribbon pointing through the wall towards the living room.

She finds Kara on the floor next to the couch with an empty bowl of cereal and a mug full of coffee on the glass table to her side. Lena briefly wonders why Kara wouldn’t sit on the couch until she realizes it’s the spot with the biggest patch of direct sunlight.

“You’re like a cat,” Lena muses from the doorway.

Kara looks up with a grin and pushes her glasses higher on her nose. “It’s warm!”

Lena rolls her eyes with a smile and pours herself some coffee before joining Kara, now on the couch with her legs stretched out and absorbing as much sunlight as she can reach. “Sleep well?”

“Youp!” Kara pulls Lena’s legs onto her lap. “You have the softest bed in the world.”

“Glad to hear it.” Lena clicks on the TV and opens her laptop, quickly quieting Kara’s protests against working on a Sunday morning with the assurance that it’s only a couple emails.

“It’s always ‘a couple emails,’” Kara grumbles.

Lena admittedly only focuses for about ten minutes, and she blames it on being more relaxed than she’s ever been in her life. She limits herself to one sip of coffee per three emails in an attempt to be productive, but her eyes keep wandering to Kara. To be fair, Kara makes enough idle comments about the reality show of the hour to warrant Lena’s attention, and the messy bun on top of Kara’s head noticeably bobbles each time she looks up from her phone to the TV. She’s struck, again, by how easy it is, what with the calm that seeped through to the marrow of her bones (to her soul, says a soft voice in her mind) and Kara’s fingers occasionally tapping her leg to the beat of cheesy weekend commercial jingles. Her thoughts drift backwards to the night before and all the steps that led to it. Maybe she can pinpoint exactly when everything became so easy, single out the memory and cherish it or replicate the conditions for it to occur again so she can savor it. She’s unsurprisingly unsuccessful, but she does find a bothersome inconsistency that she can’t shake even after an additional 18 minutes of pretending to work.

“Have you ever been with a girl?” she blurs out.

“H-h-have I what?”

Lena fights down a smirk at the high pitch of Kara’s voice. She slowly runs the tips of her fingers along the top edge of her laptop, Kara’s eyes tracking the movement, before pressing it shut. “I’ve been thinking about it since last night.”

“Yeah?” Kara gives a shaky laugh and another incomprehensible stammer, and her hands fly to her coffee. She inhales a long gulp, tilting the mug up to the ceiling, and Lena innocently rests her head on her hand.
“Yeah, with Alex being a little off.”

Kara finally looks back at Lena and, upon seeing Lena’s triumphant smirk, puffs out her cheeks and tickles the bottom of Lena’s feet.

“You’re mean.”

“Never claimed otherwise.” Lena squirms and slips her legs off Kara’s lap. “But, really, you came out to each other at the same time, right?”

“Yeah. Pretty much.”

“But you seemed comfortable enough pursuing something with me.”

Kara adjusts her glasses with a blush. “Was I that obvious?”

“You definitely weren’t subtle.”

“Then why’d you—”

“Off topic,” Lena interrupts with a sharp shake of her head. “So: have you?”

“Um…” Kara’s hand slides down from her glasses to the side of her face and joins her other to rub her flushed cheeks. She takes a deep breath, and Lena’s about to tell her to forget it when she speaks again.

“Human?”

Oh.

It shouldn’t surprise Lena, but she’s happy it takes a moment for Kara to raise her head back up to look at her. It’s enough time to return her face to neutral with nothing more than a gently quirked eyebrow. “Not really,” Kara continues.

“So, it was a surprise for Alex?”

“More like she didn’t think about it. Like, she knew about… stuff… but the humans that I… um… had experiences with happened to be cis male.”

“I see. Well, I hope you aren’t opposed to the concept.” Lena puts her laptop on the table and begins to stand. “I’d hate to disappoint.”

“Of course not! No! And… I mean, it’s not like I’m…” Kara huffs and covers her face. “Sorry! I know it’s important to talk about, and we can totally talk about it more—”

Lena falls back on the couch and wraps an arm around Kara’s shoulders. “It’s okay. We can stop.”

Kara nods from under her hands and takes another deep breath. It would be suspicious to prod further, right? And how could she possibly navigate it without at least one rude misstep? Thankfully, the silence doesn’t last long as Kara groans on her next breath.

“Was I really that obvious?” she agonizes.

Lena laughs. “That’s what you’re nervous about?”

“It’s embarrassing!”
“What if I told you I knew from the amnesty interview?” Kara shakes her head with another muffled groan, and Lena releases her shoulders in favor of rubbing her back. “I didn’t say anything because I knew you weren’t ready.”

Kara peeks out from behind her hands with a grin. “That means you liked me back then, too.”

“You didn’t notice?”

“I started hoping during the gala, but I didn’t think I had a chance until we had dinner.”

“You mean when you missed my TED talk?”

“No, I mean that time when I brought you way too much food, and you still had some even though you already ate.”

“Ah.” Lena smiles and retracts her arm. “That was pretty late. I wanted you from the moment I met you.”

*And for an entire lifetime before.*

“Really?”

Lena tightens her smile into a smirk. The words slosh and churn violently in her chest and threaten to spill over, and she painfully constricts her throat until she can channel their thrashing into a quiet hum.

“What’s not to want?” she deflects. She lets her eyes roam over Kara’s body, soon followed by her fingertips. They trail over Kara’s hand, up her forearm, and to her bicep where her fingers linger while her gaze moves on to Kara’s stomach, her chest, her collarbone, her lips before settling on Kara’s wide eyes. “I’m a shallow, spoiled brat at heart. Lucky for me, you also happen to be a great person,” Lena finishes with a shrug.

“‘Lucky,’” Kara repeats with a laugh. “I’m the one sleeping with you.”

Lena bites her lip and barely restrains her laugh as she waits for Kara to register the implication of her words. The gears in Kara’s mind appear to crank slowly, most likely in time with Kara’s slackening jaw, before kicking into high overdrive.

“Not like that! I meant I slept over! I slept over in your bed next to you—”

Lena grabs Kara’s face and kisses her before she has a chance to look at the bond. She intends for it to be playful and silly, but Kara takes a moment to respond, and Lena ends up coaxing Kara’s lips into moving with a series of gentle kisses instead. It isn’t long before Kara starts to add pressure, though, but it’s nothing substantial, and Lena breaks away with a sigh.

“Well, if that’s all you got…” Lena pauses, takes in Kara’s dazed expression with a smirk and a wink, then pats Kara’s cheek and leaves for the kitchen. Kara clears her throat behind her, and Lena can imagine the accompanying glasses adjustment as if she were looking at Kara directly.

“What about you?”

Lena smiles. Kara’s shy voice barely carries over the sounds of the television and Lena rummaging through her cupboards and possesses the same timid curiosity from the last time they talked about preferences.
“I have ‘had experiences’ with girls. I gave them a good time but didn’t let them return the favor.”

“Why not?”

They weren’t you.

Her nails puncture holes into the cereal box and almost make her miss the bowl.

“Sleeping with a Luthor is a privilege,” she answers smoothly. “None of them were worthy.”

Lena resumes moving around the kitchen, lazily pouring milk into her cereal and refilling her coffee, until she sees her yellow ribbon brighten and swing around her. She keeps her back to the living room, bides her time by checking her phone, and pretends to be at least a little surprised when a hand lands on her waist. She only sets down her phone when her hair is pulled away from her shoulder and replaced by lips slowly ascending up her neck. Each kiss comes with teeth that bite maddeningly far from leaving a mark, but Lena doesn’t get frustrated until the hands on her waist drift down and graze the waistband of her shorts. She drops her voice to a growl and rakes her nails up Kara’s forearms.

“Something to prove, Kara?”

Lena wouldn’t be surprised if the next bite left a mark this time, especially with how hard Kara sucks on her skin after Lena’s resulting gasp. Kara isn’t rough, per se, but she spins Lena around and pins her against the counter with enough force for Lena to expect bruises on her hips as well. Lena doesn’t remember when she closed her eyes, but how can she fathom reserving any sense for herself when every neuron fires from Kara’s touch? All she feels is Kara’s breath passing by her ear, the edge of Kara’s glasses glancing her cheek, the tops of Kara’s firm thighs pressed solidly against hers, and, with a subtle readjustment of her arm between them, the folds of Kara’s shirt under her palm. She drags her hand over Kara’s shirt, firm enough that the indestructible skin underneath can feel it but loose enough to leave the fabric hanging, from her stomach to her chest (and, yes, Kryptonians are sensitive here, too) and with every intention to ascend higher. Before she can finish, Kara presses a quick kiss to her jaw and lifts Lena’s arms up and over her shoulders, then runs her hands along Lena’s sides as she leans down.

And, oh, this is new.

Kara grips the underside of her thighs and lifts her so, so easily. She swears she feels every groove of Kara’s fingertips against her skin, and it’s almost enough to distract her from Kara pressing more insistent kisses down her neck. Her ankles lock behind Kara’s waist at the reintroduction of teeth, and, fuck, Lena’s going to kiss the smirk out of Kara’s smug chuckle as soon as she can get Kara to release her skin. Kara places Lena down on the counter and finally gives in to Lena’s persistent pull on her hair, and Lena sets upon her mouth like a woman starved. Kara matches her hunger in spite of the awkward angle of her head tilted up to accommodate the new height difference, and she couples it with her fingers walking a trail of fire up Lena’s thighs and under her shorts. Lena can’t find it in herself to be embarrassed when a moan reverberates in her throat, not when Kara’s thumbs rub the crease where thigh meets hip so, so, so gently. Lena’s legs slacken and unhook from behind Kara, but Kara’s hands immediately wind around Lena’s hips and pull her to the edge of the counter, reclaiming the intimate contact and forcing Lena to be painfully aware of how much she’s enjoying herself. Another moan sounds out, and she tells herself that Kara moans, too, with how loud it is, and her hands fall to Kara’s arms just to feel those strong muscles flex.

...is the girl of steel... shaking?

Lena rips her lips away but rests her forehead against Kara’s and keeps their faces close. She focuses
on their shared heavy breathing and the faint quivering of the arms in her palms, and she squeezes her eyes shut no matter how hard they try to flutter open.

After all, no matter the scale, they both have powers to control.

Lena raises her right hand to cup the side of Kara’s face and gently kisses her. She holds them together until Kara stops trembling, but she doesn’t pull back farther than necessary to signify the end of the game, and she doesn’t completely open her eyes until she confirms that she can’t see any of the yellow bond. She finds Kara already looking up at her over the rim of her glasses, eyes wide and sparkling and remarkably unobscured. The morning sun passes through her irises from the side, and even the shadows from her eyelashes can’t detract from the clear, brilliant cerulean.

If Lena should never see any colors again, let this be the one exception.

She runs her thumb along Kara’s cheek, and the top of her nail glides along the bottom of Kara’s glasses. She could take them off, she realizes. It’s the closest she’s ever been. These moments never last long. They end abruptly with the levity of a laugh or the seal of a kiss. This time, Lena may have actually memorized the color of Kara’s eyes with how long they’ve been suspended here. She traces Kara’s cheekbone to the bridge of her nose, and her glasses rise with the motion.

Kara remains still.

Lena flattens her left palm against the countertop and pushes down hard. Kara’s restless gaze flicks around Lena’s face, but Lena can’t find any apprehension or fear mixed with the overwhelming vulnerability in her eyes.

Maybe Kara wants her to know.

Lena’s senses rush back to her faster than she realizes she forgot them. Her blood pounds in her ears. Her toes sting from their duration hanging in the chilled morning air. Her sore lips itch and prickle in the way that only Kara knows how to bring about. Her left hand has started to go numb, still subject to as much weight as Lena chances to press down on it.

Maybe Kara would let Lena take off the glasses, but then what? What if Kara isn’t as ready as she thinks she is? Or, even if she is ready, what if this isn’t how she actually wanted to tell Lena? This isn’t much different than crying out a declaration of commitment while tangled with a not-quite-lover, right?

Lena pushes Kara’s glasses back up and pretends not to notice Kara’s shoulders relax. She attempts a smirk, but all that comes out is a smile more genuine than she intended.

“I think you’ll get there.”

No matter how adequate, tricky, necessary, dangerous, or easy honesty can be, Lena accepts its one true certainty:

Honesty is inevitable.
Idk what a comfort zone is anymore. Major shout out to my wife for helping me get through the dirty bits.

Sorry for the brevity; next chapter will be longer. Took off the chapter end count because I keep splitting up chapters, and I don't want to be doing any false advertising.

<3

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Lena should’ve known better.

“What’re you doing next weekend?”

Maybe she’s gotten sloppy since handing her schedule over to Eve.

“Nothing. Why?”

Maybe she’s become too comfortable with telling Kara the unfiltered truth.

“...not even a fancy business dinner?”

Kara’s second question comes a moment too delayed for Lena to let it pass. She looks up from her phone and finds Kara crestfallen with her next forkful of pasta hovering an inch away from her mouth. Lena’s eyebrows scrunch together, and it isn’t until she registers the sound of jingle bells on her television that she realizes her mistake.

“...no?”

She vehemently opposes ice skating, but she concedes to one night driving through the most festive residential areas with a pit stop at the park to see the Christmas tree sometime during the week. Kara’s suggested movie marathon for the day of Christmas takes much less convincing, especially after she reassures Lena that she’s meeting with her family on Christmas Eve instead.

“Promise me you’ll try not to work?” Kara asks with a pout. “This should be the one day that nobody bugs you, anyway.”

“I’ll try, but no promises. I don’t have any pressing projects other than prep for the conference in a few weeks, but that’s mostly done now.”

“What conference?”

“I didn’t tell you?” Kara shakes her head, and Lena sighs. “Sorry. It’s an annual healthcare conference in San Francisco. I’m speaking on a couple panels.”

“Oh, I think Eliza goes to that. Sounds neat.”

“Have you ever been?”

“No,” Kara answers through another bite of food, “but Alex went once. I haven’t been able to get away from the city much since I started at Catco.”

Lena stabs her fork through a stack of kale and definitely doesn’t think about the other, more likely reasons that Supergirl’s alter ego can’t leave a crime-ridden city.

“Well, let me know if you want to get away,” she says with a smile. “I have jets at the ready.”
Lena works from her apartment for the majority of the week. The few times she goes in to the office is at Dr. Châtelet’s behest, and Lena does her best to educate the scientist on how inconvenient it is.

“You know I gave the whole company these two weeks off, right?”

“Airports are too crazy this time of year. Better to travel at the end of next month. Sit.”

Kara takes her for the drive on the night before Christmas Eve (only on the argument that Lena can’t appreciate the decorations if she’s behind the wheel) complete with commentary on the history of local decorative contests.

“Voting’s mostly online now,” she explains, “but they still have a cute meet-up for announcing the winner. I got to cover it for a smaller fluff piece on our social media.”

“Bet they really had to twist your arm to get you to do it.”

“I’m not authorized to publicly comment on our deliberations.”

The Christmas tree in the park is bigger than Lena thought it would be despite seeing a news story of Supergirl putting the star at the top. Kara shyly asks if they can take a picture with multiple promises that nobody else will see it, and Lena agrees as if she has ever taken a selfie in her life. Kara holds up her phone and angles it for them to be in the bottom corner, tree in the background and the lights strung up on houses beyond that. Lena stares at the screen, trying to calculate the most flattering angle at this focal length, when Kara slings an arm over her shoulder and smiles. She sighs and settles for closing her eyes and kissing Kara’s cheek, and she knows she made the right choice when she feels Kara smile wider.

Kara sends her two versions of the photo later that night: one unedited, and the other marked up with a sketch of holly above their heads. Lena smiles but texts her a question anyway.

‘Why holly?’

‘I couldn’t get the mistletoe to look good…’

Joey’s treatment progresses on schedule, and the Plastinos keep her updated with each session. Lena insists that she take the siblings to their appointment on Christmas Eve, especially considering that Eve is out of town and Ubers are likely to be scarce. She picks up Jess from her apartment (just a couple blocks from Kara’s) and fails to draw attention away from the neatly-wrapped present in the backseat.

“Don’t worry,” she reassures. “You’ll get your gift with your next paycheck.”

“Ms. Luthor, you really didn’t have to do that!”

“Do what?”

“I mean, I know there’s a company holiday bonus, and that’s really nice, but… anything extra is just…” Jess fumbles her phone, and it lands on the floor of the car with a thud.

“You provided a unique opportunity to study extraterrestrial pathogens at great personal risk. If all goes well, this will be very good for the company. Consider any additional compensation related to
that fact as the least that L-Corp can do to show its appreciation.” She pauses as she parks the car, then shrugs and glances over at Jess still struggling for her phone. “The card will be from me, though.”

Joey looks better than the updates led her to believe. He’s already smiling when Jess opens the door, and, although dulled by the sparse black particles still remaining, Lena can make out most of the colors in his irises even from beyond the doorway.

Most importantly, she has absolute confirmation that the treatment’s working. For the first time since meeting him, the lavender ribbon on Jess’ wrist meets the rose ribbon on Joey’s with an almost equal intensity.

He unwraps the presents slowly with his small, clumsy fingers and doesn’t tear the wrapping paper more than absolutely necessary. His eyes widen as he looks over the bright figures and models depicted on the packaging of the two boxes: a Lego set based on a cartoon Lena recognized from her last visit and a K’nex set so he can compare the building styles.

“Thank you.” His soft voice is as monotonous as usual, but he turns over the boxes with such care that Lena smiles.

“You’re welcome. Which one do you want to build first?”

“The robot.”

“Good choice.”

Jess ruffles Joey’s hair and thanks Lena as well before excusing herself for the checkout paperwork outside. Lena takes the seat next to Joey’s bed and picks up a bow that fell to the ground.

“Don’t forget this.”

“Okay.” He takes the bow delicately and places it on top of his pile of paper. “Jess says I’ve forgotten a lot of things.”

“Like what?”

Joey blinks at her slowly. “I don’t know.”

“Right,” Lena says through a strained laugh. “Silly question.”

Without a television or laptop on, the only sounds floating into the room are the bustling of medical staff and patients outside and the distant, regular beeping of heart monitors. Lena busies herself with examining the Lego box again and trying to make sense of the elaborate names and plots of the characters when Joey mumbles something under his breath.

“What was that?”

Joey’s head droops down, and his shaggy hair obscures his face from Lena’s view. “I’m afraid.”

Lena’s hand twitches as she holds it back from reaching for Joey. “Of what?”

“I’m afraid of it hurting. I know I’m doing something, so I have no reason to be afraid, but I can’t help it.”

Lena’s eyebrows furrow, and she wrangles her growl into a murmur. “I thought we modified the treatment schedule so it wouldn’t hurt anymore.”
“They don’t know. It doesn’t hurt as much as the first time, and they’re really happy, so I haven’t told them.” His hands slide off the box, and he slumps deep into his pillows as his voice trails off into a whisper. “Everything feels like pain. Happiness, too. I think it’s because I haven’t felt anything in a long time.”

Lena bites the inside of her cheek and forces herself to swallow once she tastes a hint of blood. “Well,” she says as lightly as she can manage, “at least that means it’s working. Maybe we can find something to make you fall asleep. It could give your body more time to acclimate.”

“I want to feel it. Jess says I’ve forgotten a lot of things,” he repeats with a shake of his head. “I think it’s because I didn’t feel anything. I want to remember this so I’ll remember what it feels like to fight.”

Lena releases her cheek as her jaw goes slack. Her throat constricts around half-formed words, more trite platitudes and saccharine optimism that mean nothing to a boy who has known too many horrors of the universe. Her hand twitches again, and she glares at it as if that will have any power to stop it. Her gaze flicks to Joey’s wrists, both overtaken by the white bonds born out of the collapse of a civilization and blending so seamlessly into the hospital sheets. Jess said that Dyrlians began transferring their consciousnesses into mechanical bodies that might as well be dead, but the bonds show that they finished the job or got damn close. How much hope could they possibly have left?

How much hope must this child have to keep up a fight lost by so many souls?

“That’s very brave of you. I suppose…” her breath catches, “there’s no way to face fear if you don’t feel it.”

She doesn’t demean her statement with any attempt at a smile. Joey gradually raises his head and stares at Lena, expressionless but eyes glistening with unshed tears.

“Will you stay this time?”

She takes a deep breath and steels herself for the echoes of his screams, resounding in her mind without end, loud enough that she almost doesn’t hear herself answer him. How loud will they be when he doesn’t make a sound?

“Yeah. Anything you want.”

‘Merry Christmas Eve
And Happy Hanukkah’

Lena adds emojis where appropriate, but she knows her texts are, for lack of a better word, lame. She almost doesn’t send anything, but she hadn’t responded to any of Kara’s photos outside of Apple’s message reactions even after she curled up on her couch for the evening.

At least she anticipates Kara’s call this time. She mutes the TV and starts smiling before she picks up the phone. “Hey.”

“Lena! What’re you up to?”
“I think I’m on my fourth viewing of *A Christmas Story*. How’s the party?”

“It’s wrapping up, actually. I know it’s a little late, but do you want company?”

Lena pulls her phone away, puts Kara on speaker, and checks the time. “Only if you stay the night. I don’t want to send you back this late.”

“De—”

“And,” Lena cuts in, “you can’t try to find your presents.”

It takes an extra second for Kara to reply with her agreement, but Lena makes the most of it with a quick glance to her left wrist and a brief musing on Kara’s current happiness. A half hour later, Lena gets a rapid succession of knocks on her front door, and she opens it to a disheveled Kara holding out a colorful gift bag.

“Merry Christmas Eve! We still have three minutes until Christmas morning, so hurry!”

Lena blinks and looks down into the bag. She moves to the side to let Kara in and simultaneously pulls out the large lump of burgundy fabric crammed at the bottom. “A blanket?”

Kara kisses her cheek and grins. “Better!”

Kara Danvers gave Lena Luthor a Snuggie.

Lena Luthor owns a Snuggie.

Lena Luthor is currently wearing a Snuggie.

A *Snuggie*.

It’s fractionally less absurd when Kara puts on her own royal blue Snuggie standing up and hobbles over to the couch. “This is why you don’t walk with them on.”

“Something you learned the hard way?”

“Alex.”

Kara makes her wear the clumsy garment in the morning, too, even when Lena insists that her apartment isn’t cold enough to warrant the extra layer.

“It’s not about the warmth!” Kara explains. “It’s about being cozy and practical and fun.”

Lena rolls her eyes and grabs an envelope from the tiny pile of gifts on her end table, careful not to spill her coffee with the dangling sleeve. “Merry Christmas.”

“You first!” Kara shoves a card into her face and pushes Lena’s envelope back. Lena opens the card—adorned with a cheesy pun and cartoon Christmas trees—and catches the gift card to Color Me Mine that slips out.
“I know it isn’t anything too special, and I don’t know if you paint or like ceramics,” Kara says with a shaky laugh, “but it could be fun! And I’ll get you lunch or dinner or whatever you—”

Lena leans over and kisses her rambling to a halt. “It’s cute, Kara. I’m sure it’ll be fun. Just let me know when you want to go, okay?”

Kara nods and smiles. Her smile doesn’t last long, though, as she begins opening Lena’s presents. Her jaw drops with the first gift: a professionally-printed checklist of the restaurants that Kara’s mentioned over the past few weeks as well as some high-end fashion stores that Lena was sure Kara had never been to.

“I’d give you gift cards in case you wanted to go with anyone else, but I thought that might make you more uncomfortable.”

“Yeah,” Kara squeaks. “This is, like, a small fortune.”

“It’s a piece of paper and a promise,” Lena brushes off. She reaches for the handful of small boxes on the end table and pauses before handing them over. “These… you should probably keep better track of.”

Before long, Kara sits wide-eyed in front of an array of jewelry placed elegantly in their Cartier boxes: two wristwatches, a bracelet, and three necklaces.

“Lena, just… how much was all this?” Kara asks as she holds one of the necklaces up to the light. All the necklaces are identical in form—a simple, circular pendant hanging from a delicate gold chain—but set with different gemstones. “I can’t possibly accept these.”

“Let me spoil you. Can’t have all my money go to lawyers.” Lena pushes up her Snuggie sleeves and begins picking up the stray tissue paper. “That’s a cat’s eye moonstone. The other two are cymophane and pink opal. They’re all custom, so don’t bother trying to look up the price, and if you don’t like any of the colors, we can switch for a different one.”

“Are you kidding? I…” Kara shakes her head, exhales, and watches the pendant twirl. “I love them. They’re beautiful. Thank you.”

Kara looks at her with the softest of smiles, the spinning pendant occasionally catching the sun and reflecting the light into Lena’s eyes, and Lena feels herself falling, falling, falling deep.

Lena needs to have a serious word with Dr. Châtelet.

It’s one thing to work before the holidays begin, but in-between Christmas and New Year’s? This scientist puts Lena’s obsessive work ethic to shame.

To be fair, Dr. Châtelet made a pretty convincing argument: the best time to do eye dilations is when Lena can’t possibly have any other work obligations. The only challenge will be finding a ride back to her apartment, but, worst comes to worst, she can hire a car… probably.

Today’s tests are to establish her baseline pupillary and cellular responses to specific light stimuli in controlled environmental brightness conditions, Lena surmises. They enter a large, windowless room
outfitted with lamps of various sizes, and a box of light bulbs organized by wavelength and power rests next to a computer and two cameras on the lone lab bench in the middle of the room. Lena sits on a chair in front of the bench, and Dr. Châtelet arranges the lamps to point at her from different angles. She turns off the overhead lights so the lamps are the only light source, then instructs Lena to follow her hands with her eyes, assumedly to record peripheral response in addition to direct response, and systematically switches the bulbs after a sequence of angles. Every shift is automatically followed by a click and a beep from each camera.

Dr. Châtelet doesn’t say much more than the few words necessary to tell Lena what to do until they get to the dimmest part of the test. She hovers over the laptop for several seconds, then abruptly turns off all the lights and covers the laptop screen from Lena’s view, effectively making the room as physically dark as possible.

Lena’s stomach sinks, and her hands sweat against the arm rests of the chair even without the heat of the lamps bearing down upon her. The room is dark enough that anybody without magic wouldn’t be able to track Dr. Châtelet’s silent movements, but Lena can see the soul bonds shining brightly around her wrists as clear as ever.

She could lie. Everything in her body screams that she should lie. There’s no guarantee that a woman of rationality and empiricism won’t burn her at the stake for such sacrilege.

But then… what’s the point?

She takes a deep breath, then lets her eyes follow Dr. Châtelet’s wrists. The cameras click and beep as they did before, but they only run through a few angles before Dr. Châtelet huffs and bangs her hand onto the table.

“Tell me.” Lena feels Dr. Châtelet’s glare, sharp even through the thick darkness. “What are you seeing?”

Lena straightens up in her chair and rolls her shoulders back.

“Lights.”

“Infrared?”

“Potentially. That will be a corollary conclusion of this project.”

She has enough resources at her disposal to eliminate anyone in her way.

“Are you an alien?”

“No tests have ever indicated as much.”

“What is it, then?”

She could destroy anybody she wants.

“I have magic. I see lights around people’s wrists, and they’re bright regardless of ambient lighting.”

Dr. Châtelet scoffs immediately. Lena crosses her legs and picks at her nails, anything to pretend her words don’t still ricochet like bullets in the darkness, until Dr. Châtelet scoffs again and flips on one of the bigger flood lamps.

“Now you tell me? There was an extra light source this whole time?”
Lena squints in the sudden brightness and speaks carefully. “I didn’t know they elicited physical reactions that would interfere with the research.”

“Any perception elicits a physical reaction. What wavelengths? How many? No.” Dr. Châtelet slams her laptop shut. “We’ll just do the tests again and make sure you can’t see them.” The scientist trails off into a rapid string of French, most of which Lena catches are insults and expletives. Lena smirks and raises an eyebrow.

“If you’re going to call me a whore,” she quips with her arms crossed, “you might as well do it in English.”

Dr. Châtelet stops mid-sentence and freezes over her belongings. It takes a few seconds, but she eventually shrugs and resumes packing up. “Sounds better in French.”

Lena breathes out easy, then stands from the chair without shaking or stumbling and wipes her hands on her shirt. “For the record, the magic stays undocumented.”

“No shit. No more meetings this week while I redesign all the methods.” Dr. Châtelet storms to the exit and shoots Lena one more glare. “All of them.”

Lena winces at the slamming door. In hindsight, she doesn’t know what kind of reaction she imagined, if she imagined one at all, but this is probably close to ideal. The frustration not so much, but they’re moving forward, and Lena didn’t get a resignation letter citing “insanity within management” as her reason for departure. She makes a mental note to review the preliminary data for what evidence her magic produced before her scientist infects her own laptop with a virus programmed to eradicate it. Something obviously tipped her off, but what?

How much of her magic is actually real?

Lena holds her left wrist in front of her face and stares at the yellow bond. Kara must be far; the ribbon glows vibrantly but doesn’t extend more than a yard out to Lena’s side. She slips into the memory of the first time she saw her soulmate bond, an ordinary day spent lonely in a mansion occupied by family that wouldn’t love her forever, and how she cried over the most beautiful, precious light that could only be a gift from gods. Ever since she learned about soulmate bonds, she knew they would be beautiful, and Kara didn’t disappoint. No matter how much her right-ribbons drift and change, Kara’s ribbon has always stayed the same pure, brilliant, rich yellow only truly comparable to the sun.

Her work phone buzzes in her bag, and she reaches for it on reflex. A news alert for street closures due to criminal activity pushed through to her notifications, complete with a stock photo of Supergirl’s family crest overlaid with red and blue police lights.

She sighs and strides out of the room. Better get moving now if she needs new dinner plans.

Things could be so much easier with just a single conversation. Maybe it wouldn’t be easy in the moment, but afterwards? Kara’s identity might not be her secret to tell, but it’s not her fault that she knows, and there isn’t a reason for Kara not to know that Lena knows, either.

And yet...
Kara shows up at Lena’s apartment 40 minutes later than they planned. She apologizes and claims something about pursuing a lead, but Lena kisses her quiet and ushers her into the kitchen. Kara sings praises of the meal although Lena sees straight through the effort.

“I know you don’t think my cooking’s that good,” Lena comments. “You don’t have to try so hard to be convincing.”

“No, no, that’s not it at all!” Kara hugs Lena tightly. “It was… just, it was my turn. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

Her attempt at reassurance doesn’t stop Kara from moping for most of the night, not even when Lena suggests wearing their Snuggies or watching The Wizard of Oz, and Lena gets fed up enough that, when a commercial for the annual New Year’s Eve broadcast plays, she gets the most asinine idea:

A New Year’s resolution.

Well, not really. Resolutions are utter bullshit. There’s no point in setting a start time for a goal that you can work on immediately. This is more like finally aligning deliverables with a project timeline. She’ll give Kara a week, right before she leaves for the conference in case Kara decides to come with her but far out enough from the New Year to give Kara the chance to talk to her first. It goes against everything in Lena’s instincts to fight, to tackle this problem head on and fucking do something, but she’s always waited for Kara.

Lena curls up with a pillow on Kara’s lap and reaches for Kara’s left hand with hers.

Always.

Chapter End Notes

When the fuck did this turn into a Christmas fic

Aiming to have next chapter up in a week. The waiting is painful for Lena too lol

refractallize.tumblr.com
With Dr. Châtelet revising the research methods, Lena finds that she can’t decline Kara’s social invitations anymore. She hasn’t been as reluctant ever since the night at the bar, but she’s still getting reconditioned to this “recreational activities with friends” thing. She had legitimate friends in college and tended to enjoy her time with them, but her social circles shrank to acquaintances and amicable business contacts as soon as she reclaimed her family name. Outings became exhausting, and she quickly memorized the TV schedule for every night she could stay in.

Kara, on some level, must be aware of this. She suggests relatively low-key activities and doesn’t push hard for the more tiresome pre-existing plans. It’s so subtly sweet and considerate that Lena agrees to seeing *Hidden Figures* with Winn the first time Kara brings it up. Kara shows her appreciation by pressing Lena against a wall and kissing her breathless, and Lena decides to keep that in mind for the next time Kara proposes something to do.

It’s not like she has any capacity to forget. She still feels Kara on her lips when they get to the theater.

They meet Winn at the ticket line, and Lena steps forward and pays before Kara can protest.

“Kara,” Winn warns while blocking her from Lena. “Let the lady do what she wants. She’s got this under control.” Lena taps his shoulder with the ticket, and he snatches it with a grin.

“But I invited you!” Kara complains as she takes her own ticket. “It’s only right—"

A police car zooms by, sirens blaring, and Kara’s phone rings loudly. Kara and Winn share a look, and Lena frowns.

“Oh, Kara, didn’t you have a thing with—" Winn rambles.

“Alex! Yes!” Kara chimes in with wide eyes. “She’s gonna be so mad! Lena, sorry, I have to—"

“Don’t worry. Just go.”

Lena hasn’t used her boardroom voice against Kara in a while. Maybe that’s why Kara looks back over her shoulder as she runs off. “I’ll try to make it back before the end!”

“Same ol’ Kara,” Winn says with a strained chuckle. “You’re buying the popcorn, too, right?”

Lena turns to him with a smile. “Yes, but you’re limited to two candies.”

“Better than one!”

50 minutes into the movie, Kara plops into the seat next to Lena with her own small popcorn and drink. “What’d I miss?”
“Stuff,” Winn whispers through a mouthful of popcorn.

Lena takes Kara’s left hand into her right and squeezes gently. “I’ll tell you later.”

Lena caves into game night for the New Year. She really doesn’t have an excuse this time, and, honestly, she’s just glad that Kara’s friends aren’t into clubbing. Kara promises her Shirley Temples in addition to the liquor as well as an invitation to stay the night in case she decides to drink (or even if she doesn’t, Kara clarifies) and a four-star breakfast in the morning.

“Oh, only four?” Lena teases.

“It’ll be a late night! I’ve gotta set reasonable expectations even if I’m likely to exceed them.”

It’s a more modest gathering than Lena imagined. Winn welcomes her inside, and Kara rises from her spot next to James on the couch to give her a hug. She introduces her to Maggie, standing by the array of drinks with Alex in the kitchen, but it’s Winn who saves her from the inevitably awkward small talk by pushing a drink into her hand and ushering her into the living room. Kara introduces her to James, too, who raises his bottle and nods with a tight smile, and she tosses pillows off the couch so Lena can sit next to her. Lena contributes to their conversations where she can, usually questions or appropriately snarky one-liners, but she quickly realizes James hardly acknowledges her. She confirms this with a direct question, which he answers curtly and parries into a different subject. She holds back her eye roll only because Kara uses that moment to put her arm over Lena’s shoulders and squeeze gently.

It’s no surprise, then, that Lena should choose to side with Kara on every subsequent disagreement she has with James, including the new vigilante making his rounds through the city.

“I think Guardian’s cool,” Winn says with a shrug, “and his suit is super dope.”

Kara scoffs, and her hand tightens on Lena’s shoulder. “He has no idea what he’s doing! Even if you think the suit is ‘super,’ he obviously isn’t.”

“Um, remember Parasite?” James adds. “Those robberies lately? Muggings? Super or not, you can’t say he doesn’t help.”

“Super or not,” Lena repeats, “if Supergirl ever needed real help, she’d need more than a gothic Power Ranger on a bike.”

Kara throws her head back and cackles. Lena takes a casual sip of her drink and pretends not to notice Winn and James look to each other uncomfortably. She also pretends not to notice her platinum and chartreuse bonds brighten at her escalating accusations until she concludes that James Olsen is Guardian.

That’ll be a fun conversation with Kara.
“Merry New Year!”

Lena chokes on her drink. “Mike of the Interns” stands in the doorway with a bottle of rum in hand, and, to his side, a bubbly blonde holds a bottle of champagne.

“Crap.”

Lena looks over to Kara, still coughing, and they stare at each for a second before Kara rubs her back and apologizes.

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t think he’d come let alone bring someone.”

“You knew they were a thing?” Lena gasps out between coughs.

“They were always casual, but I thought he was back with Jess.”

Lena’s eyes surely bulge out of her head.

“Everything okay over there?” Winn asks.

Lena ends her coughing by chugging the rest of Winn’s whiskey concoction, much to his delight, and finally catches her breath. “That’s my assistant.”

“Ms. Luthor!” Eve squeals and bounces over to the couch. “Wasn’t expecting to see you here.”

“Likewise.”

“And Mr. Olsen, good to see you again. How’s Catco?”

“It’s doing fine, thank you Eve.” James says with a wide smile. “I hope they’re treating you well at your new job.”

Kara rubs Lena’s back again, and Lena eases her death grip on her drink.

“Ms. Luthor’s amazing! I’m learning so much and having a lot of fun!”

“Speaking of fun, are you staying long?” Winn asks. “I think we’re going to start some games soon.”

“Oh, maybe.” Eve looks back to Mike and shrugs. “He wanted to pre-game here since the club doesn’t open for another hour. Hope that’s alright.”

“Y-yeah, yeah,” Kara stammers. “Of course. Let’s open that bottle.” She rises and leads Eve into the kitchen, leaving an empty space between Lena and James on the couch. Neither they nor Winn say anything for several tense seconds until James clears his throat and excuses himself to the bathroom.

Lena and Winn sigh simultaneously, and Winn scratches the back of his head.

“Sorry about him. He’s not always like this.”

“Nothing new, but,” she swirls the dregs of her drink at the bottom of the glass, “thank you for not being… you know… like that.”

“Psh, it’s no problem. You’re awesome, Kara really likes you, and you have a lot of money. It’s a solid investment.”

Lena smiles. “Sound business sense as well? I’ve mentioned I should hire you, right?”
“Mention it with a seven figure signing bonus, and then we’ll talk.”

Mike and Eve stay long enough for Mike to lose miserably at *Sorry!* and down half his rum. The rest of the group play multiple rounds of the game and determine Maggie the winner via a complicated tournament bracketing breakdown, as Winn coins it. With twenty minutes to spare before midnight, they disperse into groups again, and Alex distributes the remaining champagne. She serves Lena last, and, if her poor aim is to indicate anything, she may have helped Mike with some of the rum. Lena thanks her, but Alex hovers and ducks her head before tapping the bottle and taking a deep breath.

“I… should apologize.”

Lena quirks an eyebrow. “What for?”

“Um…” Alex takes another breath and lifts her head. “For that night. At the bar. It wasn’t you, I promise.”

Lena fights through the smell of cheap alcohol on Alex’s breath and smiles. “You don’t need to explain anything; Kara’s your sister.”

“Thanks for the out, but,” Alex sways, and Lena reaches out an arm to steady her, “it wasn’t okay, and you need to know it wasn’t you.”

“Thank you. I appreciate it.”

She’ll appreciate it more if Alex remembers it in the morning. She could’ve at least gotten blasted with the good shit.

Kara pulls her over to the high table by the kitchen, separated from the rest of the group but still in view of the final countdown on the television, and kisses her cheek.

“A little premature, don’t you think?” Lena says with a smirk.

“I’m getting you warmed up!” Kara kisses her other cheek and laughs.

“You’re objectively ridiculous.”

Lena doesn’t complain any further than that, especially not when Kara kisses her sweetly into the New Year four seconds early and doesn’t let go until Winn throws a noise-maker at them.

5

Everything Kara owns is, somehow, comfier. Her NCU t-shirt and thin sweatpants, towels, sheets, pillows, blankets, and even the new eye mask she lets Lena wear for the night have an intrinsic softness to them that Lena’s belongings can never achieve. Lena attributes this as the reason for her falling asleep so quickly, surrounded by everything *Kara* in the heavy quiet after everybody leaves and the fireworks fade. It must also be the reason why she wakes so suddenly when Kara tries to leave before the sun rises. Lena calls out for her and clings onto her arm before she can slip away.
“Go back to sleep,” Kara whispers. “Alex forgot something, so I’m going to take it downstairs.”

Lena hums and resettles into the mattress, and she pretends the rushing wind marking Kara’s departure is just part of a dream.

Kara, to her credit, only puts up a little initial resistance to Lena’s suggestion of going shopping. Lena believes that Kara’s genuinely excited at the idea of a refreshed wardrobe, but Kara claims that they should look up which stores are having sales or at least wait until the seasons change so they can find sales even if they aren’t advertised.

“You say that as if I wouldn’t just buy you more to make up for the deficit,” Lena counters.

Kara turns a bright red and sputters a couple syllables before regaining her bearings. “But there are so many opportunities for me to get them dirty! Especially when I’m in the field,” she argues. “There’s no reason for me to have four-digit clothes when they’ll probably get trashed.”

Lena sighs. “Fine. No single pieces over a thousand, and we’ll focus on materials that don’t require dry cleaning.”

“Four hundred.”

“Two thousand.”

“...thousand.”

“Deal.”

They hit the big department stores first as part of Lena’s strategy to get Kara comfortable with the prices. She almost succeeds, too, until they reach the fitting rooms. Kara hesitates, and her eyes dart around as she comes up with every excuse not to try on what they picked out.

“Kara, what’s going on?”

“Well, I mean, I know you wanted to go to a lot of different places…” Kara fidgets with her sleeve cuffed tight around her wrist and hugs her tote bag under her arm. “And I’m really sure they’ll fit! So it’d just make more sense to go, you know?”

Lena scrunches her eyebrows. Kara’s clearly uncomfortable, body posture guarded and small, but it isn’t until Kara adjusts her glasses and her eyes flick to a small TV in the corner playing news coverage of the latest string of robberies that it clicks: Supergirl must be on call. Even Guardian’s chipped in for the recent uptick in crime, as James so subtly mentioned two nights ago. Kara’s conservative button-down and slacks cover most of her skin, and her bag is bulky enough to have plenty of other objects obscuring whatever parts of the suit wouldn’t fit under her clothes, There aren’t any cameras in the changing rooms, of course, but any chance of leaving her suit exposed puts her identity at risk.
Lena shrugs. “You realize that I’ll be dragging you back if I have to replace anything that doesn’t work out?”

Kara grins, and her shoulders relax with a deep exhale. “Another day with you? You say that like it’s a burden.”

“Well, you are carrying everything.”

“Easy peasy.”

3

‘I’m so so so sorry Lena
There was another robbery last night
Snapper wants me to cover Maggie’s press conference’

‘George might kill you for making me come alone. I’ll bring some croissants back in case you want to work from my apartment later.’

‘Tell him sorryyyyy
But you’re the best!!!!!!!!!!’

2

Lena knew that Kara would be in a good mood. Supergirl finally foiled the mastermind behind the robberies, and Kara wrote the Catco report complete with a quote from Supergirl herself. She isn’t surprised when Kara texts her a hyped invitation for a home-cooked dinner with six silly cooking gifs, nor is she surprised when she can barely keep up with Kara’s energy.

She is surprised, though, when Kara kisses her deeply and doesn’t relent even when Lena falls back on the couch. It isn’t new territory, but it borders the unfamiliar and maybe edges over when Kara’s hips land between Lena’s legs. It’s faster than before, hands roaming with little hesitation before disappearing under fabric, and it leaves Lena with less time to think and more time to feel.

She feels Kara’s lips, gentle but ravenous, followed by exploratory tongue when Lena kisses back in earnest. She feels Kara’s steady hand smear a searing path up over her ribs and back down her side to the waistband of her jeans, and she feels a whine simmer high in her chest when Kara’s thumb tenderly caresses the dip of her hip bone. She feels unyielding muscles and tendons and ligaments interweaving seamlessly under bulletproof skin, and she hopes there are also nerves interspersed between them all strong enough for Kara to feel how much Lena wants her.
Lena’s nails scratch hard at that thought, digging in low on Kara’s back, and Kara must take that as a sign press her hips into Lena. Lena breaks away and utters a quiet “fuck” before diving back in to Kara’s mouth. This initiates a pattern but not a rhythm—Kara presses forward, Lena reacts, Kara retreats and breathes out deeply—and it’s so hard for Lena not to push for more. She could lead Kara’s hand just a little bit lower, let her own hand finish its trail higher, or rock her hips up and hold Kara firm against her because fucking shit she could be so much closer. Kara could, too, if her diminishing finesse and increasing vocalizations are any indication.

That’s why, when she feels Kara’s movements stutter and her strong arms tremble yet again, Lena tells herself she has to do the right thing despite the throbbing between her legs.

“Kara?” Lena turns her head to the side to escape Kara’s voracious mouth, but Kara just follows the path of her tendon down to her collarbone. “Kara, baby, we sh—oh, fuck.” Kara bites down on Lena’s neck and pulls with a groan, and Lena questions whether or not she really wants to be a good person who does whatever the hell the right thing is. She growls and pushes hard against the front of Kara’s shoulder.

Kara releases her and raises herself onto her forearms immediately. “Are you okay? Did I—“

“You’re fine, you’re fine, I promise.” Lena shakes her head. “I’ll just explode if we keep this up much longer, so I should get going.”

“What do you mean?”

Lena sighs and brings her hands high onto Kara’s chest. “You’re not ready to take me to bed, but I won’t be able to keep my hands off you, so…” The pulsing yellow ribbon on Lena’s wrist brightens, but she still catches the dilation of Kara’s eyes. Lena smirks and, well, they’re already here. She rolls her hips up and drops her voice to a whisper.

“Either I leave right now, or you use the next three minutes to give me something to think about when I get home.”

Fabric slowly rips by the side of her head. Lena frowns and tries to look to her side, but all she sees is the top of Kara’s knuckles, clenched tight and shaking.

“Kara?”

“Set a timer.”

It doesn’t make sense.

They spend too much time together for Kara to continue hiding her identity. It’s, frankly, just annoying at this point, and Lena’s tired, and Lena does not miss deadlines no matter how arbitrary or self-imposed they may be.
There has to be something holding Kara back.

Maybe the government requires security clearances and background checks for people who know Supergirl’s identity. Lena would fail by familial proximity alone, but she has yet to encounter a bureaucratic nightmare that she couldn’t conquer. Wouldn’t it be risky to have Supergirl’s identity on official record, anyway? With all the politicking around amnesty and whatever reason Superman stopped cooperating with the government a few years ago, it would be too reckless to entrust an entity with so many moving parts and corruptible personal agendas.

It doesn’t make sense.

Maybe it’s a policy enforced by Alex. It’s unlikely that Alex hates her, but she probably has her guard up, and she seems to be the type of fighter who won’t drop her guard until she goes in for the kill. In that case, maybe Lena should’ve tried a little harder when they met. Also, that means Lena should definitely come clean about her powers, right? Alex is probably the last person anyone should ever lie to, Supers included, so this would just prolong her agony.

It doesn’t make sense.

Maybe it’s something as simple as Kara has been conditioned to lie. Hell, Jess never shows herself to Lena without full make-up, and she always wears cosmetic contacts outside of Joey’s treatments. With so much stigma against non-human species, maybe hiding is the default response whenever possible, but wouldn’t dating a human be enough to change that response?

Lena sighs and eases herself onto her couch. She’s never going to be able to figure it out like this. If anything, all she’s tentatively deducing is that waiting isn’t doing any good.

Suppose that Lena tells Kara about the lights. What’s the worst that could happen? Lena has no better control of her powers than Kara has control of her identity. They’re just facts, a concept that her scientist was able to grasp and accept without any trouble, and they’ve both been lying by omission or otherwise to some degree this entire time. Besides, Kara’s her soulmate. That has to count for something, right? She has no reason to be afraid.

She has no reason to be afraid.

She has no reason to be afraid.

She has no reason to be afraid.

She drops her head into her hands and takes a deep, shuddering breath.
Lena Luthor is afraid.

Lena Luthor needs to fight.
She’ll give herself three answers.

Lena rolls her head from side to side until her joints pop. Then, she leans back until her neck rests on the couch cushion and looks up at the ceiling. This isn’t an advantage, nor is this for the intent of being manipulative. This is just preparation.

All’s fair in… everything, after all.

She stares and stares until her eyes dry to the point of pain. She’s already made the decision. She might as well get it over with. She breathes in, then sits forward again and watches her yellow ribbon.

“Kara Danvers will not tell me about her identity as Supergirl because I am a Luthor.”

The ribbon doesn’t change.

She breathes out and rests her arm on the cool glass of the coffee table.

“Kara Danvers wants to tell me about her identity as Supergirl.”

The ribbon brightens.

Lena closes her eyes. At least her earlier deductions were correct: something’s holding Kara back. She doesn’t have enough questions to get the exact reason, and anything too specific will be more restrictive than helpful, but it doesn’t matter. No one can stand between Supergirl and whatever she wants, so it must be...

“Kara Danvers is afraid to tell me about her identity as Supergirl.”
The ribbon brightens.
Lena smiles.
She has no reason to be afraid.

0

She’s just going to come out and say it.
Kara shows up at her apartment within 15 minutes of their agreed meeting time, so she’s just going to throw herself into it. They can start their night off with clear consciences and then order dinner like they planned.

Except Kara’s already hungry.
She’s just going to come out and say it after dinner. It gives them time to catch up on each other’s days, what with the news cycle picking back up and Lena returning to her regular workflow. Everything goes better when they have full stomachs, anyway, and it gives them more time to relax together.

But one of Kara’s favorite movies is on, and it’s always more special when they play it on TV.
She’s just going to come out and say it after the credits. Who doesn’t love Hercules? Plus, Kara knows every word to every song and should probably go to Broadway with how well she matches her voice to the characters. It would be rude to interrupt such a masterful performance.

But it’s a Disney marathon, and everybody loves Mulan, too.
Lena checks the time on her phone. It’s a little before 9 PM, and, again, Lena Luthor does not miss deadlines. Her DVR will record it anyway. She untangles herself from Kara and sits up on the other side of the couch.

“Hey, can I talk to you about something?”
Kara reaches for the remote and turns off the TV, then faces Lena with scrunched eyebrows. “Of course. Is something wrong?”

“No, I just… I want to tell you something. It’s nothing bad,” she placates. “This is just something that…” She clears her throat. “Only three people in my life have ever known this about me, and two of them took it to their graves.”

“You can tell me anything.” Kara leans forward and squeezes Lena’s left hand. Lena smiles and squeezes back before placing both her hands to her lap.

“I told you my true mother died when I was four. She… I don’t remember too much about her, just her Irish accent and strong arms and love for my father. I think I carry a little of the accent, to be honest.” She looks down to her hands and fidgets with her fingers. Her yellow ribbon shines bright,
and she watches the white bonds float around her right wrist. “I don’t know too much about my maternal lineage, either, but she tried to teach me as much as she could, and for good reason.”

Lena pauses and takes a deep breath.

“I have a… power, or a curse, or… magic.”

She chances a look at Kara, watching her intently but otherwise expressionless, then returns her eyes to her hands.

“I can see how people are connected. Every sentient soul has a ring of lights around their wrists that correspond with the other souls they know. It’s like…” Lena slowly flips over her right wrist in her lap. “It kind of looks like a beaded bracelet, but… not. Every soul someone meets becomes a bead on the bracelet, and the color of the bead matches the color of that soul. Just like no soul is the same, no color is the same.

“If somebody knows someone really well, then the bead shoots out a beam of the same colored light towards the other person, or the bead glows really, really bright. My mother called them ‘soul bonds,’ but, when I was younger, the beams reminded me of ribbons, so I always called them that. It’s… how I found Lex. When he got back to Metropolis, his ribbon led me to him.”

She stops and looks fully at Kara. Her jaw has now slackened, and her head tilts to the side, but, at Lena’s eye contact, she snaps her mouth shut and adjusts her glasses.

“Oh,” Kara starts. She stammers a few syllables intermingled with a shaky laugh before adjusting her glasses again. “Are you saying you’re an alien?”

Lena breathes out with a smile. “The jury’s still out on that one. My mother never said we were aliens, but we’ve had this magic for generations, so who’s to say?” Her smile fades, and she sucks in another deep breath. “Speaking of aliens… they have ribbons, too.”

“…d-do they?”

“Yeah.”

Lena’s gaze falls back to her wrists, and she sees Kara’s cushion shift from her peripheral vision. Her stomach twists tight, and she almost expects vomit to come out of her mouth rather than words.

“I know you’re Supergirl.”

She focuses on her breathing, not the heat filling her face or the numbness in her fingers, and waits in seconds of agonizing silence. Kara’s cushion moves again, but Lena refuses to let her eyes look up.

“What makes you think that?”

“Your ribbons match, as do Superman and Clark Kent’s.”

“That… that’s… you said that people don’t have the same color ribbons, but how can you be sure?”

Lena rubs her left wrist. “You have a very strong bond with your cousin.”

“…oh, Rao.”

Lena’s head jolts up at the sound of Kara’s feet hitting the floor. Kara begins pacing, one hand pinching the bridge of her nose and the other planted on her hip. Lena frowns and stands as well.
“It’s okay, I promise. I wanted you to have the opportunity to tell me yourself, but it feels wrong to hide it now. Nobody else knows, and nobody else will ever kn—”

“So the fundraiser, and all those times you asked me to… and Lillian! And all the times I… and we’ve been…” Kara groans and paces faster.

“It was never like that,” Lena says calmly. “I never used anything against you—either of you—and I always made sure you had a choice.”

“But this entire time, you… fuck, Lena! You knew!”

Lena’s eyebrows furrow, and her entire body pulses with the blood pumping furiously through her veins. “It’s not like I could help it. What else could I have done?”

“You should’ve told me!”

“When?” She crosses her arms over her chest and swallows hard. “When my brother tried to kill me? When I was trying to save a children’s hospital? Or how about when my stepmother tried to commit genocide?”

“Just…” Kara stops walking, then violently rubs her temples and groans again. “Sooner!”

Lena digs her fingers into her arms. “This isn’t all on me. You could’ve told me, too, if that’s what you’re so upset about.”

“No.” Kara drops her hands and glares at Lena, the ferocity only betrayed by her quivering bottom lip. “I hide my identity to protect people. Anyone,” she gestures wildly towards the windows, “who works with Supergirl puts their life in danger, but if they know who she really is? And if a-a-a criminal or bad guy found out that they knew? They’re in a million times more danger than anyone else in the city can even imagine.”

Lena scoffs. “So you were just never going to tell me? My brother already attempted to murder me, and my stepmother is the leader of Cadmus. I’m familiar enough with danger… that…”

Kara’s eyes squeeze shut.

Her bottom lip disappears behind her teeth.

Her chest heaves with a gasp.

Her shoulders shake as she slowly exhales.

Lena’s heart drowns in the tears that stream down Kara’s cheeks.

“I’m gonna go.”

Lena blinks, and Kara vanishes. She doesn’t see her door slam, but the reverberating echo rings through her ears like an explosion. She sways on her feet, the dissipating sound waves rocking against her body and threatening to pull her under, and she barely catches herself when her knees finally give out.

Kara is a hero. Kara saves people. What if she thinks saving Lena means leaving her?

Lena takes two stumbling steps to the couch and nearly misses when she lets herself fall to the cushions, but she forces herself to sit upright. The room spins, and the nausea returns with more acid than before, but she stabilizes herself by gripping the edge of the coffee table with her right hand
while she holds her left in front of her face. Every memory of every moment with Kara rushes through her with every heartbeat, swelling with every emotion she kept at arm’s length because she could never let her ribbons out of her sight, until every cell pulses with the pain that only waves and particles can induce.

*Kara will come back.*

The yellow ribbon stays the same, flush tight around her wrist without a beam pointing in any direction.

*Kara will come back.*

The ribbon doesn’t change.

*Everything will be okay. Kara will come back.*

The ribbon doesn’t change.

“What if Kara doesn’t come back?”

Lena’s lungs spasm and wheeze, and the teardrops collected in her chest spill over and join the blood dripping onto the rug. She yells as her body convulses with sobs until her throat chokes her breaths into coughs. Her fist slowly opens and hangs limp over the framing, jumping slightly with each beat of her heart, but the blood continues to flow freely.

She wipes at her face with her right hand before using it to clasp her left over the largest, gaping cut. She grimaces as the shards she can’t see through her blurry vision dig deeper into the wound. She blinks away the tears, then rises calmly from the couch and walks to the bathroom. She holds her hand in the sink, runs the cold water, and watches the red spiral down the drain from behind the glow of the yellow bond.

She croaks out a laugh. Why should she even bother to keep track of colors anymore?

Her hands work on autopilot, tweezing out every piece of glass she can find. After the first few shards, she stops wincing as the sharp pain dulls and blends into the white noise numbing the rest of her thoughts. By the time she wraps her hand and plummets onto her bed, she doesn’t feel anything at all.

She closes her eyes and spends the rest of the night lying awake in darkness.
So Stare Into the Sun

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lena technically doesn’t miss her flight. That would imply that she intended to take it. Instead, she lays in bed for an extra hour with her eye mask on and decides to skip the first day of the conference, then heads to L-Corp armed with her tinted contacts and works casually from her couch. Most projects and negotiations are just starting to kick back into gear after the holidays, and she appreciates the reprieve from constant meetings. Her left hand stings with most movements despite the thick bandages, but, regardless, she settles in for an easy, productive day until a single text from Jess triggers a headache:

‘Alex Danvers here to see you. She has a badge.’

Lena confirms as much with her thin wisp of a blue-gray ribbon rising from the ground floor. She leaves the couch and rearranges herself behind her desk, and she only looks up once heavy footsteps stop at her doorway. Alex hesitates, any rage that Lena might have expected notably absent, and observes Lena from outside her office until Lena nods for her to come in.

“Mind if I…?” Alex motions for the door, and she closes it with another nod from Lena. She pauses again, then wrings her hands before taking several self-assured steps from the entryway to in front of Lena’s desk. “I need to know how you found out.”

Lena smirks and reclines in her chair. “She told me she flew to my office.”

“Oh, don’t worry. She clarified that she flew ‘on a bus,’” Lena finishes with a shrug. She only holds her smirk for a couple more seconds before she releases it into a smile. Alex reciprocates it easily with a soft laugh.

“We might need to have a talk on how to keep secrets.”

“Not a bad idea.”

“Is there a chance that anyone else knows?”

“No.”

“Okay.”

Alex nods, and Lena thinks she imagines a quiet “thank you” as Alex turns on her heel and marches back towards the door. Lena’s eyebrows scrunch together, and she stands abruptly with her hands flat on her desk before Alex can exit.

“That’s it?” She tries to keep her voice even but fails miserably. She shakes her head. “I hope you were this gentle on the front desk.”

“I even signed in.” Alex shrugs and leaves the door open behind her.

Lena stays standing after Alex exits the room. Her eyes twitch, and her throat constricts around questions she doesn’t dare ask her left-ribbon. It’s not like she could expect any answers, but she
tallies the conversation as a victory anyway.

She’s still alive and intact, after all.

She begrudgingly boards the jet at too-early-in-the-morning and accepts the consequences of skipping her reasonable flight yesterday along with her three cups of in-flight coffee. The caffeine sustains her through to her hotel check in, but she promptly crashes for a power nap without bothering to take out her contacts once she sees the pristine king-size bed.

Maybe her body was just waiting to rest once it got far enough from Kara to relinquish hope of seeing her ribbon.

She almost misses her alarm, but she wakes refreshed and moves faster than she has in the past 36 hours. She makes it to her panel with enough time to expend a drink ticket and socialize appropriately before going on stage, and she delivers what she believes to be one of her stronger speaking performances.

The shareholders must’ve thought so, too, if the jump in L-Corp stock price is any indication. She attributes this good news as the sole reason as to why it’s so easy to find her excited CFO at the Women in Science networking reception later in the evening.

“Sam, it’s good to see you,” Lena greets with a hug. “So sorry for abandoning you yesterday.”

“Don’t worry about it!” Sam pulls away and grins. “It’s worth it if it meant saving your energy for that panel. Seriously? A 30% bump?”

Lena laughs. “Good thing you don’t officially start until after the conference. Someone might it was your doing.”

“I’ll have my time,” Sam reassures. “You just gave me a springboard.”

“Lena?”

Sam’s eyes widen at the blond woman smiling kindly as she approaches them, and it takes a conscious effort for Lena not to drop her drink.

“Dr. Danvers! Hi!”

“Eliza, please.”

Lena acknowledges Sam’s departure with a nod before returning her full attention to the professor. “Sorry. Right. Eliza. It’s nice to finally meet you.”

“It’s nice to meet you, too,” Eliza’s smile curls up higher in the corners, “though it hardly feels like the first time.”

“What?”

“Kara talked so much about you at Thanksgiving. I didn’t even think she’d eat.”

“That must have been a lot of talking, then.” Lena releases a breathy laugh. “I-I-I really admire your work. I read all your research on extraterrestrial viral pathogenesis.”
“Thank you; I heard you’re working on a project along those lines, too.”

Lena sets her half-empty cup on the tray of a passing server, the risk of dropping it now significantly higher than in the beginning of the evening. “That was supposed to be quiet for a little while longer.”

Eliza laughs softly. “Linda Lee and I did undergrad together.”

“I-I see.”

“I’d be happy to take a look at your data,” Eliza continues, “in case you’re stuck with anything, although that’s unlikely with how brilliant Kara says you are.”

Lena feels her face flush, and she suddenly regrets giving up her drink. “Thank you. I appreciate the offer. Linda or I will definitely let you know.”

Eliza leaves with what feels like a genuine hug and a promise to stay in touch. Lena snags another drink and downs it as surreptitiously as possible in the crowded reception hall before heading back to her hotel. She occupies the rest of the night with organizing her new collection of business cards and scheduling follow-up emails for next week, and she’s about to deem the day a complete success before getting ready to sleep.

But it isn’t fair, really, how fast Kara’s ribbon catches her eye when she had done such a good job ignoring the bonds so far. The ribbon rapidly stretches out to beyond the hotel window, and Lena tweaks her neck with how quickly she looks up.

It dissolves before Lena can say Kara’s name.

She survives the rest of the conference with a healthy combination of coffee, champagne, and scotch, then takes a red eye after the final networking event relevant to L-Corp’s interests. She sleeps fitfully on the short flight back and even worse in her own bed, and it makes a morning pit stop at George’s café non-negotiable.

If she happens to forget her sunglasses and her eyes happen to frequently droop down to her hands, she’ll just blame the fatigue.

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“Welcome back!” George calls loudly from behind the counter. “The usual?”

“With two add-shots to go, thank you.”

George shoots her an exaggerated grimace before putting her order into the register. “That bad, huh? What’s been keeping you?”

“Traveling.” Lena answers with a cordial smile. “Nothing else too crazy yet.”

“What about Kara? Haven’t seen her at all either lately.”

Lena freezes as she reaches into her wallet. “Really?”

“Hey, Lena!”

A hand claps her on the back, and she staggers forward out of surprise more than from the force of the impact. Winn immediately apologizes and moves to catch her, but Lena waves him off.
“You’ll just get only one candy next time we see a movie.”

Winn gasps. “But I said I was sorry! What if I buy your coffee now?”

“...I might reconsider it.”

He pushes Lena’s wallet to the side and hands over his credit card.

They hover by the pick-up counter in a stilted silence, Winn fidgeting with his sweater and Lena stiffly standing with her arms crossed. After a few moments, Winn makes several noises as if about to speak before his voice cracks into a nervous laugh, and Lena just shakes her head.

“What did she tell you?” she asks quietly.

Winn scratches the back of his head. “That you know.”

“Is that all?”

George places both their drinks on the counter, and Lena and Winn thank him with big smiles. They keep their smiles on until they step outside and the door slams behind them.

“Look,” Winn says through a deep exhale. “Kara isn’t perfect, but she’s a really, really good person.”

“I know.”

“She was a hero even before she put on a cape, and she always takes on her friends’ problems like they’re her own. But, you should’ve seen her during the Medusa stuff. If it were up to her, she would’ve either torn the city apart to find Lillian or put you under 24-hour protective custody. I’ve never seen her as happy as she is when she’s with you, either. So, just, I dunno…”

Winn picks at the cardboard sleeve around his cup. Lena watches quietly and shifts her weight from one foot to the other, unsure of what, if anything, to say, until Winn groans and tears the sleeve clean through.

“She’s also been working non-stop all week, so if you could, like, give her something else to do? That’d be cool. I miss my bed.”

Lena’s eyebrows slowly rise. “Oh. I didn’t realize the situation was so dire. Thank you for the briefing, Agent. I’ll assemble a team and track her down immediately.”

“Your nation thanks you.”

The morning crawls by despite her excess caffeination. She only stays at the office due to it being Eve’s first day out of L-Corp’s onboarding. She takes Eve on a walkthrough of the labs after a lunch spent alone reviewing Dr. Châtelet’s updated research methods, and Eve surprises her with enough thoughtful questions and impressive insight to make her lose track of time. She doesn’t get back to her dark apartment until after 8, and she fully intends to ignore the blood and glass in the living room for one more night in favor of diving into her sheets and pretending to sleep.

She makes it as far as clicking on a light and dropping her bag on the couch before her left-ribbon swivels around and points towards the balcony.
Her heart beats out of rhythm and pummels the air out of her lungs.

She stares at the curtains and waits for the ribbon to unravel again, but it stays fixed in front of her. She waits far longer than she thinks she can stand—minutes or seconds or hours, it doesn’t matter—then swallows hard and hopes some air goes down with it.

“Are you going to run this time?”

The words leave her so quietly that she momentarily doubts that even a Kryptonian’s hearing could pick them up. The ribbon rises, but it comes back down and glows brighter before Lena can assume the worst, and her apartment echoes with the sound of three soft taps against the glass.

She rolls her shoulders back, walks forward, and pulls open the curtains. Kara looks in with hopeful eyes and a weak smile, a disconcerting contrast to the sigil emblazoned on her chest, and holds up a small plastic bag. Lena exhales and slides open the door but doesn’t leave any space to let Kara inside.

Kara clears her throat. “Hi.”

Lena clenches her jaw tight and leans against the door jamb.

“A little late, but,” Kara tentatively offers the bag, “merry Christmas: a full order of potstickers for your enjoyment only.”

Lena’s eyes flick across Kara’s face, scrutinizing for any sign that Kara will leave again. Upon finding nothing, she sighs and takes the bag. “I heard Supergirl was busy, but double-duty for Santa?”

“You say that like I’d pass up a chance to meet him.”

Lena inhales another deep breath, then turns and retreats to the kitchen, leaving the door open behind her. She swears Kara floats more than walks into the apartment with her cape fluttering louder than her footsteps make any sound, and she doesn’t fully believe Kara even followed her until she sees Kara transfixed by the shattered table and blood stains. Lena watches from the kitchen as the hero reaches for non-existent glasses before finishing the motion by pushing her free-flowing hair back.

“Are you okay?”

Lena sets the bag on the kitchen counter and lifts her left hand but keeps it out of her direct line of sight. “I think I got most of the glass. Could use an x-ray to confirm it’s all gone.”

Kara bites her lip, then stares intently at Lena’s hand for several seconds, and Lena doesn’t dare move a single muscle fiber until Kara blinks.

“There are some small pieces. I can ask Alex to get them out for you.”

“I’ll manage.” Lena stretches and flexes her fingers with just a twinge of pain prickling the edge of her palm. “Don’t need to give her a legitimate excuse to cut me.”

Kara stares once again at Lena’s hand before her eyes drift back to the bloody rug. “I didn’t realize how much I hurt you.”

Her voice limps through the air, and it takes all of Lena’s resolve to stop herself from running to Kara’s side. She crosses her arms and tucks her wrists into the crook of her elbows, yellow ribbon outstretched and shining bright. “You need to give me more than that.”
It’s an empty, unspoken threat, but it isn’t a complete lie. Whether it’s a memory or a promise, she’ll need more to cling to when Kara leaves again.

Kara finally looks back to Lena, eyes red but determined. “I shouldn’t have run out like that. It was wrong, and I’m sorry. I’ve been wanting to tell you for months, but, with Lillian still waiting on her trial and the cyborg still somewhere out there, you were in danger all this time. I didn’t mean to get so mad. I just… the idea of you getting hurt just… it makes me crazy, and I should’ve been doing so much more to protect you.”

“So, you decided to leave. Makes sense.”

“I’m not saying how I reacted made any sense.” Kara slowly takes a deep, heaving breath. “I’m saying I was scared. I am scared. Everything’s so different with you. I didn’t know what else to do other than stay away because I knew that it was the only way you would ever be completely safe.

“But you were so, so brave. You did what I was too much of a coward to do, and I did what I would’ve been most afraid of if I told you first. All I want to do is protect you a-a-and be with you, and I messed that up. I’m sorry.”

Kara’s shoulders sag when she finishes, and her hands sway slightly as they hang at her sides. Lena’s eyes follow Kara’s wrists, her left empty and her right bursting with colors made vivid if only by the glow of the multitudinous white bands interspersed between them. Here stands Lena’s soulmate, a goddess among men carrying the weight of two worlds, ripping out all her fear and hope and vulnerability and pain from just under her indestructible skin and laying them at Lena’s feet. Kara may be immovable, but she isn’t invincible. Even Kryptonians bleed.

Maybe that makes Lena the merciless knife: a brittle, colorless blade of obsidian brandished at the mere whisper of a challenge and slicing through steel as if it were nothing but dust.

She swallows hard and wills away the newfound ache in her chest. That’s not right. She only ever wanted to give Supergirl armor.

“I’m not going to say it’s okay,” she says softly, “and I’m not going to excuse you. I don’t want you to do this again.”

“I understand.”

Lena looks back up and finds a cautious optimism sparkling in Kara’s eyes. “Come here.”

After a moment’s hesitation, Kara shuffles forward until she stands half an arm’s length away from Lena. The ache in Lena’s chest collapses against her ribs, and she can only breathe again once she unfolds her arms and pulls Kara close. Kara buries her face in Lena’s hair, and Lena’s fairly sure she hears another mumbled apology accompany a kiss to her cheek.

“When I learned you were Supergirl, I started making anti-Kryptonite tech as soon as I could. It’s why I had the black-body generator ready for the gala. So, I get it. I want to protect you, too, and believing that you’ll be okay is one of the hardest things I have to do.” Kara holds her tighter and kisses her temple, but Lena shakes her head. “Honestly? With my brother? I’ve probably never been safe a single day in my life. You can’t protect me from everything just like I can’t protect you from everything, but we can’t live in fear, either. So, just be here.” Lena takes a step back and places her hands high on Kara’s chest, above the sigil with her fingertips resting on Kara’s exposed collarbone. The yellow bond pulses even and slow, solid and bright, but not blinding. “You said you wanted this to be real, and that means sharing your life with me. Well, I want that, too. It’s why I told you. I just need you here for that.”
Kara nods immediately. “Okay. I can do that.”

“Good.”

I don’t know what I’ll do if you can’t.

Lena isn’t fast enough to lower her arms in time for Kara’s nearly bone-crushing hug. Kara releases her quickly, though, and shoots her a grin. “Potsticker time?”

“Don’t forget they’re mine.”

“Even if you don’t finish?”

“Leftovers.”

Lena focuses on opening her food container with grand, embellished gestures before finally looking up to a pouting Kara, her bottom lip pinched beneath her teeth. Lena rolls her eyes as she picks up her food and moves to the dining table. “You still have ice cream in the freezer.”

Kara joins Lena at the table and begins burrowing into her rocky road before Lena finishes her first potsticker. They take their first few bites in silence, but Lena frowns when Kara catches a drop of ice cream before it lands on her sleeve.

“Do you want a change of clothes?”

“In a little while, maybe,” Kara says with a small smile.

Lena shrugs. “Suit yourself.”

She isn’t sure which is louder: the slap of her palm hitting her forehead or Kara’s laughter. With that, any lingering discomfort dissipates, and their smiles come easier. How comical it might seem, Lena muses, for a Super, clad in cape and boots, to devour a pint of rocky road in a Luthor’s apartment and clear the table when their conversations come to their natural conclusion. She picks up her phone and idly scrolls through her news feed, but she doesn’t make it too far before Kara approaches her from behind and loosely wraps her arms around the top of Lena’s shoulders.

“So… lights, huh?”

“Yeah.”

“What color am I?”

Lena smiles and places her hands on Kara’s. “An incredibly pure yellow. Often more intense than the sun.”

“What about you?”

“I don’t have a color. My mother said ‘the curse of the seer is the inability to be seen.’” She taps Kara’s knuckles and hums. “You don’t by chance happen to see anything?”

“No. I’m sorry.”

“Have you heard of this happening with any other species?”

“Not exactly. There are empaths and aliens who operate with some kind of psychic energy, I think, but I don’t know the details. I can ask around if you want.”
“It’s okay.”

She feels Kara shift, and the chair she sits on swivels with Kara’s slight redirection towards the balcony.

“You know,” Kara murmurs, “I once told a good friend that I see every person in the city as a light, and, every time I’ve helped one of them, a little bit of their light becomes a part of me. I think you’re the only one who can really understand that. You probably understand it even better than I do.

“Flying above the city at night, all you can see are the lights. There’s infinite stars with infinite light in infinite space, but the city always shines so much brighter. Sometimes, I wonder how, out of all the planets in the universe, I was lucky enough to end up on one of the most beautiful.” Kara pauses, breathes out deeply, then squeezes Lena’s hands. “Would you like to see?”

The blood in Lena’s face plummets to her stomach. “What?”

Kara comes around to her side, one arm still draped over Lena’s shoulders, and looks at her with a smile. “Would you like to fly with me?”

“W-what if someone sees us?”

“Very few buildings have cameras pointed to the sky, and I’ll see anybody before they see us. I said I’d protect you, right?”

And you want to prove it.

Her left-ribbon brightens, and she doesn’t even care if it infringes upon Kara’s privacy. To be fair, Supergirl had already offered to fly her home, and this isn’t really that different. Still, gunfire and nausea and years upon years of longing rush through her chest and sweep the air out of her lungs while her brain scrambles for a sensible, substantial, crucial detail that Kara may have overlooked.

“It’s the middle of January,” she points out in a high voice that she refuses to believe belongs to her. “Isn’t it freezing up there?”

Kara’s eyebrows scrunch together, but the rest of her features remain calm even as she scans the apartment and fixates briefly on the couch where Lena usually keeps a blanket. She hums, then steps away from Lena and burrows her fingers under the neckline of her suit. After a few seconds, she spins around and faces Lena again, cape draped over her hands with one corner still attached to her shoulder.

“It’s a lot warmer than it looks, and I run pretty hot anyway, so…”

There’s the hope in Kara’s eyes again, valiant and brazenly bare as it stares down Lena’s guarded skepticism and unease. Lena could probably come up with dozens more reasons to stay compliant with gravity. She probably would’ve rattled them off by now if she weren’t using all her remaining willpower to keep herself from sliding off her chair.

But, this is all she’s ever wanted right?

She feels herself nod, maybe even laugh, before standing on wobbling legs.

“I’ll get changed.”
She’s weightless before Kara leaves the ground.

Kara carries her so effortlessly, arms securely curled under her knees and around her lower back, and Lena only knows they move forward because they pass through the balcony doorway. Lena tightens her own arms around her middle when they step outside, the slight breeze spurring her to nestle deeper into the cape and Kara’s chest, but, despite the chill nipping at her cheeks, she isn’t cold.

“Ready?”

“Yeah.”

Kara ascends slowly, and her solid, unyielding frame is stable enough that it doesn’t feel like Lena’s moving at all. She holds her breath and waits for the buildings to get closer, the lights to get brighter, the wind to get stronger, but everything stays still, and she realizes they have yet to hover beyond the bounds of her balcony. She looks up and finds the hero’s jaw locked in a rigid frown, and Lena would’ve passed it off as undaunted determination if it weren’t for the slight tremble in her eyebrows.

Maybe Lena should be thinking. Maybe she should reiterate the reasons they shouldn’t do this and throw in a couple extra for good measure. Maybe she should exercise some control over her limbs and stop her hand from untangling itself from under the cape and reaching for Kara’s face.

Or maybe she should let her heart beat away her doubts and take the lead for a while.

“Hey.”

Kara’s eyebrows twitch again, but she doesn’t otherwise react to Lena’s voice. Lena’s hand lands gently on Kara’s cheek and guides her down until their foreheads touch. If Lena should have no color, maybe she can imagine herself a prism, taking in Kara’s light and bending the fear away so only the purest rays pass through and rejoin their sun.

“I trust you.”

Kara exhales deeply before kissing Lena’s forehead and returning her gaze to the sky.

And then they’re flying.

Objectively, within all the constraints and flexibility of the English language, Lena has flown before. She’s flown over cities and oceans and valleys and mountains and forests all while deliberately not thinking about speeding hundreds of miles per hour while thousands of miles above ground.

It’s nothing compared to this.

She supposes she expected it to be louder. Without the rumbling of turbines or whirring of blades, she only hears the occasional sounds caught on the more powerful gusts of wind. She fixes her sight on the distant horizon—a remnant of her adamant refusal to look down during helicopter rides—until the condensation accumulating on her eyelashes forces her to blink. She catches a glimpse of the city below, near-tangible (maybe actually tangible if she asks Kara nicely enough) and so much closer than the frames of airplane windows would ever allow, and finds that she can’t tear her eyes away. She can see the individual tail and head lights of the cars trickling through the streets in the ebb and flow coordinated by traffic signals. She can see the outlines of the distorted, glistening reflections in the dark windows of skyscrapers. She can see all the whites and reds and greens and blues and, most prominently, yellows, and she wonders if, even as Supergirl, Kara has given enough of herself to every citizen to glow that bright on their wrists.
The yellow bond radiates past the boundaries of the cape and almost reaches Lena’s chin with the dawning realization that Kara protects everything. Kara sees and hears and feels anything that’s to be seen and heard and felt, and she treasures it all as precious, fragile light. Any light that burns out, metaphorically or otherwise, forever tarnishes the cityscape with a shadow that no one else will ever perceive.

Lena doesn’t want to interrupt the quiet, but the words rocketing up from her chest to her throat have no such inclination. She manages to deflect them all to her mind where they burst and explode against each other until only the strongest three remain. She waits for them to settle in a space where she knows they’ll inevitably return, then guides them to her lips and eases them onto Kara’s shoulder with a kiss.

She is so, so lovely.

Chapter End Notes

Hi<3

Sorry for the delay in posting; I'm going through some stuff that's making it a little hard to write. This chapter was def a struggle, but hopefully it's good enough to make up for the quiet couple of weeks. (and hopefully y'all don't get so mad at me like you did for the last chapter lol)

Also, I am absolutely amazed at the hit count for this story. It's incredibly humbling, especially because I haven't seen this on rec lists or anything, and I'm just happy that I can create something that people want to come back to :)

Thanks for reading! And please let me know if you find any mistakes ^_^"

refractallize.tumblr.com

Deleted lines -

Lena could never compare the city to something as desolate as space. Instead, she’s
reminded simultaneously of the complex pathways of neurons and blood vessels and the serenity of waves shimmering in a moonlit ocean.

Maybe, like the resonance experienced when holding a seashell to her ear, it’s a little of both.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!