i can't believe we're here

by InspectorBoxer, zennie

Summary

Part three of a series of stories about how Alex and Maggie find their way back to each other. Post 3x05 fix-its.

“I don’t know how to tell you this, Detective, but I’d like to introduce you to Jamie. Your daughter.”

Notes

So we (zennie and Inspector Boxer) finally collaborated on a Sanvers fic. All mistakes ours since we're beta'ing each other, which never ends well. Also, it's our first attempt at a kid-fic based on Boxer's theory that Maggie is so gay, she can impregnate aliens. Enjoy!
Chapter 1

Past quitting time, Maggie ignored the clock and the comings and goings of the detectives around her. The sun slanted through the precinct windows as it set, clipping the edge of her desk. Another ten minutes and she wouldn’t be able to see her screen from the glare.

Since ending things with Alex, work had become her salvation, and Maggie devoted herself to the cause. Every day on the job reminded her there were plenty of people who were worse off than she was. Focusing on them spared her from thinking about her own messed up life. She might never be enough for someone of her own, but she could be enough for the victims and their families.

The fine print on the report in front of her made her eyes cross, and her stomach growled, reminding her she’d skipped lunch and dinner. She sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose, promising herself she’d call it a day in five more minutes.

“Detective Sawyer?”

A shadow fell across her desk. Maggie looked up into a pair of warm, dark eyes that could have been a mirror image of her own. She blinked at the little girl staring at her before her gaze traveled upward to the woman at her side. “Yes?”

“I’m Charlotte Sutter with Social Services. Did you know an Aileen Connor?”

Maggie’s gaze darted to the young girl again. She pegged her around five, her long, dark hair falling just past her shoulders. She wore jeans, a white t-shirt, and a forest green jacket that complemented her tan skin. The kid was adorable. Alex’s ovaries would explode at the sight of her, Maggie thought bitterly.

“Detective?” Sutter prompted.

“Um… yeah.” Maggie gave herself a mental shake. “We uh… we dated awhile about six years ago. Why?” They’d only lasted a handful of months until Aileen had ended things. One more failed relationship in a long string of them.

“I don’t know how to tell you this, Detective, but I’d like to introduce you to Jamie. Your daughter.”

“My wh…” Maggie’s words trailed off in a puff of air.

Jamie stared at her openly, not saying a word.

Maggie dragged oxygen into her lungs and barked out an uncomfortable laugh. “Okay. Wow. Who put you up to this? For a second there you had me going. She even looks like me.”

“I imagine that’s shared DNA,” Sutter said patiently. “Ms. Connor was Yarian. I assume she didn’t tell you she could procreate with human females.”

“She could what?” Maggie jerked back from the desk and stood. That particular ability had definitely never come up while they were together. “Wait… what do you mean she was?”

“I’m afraid Ms. Connor passed a few days ago after an illness. She has no other family. You were listed on the birth certificate as Jamie’s parent.”

Jamie looked up at her, those eyes so like Maggie’s own filling with tears. The sight twisted
Maggie’s gut, but she couldn’t tell if she felt sympathy or terror. She got sudden insight the wide-eyed panic in her aunt’s eyes when she opened the door to find fourteen-year-old Maggie on her front stoop.

The social worker pratted on. “We can run a DNA test if you like, Detective, but for now, either you take custody of Jamie or we’ll need to put her in foster care until we can find a home for her.”

Jamie winced, and Maggie wanted to snap at Sutter for talking so coldly in front of the child.

Slowly, Maggie sank to one knee in front of Jamie. She didn’t need any damn test to see what was plain as day, but she’d get one eventually to be sure. “Hey,” she whispered.

Jamie shrunk back, almost hiding behind Sutter’s leg, and Maggie stifled a sigh. The kid was scared senseless, and the detectives standing around staring at them weren’t helping in the least.

Maggie raked a hand through her hair, unsure if she should be ashamed for not knowing she had a kid, angry at Aileen for keeping this from her, or…

She ruthlessly clamped down on the thought of Alex, of what she would think of this development, of what it could mean for them. This wasn’t happening. This couldn’t be real. She’d fallen asleep at her desk or something and the lack of food and sleep was messing with her head.

But the chill from the tile floor seeped through her jeans, and the weight of the world added another crushing burden to her shoulders, so it had to be reality. Tilting her head to the side, Maggie gave what she hoped was a reassuring smile. “Hey, it’s okay.”

“Are you really my other mom?” Jamie asked, holding tight to Sutter’s hand.

“I might be. I’m sorry about your mother. I liked her a lot.”

Jamie nodded, her lower lip quivering like Maggie’s did whenever she couldn’t hold back tears.

“C’mere,” Maggie said gently, and Sutter let the child go so Jamie could wrap her arms around Maggie’s neck. She was so small, so fragile, but her grip was startlingly strong.

Maggie held her tighter. Six months ago, she had lost the single most important thing in her life because she hadn’t wanted kids, and now, Fate had seen fit to throw this monkey wrench in the mix. The universe had a hell of a sick sense of humor.

“Will you take her for now?” Sutter asked.

Maggie knew how it felt to be rejected by family and left in the care of near-strangers. She could never inflict that kind of pain on another child, especially her own. “Yeah. I’ve got her.”

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“So you work for the FBI? That must be exciting. Wildest thing that happens to me any given day is breaking up a tussle between hormonal sixth graders.”

Alex smiled politely as Rebecca laughed, a little too loudly for the intimate restaurant.

“A lot of days are pretty dull,” Alex lied easily, having lots of practice, “but every now and then I get to pretend to be a badass.”

Their first date was going well, but Alex couldn’t shake a sense of wrongness about the night. This wasn’t really her scene or her kind of people, but she’d chosen someplace “romantic” to impress the
pretty teacher she’d met at one of Ruby’s school functions. Rebecca had lovely blue eyes and dark hair that framed a pale, friendly face, and Alex kept eyeing her, waiting to feel a spark of attraction, the hint of a connection. So far, she was disappointed.

“So do you come from a big family?” Rebecca asked.

Alex took a sip of her white wine, her second large glass of the night. “Small. It was just me and my mom and dad until we adopted my sister when I was fourteen.”

“I’ll bet that was an adjustment.”

Alex smiled again, more genuinely this time. “You could say that. We were at each other’s throats awhile, but we grew out of it. We’re close now.”

“I’m from a big family myself. Oldest of five. Probably why I love kids so much. One of these days, I hope I have a family of my own.” She gave Alex a shy glance before finishing off the last bite of her dinner.

The news should have pleased her; after all, Alex was looking for someone who wanted the same things she did. The revelation only left her cold, though, like she was auditioning women based on their interest in children instead of attraction or desire, like what she shared with Maggie, the neverending fascination and undeniable pull.

She felt it even now, just not with the woman across from her.

Maggie, perfect in all ways except one, and that one thing had driven them apart. Alex wondered if she would ever have a date where Maggie didn’t cross her mind, where she didn’t wish Maggie was sitting across from her instead, her dimples soft and beautiful in the candlelight.

“Same,” Alex murmured after a moment.

They stayed through dessert, making polite conversation for another hour before Rebecca declared she needed to get home since she had school tomorrow. Alex walked her the handful of blocks to her apartment, already eager for the night to be over. Kara kept pushing her to date more lately, not that she was taking her own advice, but Alex had figured it was time. She’d been out with several women since, but none had lasted more than a few dates. No one could compete with the woman she’d given up.

“You want to come up?” Rebecca asked when they reached the lobby door. “Have a drink?”

A flicker of interest flared and died in Alex’s gut. “I have to be honest. I’m still getting over a breakup. Not sure I’m ready.” Never mind that she and Maggie had ended things half a year ago.

“I got that vibe. Of course, they say the easiest way to get over someone is to get under someone,” she suggested, making it clear more than a drink was on the menu.

Alex swallowed. She’d done that in a night of drunken sex she’d just as soon forget. It hadn’t helped a damn thing except to make her miss the intimacy she’d had with Maggie even more. “Maybe another time.”

Rebecca didn’t look convinced, but she kissed Alex on the cheek. “Well, when you’re ready, call me. I’d very much like to get to know you better, Alex.”

Smiling tightly, Alex nodded, waiting at the door until Rebecca was safely inside. With a sigh, she hailed a cab, heading back to her apartment alone.
A single duffle bag. All of Jamie’s belongings were packed in a single, small duffle bag, light enough Jamie could carry it. There was more, Maggie reminded herself. They would go get the rest of Jamie’s things from storage tomorrow. Unlike Maggie, Jamie had packed the bag herself, picking the toys, stuffed animals, and clothes she wanted with her as she started her new life.

Jamie paused in the doorway to Maggie’s apartment, taking in what could charitably be called a bachelor pad. Maggie was barely home, and boxes from the move were still stacked in random corners, unpacked.

“I’m not around a lot,” Maggie explained, and then bit her tongue at the fearful expression on Jamie’s face. “That, ah, that’ll change, of course.” She had no idea how she was going to explain that to her captain as she was just spinning up a huge, intradepartmental task force, but that was a problem for another time. “You hungry?”

“Sure.” Jamie shuffled into the apartment and looked around for a place to set her bag.

“So what other kinds of food do you like?” When Jamie looked at her in confusion, Maggie shrugged. “We can make a list so I can stock up on your favorites. We’ll go shopping tomorrow, if you want.” She groaned inwardly at how uncomfortable she sounded. Jamie sat, curled into herself with her eyes darting around the room, like she was planning an escape route.

Maggie crossed the living room to kneel beside her. “Look, I know this is crazy. You just lost your mom, and now you’re stuck with a stranger and everything is new and different.”

Jamie hung her head and nodded. Maggie ran her fingers through Jamie’s hair, long, wavy and soft, like her own. “It’s okay to be scared or sad. Just do me a favor?” Dark eyes met hers, a little suspicious and a lot heartbroken. “Tell me what you need, okay? Tell me when I can do something to help.”

Jamie bobbed her head in another nod, but her chin quivered before the tears started. She wrapped her arms around Maggie’s neck, sobbing into her shoulder.

“Oh sweetie.” As Maggie held the girl, stroking her hair and remembering being abandoned and alone, a fierce surge of protectiveness roared through her. Maybe this was what it felt like to be a mom.

Alex locked the door and flung her purse at the couch before heading to the kitchen. Bourbon was the first order of business, and Alex plucked the bottle from a cabinet before grabbing a glass from another. She poured herself a finger and swallowed the contents all in one go.

Wincing as the alcohol burned, she poured more. She wouldn’t get drunk, but she needed a layer of solace between her and the pain tonight. Maggie was in her head again, worse than usual, and Alex ached for what they’d had, what she was starting to suspect she’d never find again. Maybe she was
being melodramatic, but a dozen different dates should have netted her at least a spark of interest in someone, but they’d all been glaring reminders of who she’d given up.

More than anything, Alex missed her best friend. She’d trusted Maggie with things no one else knew, with parts of her soul she didn’t let others see, not even Kara. She’d naively believed she could find a love like that again and have everything she wanted without compromise.

Now Alex realized she might get the kids, the family, the white picket fence and the dog, but she would never find another Maggie.

She didn’t look at the bed as she quickly changed into her pajamas and returned to the living room. Another night on the couch sounded preferable to being in that big, cold bed alone. She sat with her glass of bourbon, tucking one leg under her as she sipped her drink.

A glutton for punishment, Alex brought up her photos on her phone. Maggie’s dimpled smile looked up at her from the screen, and Alex’s mouth twisted. God she missed her. Her voice. Her laugh. The heat of her.

What they’d had together had been amazing and rare, and Alex had tossed it aside like something she could come by a dime a dozen.

The curtains blew inward, and Alex turned her head toward the balcony door, unsurprised to see her sister sweep inside in her supersuit.

“Hey!” Kara greeted brightly. “Saw your light on and that you were alone. I thought you might stay at Rebecca’s tonight.”

Alex polished off the last of her drink and got up to get another. “She offered. I declined.”

Kara joined her at the kitchen island as Alex poured her third glass. “I thought you liked her.”

“Despite what happened with Sara, I don’t make a habit out of going to bed with people on the first date, Kara.”

“That’s not what I…” Kara bit her lip. “I meant you seemed excited about going out with her. I thought maybe this was Mrs. Right, or at least Mrs. Right Now.” Kara leaned against the island, frowning when Alex took a sip of her drink.

“You were excited about this date. You’ve been excited about all my dates. The only woman you were never excited about me dating was Maggie.” Alex blinked as the words left her mouth, startled to realize they were true.

“Pfft.” Kara waved off the comment. “You’re looking to upgrade, Alex. Find someone who can give you everything you want. A wife. Kids. That wasn’t Maggie.”

Alex tightened her grip around her glass. “I’ll never find someone better than Maggie.”

“Of course you will. You just need to get out there. Make yourself available!”

“And tell me how available have you been, Kara?” Alex demanded. “I’ve had twelve dates since Maggie and I broke up plus one drunken hookup. How many have you had?”

Kara clenched her jaw, her lips pressing into a fine line as Alex prowled the kitchen.

“Why is this so important to you? Why are you trying to shove me off onto some new woman?”
“I’m not trying to shove you off on anyone, Alex. You’re miserable. I want to see you happy again.” Kara crossed her arms, standing her ground.

“I was happy with Maggie, stupidly happy, but you never cared about that, did you?”

Kara threw up her hands. “Okay. You’re drunk. I’m going to—”

“I’m not drunk.” Alex tossed the remaining bourbon in the sink. “I—I’m just… reevaluating my life tonight, seeing my decisions through a sharper lens.” She shook her head. “I don’t understand why you want me in a relationship so badly since when I was in one, you didn’t care.”

“Of course I cared!”

“Did you?” Alex asked simply. “You never got to know Maggie. Never tried, even after we were engaged.”

“Alex…” Kara rolled her eyes and turned away, and Alex’s temper frayed.

“Maggie was the best thing that ever happened to me, and you didn’t want to know her better. You didn’t want to form a relationship with the woman I loved. She was going to be your sister-in-law, part of our family. You didn’t take us seriously.”

“That’s ridiculous.”

“Is it?” Alex mirrored her sister and crossed her arms. “Why are you entitled to wallow for a year, like your love with Mon-El was deeper than what I felt for Maggie? You dated for three months and fought most of that time. I was going to marry her, but now I should move on because it’s nothing, according to you.”

Kara lowered her hands and fidgeted with the ends of her cape. “What am I supposed to say?”

“Tell me why. Why did you treat her like she was temporary in my life? I wanted her here, forever. I didn’t just want a family, I wanted a family with Maggie. Every time I consider crawling back to her on my knees, you do everything you can to talk me out of it.”

“Because you want kids and she doesn’t. That will always be between you two, Alex. That’s not me, that’s reality.”

"Reality is that I will never find someone who makes me feel the way she did.”

“No. You won’t,” Kara allowed, “but eventually you’ll meet someone who makes you feel differently, maybe even more than you ever felt for—”

“You’re doing it again. There’s always someone better than her, right? Where’s your someone better than Mon-El? I could pick a street corner and find a guy who would treat you with more respect.”

They stared at each other, anger crackling between them.

“It doesn’t matter, though. I blew it. Maggie is out of my life.” Alex swallowed past the expanding lump in her throat as Kara dropped her gaze. “Now you can tell yourself you were right all along. I guess it's a good thing you didn't bother becoming her friend, huh?”

“I should go,” Kara mumbled. “I’m sorry you feel that way.”

“Tell me I’m wrong.”
Kara opened her mouth only to close it. She pivoted on her boot heel, stalking to the balcony door. “Night, Alex.”

With a gust of wind she leapt into the night, leaving Alex to mourn in peace.

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Aware of young eyes tracking her every move, Maggie cleared out a couple of drawers in her dresser. The situation still seemed like a dream, that her alarm would go off any moment and she’d wake to an empty apartment. There was no way she had a daughter.

A daughter. The weight of the word hit her in full measure, and Maggie swayed on her knees, gripping the drawer. Her future, or rather, the future she had without Alex, had narrowed down to her job and the biggest case of her career and now… everything had changed in an instant.

She had to make choices for two now. She was responsible for another human being. Maggie never imagined how scary those prospects could be.

“Hey,” she said quietly. “You wanna put your stuff away?” She patted the lip of the drawer and Jamie nodded, sliding off the couch and dragging her bag over.

“Thank you.”

Maggie’s lips twitched. Aileen had raised a polite kid, but now that task was on her to complete. She prayed she would be up for it for Jamie’s sake, but she wouldn’t fail her own child the way her parents had failed her. “I’ll clean out some space in the closet, okay?”

Jamie held her gaze for a moment then nodded. They both went to work, and Maggie snuck a peek or two as Jamie neatly put away her clothes. She needed to enroll Jamie in school. Find someone to look after her in the afternoons…

There were too many things to contemplate so Maggie shoved them aside. Getting through their first night together would be hard enough.

“Do you like it?”

Maggie glanced down, confused. “Like what?”

Jamie’s fingers hesitated over the badge at Maggie’s hip. “Being a police officer.”

Small talk. She could do small talk. “I do. My father was a cop. It’s all I ever wanted to be.” She wondered what her dad would think about this development. Would her parents claim Jamie as family, or would they see her as nothing but a further stain on the Rodas name?

Maggie unclipped her shield and offered it to Jamie, earning her the first glimmer of a smile she’d seen. She had dimples, Maggie realized, her DNA at work.

Jamie traced the design, running her fingers over the planes and ridges. “Do you investigate murders and stuff?”

“Sometimes.” Maggie crouched down so they were at eye level. “I actually work in the science division. Do you know what that is?”

“You arrest aliens.”

“Sometimes,” Maggie said again. “I protect them a lot, too.”
“You ever meet Supergirl?” Jamie handed the badge back.

Maggie sighed, memories of a different Danvers sister coming to mind as she clipped the shield back on her belt. This would be so much easier to handle with Alex there, if they could tackle this challenge as a couple. The fleeting thought to call her crossed Maggie’s mind, but she just as quickly dismissed it. They’d had their chance. She hadn’t been enough for Alex, and she’d be damned if she crawled back now, offering Alex what she really wanted: a child.

“I’ve met Supergirl and Superman, actually.”

“No way.”

Snorting softly, Maggie would take whatever common ground they could find. She sat down next to Jamie on the floor. “What do you want to know?”

Jamie opened up a little more, peppering her with questions about Clark and Kara for almost an hour. Maggie had a hunch she would need to invest in a Supergirl bedspread soon and her nose crinkled in distaste, but if it made Jamie feel more at home, she’d deal.

Finally, Jamie yawned once, and then again, and Maggie smiled as Jamie fought her sleepiness to ask another question. “How about I answer that in the morning? Over breakfast?” She stood and reached for Jamie’s hand, and the warmth that shot through her when Jamie took it without hesitation surprised her.

Jamie changed into her purple Powerpuff Girls pajamas, and Maggie mentally cataloged all the things she had to buy: a stepstool so Jamie could reach the sink, bubblegum-flavored toothpaste because apparently Maggie’s was ‘gross,’ a nightlight, more towels...

As they stepped out of the bathroom, Jamie paused, taking in the bedroom and living room beyond the door. She stared at the couch for a second, clutched her threadbare stuffed animal that might have been a rabbit in another life tighter to her chest, and started to walk toward it.

Without a thought, Maggie scooped her up and carried her to the bed, settling her on it gently. “I think we can share, don’t you? I’m little and you littler, so we’ll probably fit.” Jamie giggled and snuggled under the covers. “Just until we get you your own bed. Okay?”

“Yeah.”

“You, ah, want me to read you a story or something?” Maggie looked around but didn’t see any books, and she didn’t think any of her textbooks on criminal procedure were really appropriate for kindergarteners.

“I forgot my books.”

“Well, how about I tell you a story, then?” Jamie gazed at her dubiously, and Maggie didn’t blame the kid one bit as she searched her brain for something, anything, she could talk about without scarring her for life. “How about a Supergirl story?”

That did the trick. Jamie’s face brightened, and she scooted over to make room. Maggie settled next to her and spun a tale about Supergirl saving the city from a terrible villain until Jamie’s eyes drooped and she fell asleep, curling around her rabbit in the middle of the bed.

Maggie watched her for a quiet moment. There was something unnerving about seeing herself so clearly in another, tiny human being, but she had to admit it was a little amazing too. Propping herself up against the headboard, Maggie opened her shopping app and started to make a list.
Sweating through her black t-shirt in the mid-morning sun, Maggie closed the trunk of her car with a sigh of relief. Thanks to a busted elevator, her lower back now ached from carrying Jamie’s things down three flights of stairs. The shitty landlord had boxed up the Connors’ belongings and jammed them into a storage closet so he could rent out Aileen’s place before her body was even cold.

Maggie might have threatened him with a little police brutality if he did anything with Aileen’s things before she returned with a rented trailer to retrieve the rest of it. The way he’d scurried off suggested he believed her.

Not that she was much of a chatterbox, but Jamie had been unusually quiet all morning. Being home had to remind her of who was missing from her life, and Maggie tried to coax a smile from her once or twice before giving up and focusing on getting them out of there as quickly as possible.

She took a deep breath, eyeing the kid where Jamie sat on the entryway stairs, stabbing a stick she had scrounged up into a small patch of exposed dirt between her feet. Maggie wished like hell she didn’t know how Jamie felt, but maybe the point of all she’d gone through was to be what Jamie needed now.

Maggie sat down next to her daughter on the concrete steps, the traffic from the freeway a few blocks over filling the silence. She said nothing at first, hoping Jamie would share what was on her young mind, but Jamie continued to dig and ignored her.

“I’ll come back for your mom’s things this weekend, okay?” Maggie offered.

Jamie nodded, her small jaw clenched.

Sighing, Maggie glanced around the neighborhood. She was well acquainted, having patrolled it for several years before she’d made the leap to detective. She’d met Aileen at a grocery store three blocks from there. While these streets didn’t house the richest people in National City, they were full of good humans and aliens alike. The sense of community was something you couldn’t buy.

“You like living here?” Maggie asked, feeling her way carefully.

“All my friends are here.”

The poor kid hadn’t just lost her mother, she was losing her way of life and getting Maggie in exchange. Seemed like a pretty raw, lousy deal.

“What about school? You like it?”

“It’s okay.”

“There aren’t many weeks left before summer break. We could figure out a way for you to finish out the year there if you want.”
Jamie looked up at her, her features skeptical. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.” Maggie gave her a fleeting grin.

“You smile like me,” Jamie observed.

“We have dimples. They run in… they run in our family.” Maggie swallowed. Her mother had them too. “Listen, I–I know this has been the only home you’ve ever known and now you’re stuck with me, but I’ll do what I can to make all this easier, okay?”

Dark eyes filled with tears, but none fell. Jamie nodded again as she glanced away.

“Jamie,” Maggie said softly, and she realized with a start it was the first time she’d spoken her daughter’s name out loud. “Can you do me a favor?”

“Sure.” Jamie looked at her again, curious and seemingly surprised to be asked.

“I’m an idiot about the whole parenting thing. I’ve been a cool aunt before, but never a… never a…”

“Mom?” Jamie guessed.

Jesus, that was a scary word. “Yeah. I’m going to screw up a lot. A lot. I have a ton of stuff to learn, but I’m going to try really, really hard. Can you be patient with me and let me know when I’m being a dummy?”

A sliver of a smile came to Jamie’s lips. “You can’t be a dummy. Cops are too smart to be dummies.”

“You think so, huh? There are plenty of people in this city who would disagree with you.”

“Is it…” Jamie dug the stick into the dirt again. “Is it okay if I call you Maggie instead of mom?”

Maggie’s breath hitched as a confusing wave of emotions tumbled through her at the simple request. Mostly, she was relieved, but the faint twinge of disappointment surprised her. “Sure. Unless you want to call me detective.”

She grinned at her joke, but Jamie just stared at her, her eyebrows knitting in confusion.

“Why would I do that?”

“I, it was… nevermind.” Maggie patted her knee and stood. “Come on. What do you say we swing by the store and get us something to eat?”

“Okay.” Jamie got to her feet, her small hand slipping inside Maggie’s, but Maggie didn’t miss how hard she held on as she left her world behind.

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Everyone at the DEO noticed the tension in short order. Kara had naively hoped all would be forgiven after Alex slept off whatever mood she’d been in the night before, but her sister hadn’t said a word to her since Kara arrived twenty minutes ago.

She glanced across the command table, trying to catch Alex’s eye as Winn briefed them on a problematic alien that had been spotted in National City. Her own temper simmered at being ignored, at all the things Alex had accused her of last night. Alex had no right to trash her relationship with Mon-El, and all that nonsense about her mistreating Maggie…
How was she supposed to get to know Maggie better, anyway? Alex had spent pretty much every free moment with her once they’d started dating. They’d been joined at the hip. Kara could never understand how they could be around each other that much and not drive each other crazy. When she’d been with Mon-El, more than a day together usually resulted in her wanting to fling him into the sun.

They had rarely included Kara in their plans, and usually only if the whole gang had been invited. She’d barely gotten time with Alex, let alone Maggie. Now that the relationship was over, at least Kara had her sister back.

Or she did until last night.

Kara crossed her arms, glaring at Alex who continued to ignore her existence with practiced ease. The smarter agents avoided them. Winn tried a joke or two with stilted results, and J’onn eyed them both with patented space dad disapproval.

Briefing over, Alex pivoted on her heel and stalked away without a word, heading to her lab. Kara pursed her lips and watched her go, unsure what to feel or do.

“Everything okay between you two?” J’onn asked.

“Fine. I’ll do a quick patrol and then head back to CatCo.” Kara made a hasty escape. No use staying where she wasn’t wanted. She headed for the stairs and the launch pad, only to pause halfway to study Alex as she settled at her desk.

Winn joined her on the steps. “You two gonna kiss and make up soon? It was hella tense during that meeting.”

Scowling, Kara shot him a glare and Winn held up his hands.

“What is going on with you two?” he pressed.

“We had a fight last night. Alex was a little drunk and said a few things I didn’t appreciate.”

“What kinds of things?”

Kara turned her back on Alex to face him. “She’s still mourning Maggie, but last night, she took it out on me.”

“I’m sure whatever Alex said, she didn’t mean it. Give her a day or two and she’ll be back to her less grumpy self.”

“She basically accused me of hating Maggie. Said I didn’t treat her well. That I can’t wait for another woman to replace her in Alex’s life. That’s stupid, right?” Kara snorted at the mere idea.

Winn opened his mouth only to close it. He winced as he thought through his response.

“Right?” Kara repeated with more emphasis.

“Have you talked to Maggie since they broke up?”

“No. Why would I?” Kara crossed her arms. No way was she staying friends with someone who didn’t move heaven and earth to make her sister happy.

Winn tucked his tablet under his arm and stuffed his hands into his pants pockets. “Don’t you care how she’s doing? Maggie doesn’t have family, Kara. Alex was her family, and she lost her. You
know how much that hurts, to have your world ripped away from you.”

Kara frowned and fussed with her cape. “It’s not like you still talk to her...”

“Oh of course I do. We see each other a few times a month. Go out for drinks and play pool. James comes occasionally. So has J’onn. Even Lena has tagged along to dinner a couple of times. We didn’t stop being Maggie’s friends just because Alex called things off.”

Defensive now, Kara shrugged. “We never hit it off. She hasn’t even texted me once.”

“She’s the one hurting. Why does Maggie have to be the one to connect?”

Kara peeked over her shoulder at Alex, Winn’s assessment making her uncomfortable, but he wasn’t done, unfortunately.

“You know, Kara, Alex has a point. You never really tried with Maggie. At first, I assumed you were getting used to Alex being gay and being around Maggie... unnerved you or something.”

She swung back around. “You know I don’t care about that!”

“That’s why I was so confused! Then I guessed you were giving them time and space to get to know each other, and when the time was right, you’d make the effort. Except... you never did. You started dating Mon-El, and then you...”

Kara stepped into his space, and Winn backed up. “I what?”

“Look, I couldn’t help comparing why I had with Lyra to Alex and Maggie. Maggie changed Alex’s life, made her happier than she’s ever been. Can you or I say the same about our relationships?”

“You think I was jealous?” Kara shook her head. “I loved Mon-El.”

“I’m sure you did, but he didn’t love you like Maggie loved Alex. He didn’t treat you with the same respect or care. Your sister and her fiancée had what we all want, Kara. They had... magic. Maybe you resented Maggie for bringing that into Alex’s life when Mon-El didn’t do the same for you. Maybe you resented her for taking up Alex’s time when you used to have it all to yourself. I don’t know. You just never got to know her. My two cents? You missed out.” Winn cuffed her on the shoulder and headed up the stairs.

Kara watched him go before glancing back at her sister in time to see Alex look away.

She was not jealous of Maggie Sawyer. Please.

But guilt settled heavy and cold in her stomach, making it ache. Kara ignored it, heading for the launch pad. Unfortunately, the city was quiet for a change, leaving Kara with a lot on her mind.

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Jamie was acting a little too mature for her age, almost unnervingly so. Whether it was the alien genes or the loss of her mother, Maggie couldn’t say, but she was too solemn and serious for a six-year-old. She kinda freaked Maggie out.

At least their tastes appeared to be compatible. Jamie preferred fresh fruits and vegetables to junk food, even turning down packaged foods Maggie thought all kids enjoyed, like chips. Her only vice appeared to be Pop-Tarts. In the breakfast aisle, she stood for a long time, her jaw set as she held two different flavors, unable to choose between the two.
“You can get them both if you want,” Maggie prodded gently.

Jamie looked up at her with eyes so much like her own it almost took Maggie’s breath away. “Yeah?” she asked in a small voice.

At Maggie’s nod, she dropped both boxes in the cart.

“Wildlicious Wild Berry?” Maggie eyed the purple icing on the picture with a frown.

“It’s the best! You have to try it.”

“Sure, kiddo.”

Jamie glanced up at her again, and Maggie squirmed under the intensity of her gaze. She was a police detective for heaven’s sake. How did a child make her so jumpy? “What? You don’t like kiddo?”

“It’s fine.” Her eyes still regarded Maggie seriously.

“Remember when I said you should tell me when I’m messing up?”

“It was just this morning,” Jamie answered in her best duh voice, and Maggie smiled at her attitude. Serious or not, she was definitely her daughter in every way. The thought was both reassuring and terrifying.

“Well, that goes for questions too. If you want to know something, just ask.”

A vibration at her hip startled her, and Maggie grabbed her phone, holding up a finger to let Jamie know to wait. “Sawyer.”

“Hey, Maggie, I just sent you those files.” Noise from the DEO backgrounded Winn’s voice, and she could picture him slumped in his chair, punching through screens of data out of habit. “If you pull them up, I can walk you through them. They aren’t the plans to the Death Star, but…

“I’m not at my desk.” Maggie caught Jamie’s hand, and they wandered out of the breakfast aisle and into a quieter section of the store.

“Oh. Okay. Want me to call when you get back?”

Jamie gravitated toward the art supplies, her fingers stroking the cover of a drawing pad before she snatched them back.

“Not today,” Maggie answered distractedly. “I took the day off.”

“You took the day off?”

“Yeah, Winn, it happens. I have some things to take care of.” Her tone sounded defensive even to her own ears, and she winced.

“Well, okay, do you want to call me tomorrow and I’ll…”

“I’m off tomorrow too.” A long silence greeted that, and she sighed. “I’ll look over the files sometime in the next few days and call you on Monday, okay?” Jamie had picked up a star map and unfurled it to see the constellations, but she was struggling to get it to fold correctly. “Winn, I gotta go. I’ll, ah, talk to you Monday.”
Winn started to say more, but Maggie hung up on him, tucking the phone into her back pocket.

Together, they got the map folded, but Jamie didn’t seem ready to re-start their conversation so Maggie let it drop. If they were as alike as she suspected, the topic would come up again soon enough.

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“That was weird.” Winn stared at his phone, unaware he had spoken aloud until a sharp voice sounded behind him.

“What was weird?”

He swiveled around in his chair so fast he nearly toppled over. “Oh, hey, Alex, ah, nothing, nothing is weird. Everything is fine. Just fine.”

Alex crossed her arms, her eyes narrowing, and Winn sighed. He wilted under that look every time, and he knew this would be no different. If Alex had laser vision that particular expression would be terrifying.

“That was…” Winn swallowed, not wanting to hurt her. “That was Maggie.”

Alex blinked, all traces of the intimidating agent vanishing in an instant. “Oh. Is she… everything okay?”

“Fine. Yeah, she’s fine. I’m just helping her out with a, a thing, and I was going to walk her through it, the thing, but she took a day off. Two days actually. Guess she’s got a long weekend planned or…” Winn shut up too late, realizing how that sounded, what Alex would think.

Alex said nothing, her features a blank mask, but Winn saw grief flare in her eyes. He cursed himself inwardly.

“She sounded like she has a lot on her plate. Personal stuff to knock out, you know?”

“Sure. You’ve been helping her?”

“It’s a task force thing. Work-related.”

Alex nodded, her hands settling on hips. “You uh… you kept in touch, huh?”

“Yeah. I’m sorry, but…” Winn wasn’t picking sides, especially when neither of his friends had done a damn thing wrong. Somehow, that made the whole situation oddly worse.

“Don’t be sorry.” A flicker of a smile crossed Alex’s features and died. “Maggie always liked you. I’m glad I didn’t screw up your friendship too. Makes me feel a little less like an ass to know you’re still there for her.”

Winn scratched the scar on his chin, searching for something to say. “You wanted different things. You did what you had to do, Alex.”

“Did I?” she murmured, sounding unconvinced. “She’s… she’s doing okay, though, isn’t she?”

Seeing Alex in pain broke Winn’s heart, but this was one problem his skills couldn’t fix. “She’s okay,” he promised.

Alex took a deep, shaky breath and nodded again. Without a word, she squeezed his shoulder and
Sweat dripped from Alex’s chin as she pummeled a heavy bag in the DEO gym. Using her fists, elbows, knees, and feet, she worked through combinations with smooth and lethal efficiency. J’onn held the bag without comment, but Alex sensed when she ran out of steam, he would want to talk.

She just wasn’t sure what she would say, so she kept it up even though her muscles burned with every movement. It had been a surprise that Winn had kept in touch, that he could effortlessly pick up a phone and call Maggie when Alex couldn’t. Somehow, that knowledge made the tight feeling in her chest constrict even more. Maggie hadn’t been abandoned by everyone. Just by her.

It took another ten minutes before she had to stop and catch her breath.

“Just say what’s on your mind.” Alex bent at the knees, sucking in air as she ripped off her gloves.

“I could just read yours, you know,” he pointed out, and Alex glanced up at him with a scowl. “But I’d rather you tell me why you and Kara were glaring daggers at each other during the briefing this morning.”

Alex straightened, tossing her gloves into her duffle bag and grabbing her water bottle. She chugged half the contents in one go. “We fought last night.”

“I gathered. About?”

Her nose crinkled with distaste. She’d barely slept after Kara left, running through what was said and unsaid between them. Part of her felt guilty for taking her pain and frustration out on her sister, but every accusation had rung true. Kara had never wanted to know the most important person in her life, and Alex still couldn’t figure out why.

“Alex?” J’onn prompted. He let go of the bag and picked up his own gloves, slipping them on.

“Maggie.”

He gestured for her to return the favor, and Alex grabbed hold of the bag. His blows were harder than hers, and she had to work to maintain her hold, but at least he wasn’t using much of his Martian strength.

“What about her?”

Alex shrugged. “Kara has been pushing me to move on. She keeps urging me to get back out there and setting me up with other women.”

“And that’s bad why?”

“For starters, she needs to take her own advice.” Alex grunted as the bag smushed against her chest with one particularly powerful blow. “But she acts like I can just go out and find someone better than Maggie.”

“You don’t think you will?”

“I don’t think anyone will ever replace Maggie. Not the way Kara seems to think.” Alex tightened her grip, breathing past the hurt that particular thought brought to the surface. “And Kara, she never really embraced Maggie. She kept her distance the whole time we dated. Never got to know her.
Why?”

J’onn paused, thinking over the question. He frowned.

“T’m right, aren’t I?” Alex wrapped her arm around the bag. “Kara is friendly to everybody. Everybody. Why not Maggie?”

“I imagine they were a little competitive for your attention.”

“Maggie wasn’t. I can’t tell you how many times she sent me off to talk to Kara when something was bothering me. She never tried to come between me and my sister. Never. I mean, she was critical of Supergirl, but she always tried with Kara. But my sister couldn’t be bothered to reciprocate.”

J’onn’s face was thoughtful as he unleashed a flurry of punches on the bag. Finally, he paused again. “You and Maggie broke up months ago,” he said, his voice gentle. “Why are you fighting about this now?”

“What, what if I made a mistake?”

“With Maggie?” J’onn hesitated, picking his words carefully, just like he had when Alex had told him the wedding was off. “You broke up because you wanted kids and she didn’t. Has that changed?”

Alex glanced away, blinking back the tears burning in her eyes. “I… don’t know.”

“You seemed very sure in your desire to have children.”

“I… you know, at first, I wasn’t enthusiastic about the wedding because my dad couldn’t walk me down the aisle, and then, we had that ridiculous fight about a band vs. a DJ…”

“I remember.”

“And then, I fixated on children. I…” Alex sucked in a deep breath. “I barely talked to Maggie about it until it all blew up in our faces. And now, I don’t know, maybe I… I…”

“Got cold feet?” he suggested, and the realization hit Alex like a spaceship crash-landing on her head. J’onn stepped around the bag and pulled her into a hug, the smooth leather of his glove wrapping around the back of her head as she buried her face against his chest. He let her rest there for a minute before leaning back and meeting her eyes. “What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know.”

***

They’d survived their first twenty-four hours together.

Maggie desperately wanted a drink to celebrate the accomplishment, but she didn’t dare. The last thing she needed to do was send Jamie the message she needed alcohol to cope with all this even if scotch would have made things a little easier to bear.

A knock on the door interrupted her as she stacked the last of Jamie’s stuff into an unoccupied corner of her apartment. The boxes she had never unpacked after moving out of Alex’s could go into storage with Aileen’s stuff until they got a bigger place.

She wiped her arm across her forehead and swung the door open, expecting the Chinese delivery
“Hey. Look, I know it’s not any of my business, but are you okay?” Winn barged past her and into the entryway before she could stop him. “I mean, if you are afraid to tell me you are seeing someone new…” He came up short when he saw into the living room. Jamie sat on the couch, staring back at him just as curious. “Oh.”

“It’s not our dinner yet,” Maggie said over her shoulder to Jamie as she yanked Winn back into the hallway. “Jesus, Winn. What the fuck?” she hissed under her breath.

“Who’s the cute kid?” Winn kept trying to crane his head around to see through the partially closed door. “Is she part of a case?”

“Like you said, none of your business.”

Maggie squared up on him, and he deflated, his eyes softening as he took her in. “Sorry, I was just worried about you. I didn’t realize you were babysitting. You helping out a friend?”

“Something like that.” Maggie blew out a breath and tried to calm the pounding of her heart. At least Winn might be able to help her out with some research she needed to do. “She’s, ah, part-alien. What do you know about Yarians?”

“Yarian’s are pretty low on the powers scale. Largely humanoid. A little stronger. A little faster. Mostly they’re known for their intelligence and creativity.” He grinned. “Fun fact, female Yarians can procreate with human…” His eyebrows shot up as his eyes rounded comically. “Oh. Oh! Is she…” His voice dropped to an exaggerated whisper even though there was no one around to hear him except Maggie. “Is she yours?” he joked with a wink.

Somehow saying it out loud made the situation very, very real in a way nothing else had. “Yeah. Yeah, she’s mine.” She clasped her hands together to keep them from shaking.

Winn blinked, the color draining out of his cheeks. “Oh my god, Maggie, I didn’t know.”

“I didn’t either. I just found out yesterday. Her mom died a few days ago and... I—I didn’t know that I had a... I would have…” Maggie blew out a breath, the panic she’d stuffed down for the last day surging to the surface. She wiped a nervous hand over her mouth. “Jesus, Winn, I don’t know how to be a mom. What am I going to do?”

He stepped forward and dragged her into a tight hug. Maggie clamped down on her emotions, refusing to fall apart on Winn’s shoulder with Jamie in the other room, but she was damn tempted.

“You’re not alone,” he promised, and the words were exactly what Maggie needed to hear. “Whatever you need, whatever she needs, I’m here to help, okay?”

He leaned back and gave her a brief smile. “You call Alex?”

“No, and you can’t tell her.”

“But–”

“Alex and I are over, and that doesn’t change just because I suddenly have a kid.” Maggie felt the familiar pang every time she said Alex’s name. After six months apart, she suspected she always
would. “And I need time to get to know my… my… without Alex interfering. Okay?”

Winn didn’t look happy, but he seemed to understand. “I get it. You’ve got some things to figure out first.”

Maggie sighed. The topic would come up again, but at least she’d bought herself some time.

“Can I meet her? Mini Maggie?”

“Don’t call her that,” Maggie said around a weak laugh, but she nodded, wiping at her eyes.

Winn let himself back into the apartment, and Maggie followed, her legs shaking with each step. Jamie was looking out the balcony door at the setting sun, and Winn smiled when she turned and glanced up at him.

“Hiya,” he greeted, holding out his hand. “I’m Winn. I’m a friend of your m-m-Maggie’s,” he finished awkwardly and a small smirk came to Jamie’s lips as she met Maggie’s gaze.

“Jamie.” She shook his hand.

“Nice to meet you, Jamie. I heard about your mom. I’m really sorry.”

“Thanks,” she murmured, probably tired of hearing the sentiment but seeming to appreciate it, regardless.

“You um… you like video games?” Winn slung his messenger bag off his shoulder and knelt on one knee to sort through it as Jamie looked on with curiosity. “Maggie and I sometimes play. Maybe we could play a game while she waits for your dinner?”

Jamie studied the handful of games he fished out of the bag before glancing at Maggie again, silently asking for permission. She nodded, and Jamie answered with a broader smile.

“She has dimples,” Winn declared, turning around to beam at Maggie.

“You’re weird,” Jamie told him, but she was still smiling.

Maggie chuckled. “She’s got you pegged.”

“Yeah. She’s definitely your kid.” Winn’s tone was affectionate and warm, and Maggie blushed, more flattered than insulted by the observation.

“Well come on, sassy pants,” Winn said to Jamie, and she giggled, a sound Maggie was beginning to appreciate. “Let’s see what you got.”

Winn stayed through dinner, giving both Maggie and Jamie a much needed diversion from their new, fraught reality. Jamie mopped the floor with him most of the night, and Maggie couldn’t deny the hint of pride at watching her kid lay waste to Winn’s ego.

One day down. A lifetime to go. She could do this.

She had to.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year!

The early morning sun reflected off the water, nearly blinding in its intensity, and Alex wished she’d remembered her sunglasses. Instead of a Saturday morning run, she decided to take a long, meandering walk through the city to be alone with her thoughts. It was a habit she picked up these last few months when her apartment became too quiet, too much like a tomb to the life she had expected to have with Maggie.

Her path took her into an unexplored part of town, and if it was a little too close to the police station where Maggie worked, well, that was just where her feet had taken her this morning. No hidden meaning in that.

A donut shop on the corner was doing brisk business, and the smell of dough and cinnamon wafted through the air. Her stomach growled, and Alex tossed her empty coffee cup in the wastebasket, deciding she deserved another cup and a glazed before heading back.

There were a few cops from the station loitering around, waiting on orders, a couple of families seated along the windows, and… “Maggie.”

Maggie hadn’t missed her Saturday morning run, apparently. Her messy ponytail stuck out the back of an NCPD baseball cap pulled low over her eyes. She looked better than Alex remembered, and Alex mourned the months they had spent apart anew. After the last few days of soul-searching and thinking about her constantly, seeing Maggie stole the breath from her lungs.

“Danvers, hey.” Maggie’s smile was uncertain and puzzled, not dimpling her cheeks or lighting her eyes. Alex missed the warmth, the special joy that had been reserved for her and her alone.

“Hey.”

Maggie glanced around the shop as if realizing, suddenly, where they were. “You’re a long way from home.”

“Yeah, I guess. I decided to go for a walk and needed more coffee. The donuts smelled amazing.”

“They are. Someone brings them into the precinct pretty often.”

They lapsed into an uncomfortable silence, one where Alex ached to apologize, to beg for forgiveness, but she did neither, wishing like hell she hadn’t been such a fool to let this woman go.

“Are you, ah, working today?”

The counterman called her name, and Maggie stepped away to pick up her order. A moment later, she returned with a laden cup carrier. “No… uh… just heading back to my apartment. I… um got a place closer to work when…”
She didn’t have to say *when I moved out*. Alex heard it clearly, as clearly as she saw the two coffee cups in the carrier and the full pastry bag in Maggie’s hands. Winn’s speculation about a long weekend had apparently been on the money, and Alex smiled awkwardly, even though she was dying inside.

“That’s nice. To be closer to work, I mean.” Alex winced.

“Yeah, it’s…” Maggie shrugged. “I should get going before this gets cold.”

“Of course.” Alex stepped back, half hoping the floor would open up beneath her feet and swallow her whole. Anything would be better than being treated like a distant acquaintance by the woman she’d wanted to spend a lifetime with.

Maggie hesitated, like she wanted to say more, and a flicker of hope ignited in Alex’s chest only to extinguish a moment later.

“See you around, Danvers,” Maggie murmured, brushing past her.

Alex stayed rooted to the spot as the bell on the door jangled as Maggie left. She turned her head, watching Maggie cross the street and hurry on her way without a backward glance. Jealousy, thick and hot, washed over her, and the smell that had tempted her into the shop suddenly made Alex nauseous. Maggie was going home to someone, and it wasn’t her.

Gutted by the random encounter, Alex left the shop empty-handed, wandering away from the police station until she found a deserted stretch of waterfront. She sank down on a bench, hugging herself, and let the tears come.

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Pausing a few blocks from the donut shop, Maggie leaned against a brick building as she struggled to breathe through a harsh ripple of pain. Seeing Alex had somehow managed to make her heart leap and simultaneously shatter.

God, she missed her. She missed Alex’s smile, her voice, her laugh, the heat of her arms at the end of the day. It all came rushing back, the life they’d had, the future they’d walked away from. A tiny, wounded sound escaped her throat as she fought back tears.

The universe could really go fuck itself. First Jamie and now this. Hadn’t she been the punchline of enough cruel, cosmic jokes to last a lifetime?

Or did the universe throw Alex into her path because Maggie had decided not to tell her about Jamie? Jesus, that was rich. Just as she had become the perfect package deal for everything Alex wanted, they have their first real interaction in months.

She shook her head, refusing to think like that. There was no such thing as Fate binding them together, or they wouldn’t have been so easy to tear asunder.

Taking a deep, shaky breath, Maggie pushed off the bricks and headed home. Her life was on a different course now, and so was Alex’s. Someday losing her wouldn’t hurt so damn much.

Today was not that day.

***
“Ponytail!”

Kara grabbed her notebook and scurried to join the Monday morning assignment meeting. Running a few minutes late thanks to an armored car robbery, she slid in between two taller reporters and waited for Snapper to turn his ire on her.

“Hand off your story about the city parking shortage to Chad. You’re working the crime beat now.” He glared over the top of his glasses when Chad started to protest. “Don’t forget to cover the wanton destruction of parking structures by superheroes and alien invaders angle. It fits with our ongoing coverage of the city budget and infrastructure priorities. Danvers will have her notes to you momentarily.”

“Yes, sir,” Chad grumbled, and Kara gave him an apologetic smile as he brushed past her. She had no idea what he’d done to get demoted from the crime beat, but she’d make the most of the chance to prove herself. She flipped open her notebook, ready to get started.

“Now that you’ve graced us with your presence this morning, Danvers, there’s some new drug on the streets causing a spike in overdoses. I got word the NCPD is setting up a task force.”

“Any word on what the chemical compound of the drug is or what the public safety implications are?” When there was no answer, Kara looked up, tapping her pen against her lips. Snapper had a glare waiting for her and she cringed. “Oh, right, if you had those details, the story would already be written.”

He gave an exaggerated nod which Kara returned as she wrote her questions down.

“Today, Ponytail,” he shouted when Kara didn’t leave fast enough. “And don’t forget to give those notes to Chad.”

Kara sent Chad a file as she tried to figure out her approach. NCPD was the obvious place to start, but she hated going in with no intel. After a few minutes of searching recent incident reports, Kara decided to see what she could find out from the hospitals handling the emergency calls.

Satisfied with her plan, she set off to bag the story, and if said plan gave her a few more hours before a potentially awkward run-in with a certain detective, then all the better.

***

Maggie expected to feel relief at getting back to her life, but she couldn’t stop worrying about Jamie. She’d dropped her off at school an hour ago, and Maggie hoped like hell she was handling it okay. Jamie hadn’t been back since her mother died, but the kid seemed to take the whole thing in stride.

“Sawyer.”

Her head snapped up, and Maggie glanced toward her captain’s office. He gestured for her to join him with a crook of his finger.

“Shit,” she whispered under her breath as he stepped back inside, expecting her to follow. She stood and crossed the largely empty bullpen, dreading what she suspected was about to happen. Bad enough to be a woman and gay when you were trying to move up the ranks. Add motherhood into the mix, and Maggie suspected her career trajectory was about to come to a screeching halt.

“Have a seat.”
She settled in the chair across from Captain Dawson with a sigh. “Sorry about last week, sir, I—”

He waved her off as he leaned back in his creaky chair. “I heard what happened, and it’s not like you don’t have the PTO.” He slipped off his glasses, studying her critically. “The guys in the bullpen treating you okay? Your reputation as a stud has certainly grown.”

She grimaced, her cheeks heating with embarrassment. “Nothing I can’t handle.”

“That include having a daughter dropped in your lap out of the blue?”

Maggie was less sure about that one. “It’s… an adjustment, but I will not let it interfere with my work, sir.”

“I think we can safely say you’ll do your best, but things like this will interfere, Sawyer. Take it from a man with three kids. Your life just became a tightrope act of balancing family and duty. Sometimes you will fall off.”

She wasn’t sure if that was supposed to be comforting or a warning. “Am I being replaced as head of the task force?” No sense in waiting for the hammer to drop. Maggie braced herself to kiss the biggest case of her career goodbye and tried not to feel bitter about the timing of all this.

“No. Your work has always been exemplary and replacing you at this point would reset us to square one. We don’t have time to get someone else caught up, and no one is more qualified to handle this. We had another two overdoses last night, one of them fatal.”

“I heard. That makes six deaths now.”

“I didn’t pull you in here to punish you, Maggie. You’re here because you’ve had something life changing happen to you during this investigation. As much as you’re getting teased for siring a kid, there isn’t a cop in this bullpen that doesn’t have your back, including me. That goes for the task force to babysitting duty. We’ll help you get through both. Understood?”

Maggie had always respected Dawson, but she’d never imagined an endorsement like this from him. After wallowing the last six months and feeling like she’d never be good enough for anyone or anything, his support meant the world. Her situation with Jamie was suddenly a little less daunting. She cleared her throat. “Thank you, sir.”

“I know you were working from home some this weekend. Catch me up to speed on the case.”

“You know the particulars of the drug?”

Dawson shrugged. “Narcotics has their cases and we have ours. Refresh me.”

“Its base is Belamort. I only know so much of the science, but to sum it up, it’s like a parasitic plant from the planet Kahlo. It’s prohibited off-world, but that hasn’t stopped pirates from stealing shipments and selling the drug on the black market.”

“And National City is open for business.”

Maggie nodded.

“And the parasite is what’s killing people?”

Maggie waffled her head back and forth. “The parasite stimulates the pleasure centers of the brain and makes your fantasies damn vivid from what I gather, but these dealers are mixing it with cocaine.
The two together prolong the high. Belamort alone wouldn’t be so problematic, it’s mostly a sedative, but it juices the effects of the cocaine on the body. Some people are more susceptible to overdosing, and some are simply taking too much.”

“So this… Gold Rush as they’re calling it is an alien speedball? No wonder people are dropping dead.”

“We’ve been tracking Ian Blackwell through narcotics. He’s a well known dealer for your typical street drugs, but he’s connected. Weasels out of a conviction every time. Don’t know who his protector is, but word is he and Roulette are running buddies. Someone high up the food chain covers their asses.”

“So where are you on the case?”

“We’re trying to pin down who is supplying him with the drug and whether Blackwell is the one mixing the Rush. We want to stop his source cold before we take him down, otherwise someone will just step into his shoes the second he’s in cuffs. This stuff is too addictive to let it continue to spread.”

“Any leads on who might be covering for them?”

Maggie frowned. “Some faint trails lead to a person who might have a more… scientific interest in the drug, but nothing concrete yet.”

“Not going to give me a name?” Dawson smiled.

“Would you give me one at this stage of your investigation, sir?” Maggie wanted no one to know she was looking into Maxwell Lord. That was the kind of heat she didn’t need on this case. Not yet.

“Probably not. I won’t keep you, but you tell Hawkins over in narcotics he needs to throw everything he has at this case. I need one of my best detectives back in the fold sooner rather than later.”

Maggie nodded and stood and Dawson did the same. She was halfway to the door when he surprised her one last time.

“You got a picture yet? Of your little one?”

Maggie blushed again, but she slipped out her phone. She wasn’t sure what had possessed her, but she’d snapped a surreptitious photo of Jamie playing video games with Winn. Maggie passed the photo to her captain.

His eyebrows lifted as a faint smile formed beneath his silver mustache. “That apple certainly fell from your tree, didn’t she? She’s beautiful, Maggie.”

“She is,” Maggie agreed. “I just…”

“When I had my first, I was scared out of my mind. Convinced I would make a horrible parent. Warp the child for life. Sound familiar?”

He handed Maggie the phone, and she tucked it into her back pocket. “Maybe a little.”

“I’ve seen you with the kids who come in here. I don’t know if you ever wanted to be a mom, but you’ve got what it takes. Trust in your empathy as much as you trust your gut and you’ll do fine.”

She nodded, hoping he was right. “So your kids… they turned out okay?”
“Hell no. I messed ‘em all up. One’s even a defense attorney.”

Maggie snorted and grinned. “Thanks for the faith, Captain. I could use a little right now.”

“You’ve got this, Maggie.”

Maggie let out a slow sigh of relief as she stepped out the office, her shoulders sagging as tension drained. Amid all her other worries, the impact of abrupt parenthood on her career had been pretty high. Her work had been the only thing that had kept her going those first few weeks after Alex.

Having an unexpected support system rally around her validated her decision to stay in National City after the breakup, and it was gratifying to know people had her back. It almost made her feel like she was up to the challenge of raising Jamie by herself.

Almost.

***

Several hours and three hospitals later, Kara gave up. The administrators were tight-lipped, even on things that were public record. All they would confirm was a recent spate of overdose cases caused by a drug with the street name Gold Rush, a mixture of an unidentified substance and cocaine. They were unmoved by Kara pointing out that initial news stories had already reported those details.

Buying donuts for the EMTs and paramedics didn’t work either. They even ate most of the crullers.

Feeling pressure to prove herself on her new beat, Kara squared her shoulders and pushed her way through the glass doors of NCPD headquarters and to the reception desk. “Kara Danvers, CatCo Magazine.”

The officer on duty looked up from his paperwork with a bored expression.

“I’m here to see the lead detective on the, ah, Gold Rush task force please,” Kara said, trying to sound as authoritarian as possible.

“You’re in luck.” He pointed behind her. “She’s right there.”

Kara turned, wincing at the woman who stood before her. “Maggie?” Maggie’s eyes narrowed, and Kara quickly corrected herself. “I mean… Detective Sawyer, just who I wanted to see.”

“What can I do for you, Kara?” Maggie crossed her arms over her chest and fixed Kara with a look she couldn’t decipher. It wasn’t cold, but it wasn’t friendly either, and Alex and Winn’s accusations whispered at the back of Kara’s mind.

“I’m doing a story on the Gold Rush epidemic in National City. I’m here for details on the case.”

Maggie pursed her lips before gesturing Kara to follow her deeper into the precinct. She paused by a desk with neat stacks of paper files and a computer with the NCPD logo floating across the screen. Maggie rooted in a drawer before pulling out a stack of business cards, handing one to Kara. “Here.”

Kara took it carefully, suspicious of the smirk lingering at the corner of Maggie’s lips. “The NCPD Public Relations Department?”

“You can call the number, email, or they have an office just off the lobby if you want to stop by.”
“Really, Maggie?”

“They have a statement prepared for the public.”

“You can’t help me out a little? Give me something off the record?”

“No. We’re in the early stages of our investigation and all information we deem relevant for public consumption is given to PR to disseminate.”

“But I’m not the public. I’m the press.” An edge of a whine crept into Kara’s voice.

“Yeah, you’re right. You’re worse.”

Kara pulled up short. “Look, just because you are mad at Alex, don’t…”

Anger flashed in Maggie’s dark eyes, and Kara lapsed into silence when Maggie gripped her elbow and tugged her into an empty office. Kara could have resisted easily, but she didn’t doubt Maggie would tell her off in the middle of the bullpen if she didn’t follow.

Releasing her arm, Maggie took a couple of steps forward before rounding on Kara. “This has nothing to do with your sister. Or you. This is about me and my job.”

“But…”

“I will not leak information about my task force, information that could come back to me. This is the biggest case of my career and there are lives on the line. I am not doing anything that puts my work on this case in jeopardy.”

“The public has a right to know about potential threats.”

“Yeah, they do,” Maggie agreed. “Which is why the public relations team gets as much information that the task force can safely share without compromising our investigation.”

Kara frowned, furiously thinking over the scant information she had. She couldn’t go back to Snapper with nothing or she’d be back reporting on parking lots with Chad. “Wait. Why are you running the task force?”

“Seriously?” Maggie cocked her head, glaring at Kara.

“No, no,” Kara blurted, realizing she’d unintentionally offended her. “I know you’re a great detective and all that, but why isn’t narcotics handling it?”

Maggie hesitated.

“A detective with the science division is running a task force on a major narcotics investigation?”

“It’s an intra-agency task force. Narcotics is deeply involved,” Maggie explained, but Kara wasn’t buying it.

Kara took a step forward, and Maggie drew up straighter as they squared off. “The drug is alien in origin, isn’t it?”

Maggie stared her down for a long moment before sighing and shaking her head. “Getting better at this, aren’t you?”

It was barely praise, but coming from someone as talented at her job as Maggie, Kara soaked up the
comment. Considering how critical Maggie always was of Supergirl, it was nice to get a little
acknowledgement as Kara Danvers, at least.

“Fine,” Maggie huffed. “One of the components of Gold Rush is of alien origin. That’s all I can give
you, Kara, which is one nugget more than the rest of your reporter friends have.”

“Come on, Maggie.” Kara lowered her voice to a whisper. “I’ve been to a lot of planets. Maybe I
know something. Maybe I can help. Just read me in…”

“You don’t get it, do you? My job was the only thing I had after I lost A… my fiance, my home…”
Maggie’s voice was raw with emotion. “Are you really asking me to do you a favor that could cost
me that too?”

For such a small human, Maggie knew how to pack an emotional punch. Kara floundered for
something to say, tempted to remind Maggie she’d made as much of a choice to walk away from
Alex as Alex had to walk away from her, but she sensed that was a bad idea. Maggie always made
her defensive, and this encounter was no different.

Maggie scoffed when Kara said nothing. “Have a nice day, Miss Danvers. Going forward, talk to
public relations. Consider this source closed for business.”

Kara watched her go, kicking herself for how she’d handled the situation. Now the detective in
charge of the investigation had cut her off. Not to mention Winn and Alex would see this as further
proof she’d never cared about Maggie.

But hadn’t Winn said something about helping Maggie with work? Kara slowly smiled. Maybe she
had a way to keep herself on the crime beat after all.

***

The control room was quiet, and Winn glanced over his shoulder before tapping out a search.

“Whatcha doing?”

He jumped, his heart nearly bursting out of his chest as he fumbled with his mouse and closed the
browser window. “Nothing,” he squeaked. “What makes you think I was doing something?”

Kara leaned against his desk and folded her arms. “Well, it looked like you were searching Porg
videos on YouTube. And here I thought they were, and I quote, ‘a shameless attempt to cash in on
more mechanidizing.’”

“Well, I need screencaps for, um, a blog post I’m going to write.”

“Need help?” Kara smirked.

“Um, no…. What can I do for you, Kara?”

“Well, I was hoping you could help me out.”

“With what?” Winn asked, suspicious of the almost too-sweet tone of her voice.

“What do you know about Maggie’s task force on Gold Rush? I’m writing a story on it and, well, I
stopped by the NCPD but Maggie wouldn’t give me the scoop. Then I remembered you mentioned
helping her out the other day so…”

He narrowed his eyes and pursed his lips, suspecting a trap. “Maggie didn’t give you anything?”
“Just the phone number for the public relations department and a tidbit about an alien substance,” she groused.

Winn sighed. “I don’t know, Kara. I wouldn’t want to share something Maggie doesn’t want shared.” When she tried to look intimidating, he shook his head. “That is definitely not going to work. In the order of scariness, there’s Alex, Maggie, and then you. Actually, there’s Alex, Maggie, J’onn, Lucy, and, well, Vasquez… Eliza…”

“Are you putting Maggie’s friendship over mine too?”

A red alert siren went off in Winn’s head, and he floundered for the right response.

“What about Maggie?”

Winn spun in his chair, grateful for Alex’s timing. Kara was less thrilled, groaning before facing her sister across the console table in the center of the room. Clearly they hadn’t patched things up over the weekend.

“She’s running a task force about a new street drug I’m reporting on. She won’t help me out.” Kara sounded all too pleased to say as if that proved her position on all things Maggie Sawyer. “But Winn has been assisting her. So I thought he might be able assist me too.”

A frown twisted Alex’s lips as she looked between them. Winn didn’t miss the hint of pain in her eyes, probably that everyone seemed to be talking to Maggie but her. “I haven’t heard of any DEO involvement in an NCPD task force.” She straightened as J’onn stepped up beside her. “Sir?”

“Because there is no DEO involvement.” Winn raised a finger to interject, but J’onn stopped him with a look. “It’s a police matter.”

“Maggie at least confirmed one component of the drug was alien. What is it? What does it do?”

The tension in the room spiked as J’onn gave Kara a look in warning, and Winn scrunched lower in his chair. His heart ached when he saw the distracted expression on Alex’s face. Her mind seemed a million miles away, and he wondered what her thoughts were on Maggie now. He hadn’t had the guts to ask in months.

“The DEO will not be an anonymous source for your story, Miss Danvers. For one, we will not intervene between the NCPD and CatCo.”

“But as Supergirl…”

“There’s a difference between your work with the DEO as Supergirl and your work as a reporter for CatCo magazine.”

“I think a public health crisis warrants DEO involvement,” Kara argued.

“The NCPD has jurisdiction and is doing the right thing in creating a task force to address the situation. I suggest you work with them.” Kara looked rebellious, but J’onn was unmoved. “And I don’t want to see anything in your story you inferred through your work with the DEO, am I clear?”

Kara looked to Alex for support, but got none. “Fine. I’ll do it myself.” With that, she stalked to the balcony and took off.

Alex watched her leave. “Was the lecture necessary, sir?”
“Yes. If she’s going to be a real reporter, she can’t keep cutting corners, like using herself or the DEO as her source.” He turned to Winn. “And Mr. Schott, if the NCPD needs the help and resources of the DEO, they will put in a request through official channels and I will authorize our involvement. Am I clear?”

Winn wilted under his glare. “Um, yes, sir.”

Brooding more than usual, Alex nodded and headed back toward the lab as J’onn joined Winn at his workstation.

“Something else you want to say, Mr. Schott?”

“Just that Mag—Detective Sawyer made a request through official channels, and you authorized it.”

“Which is why we will continue to feed information to the NCPD, but if Alex knew that, she would want to be involved. You know,” J’onn paused, “and I know, Maggie does not need Alex around right now.”

“Did you… Oh my god, you…” Winn dropped his head in his hand. “Maggie is going to kill me.”

“It’s not exactly your fault, but she, and Jamie, have been on your mind all day.”

“You…” Winn pointed an accusing finger. “I’m, I’m going to get one of those tinfoil hats to wear to keep you from doing that from now on.”

J’onn just smiled and clapped him on the shoulder.

***

Maggie had been living off takeout a little too much since ending things with Alex, the act of preparing a meal reminding her of the nights they’d spend in, enjoying the simple pleasure of being domestic. That needed to change, for her own sake and especially Jamie’s, so she was making dinner for two for the first time in half a year and trying not to stew over Kara’s visit to the precinct that afternoon. It still chafed, how little regard Kara had for her.

She glanced over her shoulder when she heard rustling. Jamie rooted through her duffle bag, a frown on her young face. After a minute, she slipped out a sketchpad and a box of charcoal pencils before wandering over to the kitchen table and sitting down.

“Is it okay if I draw here?” she asked.

“Sure,” Maggie replied, curious. “Are you finished with your homework?” God, that was such a mom thing to ask.

Jamie nodded. “It was easy.”

While things were still awkward and painfully polite, they were making moderate progress. It helped they had things in common, but Maggie still felt ill-equipped to handle the situation. She wondered if that sensation would ever go away.

As she watched, Jamie flipped through the sketchbook, and Maggie caught glimpses of her drawings. Her eyes widened, and she checked the sauce on the stove before cautiously approaching.

“You like to draw?” She slid her hands into the back pockets of her jeans, stopping far enough back so she wouldn’t seem like she was prying.
Jamie nodded. “I like art. Drawing and painting are my favorites.”

“Can I see?”

Jamie hesitated, and Maggie’s cop instincts knew there was something in the sketchpad Jamie didn’t want to show her. She sighed, though, and slid it over.

Maggie sat down in the chair closest to her. “I don’t have to look if you don’t want me to.”

Jamie seemed surprised by the offer, but she shrugged. “It’s just… there are a few of you in there.”

“Me?” Maggie blinked.

“Mom would cut stories out of the paper about your cases. Sometimes they had pictures.”

Her throat tightened, and Maggie swallowed with effort. “So you’ve known I was your… your um… for a while now?”

Jamie shrugged again. “Mom said you were, but sometimes I thought she picked you out of the paper so I’d stop asking questions. She said she would tell you, but then she saw you got engaged. She didn’t want to contemplate things for you.”

“Complicate,” Maggie corrected gently.

“Complicate,” Jamie agreed, biting on her thumbnail as she waited for Maggie to look through the sketchpad.

Sensing she had permission, Maggie started at the beginning, sifting through the pages. The drawings were not the work of a child, and she sat up straighter, marveling at the recreations of flowers, buildings, Aileen, and other children.

“You’re really good.” Maggie glanced up, waiting for Jamie to meet her eyes before she smiled. “I can draw a little. Always liked art in school, but I can’t do anything like this. These are…” She trailed off when she turned the page, startled to see herself even though she’d known a few images were coming.

Her likeness was uncanny. She was escorting a prisoner out of the NCPD, her jaw set and her eyes flinty. Not the friendliest image of her, and Maggie hoped Aileen had found an image of her smiling at some point. When she turned another page, though, Maggie laughed, a ball of warmth gathering in her chest.

Jamie had drawn her in Supergirl’s suit. She’d made a few modifications to the outfit, thankfully giving Maggie pants, and her cape billowed and flowed around her as she advanced on some hapless criminal, the logo for the NCPD on her chest in place of Kara’s trademark crest.

Maggie’s fingers rested on the edge of the drawing. She wondered, briefly, at what Alex would think of the depiction before banishing the thought.

“You think I’m a superhero?”

“Mom said you were. Not that you had powers, but she said you were a hero anyway.”

Oh Aileen… Maggie’s heart clenched, and she wiped away an unexpected tear. She wished with every fiber of her being Aileen had told her about Jamie from the beginning. Maggie would have stepped up. She would have been there, for both of them.
“Is it bad?” Jamie asked fearfully.

“No, sweetie. It’s amazing. I just… I miss your mom,” Maggie admitted. She would have given anything for just five minutes with Aileen now. To learn all she could about this life they’d somehow made together.

“Me too.”

Maggie wiped away another tear. Aileen had set the parenting bar damn high. Maggie knew she would never live up to her example. She could only do her best to try. She thumbed through several more pages until her breath caught.

Aileen had found a photo of her smiling. Her engagement announcement to Alex.

Jamie had drawn them both, capturing the joy in their eyes, the perfect tilt to Alex’s lips as she playfully smirked at Maggie. The moment came back to her in a rush, how happy they’d been, how in love. Maggie closed the sketchpad and leaned back. The drawing hit her like a kick to the gut.

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“Aren’t you married now?” Jamie asked innocently, twisting the dagger deeper.

Maggie bit her lip, tasting the salt of her tears and the bitter tang of disappointment. “We… yeah, I uh… we didn’t work out.” She rolled her eyes. Understatement, thy name is Maggie Sawyer, she thought sourly. “I wish we had. Alex would… Alex would really like you.”

“I’m sorry.” Jamie’s small hand reached out, hovering over Maggie’s for a moment before she followed through, clasping the back of her fingers.

How pathetic did she look to have a child want to console her? Maggie struggled to get her emotions under control, to be the adult in the room.

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“Complicated?” Jamie asked, using the word right this time. When Maggie looked up, Jamie’s dimples were just barely visible.

“Very complicated,” Maggie agreed with a faint smile of her own. She ran her hand through Jamie’s hair, the touch so soothing she did it again.

“You miss her?”

“Yeah.” Maggie swallowed and cleared her throat, sniffling a little as the tears came too fast to stop.

Jamie’s chair scraped over the floor as she scooted back, and a second later, small, warm arms came around Maggie’s neck. They’d both lost someone they loved, Maggie realized, scooping Jamie up into her lap to hug her a little tighter. Maybe, just maybe, they could both help each other heal.
“Does being a police officer mean you work all the time?”

Maggie’s head came up, and she winced, her neck twinging from being bent over documents for too long. “What?”

Jamie set her video game controller aside and slipped off the couch, padding in her pajamas to the kitchen table where Maggie had spread out her files. “You work all day then work more at night.” She plucked at the corner of a folder, but Maggie put her hand on it, protecting Jamie from the disturbing pictures inside.

“Usually, no, but I’m heading up a task force.”

“What’s a task force?”

Maggie’s lips twitched into a trace of a smile. Jamie was so smart she sometimes forgot the kid still had a lot to learn. She studied her for a moment, weighing how much to share about her case. They’d passed the two-week mark together with little incident, and Maggie didn’t want to ruin their record now by upsetting her or saying the wrong thing.

“Well, it’s when you gather a group of people to tackle a specific problem. Everyone brings their unique set of skills to the table to help.”

“So what’s the problem you’re working on?” Jamie stood on tiptoe, trying to see more of the photos and pages.

With a sigh, Maggie started bundling everything up. The reading material definitely wasn’t kid-friendly, and neither were the pictures. After she shoved everything into her messenger bag, she pulled out the chair beside her and patted the seat. Jamie crawled up on it and waited expectantly.

“Here’s this drug called Gold Rush…”

“I’ve heard of it.”

Maggie’s stomach sank at the thought of Jamie or any child her age getting their hands on the stuff. “Is it in your school?”

“No. Some of the older kids talk about it. They know people who take it. It’s kinda expensive, though. Most everyone in my school couldn’t afford it.”

Thank God Jamie’s school wasn’t in a more affluent neighborhood or Maggie would have found a whole new list of things to worry about. “Make sure your friends know they should never take it. It’s dangerous. And if anyone offers you drugs, any drugs, outside a doctor’s office, you say no, okay?” She grimaced. Everything out of her mouth these days sounded so damn… parental. “This drug has made a lot of people very, very sick.”

“Did they die?”

“Some of them,” Maggie admitted after an awkward pause. “My job is to lead a team to catch whoever makes and sells the drug.”

Jamie traced the wood grain on the table with her small fingers. “When will you arrest them?”
Good question. Maggie rubbed the back of her neck. “Not as soon as I’d like. See, when you’re a cop, you have to build a solid case against people you need to arrest. I have to make sure there’s no question of their guilt. In this case, lots of bad people are working together. We need to arrest as many of them as we can all at once. Does that make sense?”

Jamie nodded seriously. “Have any kids died?”

“A couple of teenagers have.”

“So all your work… you’re trying to keep other people from dying?”

Maggie breathed in deeply, understanding there was more to the question than idle curiosity. “Yeah. I don’t want any more families to go through what you’re feeling right now.”

Jamie nodded again. “Okay. You should keep working then.” She climbed off the chair and wandered back to the couch, but the soft pout on her lips didn’t go unnoticed.

This was that tightrope the captain mentioned, beneath her feet. Maggie hesitated, frowning as she tried to find the right balance. So many nights as a child she’d wanted nothing more than her father’s attention, but work had always come first. She wouldn’t follow in his footsteps if she could help it. Jamie wasn’t going to know that pain.

Maggie glanced at her watch. “You know what? It’s Friday night and I feel like popcorn and a Disney movie. How about you?”

“Really?” Jamie’s whole face brightened, and Maggie was pleased she’d made the right choice this time. “Can I pick the movie?”

Maggie stood and stretched, her joints popping uncomfortably. “I guess,” she grumbled playfully, pretending to be put out, and Jamie giggled. “Better be a good one, though.” She shuffled to the pantry and pulled out a bag of microwave popcorn as Jamie sorted through the pile of Blu-Rays Winn dropped off the night before.

“101 Dalmatians?”

“Have you seen it?” Maggie tossed the bag in the microwave and turned it on.

Jamie shook her head.

“If you like puppies, you’ll love it.”

***

Kara turned off the television with a huff, in no mood to watch Veep if Alex wasn’t there to watch it with her.

For the second week in a row, Alex had blown off sister night. She’d thrown herself into her work, turning sulky or snappish every time Kara was around. Kara had a new appreciation for how annoying she must have been after Mon-El left the first time. Maybe this was karma.

With a sigh, she gathered her half-eaten bowl of popcorn and her beer and trudged into the kitchen, setting both in the sink. She scooped her phone off the island and checked her messages. There were none.

Biting her lip, Kara typed one, hoping it wouldn’t be ignored.
Will you at least tell me you’re okay and not lying dead in a ditch somewhere?

There was no immediate reply. Not even tiny bubbles to indicate Alex was responding.

This whole thing with Maggie had been building since the breakup. Alex stuffed her feelings down too much. Other than a few false alarms where she’d tried to bolt back to her ex, Alex had tried to keep both herself and Kara from wallowing in their assorted romantic woes. Kara could see now it had been a mistake to let her, but her misery had loved Alex’s company.

“Sister of the year, you’re not,” Kara groused.

Her phone chimed in her hand, and she glanced down at the screen.

*I’m not dead.*

Kara snorted. Better than nothing.

They couldn’t go on like this, but Alex refused to meet her halfway. Being Supergirl was useless in this situation. Not even she was strong enough to make Alex let go of a grudge.

Maggie would have convinced her, Kara thought sourly. She’d been the Alex whisperer, always able to get Alex out of her shell or to see reason. She’d shown Kara a side of her sister she had no idea even existed. But Maggie was out of the question. She wouldn’t talk to Kara about Gold Rush and the case, let alone Alex. That left Kara with only one choice: the nuclear option.

She dialed a number from memory and brought the phone to her ear. This would either work, or Alex would never speak to her again.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Eliza, it’s Kara. Got a minute?”

***

Cruella slapped her henchmen, and Jamie flinched and scooted closer on the couch.

“You scared?” Maggie eyed her with a frown, worried they should have chosen a different film.

“No,” Jamie huffed. She jutted her little jaw forward, raising her chin, and Maggie melted at how adorably defiant she was. Is that what she looked like when she was being stubborn? No wonder Alex always smirked at her.

“Well, make me feel better. Cruella creeps me out.” Maggie held up the blanket draped across their legs and extended her other arm across the back of the sofa.

Jamie looked skeptical, but after a moment, she scrambled over, tucking herself warm and safe against Maggie’s side. Maggie draped her arm around Jamie’s small frame.

“My hero,” Maggie murmured.

“No problem.” Jamie’s tone was blase, and Maggie grinned, unseen.

A few minutes later, Jamie leaned her head on Maggie’s shoulder, clutching her tattered rabbit to her chest. Maggie swallowed, caught off guard when heart clenched in a sweet ache. She thought it would take months to bond with Jamie, if she ever truly could, but for the first time since this whole ordeal began, they felt a little like… family.
Alex wanted this feeling, this responsibility. A pang of guilt struck her as she imagined Alex here, enjoying the movie and popcorn with them. Maggie felt selfish, like she was depriving her, and cruel, for having what Alex craved when she hadn’t wanted it herself.

The look in Alex’s eyes last weekend at the coffee shop still haunted her. The love hadn’t left them, and if she picked up the phone right now Alex would be there within the hour. She could have her back, could touch her, hold her, kiss her again.

Tears blurred the screen, but Maggie blinked them away. Getting Alex back by dangling her daughter as bait wasn’t fair, to any of them. She wasn’t enough for Alex by herself, and she sure as hell wouldn’t use Jamie like some kind of bonus offer to make herself more attractive to her ex-fiance. Alex made her choice, and she hadn’t chosen Maggie. They all had to live with the consequences.

Even if it meant Alex didn’t get a chance to share in Jamie and Maggie’s life. Even if it meant Maggie didn’t have her as a partner in this new adventure. Even though it hurt like hell.

By the time the movie ended, Jamie had stretched out on the couch, resting her head on Maggie’s thigh. Maggie paused the credits. It was past Jamie’s bedtime. With plenty of files left to review, Maggie leaned forward to urge Jamie to go get ready for bed, only for her breath to hitch.

Jamie was asleep, clutching her stuffed rabbit with one hand and Maggie’s knee with the other. Her breathing was deep and even, and Maggie smiled as she studied Jamie’s peaceful profile. After the past few weeks of missing her mother, Jamie often cried herself to sleep at night so Maggie didn’t have the heart to wake her.

Settling back against the couch cushions, Maggie closed her eyes, thinking about all the things she needed to handle personally and professionally. She didn’t planned to drift off, but when she woke to daylight streaming through her windows the next morning, Jamie hadn’t moved either.

***

Alex adjusted the grip on her gun, easing along the far wall of a delipidated warehouse, her nose wrinkling at the smell of burnt motor oil. Cold seeped up through the soles of her boots, and she shivered.

Seven months ago, she wouldn’t have been spending her Sunday night freezing her ass off in a dark and dank building. She would have been cuddling with Maggie on the couch. They would have watched a movie or a late football game, trading teasing touches until one of them gave in and the TV was forgotten.

She missed holding Maggie in her arms, the way she smelled when Alex nuzzled her neck. She’d bought Maggie’s shower gel on a pathetic whim, but it didn’t smell the same when it wasn’t mixed with Maggie’s skin.

Now someone else was breathing in Maggie’s scent, kissing down her long neck, savoring the flash of those devastating dimples when they made Maggie smile...

“Everything okay?” Winn’s voice in her ear snapped Alex back to her surroundings.

“Fine. Why?” she answered in a clipped tone, embarrassed to get caught with her mind wandering.

“Because you stopped moving, and you’ve been standing there for the last five minutes.”

Alex glanced around, mortified. This situation with Maggie couldn’t go on like this. If she didn’t do
something soon, she would get herself killed. Or put a team member in danger.

“Just… considering my options.” Alex winced at the lame lie.

“Right. Any sign of your helgramite?”

“None,” Alex admitted, disappointed. She’d been spoiling for a fight all day. “Any word from the other agents?”

“They’re still checking the remaining warehouses.”

She nodded to herself.

“Ale... You okay? I know you and Kara are still… distant, but you seem…”

Her stomach plummeted at the note of worry in his voice. While she appreciated his concern, it also meant she was letting her personal life interfere too much with work. “Yeah. Just…” She bit her lip, not wanting to lie to him again.

“Maggie?” he guessed.

Alex swallowed past the sudden stone in her throat. “We’re on comms, Winn.”

“I switched us to a private channel. I wanted to be sure you were alright. You’ve worked the last three weeks without a day off. Sue me, but I care about you.”

With no discernable threats in the immediate vicinity, Alex slumped against the wall. It wasn’t like she could talk to Kara about any of this right now, and a friendly ear was exactly what she needed. “I think Maggie is seeing someone. I think it’s serious.”

Winn was quiet for a long moment, and Alex wondered if something had happened, if the target had been spotted. “Uh…” he began slowly. “She hasn’t mentioned anyone to me.”

That didn’t make Alex feel any better. Maggie likely wouldn’t tell him for fear Winn would tell her.

“I ran into her last weekend at this coffee shop. She had two cups of coffee and a bag full of donuts. Way more than she would eat by herself.”

Again, Winn was conspicuously silent for a long while before he spoke. “Maybe one of those cups was hot chocolate.”

Alex frowned. “What difference does it make, Winn? She took a long weekend, ran out to get breakfast for her and her new…” Alex couldn’t even say the word. The thought of someone being with Maggie, touching her, replacing Alex in her life, drove her crazy.

“I’m saying we don’t have all the facts. We shouldn’t jump to conclusions. Besides, you let her go, Alex. You knew she’d move on eventually. Isn’t that what you’re doing?”

This time, Alex was the one slow to reply. “I know. I… It’s just…”

Something banged in a distant corner of the warehouse, and Alex’s attention was immediately back on her surroundings. “I’ve got company.”

“Directing agents to your location.”

She got the fight she’d been spoiling for less than sixty seconds later, narrowly missing being
skewered by one of the helgramite’s spikes. They tussled, and Alex wound up with more scratches and bruises than she had when she came in, but she finally slammed the butt of her gun across his jaw and he went down as the other agents arrived.

“Target secure.” Sweating now, Alex knelt and rolled the alien over, slapping a pair of reinforced cuffs on him. “Tell Vasquez they can expect a pretty new face at the desert facility.”

“Will do.”

Alex got to her feet, releasing the velcro on the sides of her tactical vest to let the air stir against her damp skin as the other agents took over. She wandered outside into the cool night, her mind whirring with the one subject she could never seem to stop thinking about, even as she’d been fighting for her life.

She had to talk to Maggie, see for herself how she was doing. If Maggie was happy, maybe then Alex could finally let her go, and if she wasn’t…

Her phone buzzed, and Alex slipped it out, frowning when she saw the name on her caller ID. “Hello?” she answer quickly.

“Alex?”

“Mom, hey.” Alex stepped away from the agents as they escorted the prisoner out, moving further down the alley to where it was quieter. “Everything okay?”

“Fine. I wanted to get away from Midvale for a few days and come see my girls.”

A jolt of alarm swept through Alex, far stronger than anything the helgramite elicited. “You uh… you’re coming to National City?” She winced, hoping she didn’t sound as panicked as she felt.

“I’m in National City. Thought I’d surprise you. I know you’re working so I’m at Kara’s right now. Can you join us for a late dinner?”

Fuck, fuck, fuck. Alex raked a hand through her hair and started to pace. She sensed a conspiracy, or an intervention, or both. “Um…”

“Come on, sweetie. I haven’t seen you since Christmas.”

“Sure,” Alex said with little enthusiasm, wilting under her mother’s guilt trip before she laid it on any thicker. “We just arrested a suspect so it’ll be a little while.”

“That’s fine. Bring a bottle of wine when you come and we’ll catch up. Can’t wait to give you a hug.” Eliza disconnected and Alex tucked her phone into a pocket on her tactical vest.

“Kara is siccing your mom on you?” Winn’s voice carried over Alex’s earpiece, making her jump. She’d forgotten to turn it off. “That’s… dirty pool.”

Her jaw clenched as Alex watched the agents load the prisoner into a black, unmarked van. “It’s a good thing Kara is indestructible or we’d have one less superhero around before the night is over.”

***

“So Kara tells me you’ve been working a lot,” Eliza said around a sip of wine as Kara cleared the dishes from the table in the blink of an eye. Even with her superspeed, she had to feel the glare Alex shot at her back.
It had been an ambush, in every sense of the word, although Eliza had kept the conversation light and focused on some new journal articles Alex would be interested in. A topic Kara found boring, and yet her sister smiled and pretended to listen throughout dinner.

Lousy, no-good, traitor, Alex seethed. They had sworn an oath to keep sister-stuff secret from Eliza, and Kara would pay for breaking a thirteen-year-old bond.

Eliza’s question interrupted Alex’s plans for payback, pulling her back to the here-and-now. To face the inquisition, or at least her mom’s version of it.

Alex took a slow sip of her bourbon and arched an eyebrow at Kara, hovering out of arm’s reach. She had shown up at the door with the requested bottle of wine and a fresh bottle of Blanton’s, and Alex had taken particular joy in the way Kara blanched when she poured a huge tumbler to accompany dinner.

“What else has Kara been saying about me?” she asked.

“Nothing!” Kara huffed.

Alex scoffed and took a large swallow, daring Kara to say anything else. “So you didn’t call mom and invite her to National City to stage this intervention? She showed up and wanted to do dinner for no reason at all?”

“Alex, Kara is worried about you.”

“No, mom, she’s worried about herself. She’s upset I’m mad at her, and she wants you to help her out of the doghouse. This visit isn’t even about me, or the fight, it’s about making everything okay. For her.”

At least Kara had the wherewithal to look abashed, but Alex wasn’t done. She may have been the one ambushed, but she was at least going down swinging. “If she cared at all about my feelings, she would have come to me and, I dunno, listened to what I had to say, instead of calling you.”

“I listened! But…”

“Girls!” Eliza glanced between them, and made a shooing gesture toward Kara. “Isn’t there a fire you need to put out, dear?”

“Besides how tonight is going up in smoke?” Kara snarked, but when Alex tightened her lips into a hard smirk, she cowered a little. “Yeah, I think I hear a siren now. I’ll be back.”

With a woosh, she left, and some of Alex’s anger fled with her. Exhaustion pulled at her limbs, and her ribs ached where the helgramite had gotten a solid punch in. Candles on the table flickered in the light breeze from the open window, and Alex stared at the flame, afraid to see the look of disappointment or worse on her mother’s face.

A chair scraped on the floor. “Come on, let’s sit.” Eliza indicated the couch, and Alex sighed, tightening her grip around her glass as she followed. Settling as far away from her mom as possible, Alex swirled the remaining liquid and considered what her mom would say if she finished it in one long drink. Something disapproving, she was sure.

“I’m sorry.”

Alex blinked, raising her head to meet Eliza’s eyes. She was surprised by the worry she saw there. “For what?”
"We didn’t... we haven’t talked since you, and Maggie..." Eliza sighed and toyed with the glass in her hand. Alex watched as the dark liquid reflected the candlelight. “I don’t know why it’s harder to talk to you, my own daughter, than anyone else. When you came to Midvale, you didn’t seem like you wanted to talk at all, and then, it’s never come up.”

“You didn’t ask,” Alex reminded her.

“You’re always so strong...”

“Since when do I have a choice?” Anger flared, and Alex let a sip of bourbon burn through the irritation. “What’s the point in me trying to... to talk about this? About any of this?”

“What do you mean, sweetie?”

“I bury my feelings because everyone is so... inconvenienced when I don’t. Kara gets bent out of shape and sics you on me, or you get upset because I’m being secretive or...” Alex shook her head. “It’s never about how I’m feeling, it’s about how I’m making you feel and it’s just... not worth it. So I don’t bring it up.”

“Alex...”

“I mean, I tried. I told Kara and what happens? You show up.”

“She said you were shutting her out.”

“For two weeks. She shut me out for six months, mom. But now she’s inconvenienced because I skipped sister night, and here you are. To referee. So she can get back to her life the way she likes it.”

The pain on Eliza’s face almost made Alex feel guilty. Almost. But it was exactly that which kept her quiet time after time, and for once, she hurt too much to make everyone else feel better. “It’s all about Kara, not me. Only one person in the last fifteen years has consistently put me first...”

“Maggie.”

“Maggie,” Alex affirmed. “She put me first, mom. And I, I didn’t do the same. I was like Kara, making everything about me and my needs. The one time I should have put her first, I didn’t. I didn’t. I was selfish.”

“There’s nothing selfish about wanting children, about wanting a family.”

“But we should have talked about it more, given it more time. The decision was years down the road, and I broke it off in a week. A week!”

Eliza framed her face and wiped at the tears streaming down her cheeks. “Oh honey.” Alex sucked in a shaky breath. “I’m so sorry.”

“She was the... best thing to happen to me and I was selfish, just so selfish, I should have...” Eliza drew her into a tight hug, and the dam burst, and Alex cried in her arms like she hadn’t since she was a child. Eliza rocked her as the anger and pain drained out of her in a steady stream of tears.

The storm finally passed minutes later, and Alex straightened, wiping her eyes. Eliza’s expression was gentle, and her grip on Alex’s hand was surprisingly strong. “Who are you really mad at?”

“Kara. Maggie. Me.” Alex closed her eyes as the last of the anger seeped away. “Me. I let her go. I
lost her. She fought for us and I, I didn’t. And every day since, this feeling like I made the biggest mistake of my life just… grows.”

Nodding in understanding, Eliza brushed Alex’s hair back from her face. “What are you going to do about it?”

“I don’t know. I want to go see her, but I think she’s moved on. And she deserves to, she deserves someone to put her first.”

“Do you still love her?”

“Yes.” There was no hesitation, not even a little. Alex remembered her words, said over the comms. *Love you too. Forever.* She hadn’t lied, but she hadn’t realized how true, how fundamental, those words were. It had taken her too long to figure it out, to understand she would never not love Maggie, with all of her being. “And I miss her, so much.”

“It sounds like you want to fight for her.”

Alex nodded. “I do, but what if it’s too late? The time to fight for her was months ago, before I let her go. Before I destroyed everything.” She sucked in a breath, feeling what was rapidly becoming a familiar ache in her gut. “What if she found someone else? What if she’s happy?”

“And what about kids? I thought you wanted to be a mom?” Eliza’s hand was warm where it rested on Alex’s knee.

“I did, I mean, I do. I think.” Alex let out a sigh of frustration as exhaustion weighed on her, so tired of trying to figure out what she wanted, what she needed, in her life. “I want a family,” she said, finally. “But I want it with Maggie.”

“And if you can’t have both? Maggie and children?”

“I…” Alex shook her head, helpless. It still tore her apart, but she knew, deep down, she had chosen wrong the first time. “I want Maggie. I miss her, so much. I thought maybe I could find someone else, but…”

“You haven’t given it a lot of time,” Eliza reminded her gently.

“I know, and I can’t explain it, but…”

“You just know?”

“Yeah. I mean, I think I knew, before, but she was my first. I didn’t have a lot of experience and I thought maybe that… feeling… would be something I could find again. With someone else.” Alex raised her head and looked her mom in the eye. “I was wrong. I will never love anyone like I love her. Mom, what do I do?” Alex pleaded.

Eliza sighed. “Oh honey. I wish I had answers for you. Just know that whatever you decide, I’ll support you.” She reached over and clasped Alex’s loosely linked hands where they rested in her lap. “I messed up before, but I’m here for you now. As long as you need me. And I’ll talk to Kara. You know she was always a little jealous of Maggie. Your sister liked being the center of your world a little too much.”

Alex blinked, looking at her mother in surprise. “Didn’t think you noticed.”

“I noticed. And you liked it that way, sweetie. It was easier to make Kara your life than to have your
“Until Maggie,” Alex said softly.

“Until Maggie.”

Shifting, Alex laid her head on her mother’s shoulder, closing her eyes as Eliza wrapped an arm around her and pulled her close.

“But make sure you know what your heart can’t live without, Alexandra. You can’t beg Maggie to come back only to push her away again if you change your mind. She’s been hurt enough.”

“I know.”

***

Kara’s apartment was dark and empty, the scent of spent candles still lingering in the air as she landed and shut the window behind her. While she might have moved on from Mon-El, she still missed him, or missed the idea of him. He’d been someone to come home to, someone to talk to about her day, especially after Alex had started dating Maggie and hadn’t been around as much. Loneliness settled over her, but she resisted the urge to go back out.

She sighed, regretting how she’d handled everything with Alex the last few weeks. Ambushing her tonight had to be the dumbest thing she’d ever done, and she’d pulled some whoppers on her sister in the past.

“You’re an idiot.”

Kara’s heart leapt and she whirled, her cape knocking off a bowl of fruit on the island. Lost in her head, she hadn’t noticed the figure sitting on her couch, waiting. Alex turned on the light and they stared at each other for a moment.

“I don’t know if I’m capable of having a heart attack, but we nearly found out just now.”

Alex didn’t smile, she simply looked away, gazing into her glass of bourbon. “Mom went back to the hotel.”

No referee then. Just the two of them. Nervous, Kara edged closer. “I’m sorry. You’re right, I’m an idiot. I shouldn’t have…”

Alex shrugged. “We talked. About a lot of things. I got some stuff off my chest.”

Kara bit her lip. She could tell Alex had been crying, and she hated playing a part in causing her more pain. At least Alex was talking, though, so Kara cautiously sat beside her. “Is that a good thing or a bad thing?”

“It’s more than you and I ever do.”

“We talk all the time,” Kara protested, wounded by the accusation.

“Not when we hurt each other. Not really. We didn’t talk after the Red K incident. We didn’t talk about Clark and what I said about him abandoning you. We’re two of the biggest badasses in this city but we’re cowards when it comes to confronting each other about the pain we cause.” Alex looked at her again. “I’m too tired to fight with you tonight, so I’m just going to say this and go.”

Kara drew herself up straighter, bracing herself.
“I can’t be what you need anymore, Kara. I can’t keep putting my life, my feelings, on hold to make the strongest woman on the planet… more comfortable. For more than a decade, I’ve given you everything I have, but when I finally found one thing for me, you resented it.”

Kara wanted to argue, but she remained silent, letting Alex say her piece.

“Maggie changed my life,” Alex whispered, her eyes filling with tears. “She helped me find myself, helped me be happy, happier than I ever thought I could be. So I can’t understand, after being there for you all these years, practically giving up my life, my family, and my career to keep you safe, why you couldn’t be bothered to get to know her.”

“Alex…” Kara’s voice came out hushed and strangled. She blinked, a few tears of her own rolling down her cheeks.

“Don’t.” Alex held up her hand. “Don’t argue with me, or make excuses. Just… think about what I said. Think about how that made me feel. How that made Maggie feel. How that rejection of her might feed into my thoughts and fears.”

Kara had no answer.

Alex unfurled from the couch and set her tumbler on the coffee table. “We’ll talk later. Really talk this time, but right now, I need to go.” She squeezed Kara’s shoulder as she walked past, heading for the door.

“You know I love you, right?” Kara blurted.

“I know. I love you too. I just don’t like you very much right now.” Alex yanked her leather jacket on, unsteady on her feet. “If it’s any consolation, I don’t like myself much, either.” She left, the door shutting quietly behind her.
Chapter 5

Winn balked in the conference room doorway, glancing over his shoulder to make sure no one else saw what he did. Alex sat, unstirring, at the table, her forehead resting on the glossy black surface. She looked asleep, or worse.

Aware he was taking his life into his hands, Winn approached, setting his tablet on the table as quietly as he could. Holding his breath, he reached for Alex’s shoulder.

“Don’t touch me.”

Winn snatched his hand back, happy to still have it. “Things went well with your mom and Kara, I see.”

Alex drug her head up as if it weighed twice her body weight. She gave Winn a bloodshot glare that should have sent him scurrying to J’onn for protection, but as Alex once said, you never learned anything by running away.

Taking a deep breath, Winn pulled out the chair beside her and sat down, making Alex’s brow furrow at his unexpected bravery.

“What happened?” Winn asked.

After an uncertain moment, Alex shrugged. “An ambush. I got mad at Kara. Then I got mad at mom. Then I got mad at Kara again.” She rested her head in her hands. “Then I decided to talk to Maggie.”

Panic went off like a grenade in his chest. If Alex had met Jamie… “Oh. Wow, how did…”

“Except I went home first to write what I wanted to say, and I may have drank a little more.” She groaned and set her chin on the table. “A lot more.”

Winn couldn’t help the small sigh of relief that escaped. At least Alex hadn’t shown up drunk and encountered Jamie after fighting with her family all evening. That… would not have gone well.

Alex’s eyes started to droop, and the misery etched into the sharp lines of her face made Winn’s stomach ache. She had bottled up her grief and pain these last six months until it couldn’t be ignored. Kara once mentioned her sister didn’t always cope well, but Winn had only seen glimpses of that trait. Until now.

Winn stood on shaky legs and left the room, returning with a huge mug of coffee. He set it in front of Alex before sinking back in his seat.

“Thank you,” Alex mumbled as she wrapped her hands around the cup and leaned back in her chair to take her first sip.

“So… you never talked to Maggie then?” Winn kept his tone light, politely interested and innocent. Alex was clearly too hungover to notice how fake he sounded.

Alex shook her head only to wince and close her eyes. “No. Just spent the night writing.”

“How’d that go?”

“Couldn’t read a damn word this morning but Maggie’s name.” Alex set the mug down and rubbed her temples. “I feel like my life is imploding.”
Winn risked reaching out again, breathing a little easier when Alex allowed him to clasp her shoulder. “What are you going to do?”

She sighed, a small, wounded sound. “I don’t know. It was so clear in my head last night. I wanted to see her, just see her. Talk to her. Tell her how I feel. See if... there’s a chance.” Toying with the mug, she took a drink, and then another. “But this morning, I dunno, I feel like…”

“Like what?”

“Like I don’t deserve to be in her life anymore. Like I don’t deserve another chance.”

Winn knew Maggie missed her. She wouldn’t say it, but every mention of Alex’s name dulled Maggie’s smile and brought the glimmer of tears to her eyes. She was hurting as much as, if not more than, Alex.

But Maggie had Jamie now, and she needed time. They were learning about each other, learning how to be a family. They were doing so well, better than he expected at this stage, and Alex barging into the relationship now could derail that.

“Maybe you should give yourself a little time. Sort things out with Kara first. That way you can come to Maggie from a healthier place.” Winn nodded, impressed with his suggestion if he did say so himself.

Alex looked at him, bleary-eyed, but she seemed to consider the idea. “But what if I wait and Maggie…” She gulped and blinked back tears. “What if Maggie moves on? What if she has already?”

He scrubbed a hand through his hair, praying he could hold his ground. “If it’s meant to be, it’ll be, Alex. I believe that. As for Maggie, I could… do some snooping for you. See if she’s dating someone, but I don’t think she is. She’s been busy. The task force is loading her up right now.”

“Yeah?”

“Absolutely. I’ll do recon for you. Get the lowdown. The skinny on Maggie Sawyer’s love life. Agent Schott reporting for duty.” Winn saluted, aware he was going too far but unable to help himself.

Alex’s features scrunched, but she didn’t grow suspicious. “Are you always this chipper on a Monday morning?”

“I only seem chipper because you’re hung over.”

Alex accepted the excuse without a fight. She sipped more coffee as they waited for their meeting to start.

Winn drummed his thumbs on the table, wishing J’onn would hurry. Should he warn Maggie Alex was spiraling? Would that put too much pressure on her to let Alex back into her life before she was ready? As much as he loved Alex like a sister, he had to put Maggie and Jamie’s wellbeing first.

He glanced over and swallowed at the defeated expression on Alex’s face. No matter how hard that decision was.

***

Frazzled, Maggie darted up the stairs, cursing herself every step. As the task force came together,
she’d gotten held up at work and couldn’t get away. Now it was nearly seven thirty, and she still needed to make dinner, help Jamie with her homework, and pack for their pending move to a bigger place in the building. She had a new appreciation for single moms who made juggling work and family look easy.

Unlocking the door, she shouldered it open and hurried inside. “Hey, Jamie? I’m home. Give me two minutes and I’ll get…” Maggie trailed off, staring in confusion at the sight that greeted her.

Surrounded by boxes in the middle of the living room, Jamie sat astride a live, miniature pony. Maggie blinked, searching for calm and finding none. Jamie giggled and pointed at her flummoxed expression before jerking on the reins. “Giddy up!”

“No!” Maggie shouted, snapping out of her daze. She shut and locked the door. “No giddy up. We don’t need the downstairs neighbors to report us for… hooves on the ceiling. Assuming they haven’t already.” She chucked her messenger bag on the couch and crossed her arms as the pony looked up at her balefully. “Seriously? You thought this was a good idea?”

The horse seemed to melt away before Maggie’s eyes. Jamie’s feet landed on the carpet as J’onn shifted, and she slid off his back with another giggle as he resumed his typical form.

“No!” J’onn rumbled with a sheepish smile as he stood. “We got carried away.”

“Uncle J’onn is fun!” Jamie declared, and it was impossible for Maggie to be mad seeing Jamie so happy.

“Just tell me there was no galloping.”

“No galloping,” J’onn promised. “No room.”

Maggie blew out a tired breath and headed for the kitchen. “Thanks for watching her again. Ms. Mundy can only stay until six.” Her retired neighbor had gladly taken on caring for Jamie after school for a small fee. That took care of three hours a day, but as the task force ate up more of Maggie’s time, she needed an alternative for nights like this. One more thing to add to an already bursting list.

She was being pulled in too many directions, and guilt was becoming a constant in her life. When she was at work, she was neglecting Jamie, and when she was with Jamie, she was neglecting work. After a few encouraging weeks, the strain of being a single parent was setting in.

Jamie’s small, pink tennis shoes squeaked on the tile floor as she followed Maggie into the kitchen. “You mad?”

“I’m just… stressed a little,” Maggie confessed, shooting an embarrassed glance at J’onn. “I’ve got a lot on my mind.” She stroked a hand through Jamie’s hair. “I’m not mad at you.”

“You sure?” Those dark eyes looked up at her, full of fear and worry. She was letting Jamie down. Her best efforts weren’t good enough. They never were.

“Yeah,” she breathed out, offering Jamie a tremulous smile.

Jamie stepped forward and hugged Maggie around the waist. “Glad you’re home. I’ll go finish my homework.” She darted away, leaving Maggie more startled by the hug than finding a pony in her living room.

“You’re doing a good job with her,” J’onn said, reminding Maggie he was there.
Maggie turned to the stove and grabbed a pot out of a cabinet. “I’m not sure about that.”

“You don’t have to cook. Winn ordered pizza. Should be here in a few minutes.”

“Winn’s here?” Maggie didn’t want to be rude, but she had too much on her plate to entertain.

“Downstairs in your new apartment. He’s painting Jamie’s room. We know you’re swamped with the task force and wanted to help.”

Maggie sagged against the stove, relief and gratitude hitting her so hard tears threatened. “Sorry,” she whispered as J’onn came closer in concern. “I…”

“It’s alright. Being a parent overwhelms sometimes. The constant worry. The struggle to balance the personal and professional. Feeling the need to be in two places at once.”

She nodded.

“And that’s just with Alex, Winn, and Kara. Don’t get me started on what it was like with my own children,” he said with a sad smile.

Maggie snorted, but she quickly sobered. “Am I cut out for this?”

J’onn’s large hands settled on her shoulders. “You’re doing great, Maggie. Jamie chatters about you constantly when you’re not here.”

She looked up at him, much like Jamie looked up at her. “Really?”

“Really. She thinks you’re quite the hero, protecting families and busting bad guys. Sounds like she brags about you at school too. Jamie is exceptionally empathetic for a child her age. She understands your situation better than you think.”

“She does, but that doesn’t stop her from feeling alone or like she’s a burden. I know how that hurts, and I don’t want to inflict that pain on another child.” Maggie wiped away a traitorous tear from her jaw.

J’onn drew her into his arms. “I know this is hard, but from one parent to another, you’re making it work. We’ll make sure Jamie is covered while you handle the task force. I’m happy to help whenever you need me.”

“Thank you,” she murmured into his chest.

“I should check on Winn. He needs supervising.”

Maggie chuckled, exhausted but committed to her choices for now as she stepped back. “Did I tell you she wants a Supergirl room?”

J’onn tried to suppress a smile and failed. “There are bedspreads with Kara’s likeness on them. I’d be happy to get one for her.”

“Don’t you dare.”

***

Eyes scratchy from a lack of sleep and a long, brutal day, Maggie gazed over the whiteboards ringing the room. She was amazed by the information the task force had amassed in less than a month. Piece-by-piece, the web grew. They had a good idea how the smugglers were getting
Belamort onto the planet. Maggie itched to shut down the supply chain, but until they could prove who was behind the Gold Rush ring, any action would only send the rats scurrying to start up again elsewhere.

A sense of satisfaction bubbled up in her chest, and for a moment, she let herself just breathe. The captain of the narcotics squad had stopped by the converted conference room they were using as their base of operations to avoid prying eyes. She’d left impressed with the speed and thoroughness of their work.

After letting her doubts get the better of her last night, Maggie was on steadier footing today thanks to J’onn and Winn. She might pull this off, lead a task force and solve the biggest case of her career while learning to be a single mom.

She leaned back against a beat-up desk in the corner and stared at an empty spot in the middle of the biggest whiteboard. The key puzzle piece she kept to herself: the mastermind behind it all.

Maxwell Lord was in this up to his eyeballs. She just couldn’t prove it yet or fully understand why. If only...

She drew in a breath as pain stabbed through her gut. She missed Alex, always, but in moments like this, she missed Agent Danvers. After a rocky start, they’d clicked, and Maggie longed for the simpatico they’d shared. They’d been so in tune, finishing each other’s sentences, always having each other’s backs. She’d loved bouncing ideas off Alex and watching her keen mind work on a problem. They were better together, in every sense of the word.

Instead, Maggie muddled through on her own. Anger surged through her, at Alex for being so quick to end them, at herself for refusing to compromise. If they had given their relationship, their love, time to grow and mature, they both could have everything they wanted right now. The marriage, the house, the dog, and the kid.

With a sigh, Maggie turned away from the boards and tried to concentrate on the pile of printouts on her desk. Somewhere in the stack of financial records and taped phone conversations could be a clue that would break their case wide open. It was a long shot since data analysis hadn’t come back with anything new, but sometimes human eyes saw what machine intelligence missed.

“Sawyer?” Marshall, one of the narcotics detectives on the task force, pressed the old-school wired phone to his chest instead of hitting the mute button. “Front desk says there’s someone named Danvers here to see you.”

Fear and hope blossomed in Maggie’s chest, as if thinking about Alex had conjured her, but then he clarified, “Kara Danvers. Something about a tip?”

To their credit, the coworkers who knew about her broken engagement gave her sympathetic looks as she passed by the smattering of desks. “Thanks. I’ll be right down.”

Maggie took the stairs, the rapid staccato of her steps gearing her up for another confrontation with Kara. She burst out of the stairwell, and Kara pivoted away from the elevators where she waited for Maggie to arrive.

“Detective Sawyer, thanks for your time,” Kara greeted formally, her usual air of blundering arrogance muted. She seemed subdued, cautious, and Maggie wondered at the change. “Can we talk someplace private?”

In no mood to deal with a reporter, especially one that reminded her of Alex, Maggie nearly blew
“Sure.” Maggie gestured for Kara to follow, leading her through a maze of hallways before opening a door and gesturing Kara inside. The interrogation room through the one-way glass was dark, and Maggie leaned against the observation table, waiting Kara out.

“I’ve never been on this side before. I mean, there was that one time in the prison when…” Kara stopped mid-sentence and bit her lip, the specter of Alex rising between them.

“The desk sergeant said something about a tip?” Maggie prompted before they ventured into more painful territory. “Unless you have something, I have to get back to work.”

Kara sighed, acknowledging the subtle criticism in Maggie’s tone. “I have something for you.” Sliding her glasses down, Kara took another, harder, look around.

“It’s a secure room, Kara.”

“Just making sure.” Even though she appeared satisfied, Kara stepped closer and dropped her voice to a whisper. “Last night I responded to a fire. It was an old warehouse on the dock, started by a chemical explosion. A couple of the firefighters were acting funny, like drowsy and high.”

That got Maggie’s attention. “You think it was Gold Rush?”

“I think it was Belamort, which is a component of Gold Rush. The alien component? The little tidbit you tossed me last time but didn’t name?”

Maggie crossed her arms, agitated by Kara’s presence and interference. “I take it you had your buddies at the DEO run tests?”

“They already had samples on file, Maggie. I’ve kept Belamort out of the press. Wouldn’t want to jeopardize your investigation.” Kara slipped a piece of paper out of her bag and handed it over. “The DEO’s results, in case there’s something your fancy NCPD lab didn’t catch.”

The dig earned Kara a glare, but the fact she’d kept the Belamort info on the down low made Maggie mellow a touch. She folded up the results and tucked them into her back pocket, more interested in what else Kara found. “Were they mixing the Gold Rush there?”

“I don’t know. Most everything was destroyed in the fire.” Kara slid her bag off her shoulder and set it on the table. The smell of ash filled the room when she opened it. “I grabbed some files. There may be more, but the fire investigation unit has the scene locked down.” She shrugged in apology before pulling out a hard drive wrapped in plastic. “This got waterlogged so I don’t know if you can recover anything off of it.”

Maggie itched to go through the files and dispatch a detective to the scene, but she cocked her head and regarded Kara. “Will I see this on the front page this afternoon?”

Irritation flickered in Kara’s eyes, but she tamped it down. “I thought it was better if the task force tackled any leads first.” The resignation in her voice hinted at how much she regretted the fact. She pushed the pile of papers and electronics toward Maggie.

“Thanks.” Maggie glanced down before meeting Kara’s eyes. “I don’t want to seem ungrateful, but I’m curious, why?”
Kara took a deep breath. “Because this drug is dangerous, and the NCPD can stop it better than Supergirl.”

Maggie nodded. About damn time Kara figured that out.

“And because… I’m trying. To do the right thing. To not make everything about me.” Her gaze dropped as her fingers traced a scar on the table. “I respect you and the work you do, Maggie.”

Unsure how to respond to something Maggie never expected to hear, she could only stare at Kara in disbelief.

A small grin sprang to Kara’s lips when she looked at Maggie again. “And explaining to Snapper how I came across the information would be… complicated.”

Maggie snorted. That was more like it. But Kara’s words touched her, and this whole thing seemed like an apology, of a sort. “What, can’t use Supergirl as a source for this one?”

Kara grimaced. “Probably wouldn’t go over well. But, if, I dunno, the information were to lead to something, maybe I could get a heads-up before the NCPD PR department puts out a press release?”

“I could give you 15 minutes… if I’m in a good mood, maybe 30,” Maggie relented, a smile teasing the corners of her mouth.

“I can type fast.”

“I bet you can.”

***

The smell of paint lingered in the air as Jamie fluttered around her new bedroom, straightening a pillow on her bed and running a hand over the small storage cabinet holding her art supplies. Her smile would have lit the room if not for the sun setting through the window.

“Here.” Maggie handed her a small gift bag, and Jamie’s eyes grew wide as she poured the contents onto her bed to sort through the assorted pencils and containers of paint. “I, ah, noticed you were low on some things.”

Jamie froze, her eyes darting from the pile of art supplies to the new easel and bedspread.

“What’s wrong? Did I get the wrong kind?”

“Can we, um, I mean, can you… pay for all this?” Her small hand waved at the room and more spacious apartment beyond the door.

Maggie recalled the way Jamie hesitated in the grocery store, chewing her lip as she tried to decide between two flavors of Pop-Tarts. Memories stirred, of her aunt buying little extras Maggie knew she couldn’t afford, trying, in all ways great and small, to give Maggie some semblance of normal. To make her feel loved when she’d been discarded.

“You don’t have to worry about that,” Maggie tried to assure her, but Jamie didn’t look convinced.

She and Aileen had been living modestly, that much was clear, but Maggie had seen nothing to warrant this kind of concern. She sat down on the bed and patted the space next to her. After a brief pause, Jamie joined her. Maggie slid her arm around Jamie’s shoulders to give her a squeeze. “Why are you worried?”
Jamie shrugged. “I got dumped in your life, and now I’m messing it up, and you’re spending all this money on me. You weren’t expecting this.” Expecting me was the subtle subtext of her sentence, and Maggie closed her eyes, wishing once again Aileen had let her know about their daughter. This whole experience could have been less traumatic for both of them.

“Some of the best gifts are unexpected,” Maggie told her quietly, giving her another squeeze. “And we’re fine. I, um, had some savings.”

“For the wedding?”

Damn this kid and her insights. “Yeah,” Maggie admitted.

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay. What happened, happened. But you’re here now, and I can afford to splurge a little to get your room set up the way you like it.”

“Even this?” Jamie stroked her new comforter, right over the giant Supergirl crest, and Maggie rolled her eyes. At least Kara’s face wasn’t staring at her, and Jamie hadn’t wanted the matching sheets with little pictures of the superhero all over them. Those, Jamie had deemed too childish. Thank heaven for small favors.

“Even this.” Maggie reached down and tickled Jamie’s ribs, eliciting a squeal of laughter that made her ears ring.

They spent a few minutes putting away the last of Jamie’s things before Maggie ruffled a hand through Jamie’s hair and left to review the files Kara had dropped off. She was nearly out the door when Jamie’s hesitant voice stopped her.

“Thanks, Mo-M-Maggie.”

Maggie’s heart stuttered at the near slip. Jamie had nearly said “mom,” and Maggie was shocked by how much she wanted to be called that, how much she wanted to be that. She was ready when Jamie was.

“You’re welcome.” Maggie walked to the desk she set up in the corner of the living room for her work. A small tremor rippled through her body, and she braced her hands on the worn surface, hanging her head.

Maybe Alex wasn’t the only one who’d given up on them too quickly.

***

The fabric of her cape snapped as Kara strode into the command center. Alex glanced up from her tablet, taking in the monitors before focusing on her sister. No crises were unfolding, so Kara’s agitation had to be work-related or… her.

“You okay?” Alex asked as Kara drifted closer, but not too close. She experienced a moment of regret for the uncertainty in Kara’s eyes.

Kara sighed and edged around the console in the center of the room. “Yeah. It’s Snapper. He wants something new on the Gold Rush investigation. There were three more overdoses last night, and the death toll is rising fast.”

Alex frowned. She hadn’t realized the situation had gotten that bad.
“There’s nothing to report, but Snapper doesn’t want to hear that. The other news outlets don’t have anything either, but I’m expected to pull something out of the air, apparently.” She huffed and crossed her arms over her crest. “Mag—uh, detective in charge of the task force won’t release much information about the investigation.”

Of course. Here they were again. Alex opened her mouth to speak, but Kara cut her off.

“And before you say anything, I’m trying. I saw her earlier this week to pass on some intel I came across at that warehouse fire.”

So maybe some of what Alex had been telling Kara was penetrating that thick, Kryptonian skull after all. Although Alex could have done without the surge of jealousy at the thought of Kara working with Maggie on this case. “I, I’m sure she appreciated that,” she said, squashing all the questions she wanted to ask.

“I think she did. She said she’d give me a heads-up so I could scoop the other reporters, but that was days ago.” Kara’s voice edged into a whine.

“She’ll give you something when she has it.”

“Yeah, I—shoot!” Kara cocked her head and closed her eyes. “There’s an ambulance caught in traffic. I should—” Kara took a step toward the balcony, but she swung back suddenly. “Sister night Friday? Talk instead of a movie?”

“Yeah, I’d like that,” Alex replied, and her sister flashed her one of her signature 1000-watt smiles before taking off, a flash of red in the early afternoon sun.

Alex grabbed a fresh cup of coffee and headed back to her lab. She hesitated for only a moment before pulling up the chemical analysis for Gold Rush and settled in to read.

***

Finished with her homework and chores, Jamie settled down at the kitchen table to draw while Maggie prepped dinner. They were settling into a routine in the new apartment, and if everything went well, there would be more nights like this one to come.

Two months ago, Maggie would have worked until her fellow detectives kicked her out of the precinct, or maybe downed a few shots at the bar if she was feeling especially sorry for herself. Even though she was still walking that tightrope and might always be one step away from a tumble, Maggie had to accept things were better this way. Healthier.

Jamie impacted her life in ways big and small, in ways she never imagined a child could. While Maggie still mourned for the life she’d wanted for herself, she couldn’t deny the appeal of this one now. There was something wondrous about watching her child learn and grow and seeing glimpses of who she could become. Parenthood might be a bigger adventure than she’d ever imagined. She just wished she didn’t have to do it alone.

When thoughts of Alex threatened, Maggie cleared her throat and glanced over her shoulder. “What are you working on?”

“Some flowers,” Jamie answered readily. “I thought I’d take them to mom’s grave if that’s okay.”

Maggie paused mid-chop. They’d visited Aileen once, shortly after Jamie had come to live with her. She should have asked Jamie if she wanted to go again. Mentally berating herself for not thinking of it, Maggie leaned against the counter and crossed her arms. “Yeah, of course. We can go Saturday if
you want. I’m always happy to take you, though.”

“I know. It’s just hard to go.” Jamie kept her head down, coloring something with a blue pencil. “I don’t want her to think I’ve forgotten her. Or for her to feel alone.”

Maggie wiped her hands on her jeans and wandered over to the table, noting the beautiful irises Jamie had drawn already. They had been Aileen’s favorite. “You know… it makes me proud, the way you put other people first.”

Jamie stopped drawing, her dark eyes wide with surprise as they met Maggie’s. “Isn’t that what you do?”

“It’s kinda my job.” Maggie shrugged one shoulder. “I get paid to protect and serve.”

“That’s not why you do it. You like helping people.”

Maggie tilted her head, amused a six-year old had her pegged. “You think so, huh?”

Jamie rolled her eyes, and Maggie snickered, put properly in her place.

“Fine. You might be onto something there, kiddo.”

“I want to be like you when I grow up.” Jamie picked up a different pencil, leaning forward as she colored in a purple flower petal.

“Like me?” The thought was incomprehensible. Maggie didn’t think of herself as someone others aspired to be; otherwise, people wouldn’t keep throwing her away.

Jamie nodded, shading one side of the petal a little darker than the other. “Uh-huh. I like helping people too.”

“I thought you wanted to be an artist.”

“I want to be a cop and an artist. Or maybe a firefighter. That would be kind of cool.”

A smile tugged at Maggie’s lips. “So you want to be like Supergirl and save the day, huh?” Maggie figured Jamie didn’t really mean her, more like first responders in general.

“No, like you. It’s neat when she saves people, but you stop bad things from happening, or you lock up bad people so they can’t hurt anyone else. And you do it without powers. It’s easy for Supergirl.”

Maggie bit her lip, wondering if Jamie would ever cease to surprise her. “How long have you wanted to be a cop?”

“My whole life.”

“The whole thing, huh?” Maggie joked.

Jamie gave her a playful glare and Maggie laughed.

***

Nervous, Kara bounced on the balls of her feet. Her last encounter with Maggie had gone better than expected, but Kara had come with proverbial olive branch in hand then. Now she needed something, anything, to keep Snapper off her back, and Maggie was her only hope.
Blowing out a breath, Kara knocked on the door, hoping she’d gotten the right apartment. A moment later, Maggie cursed under her breath on the other side.

“I heard that,” Kara teased. She couldn’t blame Maggie for being grumpy about Kara showing up at her home.

A few deadbolts turned and Maggie jerked open the door wide enough to step into the opening. “Kara, hey,” she greeted without enthusiasm. “This isn’t a good–”

Kara didn’t let her finish, using a pinch of super strength to push the door open and out of Maggie’s hand before breezing past her into the apartment. It was a jerk move and would piss Maggie off, but Kara was desperate.

“I’m sorry.” Kara rounded the instant she was inside, facing Maggie who didn’t bother to shut the door. “I know it’s getting late, but I need what you found on the hard drive. Snapper is on the warpath. If I don’t bring him something, he will assign a reporter who won’t be as… cooperative.”

Maggie’s hands settled on her hips. “A lot of the data was corrupted. I have nothing to give you. Not yet.”

“I could have kept the drive, taken it to the DEO, but I didn’t. I’m trying to help, Maggie, but you’ve got to trust me.”

“This isn’t about trust, Kara. We need time. I promised to give you a heads-up when we had something, and I keep my promises.”

“Winn could do this faster.”

“We already came by the drive under sketchy circumstances. The more we keep the chain of evidence intact, the better.”

“Sketchy? I’m sketchy? Just because you can’t tell everyone that Super–”

Maggie’s gaze darted past Kara’s shoulder, and Kara realized nearly too late they weren’t alone. She glanced behind her, expecting a gorgeous woman she would definitely not tell Alex about, only to find a small child at the kitchen table.


“Hi.” The girl eyed Kara shyly before she went back to drawing, her pencil moving across the page with quick, practiced strokes. She was adorable, her little legs swinging back and forth under the chair.

Kara looked back at Maggie, confused, but Maggie was already shutting the door, resignation etched into every line of her body.

Curious, Kara approached the table, staring in awe at the drawings strewn over the surface. As she watched, the girl drew a new iris with a skill that should be beyond someone so young. She snagged a corner of one sketch and tugged it toward her, stunned by the child’s talent.

“You’re really good.”

“Thank you.” She glanced at Kara again, still bashful, but she smiled, forming a pair of perfect dimples Kara had seen before.
“I’m Kara.” She offered her hand, and the girl paused, looking to Maggie for permission.

“It’s okay,” Maggie murmured. “Kara is…”

“A friend,” Kara readily supplied. “I work with Maggie sometimes. And who might you be?”

“Jamie.” She shook Kara’s hand, smudges of pencil lead on her fingertips. Kara didn’t mind.

“It’s very nice to meet you, Jamie. You like drawing flowers?”

“My mom likes flowers. I’m drawing some for her.”

“They’re beautiful. She’ll love them.”

Maggie made a tiny noise of protest in the back of her throat. “Kara–”

“She died,” Jamie explained. “It’s just me and Maggie now.”

Her words fell into a heavy, startled silence.

Kara swallowed, but she didn’t turn and look at Maggie, asked none of the hundred questions racing through her mind. “I’m so sorry. My parents died when I was a little older than you. I know how much it hurts.”

Jamie eyed her, more intrigued than before. She nodded in shared understanding. “Maggie helps a lot.”

“I’ll bet.” Kara gave Jamie what she hoped was an encouraging smile. “Can you excuse us a second, Jamie? I need to borrow Maggie.”

“Sure.”

Kara pivoted away from the table, grasping Maggie’s elbow and hauling her out onto the small balcony. She let Maggie twist free as they stepped outside, the warm, muggy night washing over them. Kara closed the door with a soft thump before rounding on her. “Who is she?”

Maggie hitched her chin higher and tried to stare Kara down. “None of your business. I tried to tell you this wasn’t a good time.”

“Tell me she’s a witness in a case. A cousin. A sister.” But Kara already knew the truth, some part of her had known the second Jamie smiled at her.

With an unsteady sigh, Maggie’s whole frame slouched in defeat. “She’s my daughter. Happy?”

“Happy? You broke up with Alex because you didn’t want kids, but you… you…” Anger rushed through her, swift and hard, and when she grabbed the rail, it bent under her fingers.

“I didn’t know,” Maggie spat back. “I found out a little over a month ago.”

“How the hell do you have a kid who clearly shares your DNA and you didn’t know? That’s…”

“Her mother was Yarian. I… we…” Maggie’s hand waved toward the kitchen table. “She never told
Kara’s head rocked back as the truth slapped her across the face. “You had no idea?”

“None.” Maggie sighed, slumping against the rail, and Kara’s temper cooled. “The first I heard of all this I was face to face with Jamie and a social worker. Believe me, if I had… ” She swallowed, and Kara got a glimpse of a woman whose world had been flipped upside down.

They said nothing for a few, tense moments as Kara processed the news. “Why didn’t you call her? Why didn’t you run straight to Alex?” she finally asked.

“Because I didn’t want her to know.”

“Alex still misses you like crazy. We’ve been fighting about you for weeks! All this time you could have been back together—”

“No, Kara, we couldn’t.”

“But…”

“This isn’t about Alex. It’s about me, and Jamie. I need time to get to know my kid without… without…” Maggie’s gaze skittered away, and she swept her hand through her hair, tucking it behind her ear. “I have to be what Jamie needs right now, and I don’t need Alex charging back into my life now that I check all her boxes for an ideal wife.”

Kara winced.

“Alex and I are over. Jamie doesn’t change that.” Maggie raised her head, her dark eyes pleading. “Promise me you won’t tell her. Not for a while, anyway.”

Kara nodded slowly, her heart heavy. Her sister was in agony, and keeping this news from Alex would be the hardest thing she had ever done, but Maggie was right. It wasn’t her place. She glanced into the apartment, sliding her glasses down to see Jamie through the curtains. Maggie was trying, but…

“Are you…” Kara pursed her lips, searching for the right words, debating if she even had the right to say what she was about to say. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but are you sure you should keep Jamie?”

Maggie bristled, her eyes narrowing as she stepped in closer. “Excuse me?”

Kara ran her fingers over her brow. “I just… You didn’t want kids. Are you sure you’re the best parent for her? Jamie could have a mother and father, or two mothers, or two fathers…”

“You don’t get to judge me.”

“I’m not judging. What you’re doing, what you’re trying to do… Maggie, I admire that. I was going to do the same for Clark. But if you don’t want a child, there are so many people who could give her a good home.”

“She’s my daughter,” Maggie crossed her arms. “Do you have any idea how it feels to have your family turn their back on you? I won’t do that to my own kid. Didn’t Alex tell you what happened to me?” Her voice quivered but didn’t break.

Kara studied her in the faint light, sensing she was missing something important, something she’d
never taken the time to learn. “I’m aware you aren’t close to your family, but…”

“They threw me out for being gay. Fourteen years old on Valentine’s Day, and they dumped me on my aunt’s sidewalk. When my dad came to the shower that was the first time I’d seen him in almost twenty years.”


“It doesn’t matter. You don’t know what that’s like.”

“But I do.” Kara drew in a shaky breath. “I’ve been in Jamie’s shoes. Where the only family I had left in the universe didn’t want me. When I got to Earth, Clark had a life with no place for me in it.”

Maggie took a step back, regarding Kara a little differently. “But he—”

“We’re closer now, but Clark left me with the Danvers because he realized he wasn’t the best person to raise me. And yeah, it hurts, but I got Eliza, and Jeremiah, and Alex… I got a sister I wouldn’t trade for anything even if she hates my guts right now. I was better off with them.”

They stared at each other, the silence no longer as thick or uncomfortable.

“I hear what you’re saying. I do,” Maggie promised slowly. “But that hurt you carry, that Clark made you feel, I can’t do that to her. I won’t let her feel the pain I do. I won’t.”

“I’m not sorry the Danvers adopted me.”

“I know, and I’m glad you ended up with them, but every situation is different. I get why you’re asking me to think about this, but I already have. All I’ve done is think about this.”

Kara nodded. “Life threw you a curveball, didn’t it?”

Maggie snorted. “Something like that.” She glanced toward the apartment. “I was so sure I never wanted kids. A hundred percent sure. I let Alex go so she could…” She bit her lip. “But now I…”

“Might see yourself as a mom?” Kara smiled, impressed with Maggie in a way she never had been before.

“Yeah,” Maggie breathed out. “Right before you showed up, Jamie told me she wanted to be like me when she grew up.”

Kara’s heart melted at the thought. “You’re already falling hard, aren’t you?”

“Maybe.” Maggie met Kara’s gaze. “About Alex…”

“I won’t say anything.” Kara hoped Alex would forgive her someday. “You’re right. You and Jamie deserve time together, but… you need to tell her at some point, Maggie. Alex deserves to hear it from you.”

“I know. I just need a little more time. If you uh… want to stay for dinner, I’m sure Jamie would like to talk to someone other than me for a little while.”

“I’d like that.” Kara meant it, determined to make the most of a second chance to know Maggie Sawyer.

“And she’s a fan of your alter ego, FYI. She thinks I’m all that and a bag of chips because I’ve met you.”
Kara’s smile widened further. “Bet that drives you crazy.”

“Don’t let it go to your head, Supergirl.”
Grit crushed underfoot as Maggie followed the strobing red and blue lights to her crime scene. Out like a light when the call came in at one in the morning, she longed to crawl back in bed for a few more needed hours of sleep, but that seemed unlikely with another dead body on her hands.

“Sawyer.”

“Ragland.” Maggie nodded at the narcotics detective as she ducked under the crime scene tape. She’d left Jamie asleep with Winn keeping watch. She wasn’t sure how she’d manage nights like this without him and J’onn willing to show up without complaint. “What do we have?”

“Alien this time. Didn’t want to tell you on the phone, but…”

Maggie’s gaze sharpened on him as she gloved up. “What?”

“You know the guy. He’s one of your informants. Hangs out at that bar you like.”

“Shit,” she hissed through her teeth. Maggie’s stomach twisted as names and faces sprang to mind. Her boots splashed through a puddle, soaking her ankles as she hurried down the alley. Rain had come and gone earlier in the night, and Maggie prayed the body was dumped after the storm.

She made out jeans and a worn pair of loafers under the crime scene lights, both largely dry, but she couldn’t be thankful for their good fortune. The shoes alone tipped her off and stopped Maggie in her tracks.

Brian.

He’d been such a screw-up, but he’d had a huge heart. From helping her and Alex get a bead on Cadmus to buying Maggie drinks after their breakup, Brian always wanted to help. He didn’t deserve to be thrown away like trash in a garbage-strewn alley.

He looked asleep when she reached him, or maybe sleeping off a bender, propped against the dumpster. Maggie crouched and studied his peaceful features. His face blurred with tears she quickly blinked away.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered, knowing she’d failed him.

Ragland knelt beside her. “You okay?”

Maggie bit her lip and shoved her emotions down. She would mourn later, away from the crime scene and the team looking to her to lead them. Nodding at Ragland to continue, she half-listened as she pushed up Brian’s sleeve to see the fatal track mark on his scale-covered skin.

“This is what? Fifteen deaths now?” Ragland asked.

“Yeah.” Maggie knew every one of their names, their faces, their families. Even Brian, whose only family was the denizens of the bar.

“We’re closing in on them, Maggie.”

“Not fast enough.” Maggie rocked back on her heels, trying to think. They needed to accelerate the timeline, amp up the pressure on Blackwell, but her fuzzy mind refused to come up with a single plan. She sighed and gave Brian a last look, knowing the image would be seared in her brain for a
long time.

Pivoting as she stood, Maggie nearly crashed into someone behind her. Her hands came up in defense only to be grabbed, her body recognizing the touch long before her gaze locked on Alex’s eyes.

“Agent Danvers.” Maggie ignored Ragland’s startled look. By now, everyone on the task force was aware of her broken engagement, but most had never seen Alex in person. She had hoped to keep it that way.

“Sorry. I…” Alex let her go with notable reluctance, her hands falling to her sides. “Call came in about your victim. Do you mind?”

“Since when do you worry about treading on my jurisdiction?” Maggie couldn’t help the dig, but the lame joke fell flat.

Alex moved closer, and Maggie caught a whiff of familiar shower gel and shampoo. “He’s important to my superiors.” Maggie didn’t move; she hitched her chin higher as Alex drew up to her full height. “This doesn’t have to be harder than it is… Detective.”

Their gazes fenced, saying more with a look than words ever could. Finally, Maggie surrendered and moved clear, letting Alex survey Brian’s body. Alex’s jaw clenched, the only outward sign she was affected by his death.

“Since you’re here, I’m assuming this is another Gold Rush case?” Alex knelt by Brian, slipping on a pair of blue latex gloves.

“Yeah.”

“How can you tell?” Alex asked, her voice and demeanor clinical.

Alex was being professional. Maggie could play that game too. “See the faint, gold sheen around the injection sight? Pretty telling. We’ll know for sure after a tox screen.”

“We’re taking the body.”

“Like hell.” So maybe professional was stretching it.

Alex stood and motioned for Maggie to step away with her. Maggie shot a tense look at her squad before complying, following Alex down the alley away from curious eyes and ears.

“I’m not trying to stomp on your case, Maggie.” Alex was almost apologetic, for once trying to explain instead of barking orders.

But this was the NCPD’s investigation and Maggie’s task force, and she wasn’t backing down without a fight. Maggie crossed her arms over her chest and stared Alex down, the expression on her face saying all she needed to say.

Alex sighed. “Look, we’ll share whatever we learn, but Brian was a DEO informant, and he was working on some things for us. We have to make sure there’s no connection between his work and his death.”

“I’m aware of his role, Danvers. I introduced you, remember? He was my informant too.”

Alex’s mouth flattened into a tight, thin line. “The DEO has stayed out of your case until now, but I
don’t see how we can continue to sit on the sidelines.”

“Easy. Park it in your secret lair and stay out of my way.”

Alex shook her head. “Not an option.”

“And neither is taking over my investigation.” Maggie huffed out a frustrated breath. “We’re close, Alex. My task force is close to shutting the whole thing down, but we have to make sure the charges stick. The major players weasel out of this, and we’re going to be right back in another alley with another dead body in six months.” She gestured toward Brian, slumped against the dumpster. “I won’t let that happen. It’s my case.”

“We can work together,” Alex offered carefully.

“No. We can’t. Not you and me.” Maggie’s tone was sharp, and she regretted it when Alex flinched.

“Then assign me a detective,” Alex ground out. “Someone who can stand the sight of me for more than ten seconds.”

Silence lengthened between them as they glared at each other, until Alex dropped her gaze and her shoulders slumped in defeat.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t…” Maggie stripped off her gloves and tucked her hair behind her ears as Alex stared at the glistening asphalt beneath their feet. “This still…” She was mortified to feel the burn of tears, but Maggie refused to fall apart in front of her colleagues. “This still hurts.”

“I know. Believe me, I know.” Alex met her gaze again, and the anguish in her brown eyes swallowed Maggie whole. “Not a day goes by, not an hour, that I don’t miss you, but the DEO is in this now, like it or not. You can work with me, get a clear line of communication and cooperation, or I can share the bare minimum with the random cop you tag me with.”

“That sounds like blackmail.”

“I need someone who can work with the DEO as the DEO. I don’t know your guys, Maggie, but I know you. I can’t read any of these detectives in without the days it will take to run a thorough background check, and we don’t have that kind of time.”

“Have J’onn assign another agent–”

“One with my capabilities? I’ve been analyzing the drug, trying to find a way to neutralize or reduce its effects. Maybe we need more time to bring down the ring, but with any luck, I can figure out how to counteract the drug to prevent additional overdoses.”

Maggie sighed. She had wished for Alex’s insights on this case, but as the reality of working more closely with her reared its ugly head, she wondered if she was up for it. “Fine. We’ll work together.”

The briefest of smiles lifted the corners of Alex’s lips, and Maggie hoped she wouldn’t regret her decision. “We’ll do our best not to trample on your case. I’m sorry about Brian.”

“He was a good guy. And he wasn’t a drug user. My guess? We won’t find another mark on him.”

Alex stiffened. “You think this was deliberate? Suicide or…?”

“Not suicide. His species has rules about that sort of thing. Brian had his ear to the street, helping out the NCPD on this case. I suspect someone got wind and killed him.”
“Takes this whole thing to another level if your drug ring is resorting to murder now.”

“They’ve already killed fourteen people with their poison before tonight. They just cut to the chase this time.”

Alex nodded. “Let me get him back to the DEO. I’ll have a report on your desk by tomorrow morning.”

“It is morning, Danvers.”

Alex’s smile lasted a breath longer this time, and Maggie knew it would haunt her dreams when her head hit the pillow. “Before sun up then.”

“Save it. I’ll stop by the DEO. Fewer questions that way. Assuming my visitor pass still works.”

“It’ll always work,” Alex promised. She reached for Maggie’s wrist only to catch herself, and Maggie ached to feel the heat of her, the strength of her touch. Seven months and the agony was still as fresh as the day they’d said goodbye.

She could end that agony. Tell Alex about Jamie. Ask if Alex still wanted a family because she could have one now, with her, but Maggie held her tongue. This was neither the time nor place, not with a dead friend fifteen yards away.

Alex looked like she wanted to say more, but she took a step back instead. “I’ll see you in a few hours.” She didn’t wait for a response, spinning on her boot heel and striding down the alley.

Maggie watched her go until she was out of sight.

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“It’s really Brian?”

Torn from her tortured thoughts, Alex glanced up to find Kara waiting for her outside the door to her lab. The primary colors of her supersuit assaulted Alex’s eyes in the stark hallway and she grimaced. “Yeah. It’s him.”

Guilt stirred in the pit of Alex’s stomach. She’d barely thought about Brian since leaving the scene, her thoughts obsessing over Maggie and the way she’d handled things with her.

“And it was Gold Rush overdose?”

“Looks like. The techs are bringing his body up now.”

Kara sighed as Alex passed, and Alex heard her cape swish as her sister turned and followed. “I didn’t know he took drugs.”

“He didn’t. Maggie doesn’t think he did this time, either.” Alex flipped on the lights as she stepped into the room. The buzz from the fluorescents did nothing to help the persistent headache she’d developed since leaving the crime scene. She grunted as Kara grabbed her elbow, jerking her around to face her.

“You saw Maggie? Didn’t you go out there at like… one in the morning?”

“It’s her job, Kara. What difference does the time make?”

Kara opened her mouth only to close it.
“What?”

“What?.. that had to be… awkward.”

“You have no idea.” Alex set up the instruments she needed to perform a thorough exam. Sleep was out of the question for the rest of the night if she wanted a comprehensive report for Maggie by daybreak.

“You okay?” Kara asked, coming to a stop on the other side of the autopsy table.

“What do you want, Kara? Not to be rude, but I’m kind of busy.”

“I have a job to do too, Alex. The one I have as Kara Danvers. If Brian was given an overdose of Rush, that’s news. And he was a friend. He deserves justice whether he took that drug voluntarily or not.”

“I won’t know anything definitive for hours, and then it will be up to Maggie what she shares with the press. I won’t jeopardize her investigation. She hates me enough already.”

“Hates you? Maggie doesn’t hate you.”

“She could have fooled me.” Alex gloved up, expecting Brian’s body to arrive any moment.

“Alex,” Kara scolded. “This is hard on her too.”

“Oh, now you take her side?” Alex gripped the edge of the table. If she’d had a fraction of Kara’s strength, it would have crumpled under her anger and grief.

“What happened? Something has you wound up. Something besides Brian and seeing Maggie in a professional setting.” Kara crossed her arms, waiting.

It was Alex’s turn to sigh, and she did it with feeling. “It’s still there.”

Drifting to the end of the table, the telltale crinkle formed between Kara’s eyebrows. “What’s still where?”

“I always got this… jolt in my gut when I’d wake up to her smile. Or when I’d see her again at the end of the day. I’ve missed that. Seven months apart, and it still hit me as hard as it did the first time.” Alex shook her head. “How could I let that go? Let her go? Treat what we had like it was so common and easy to replace?”

Kara’s boots scuffed on the floor as she rounded the corner to stand beside her. “Maybe Maggie still feels that jolt too. Working with you will be hard, for both of you. Why do this to yourself? To her?”

Alex met Kara’s eyes, startled by the question as much as the tone of compassion in her voice. “It’s work. We knew our paths would cross again. It’s a minor miracle they haven’t before now.”

“Look, I appreciate we’re having a civil conversation about Maggie and my feelings for a change, but I have work to do.”

Kara pursed her lips. “Okay, but be careful. Whatever you’re trying to prove or accomplish… it’s my sister’s heart you’re playing with. And Maggie’s.”

That Kara cared about Maggie in this equation was a significant improvement, but Alex’s thoughts
were too muddled to dwell on her sister’s about-face. She nodded, and Kara kissed her on the shoulder before leaving her alone, passing the techs as they wheeled Brian’s body into the lab.

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Maggie stepped out of the elevator with a sense of déjà vu, like the intervening months hadn’t happened. Winn waved, and she saluted him with one of the coffee cups burning her hands as she crossed to his workstation.

“Hey, stranger, good to see you back!” His enthusiasm was a slap in the face of her sleep-deprivation.

Maggie had gone home when she’d finished at the crime scene, but instead of catching a few precious hours of sleep, she had tossed and turned, alternatively anticipating and dreading seeing Alex. She dragged herself out of bed at dawn and went for a run, getting home in time to wake Jamie up for school.

“One of those for me?” Winn asked, reaching for a cup, but she yanked it out of his reach.

“No. I thought you’d be sleeping in.”

“You, well, somebody texted me at five asking me to run a computer search for chemicals with certain characteristics, and then again at six to search the alien database…” He shrugged and pointed at his monitor. “A lot easier here than over wifi.” His gaze shifted over Maggie’s shoulder. “And no, I don’t have anything for you yet.”

“Hey.” Alex’s voice was tentative, with a softness for Maggie alone. “That for me?”

Maggie turned to find Alex framed by the morning sun through the high windows, the red in her hair glowing. God, she was beautiful, even with exhaustion clear on her face. Maggie extended the cup like a peace offering. “I figured you would work all night, Danvers. Nothing you like more than a dead body and a new puzzle.”

“There are a few things I like more…” Alex teased as she took the cup, her eyes widening as if she realized how flirty that sounded. “Sorry, long night.” She scrubbed her hand over her face and took a sip of her coffee.

It was fixed the way Alex liked it, and the small, knowing smile on her lips was almost Maggie’s undoing. She had debated with herself the full ten minutes it took to walk the extra blocks to Alex’s favorite coffee shop, but seeing that smile was both punishment and reward.

Maggie’s heart ached as Alex savored her coffee. Their morning coffee ritual had been an important part of their routine, ever since Maggie fixed them a pot after their first night together. It was a potent reminder of all she missed, their silly bets, waking up in each other’s arms, cuddling on the couch after a long day.

All the little things they had done for each other haunted her now.

And so did the gauntness in Alex’s cheeks. She was too pale, too thin, and Maggie wished she brought breakfast. Despite the anguish at seeing her ex, Maggie was, for once, in a better place than Alex, and that thought pained her more than expected.

“So what did you find?” Maggie asked, getting down to business for both their sakes.

***
Alex didn’t miss the deep breath Maggie took before joining her in the lab, pulling the door closed behind her. She mentally groaned, kicking herself for her earlier slip. The teasing tone in Maggie’s voice had triggered a flirtatious response, but Maggie had gone still rather than respond in kind.

“So, um, you were right. There were no other track marks on Bri–on the body. There was bruising on his arms and chest, consistent with being held down and injected against his will.”

Gritting her teeth, Maggie nodded grimly. Even though she was giving her all to this investigation, Alex suspected Maggie was about to double that.

“It gets worse,” Alex confessed.

“Course it does.”

“They injected him with a ‘hot’ dose, meaning the purity level was higher than the street version.”

“I’m running a narcotics task force, Danvers. I know what that means.”

“Right. Sorry.” Alex winced. “What you don’t know is this hot dose had enough cocaine and Belamort to take down an elephant. Brian would have fallen into a thrall in less than thirty seconds. His heart likely gave out inside two to three minutes, but at least he was too blissed out to feel it happen.”

“Small mercies.” Maggie walked over to Brian’s sheet-clad body, gazing upon it for a tense moment before turning back. Alex could almost picture the wheels turning in her head, Maggie’s keen brain sorting and sifting through the facts. She always loved watching her work.

“So a regular tox screen would have caught that Brian’s death wasn’t accidental.”

Alex nodded. “If your drug dealers were trying to make this look like another run-of-the-mill overdose, they did a pretty bad job.”

“They weren’t. They were sending a message.”

Startled, Alex’s head shot up from where she was pulling up the chemical analysis on her computer. “Send a message? To whom?” Alex knew the answer as soon as she asked the question, her heart sinking.

Maggie twisted her fingers together. “To me, probably, or maybe the NCPD.”

Alex could tell Maggie didn’t believe the latter. She reached out, her fingers stopping a whisper away from stroking Maggie’s arm, but Maggie stepped back to avoid her touch. It was startling how much the rejection hurt.

“It’s fine, Danvers. Nothing I haven’t dealt with before.” Maggie’s gaze skittered away when Alex tried to make eye contact. “Anything else you found in your fancy lab? Something that will help with the case?”

Sighing, Alex moved back to her computer and Maggie followed at a distance. “Anomalies in the Belamort. Like it’s been synthesized with another chemical.”

“What kind of chemical? And why?” Maggie lingered behind her, closer but not close enough.

“Still running it down, but if I had to guess?”

“Yeah?”
“It’s a sophisticated attempt to extend the life of the Belamort parasite.”

“Sophisticated?” Something must have clicked in Maggie’s head, sparking a gleam in her dark eyes.

Alex knew that look. “What aren’t you telling me?”

Maggie hesitated, but she finally shrugged, trusting Alex on some level at least. “You still keeping tabs on your buddy Maxwell Lord?”

“Max? I mean, yeah, we keep an eye on him. Passive monitoring of his financials, patents, that sort of thing. You think he’s involved?”

“I have reason to suspect he’s helping bring Belamort planetside.”

Alex shook her head. “We would have detected something. Max couldn’t run an interstellar smuggling operation without a serious outlay of cash. For all his faults, and Max has plenty, I don’t see him selling drugs.”

“Unless Gold Rush is a means to an end.”

“You think he’s selling Belamort to keep another operation off the books? What’s he trying to finance?”

“That is the million dollar question.” Maggie fisted her hand and tapped it on the countertop. “If I knew, I could bust this thing wide open. We’re so damn close…” Her phone buzzed, interrupting. “Sorry.” She fished the device out of her pocket.

Glancing at the screen, Maggie’s face transformed. A brilliant smile dimpled her cheeks and lit her eyes, the worry lines disappearing in an instant. Alex had always thought that soft expression was reserved for her and her alone, but whoever sent that text was the recipient now.

Maggie seemed to realize Alex was still there, and she fumbled with her phone as she stuffed it in her jacket pocket. Alex didn’t mean to pry, but she glimpsed a drawing of a beautiful, detailed bonsai tree, vivid against a background of pale blue on the screen. Jealousy burned through her, souring the coffee in her nearly empty stomach.

Their eyes met in silence, and the distance between them gaped as deep and dark as a chasm. Maggie opened her mouth to say something, but she stopped, huffing out a breath instead. At least she didn’t confirm she’d found someone else, allowing Alex to pretend a little longer they had a chance.

It didn’t make the impossible task of dragging air into her lungs any easier though.

“Um.” Maggie ran a hand through her hair. “That chemical? When you isolate it? Can you let me know? If we trace the supply chain, it might be the break we need.”

“Yeah, yeah, of course. I’ll… text you when I have something.”

Maggie nodded. “Send nothing specific. I’ll come by and pick it up. I… don’t know if I should trust my phone, you know?”

“Yeah. I can send it with Winn if you’d rather avoid…” Alex attempted a casual shrug but the way Maggie flinched suggested she didn’t pull it off.

“Probably a good idea.”

Silence stretched between them again for an excruciating moment.
“Thanks. For the help.” Maggie took a step back.

“Thanks for the coffee,” Alex replied with a weak smile.

“Sure. See you around, Alex.”

Maggie got as far as the door before Alex blurted her name. She looked back, and as beautiful as she’d been the night before, in the light of day, she took Alex’s breath away.

There were so many things Alex wanted to say, to change, but she held her tongue. “Be careful out there.”

“You too, Danvers.”

Maggie’s perfume lingered to haunt Alex long after she was gone.

***

Alex knew she had an impressive list of fine qualities as an agent, but patience and temper weren’t on it. Both were being sorely tested by circumstance and a mere four hours sleep in the last two days.

After wrapping things up with Brian, she spent the afternoon digging into Ian Blackwell. Each new case she mined for intel cranked her anxiety to a new level. The guy was a killer, connected as hell, and now he was focused on Maggie. Alex couldn’t sit by and do nothing about that.

She navigated the DEO hallways until she came to J’onn’s seldom-used office, finding him cursing over a report, hopefully not one of hers. He motioned her inside, and Alex entered, shutting the door behind her.

“I don’t need to read your mind to know who is on it,” he murmured, signing his name to the document with a flourish.

Alex debated standing but sat in front of his desk instead. The late afternoon sun streamed through the window, striking her back and warming her shoulders. “Sir…”

J’onn clicked his pen and set it aside. “I’ve deliberately kept you away from Maggie’s investigation, so you can imagine my frustration when you charged into it last night without authorization.”

Alex wasn’t surprised by the news, suspecting collusion already. She couldn’t blame them, but the deception still chafed. “So Winn helping her… that was with your blessing even though you pretended otherwise.”

He closed the file he was working on and crossed his arms on top of it. “This is a career-making case for Maggie. I know you mean well, and the instinct to protect her hasn’t lessened despite your relationship status, but stay out of this, Alex.”

“I can’t do that. I’m requesting a protective detail for Detective Sawyer. She may not be a DEO agent, but she’s an asset to this organization, and I have every reason to believe her life may be in danger.”

“Alex, I say this out of friendship, have you lost your mind?”

Exhaustion made her uncoordinated, and Alex stumbled as she shot to her feet. She paced as much out of agitation as a need to stay awake. “I’m not overreacting. Sir, Maggie thinks they murdered Brian to send her a message. That Blackwell is warning her to back off. We both know she won’t.”
J’onn leaned back in his chair. “Alex, this isn’t Maggie’s first rodeo. She’s received plenty of threats as a cop.”

“But these people murdered a friend last night. Brian would have…” Alex swallowed. “He would have been at our wedding.”

“I know. And I’m sorry about his death, but Maggie would need a protective detail until retirement with all the threats she gets on the job.”

“She’s never been threatened. Not like this.”

“That she told you about. Clearly she knew you’d do… this.” J’onn gestured at her with a wave of his hand and Alex pursed her lips. “Maggie can handle herself, and she has the NCPD as backup.”

“Fine. You don’t want to use DEO assets? I’ll ask Kara to keep an eye on her,” Alex fired back, her tone haughty. “She can fly by her apartment every night.”

“You’re going to have your super sister spy on your ex-fiancée? Can’t you see how that would be… problematic?”

Alex scraped her fingernails over her scalp, itching to do something, to hit something. She wanted to make a run at Max and slam his face into a desk or two. All that mattered was protecting Maggie. She’d hurt her enough, and Alex would be damned if she let Max finish the job. “Then I’ll do it. I’ll keep tabs on her on my time. I’ll—”

J’onn stood. “You’ll do no such thing, or I’ll throw you in a cell and lose the key until this case is over.” He came around the desk while Alex seethed at being denied. “You’re barely on your feet. Go home and get some rest. That’s an order. You’ll see things differently with a clearer head.”

“A clearer head won’t change the fact a major drug trafficking ring is targeting…” Alex stop moving, the loss rushing over her anew. She gripped the back of the chair, digging her nails into the black leather.

“The woman you love,” J’onn finished for her, his tone gentle. “I think you should talk to one of our psychiatrists about this situation with Maggie. They could help.”

“I don’t need my head shrunk,” Alex groused. “I need a time machine to go back and stop myself from giving her up. Don’t we have one in a warehouse somewhere?”

J’onn settled on the corner of his desk when Alex resumed pacing. “More than one, actually.”

Alex glanced at him in surprise. “Really?”

“No.”

Alex couldn’t tell if he was messing with her or not. “Sir…”

“If it will keep you from doing something stupid, I will check with Maggie myself several times a day. We’re still in touch. I think she would be more comfortable hearing from me or Winn.” He dropped his gaze, studying a smudge of ink on his fingers.

Alex stared at him, unable to shake the feeling he was keeping something from her. Maybe it was her paranoia talking. “I… I would appreciate that.”

He nodded, a thin smile on his lips when he looked at her again.
“But if someone from Blackwell’s operation makes a run at Maggie—”

“Then we will revisit this conversation,” J’onn promised. “But Maggie neither wants nor needs protection. Brian was an informant, and he was likely killed for something he knew. If his death rattled the head of the task force, I’m sure that was a bonus for Blackwell.”

She sighed, so tired she could fall asleep standing up.

“Go home,” J’onn urged again. “I don’t want to see your face until tomorrow morning. You want to help Maggie? Make sure your best is what you have to give.”

Alex groaned in disgust. “I hate it when you make sense.”

“Get some rest, Agent Danvers. And make no mistake. I’ll have my eye on you. You go near her place, run a trace on her phone, or even think—”

“Don’t be a stalker. Got it.” With another sigh, Alex jerked open the door to his office and left, lamenting that she worked for a freaking mind reader.

But J’onn was right about one thing, Alex mused as she trudged to the locker room to get her things. She needed to be at her best for Maggie, and her current condition didn’t come close. A meal and a few hours sleep would clear her head a little.

Then she would see what her old friend Max was up to.

***

“Giraffes!”

Maggie chuckled as Jamie darted ahead, her tiny feet slapping on the asphalt as she hurried toward the enclosure. The zoo had been a brilliant idea if Maggie did say so herself. She’d never been beyond breaking up a fight between two blitzed dads in the parking lot, and it was Jamie’s first time as well.

She sat down on a bench, doing her best not to dwell on the case or Alex. After too many hours devoted to work this week, Maggie wanted bonding time with Jamie. They both needed it.

“Lunch is served.” Winn appeared on Maggie’s left, juggling their food. He handed her a cardboard basket overflowing with fries and two soy burgers before sitting beside her. He’d snagged a pair of loaded hot dogs for himself and was already chewing his first bite.

“Thanks.” Maggie watched Jamie interrogate a zookeeper, peppering the patient older woman with questions like a pro.

Winn didn’t say anything for a minute, and Maggie turned, curious about his silence. She caught him lowering his phone with a busted expression.

“Did you just take my picture?”

“You were adorbs.” He turned the phone around. “See? Proud momma.”

Maggie took the phone, startled by the smitten look in her eyes and the sweet smile on her lips. When the hell had she gone from feeling like she was giving up her dreams out of obligation to looking at Jamie with that kind of love?

It surprised her, how fast Jamie wormed her way into Maggie’s heart, how she hurried home most
nights to spend time with her kid. Maggie’s aunt had loved her and done her best, but their relationship had always been… uneasy. They had grown close out of necessity, not out of choice.

Maggie expected the same for her and Jamie, but what they had felt natural and real. They were healing each other.

“Motherhood looks good on you, Mags.” Winn’s sentiment was followed by a slurp of soda.

She snorted, pretending to be unaffected as she handed the phone back. “Yeah well… You seem to enjoy being Uncle Winn.”

“Spoiling her is my favorite pastime.”

“I noticed. Two more Disney Blu-Rays mysteriously showed up on my coffee table last week.”

“Huh. Wonder where those came from?” Winn shrugged, feigning innocence.

Jamie joined them a minute later, and Maggie washed her hands with some Purell wipes from Winn’s messenger bag. Jamie dried her hands on her jeans and grabbed her burger.

They ate while Jamie recounted a litany of giraffe factoids she’d learned, amusing Winn and Maggie who listened politely.

“So you want to be a zookeeper now?” Maggie asked when Jamie came up for air between bites of her burger.

“Nooo,” Jamie huffed. “I still want to be a cop like you, silly.”

“Oh jeez,” Winn said, slapping a hand on his chest. “My heart. It melted. That’s so cute.”

“Shut up, Winn,” Maggie and Jamie said in tandem.

Jamie’s small hands wrapped around Maggie’s wrist as she rotated Maggie’s watch to check the time. “Can I have three dollars to feed the giraffe?”

“Sure.” Maggie wiped a smear of mustard off the corner of Jamie’s mouth with a napkin. “Just make sure you don’t feed him any part of you.” She poked Jamie in the stomach and got a giggle.

“She,” Jamie corrected, sliding back off the bench.

Maggie dug out her wallet and handed Jamie a five, but Jamie bypassed the money to hug her around the neck.

“Thank you,” Jamie murmured when Maggie returned the hug. Maggie suspected her appreciation went further than giraffe lunch money, and she gave her daughter a squeeze. Jamie slowly released her before grabbing a fry in one hand, the five in the other, and running off.

Maggie cleared her throat. Hugs from Jamie were more common now, but their effect on Maggie was anything but. She’d kept Jamie a secret from Alex to give them time to form a relationship, never expecting one to happen so fast. Maybe it was time to come clean, and Kara was right. Alex deserved to hear the news from her.

“You thinking about Alex or the case?”

Maggie sighed, unsurprised she’d telegraphed her thoughts on her features. “Alex. I need to tell her soon.”
Winn nodded as he pitched his empty soda cup. “You know she’ll want you back.”

There was no going back. Not now. Not without always wondering if Alex was only there for the family and not for her. “Yeah, well, we can’t always have what we want.”

Jamie skipped back to them when she was done, her threadbare rabbit clutched under her arm as always. “Did you watch me feed the giraffe?”

Winn gave Maggie a second to compose herself. “I did. Did it slobber all over you?” He reached in his bag again as Maggie watched them fondly.

“Yeah. It was cool.” Jamie held up her hand, giraffe saliva stretching between her fingers.

“Gross.” Maggie grimaced as Winn laughed. He helped Jamie wash her hands then scooted over, patting the bench. “Come here, sassy pants. I want a selfie with the three of us.”

Maggie obliged as Jamie crawled between the two of them. They crowded together, smiling wide for Winn’s camera.

“Ready?” Winn asked. “Everybody say ‘routing algorithm!’”

Jamie butchered the last word, and they laughed. Winn lowered the phone, tipping it toward Maggie to show her the shot. Her throat tightened at the happiness in Jamie’s eyes, in her own. The three of them had lost their families, but they were making a new one together.

Spying something she didn’t expect, Maggie grabbed the phone out of Winn’s hand, using her fingers to enlarge the background.

“What’s wrong?”

Maggie looked over her shoulder. Two men, both in jeans, t-shirts, light jackets, and sunglasses, loitered near the elephant exhibit. They had a clear line of sight to the bench, and Maggie noted telltale bulges of shoulder holsters beneath their windbreakers.

Every cell in her body froze. Maggie couldn’t move, couldn’t breathe, the fear for Jamie so powerful it paralyzed her. Not since she’d seen Alex floating in that tank had she known terror this acute.

Then anger rushed in, fueling her muscles, and Maggie surged off the bench.

“Whoa. Maggie–” Winn stood as Maggie flung the phone at him, and he fumbled it before seeing what had her spooked.

Stalking toward the two men with determined strides, Maggie’s hand gravitated toward her hip, but there was no gun or badge to back her up, both locked in a drawer at home. Blackwell’s men saw her coming and smirked before blending into the crowd. By the time she reached their position, they were gone. She wiped a trembling hand over her mouth. It was one thing to come for her, quite another to come for her kid.

“Time to go,” Maggie said in a clipped tone when she returned to the bench.

“But we haven’t seen the penguins,” Jamie pouted.

“I know, sweetie. Another time.” Maggie’s gaze landed on Winn. If she looked even half as freaked as he did, Jamie would know something was wrong.

“Maggie,” Winn started, but she shook her head. With a shaky sigh, he tossed the rest of their lunch
and scooped up Jamie. “Come on, kiddo. Your mom is right. We need to go.”

“But I want to see the penguins,” Jamie uncharacteristically whined as they moved toward the exit.

Guilt and fear gnawed at Maggie’s guts, her gaze sweeping the crowd, on alert for potential threats. Her worlds had collided, and she struggled to think through the panic bubbling at the base of her brain. There was a target on her back now, and she half expected a bullet to strike her dead with every hurried step.

“We’re gonna meet Supergirl instead,” Winn said, earning him a sharp look from Maggie. “Next stop is the DEO. That’s non-negotiable.”

“Alex…” Maggie hissed.

“I think we’ve got bigger things to worry about, Sawyer.”
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

We said this is a slow burn and a journey for everyone involved... so it's coming. Be patient. ;)

What the hell had she been thinking?

Maggie swallowed, Jamie’s small hand warm in her grip as the elevator rose toward the command level at the DEO. She’d made a lot of mistakes in her life, but none as unforgivable as this one. Jamie was in danger, and Maggie had put her there. She might as well have slapped the target on her daughter’s back herself.

“She’s not here.”

Winn’s voice was slow to penetrate the tempest of regrets and recriminations swirling inside Maggie’s head. Confused, she looked at him, and he waggled his phone at her, indicting he’d checked.

Alex, she realized, but Maggie didn’t relax. She would give almost anything to see her right now. To witness that confident swagger as Alex strode toward her, to feel the comfort of her strong arms, to find reassurance in her cocky grin. Alex had a way of soothing her, her presence often enough to tame Maggie’s fears and doubts.

But not even Alex could make her feel better about this.

“Want me to call her?”

“No,” Maggie croaked after a noticeable pause.

Winn sighed, but he didn’t argue, turning away to eye the passing floors.

“I’ll tell her soon,” Maggie promised, knowing the confession would come too late now. One more mistake in an endless list of them.

The doors parted, and J’onn was waiting, concern etched into every line of his face. He met Maggie’s gaze, and she suspected he knew the decision she’d reached in the tense car ride over.

“Where are we?” Jamie asked timidly, her first words since they’d left the zoo. She took in the towering space with wary curiosity.

“Welcome to the DEO.” J’onn tore his focus from Maggie and offered Jamie a tight smile.

“No!” Jamie pivoted and threw herself at Maggie’s legs, startling all three of them and shocking Maggie out of her darker thoughts.

Maggie’s stomach plunged at Jamie’s terror. “Hey, hey,” she chided gently, prying herself free before sinking to a knee in front of her. “It’s okay.”
“But the DEO hurts people like me.”

“No, sweetheart.” Maggie ran her hands down Jamie’s trembling arms before grasping her hands. It never crossed her mind Jamie might have heard rumors about a government black op locking aliens away, but it should have. Tales of the DEO and Cadmus often went hand in hand in the alien community. “Your uncle J’onn and Winn work here, and I work with them sometimes. So does Supergirl.”

Jamie regarded the black-clad agents coming and going with a suspicious frown.

“Listen to me. I will never, ever let anyone hurt you.” That promise Maggie would take to the grave.

Jamie hugged her as Winn and J’onn lingered, silent by their side, and Maggie clung to her. She had just gotten used to her heart soaring whenever Jamie’s thin arms wrapped around her, and now… Doing the right thing for Alex had nearly broken her, but doing it again for Jamie would finish the job.

Of that she was sure.

“Agent Schott, would you give Jamie the nickel tour while I talk to Maggie?”


Jamie seemed less than thrilled, but she let Maggie go and took Winn’s hand. Her young eyes searched Maggie’s for a moment, and Maggie wondered what she saw, if she sensed what was coming.

Maggie forced a smile on her lips. “It’s okay. Have him show you the landing pad. It’s cool.”

With one last sad glance over her shoulder, Jamie let Winn lead her up the stairs as Maggie got to her feet, the weight of the world pressing down on her weary shoulders.

“You can’t.”

So J’onn had read her mind. Maggie faced him. “She would be better off. You know that’s the truth.”

“Like hell,” J’onn growled. “That little girl adores you, and you love her. You can’t give her up, Maggie. Or on yourself.”

“She deserves a normal life.” Tears brimmed in her eyes and she fought a losing battle to stop them. “I can’t give her that. I never should have tried. Jamie deserves a nice house, a loving family, and a big backyard to play in.” A breath that sounded more like a gasp escaped. “I can’t give her that, any of that. I can’t even keep her safe.”

“What she deserves is to be with the mother she loves. You will break her heart if you do this.”

“I know. It’s breaking mine,” she ground out, her lower lip quivering beyond her control. “But it’s best for her. Someday… I hope… she’ll understand.”

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Reeking of smoke and ash from the forest fire she’d just extinguished, Kara landed on the launch pad as the doors swished open. Before her cape had the chance to settle around her, she was engulfed in a hug as Jamie flung herself into Kara’s arms.
“Supergirl!”

With a soft, relieved laugh Kara wrapped her arms around Jamie’s smaller frame, all too happy to return the embrace. Thank Rao she was okay. J’onn’s text had been vague and hadn’t mentioned Jamie at all, but there was no way Maggie was checking out the zoo without her daughter. “Well, hi there.”

“Oh boy,” Winn wheezed as he finished jogging up the steps, stumbling out onto the pad after Jamie. “Listen. I can explain. Don’t be mad, and you can’t tell Alex…”

Kara’s brow crinkled as he babbled. She ignored him, glancing down into a pair of adorable dimples as Jamie grinned up at her. No way would Maggie ever smile at her like that, and the thought made her chuckle again.

“You must be Jamie. Maggie told me all about you.”

“She has?” Jamie lit up, her dimples growing more pronounced. Jeez, she was a cute kid, and Kara’s affection for her deepened.

“She has?” Winn gripped the rail. “You knew? Wait, what?” His eyes widened. “Oh god. You, me, and J’onn know, but Alex doesn’t?”

“Winn, not now,” Kara scolded. She looked past him, focusing on Maggie and J’onn where they argued at the base of the stairs. Kara overheard every word, and her smile slipped.

“Do you really know Maggie?” Jamie asked.

“I do.” Kara knelt next to her. “Maggie…” She glanced at Winn, searching his features for judgment she didn’t find. “She’s becoming a good friend.”

Kara had drawn with Jamie two nights that week while Maggie worked the case from home. Not only had she gotten an exclusive kernel or two about the Gold Rush case, but she’d gotten to know Maggie better, seeing a side of her she’d never bothered to learn before.

“Did she tell you she bought me a bedspread with your symbol on it? It’s really cool.” Jamie’s tone leveled out into something more matter-of-fact as she found her chill.

“Did she now?” Kara asked, amused. That was prime teasing material. “I’ll come see it sometime.”

Maggie’s boots sounded on the stairs, and Kara straightened, shooting Winn a look. He huffed, but held out his hand for Jamie. “Come on, kiddo. Maggie and Supergirl need to talk for a second.”

Jamie looked behind her before glancing back at Kara in awe. “Did you hear with your superhearing?”

Kara winked, and Jamie looked far more impressed with Supergirl than Maggie ever had or would.

By the time Maggie reached the landing pad, Kara was waiting for her alone. She cut to the chase. “You can’t give her up. Not now.”

“How many times has Alex told you not to eavesdrop?” Maggie shuffled to the rail and leaned against it. Her eyes were red, but no tears fell as the summer breeze stirred her hair and rustled Kara’s cape. Maggie’s features were set, a stubborn cast to them with which Kara was well acquainted.

“If Alex knew your plans, she would be glad I did. Maggie, if what I said to you the other night is
“You were right. Jamie deserves more than I can give her. She deserves a real family. A normal family, not…” Maggie gestured around the DEO, “whatever it is I’m giving her.”

“Stop it.” Kara moved in close. “You’re a great mom, and Jamie is happy with you. I’ve seen that firsthand, and I am not okay watching a family who loves each other be needlessly torn apart.”

“But maybe we have to be. I can’t keep her safe and bring down Blackwell, Kara. I can’t do both.”

“You can’t do both alone, but you’re not alone, Maggie. You have the NCPD, the DEO, and you have me. You have Supergirl in your corner.”

Maggie blinked, and Kara pressed her advantage, sensing an opening, a chance to fix this.

“You’re so used to going it alone you believe you have to do it now, but you don’t. We have watches we can give you. Both of you. All you need to do is push a button, and I’ll break the sound barrier to get to you or Jamie.”

“I can take care of myself.”

“So can Alex, but that didn’t stop Malverne from grabbing her.”

Maggie started at the reminder, and Kara squared up, her hands on her hips.

“You were almost my sister. Jamie would have been my niece. If you think for a second I won’t protect you both, you’re not nearly as smart as I give you credit for. No one will hurt her. Or you. You have my word.”

Maggie swallowed, her dark eyes glistening. “Always thought you hated me.”

“I never hated you. I just hated…” Kara closed her eyes, the truth slapping her across the face. “I hated that Alex’s life stop revolving around me. Some superhero, huh? Guess I wasn’t good at sharing.”

“I had a chip on my shoulder about you.” Maggie gestured at Kara’s suit with a flick of her wrist. “This version of you, anyway.”

It stung, just a little bit, that Maggie hadn’t been as awestruck with Supergirl as most everyone was, but Kara had finally gotten past that.

Maggie leaned against the railing to take in the city spread out below them. “Alex proposed here, you know. I knew in my gut it was too soon, but I loved her so damn much I…” Sighing, Maggie shook her head. “You and me would have been a problem for her somewhere down the line. Too much friction. Too much competition for her affections.”

“We weren’t the only problem…” Kara’s eyes tracked to Jamie, giggling over something Winn said, and Maggie’s gaze followed hers. “You could remove that barrier now.”

“Telling Alex won’t change anything, Kara.”

“She misses you.”

“And I miss her, but…”

“But what?”
“Alex didn’t choose me. I wasn’t enough for her, and I can’t live my life wondering if she came back to me for Jamie, if the woman I love only wants me for my kid.”

“Maggie, that’s not fair to Alex. She...”

Maggie shook her head. “When we broke up, I said... I told her I wanted her, but she said she wanted kids. Not me, just kids. She didn’t want me. And that’s when I made her, I made her say it.”

“Say what?”

“That we couldn’t be together.”

Kara hadn’t heard this from Alex, and the pain in Maggie’s voice was still raw, even after all these months.

Maggie drew in a ragged breath and straightened. “I’ll tell her about Jamie, but we’re not getting back together.”

“Wow, she really fucked up, huh?”

Maggie gave her a sideways look. “Maybe we both did. Maybe this, me and Jamie, and Alex and... some... somebody else, is meant to be.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Me too.” Maggie turned and glanced back inside. Her gaze alighted on Winn and Jamie as they leaned over the top rail and watched the agents below.

“What are you going to do?” Kara was afraid of the answer.

“It helps, you looking out for her, but it doesn’t change the threat, or that she could have so much more with another family.”

Taking a chance, Kara slung her arm around Maggie’s shoulders, drawing her closer. Maggie stiffened under her touch, but she didn’t pull away. “Can I make a suggestion?”

“Can I stop you?”

Kara ignored the dig. “Tell Jamie the truth. Tell her about Blackwell and your fears. Give her all the facts.”

“And then what?” Maggie’s voice was hushed.

“You let her do what we never got to. You let her choose what happens to her, and you have to honor her choice, whatever it might be.”

Just when Kara feared Maggie would refuse, she released a shaky breath and nodded. It was far from a victory, but Kara would take it.

The rest was up to Jamie.

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Maggie resisted the urge to prowl the apartment, to check every room and closet for intruders and listening devices. After Malverne, she had formed the habit of installing passive alarms and monitoring systems, and their new place had not escaped that treatment.
They were as safe as they could be, but Maggie didn’t feel safe at all.

Her eyes flitted over the evening sun slanting through the high windows, and Maggie had to stop herself from pulling Jamie into an interior room or running over to draw the curtains. She knew her grip on Jamie’s hand was too tight, but Jamie wasn’t letting go and neither was she.

“Are you hungry?” Maggie asked, reaching for any hint of normalcy, hoping to prolong the inevitable.

“No,” Jamie’s voice was quiet, her rabbit clutched in her arms as she pressed herself against Maggie’s leg. It broke Maggie’s heart to see her so fearful.

“I guess I need to tell you what happened today,” Maggie said with a sigh. She sank down on her knee in front of Jamie and rubbed Jamie’s shoulders. “I’m sorry our trip to the zoo got cut short, and we had to go to the DEO.”

“I didn’t like that place.”

“I know, sweetheart. I know. I just freaked out… and I needed to talk to uncle J’onn about it.”

“What happened?”

“You remember when we talked about the task force? Well, the bad guys don’t want us to shut them down. They’ve made threats…”

“Were they at the zoo?” Leave it to Jamie to put the pieces together so quickly. Her daughter was too much like her.

“Yeah,” Maggie admitted. “And I got scared. Because the bad guys were there when I was with you.” She dropped her gaze and blinked against tears gathering in the corners of her eyes. “I was afraid they would hurt you.”

“But you’ll protect me.” Jamie’s faith and trust were absolute, and Maggie wished she felt it herself.

“You are in danger because of me. But… if you had a normal mom... A normal family…”

Jamie jerked out of her hands, and Maggie yanked her head up in time to see her child’s heart shatter in front of her eyes. Tears already streaked down her face as Jamie ran into the living room, flinging herself on the couch, and sobbing into a pillow.

“Jamie…”

Maggie followed, but when Jamie flinched away from her touch, she retreated to the kitchen. It wasn’t the first time she felt helpless as a parent, but it was the worst. She fidgeted with the watch Kara and J’onn had insisted upon, her hands shaking as Jamie cried herself out like only a child could, wholeheartedly and at top volume.

As the sun sank lower and the shadows grew, Jamie finally quieted and rolled over, rubbing her eyes while she sniffled. She curled into herself, her arms hugging her thin frame, as if to make herself as small as possible. As small as she was feeling.

Maggie remembered what that felt like.

Detouring, Maggie snatched a box of tissues from the bathroom and set it on the coffee table. Jamie didn’t move until Maggie went to the far end of the couch to perch awkwardly on the arm. Satisfied
that Maggie wouldn’t come any closer, Jamie pulled a huge wad of tissues out and blew her nose.

Twisting away from her, Jamie buried her face in the pillow again. Maggie struggled against her own tears as she regarded the stubborn set of Jamie’s shoulders.

Taking a deep breath, Maggie tried again. “You know, when Supergirl came to Earth, Superman was supposed to take care of her. He was her cousin, but instead of raising her himself, he found this... amazing family. A family where she could have a mom and a dad and, and, a sister. They lived in a big, beautiful house by the ocean, and, even though she was an alien, Supergirl got a chance to have a normal childhood.”

Jamie canted her head so she could hear every word, but Maggie pretended she didn’t notice. “It hurt him to let her go, but Superman knew Supergirl would be better off with them than with him. He didn’t want to, but he knew it was selfish to raise her. She deserved a family like that, not… not what he could offer her.”

Risking another glance, she found Jamie half-turned toward her, her head resting on the pillow, but her eyes on Maggie now, red-rimmed and intent.

“My job, me… I put you in danger. I’m scared you’ll get hurt, and I’m worried that… I’m being selfish.” She could do this. Maggie could break herself into pieces to save Jamie, to give her the life she couldn’t, like she had done for Alex. “I’m worried keeping you with me will prevent you from having a real family.”

“You’re my family,” Jamie pointed out, her voice sullen and rough.

“I know, and I’ll never stop being your mo... family. I’ll always be in your life, I promise. But I want you to have the best life possible.” Maggie shifted to face her. “You deserve a sister or brother and regular parents. At first, Supergirl was hurt because she thought it meant Superman didn’t want her. But now she understands he loved her enough to let her go, and she’s glad he did.”

Maggie chanced it and slid down onto the couch cushions, careful to leave Jamie plenty of space. She breathed a little sigh of relief when Jamie didn’t scoot away. “Do you understand? You don’t have to stay with me to have a family. You won’t lose me, but you’d have so much more. I’m…” Maggie hesitated as her heart pounded in her chest. “I’m giving you the choice Supergirl didn’t get.”

She had been sure she needed to send Jamie away, but now, faced with the possibility Jamie might choose another family, Maggie felt her resolve crumble. She didn’t think she could survive being second choice again.

“You’re my family,” Jamie repeated, with a stubborn lift of her chin. “I want to stay with you.” The simple statement was spoken with the flawed confidence of a child. But this child, her child, had seen more than most, and Maggie made herself trust that.

“Yeah?”

Jamie nodded, and the sudden wave of relief rushing through Maggie’s limbs surprised her. Not until this moment did she realize how scary and wonderful it was to be enough for someone. To be chosen.

“Wanna know a secret?” Maggie asked.

Jamie gave Maggie a suspicious, but curious, sideways glance as she sat up. “Maybe.” She hesitated, thinking it over. “Sure.”
Maggie shifted closer and whispered, “I love you.”

Jamie pulled back in surprise. “You do?”

Trying not to be hurt by the shock in Jamie’s voice, Maggie smiled encouragingly. “You are easy to love, kiddo. That’s why I’m so worried about you. Why I… I’m glad…” She swallowed past the lump in her throat. “I’m glad you want to stay with me. I…”

“I get it.”

“You do?”

“You are being a hero. Like Superman.”

The tears she had been holding back welled in Maggie’s eyes. “It’s not that I don’t want you. I do, more than anything in the world. What I don’t want is for you to regret staying with me and giving up a chance for a more normal childhood.”

A tentative hand patted her leg, followed by Jamie’s weight settling against her side.

“You’re all the family I want,” Jamie insisted, and Maggie curled around her, hugging her tightly.

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Alex sucked on her forefinger, the paper cut stinging like a bitch. Her second of the day, she reached for the bandaids already sitting on her dining room table.

The DEO spoiled her, supplying her reports and intel in digital form, but when she’d flashed her fake FBI badge at the NCPD earlier and demanded copies of all the Gold Rush files, they’d made her wait for almost an hour before dumping three boxes full of paper on her.

The look she’d gotten from the desk clerk suggested she was persona non grata around the Science Division. Alex doubted her cover identity was to blame. More likely she was infamous for ditching Maggie a month shy of their wedding.

Alex didn’t blame the detectives for giving her the evil eye. She deserved it.

Sighing, she bandaged the tip of her finger, her eyes on another file. Blackwell ran with a nasty crowd. Selling and smuggling narcotics were the least of their crimes. As hours passed and Alex’s knowledge of the organization grew, her fear for Maggie intensified.

But nowhere did Alex find a connection to Maxwell Lord. Maggie must keep that information to herself. With his connections, Alex would have done the same, but knowing Maggie was out on a limb alone didn’t make her feel any better.

A knock at the door startled her. Alex glanced at her watch, blinking when she saw the time. She’d missed lunch and was close to missing dinner.

Taking a quick glimpse through the peephole, Alex paused, trying to decide if she was up for a visit from the person on the other side.

“Let me in, Alex. I can see you.”

Alex unlocked the deadbolt and swung the door open, revealing Kara with a small stack of pizza boxes and a six pack of beer. For a moment, Alex was reminded of a fateful visit from Maggie, but she brushed the memory aside. It hurt too much.
“Hey.” Kara looked contrite. “I know we keep making plans to talk but some crisis or other keeps getting in the way. I thought… maybe we could talk now?”

Alex bit her lip. The pizza smelled amazing.

“I heard your stomach growl in the elevator.” Kara thrust the pizzas into Alex’s hands and brushed past her, setting the beer on the kitchen island.

Alex shut and locked the door before joining her, but Kara had already gravitated to the table, glancing over the files.

“Not a word,” Alex cautioned her.

“About what?” Kara glanced up, her blue eyes all innocence behind her glasses.

“About me looking into Maggie’s case. This is something I need to do. For her and for Brian.” Alex fetched two plates and napkins before snagging one of the pizza boxes and settling on the couch. “Just be glad I’m working from home on a Saturday for a change.”

“You love her. I get it.” Kara grabbed two bottles of beer and joined her.

Alex chewed on her first slice, regarding her sister with suspicion. “That’s it? No warnings? No sisterly advice? No accusations I’m going off the deep end?”

“You did that a long time ago,” Kara said, twisting the cap off her beer. Alex smacked her arm only to wince and shake her hand, making Kara smile. “I mean, I want you to be careful. You’ve both been hurt enough. But I get it. You love her and want her safe.”

Nodding, Alex wiped her hands on her napkin before starting on a second slice. They ate in companionable silence for a few minutes, and Alex had to admit she’d missed this. She’d locked Kara out in the cold for over a month now, and while things had been better between them, they were far from resolved. Alex wanted to get back to work, but Kara was making an effort. She couldn’t ignore that after clamoring for it all this time.

“You were right.”

Alex hesitated, her beer halfway to her mouth. “About what?”

“About Maggie.” Kara set her plate down on the table and shifted to face her. “When you accused me of being… distant with her.”

Stunned, Alex didn’t know what to say, having never expected Kara to confess the truth so bluntly. She set her own pizza and beer aside as Kara slipped her glasses off and fiddled with the earpiece.

“I’ve told you before you’re my home. More than Earth. More than the Danvers. More than anyone or anything, home for me is you.” Kara looked up at her, waiting for a reaction.

Alex swallowed. “Then why—”

“Because suddenly… home for you was her.” Kara blinked, and Alex watched tears catch in her eyelashes. “I was selfish, used to having you all to myself. You were always there when I needed you. When you came out… I was and still am so proud of you, I just… I didn’t realize how much things would change. That you would find someone you wanted around more than… me.”

“Kara…”
Kara bolted to her feet and paced in front of the dormant fireplace. “I got jealous, and maybe a little petty. Then I pulled away from you because it felt like you were pulling away from me, and the further apart we grew, the more I resented her for coming into your life. She blew everything up, tore apart something I thought was unbreakable.”

“Maggie did nothing but love me, Kara. You can’t blame her. Realizing I was gay opened up a world for me I never thought I could have.”

“I know. I see that now, but I was like a kid losing her favorite toy. I didn’t want to share you.”

This was progress Alex hadn’t expected. She threw Kara a bone, lightening the mood. “Your favorite toy? Am I being compared to a Tonka truck?”

“More like a Barbie Dream House. Way cooler.”

“Says you.”

They smiled at each other.

“Look, neither of us had a serious relationship before Maggie and Mon-El. We were bound to make mistakes with them and each other. I know I…” Alex shrugged. “I fell for Maggie crazy hard, and there were times I put the way she made me feel over you, and I shouldn’t have…”

“Alex.” Kara sat on the couch again, taking Alex’s hand. “You deserved to fall head over heels in love, and you deserved a sister who should have been supportive of that. Our relationship has always been unbalanced with me usually getting the better end of the deal. Maggie evened the scales. I should have thanked her for making you happy, not resented her for it.”

“What changed your mind?”

“Maggie. I’ve talked to her a lot lately, seen a different side of her.” Kara dropped her gaze, her thumb stroking Alex’s bare ring finger, and Alex wondered what she was thinking. “She’s pretty wonderful.”

“She is,” Alex whispered.

They sat in silence for a moment.

“I know you don’t believe me, but you’ll find someone else, Alex. You’ll fall in love again, and it won’t be the same, but it could be a different kind of good. And you’ll have the family you want…”

“I don’t want a family.” The words slipped out, the truth Alex had been wrestling with the last several weeks no longer willing to be denied.

“What?”

“Not without her. Not without Maggie.” Alex sat up straighter. “I just… I think I got cold feet. First it was dad, then stupid wedding details, but then… then I ran into Ruby at the promenade that day…”

Her sister gaped at her, a look of disbelief and something else on her face, and Alex plowed forward. “I don’t think I even realized it was happening, or that I was looking for excuses, but I got this kid thing in my head and it snowballed. Maggie expressed reluctance and bam! Suddenly that was a deal breaker.”
“Are you saying you don’t feel that way anymore? You would take children off the table to be with Maggie?”

“I don’t want a family. Not unless I can have one with her. Now that I know what life is like without her, it’s no contest. Maggie comes first.”

“Do you not want kids at all?” Kara asked in alarm.

“No, I mean… yes, I still want to have a child, but I want one with her. If I can’t have that, having her is enough.”

Kara slumped against the back of the couch. “Oh Rao.”

“What?” Alex frowned, puzzled by her reaction.

“What are you going to do?”

“Do? What can I do? She’s moved on. I think there is someone new in her life. Someone texted her a drawing of a bonsai the other day, and you should have seen the smile on her face.” Alex sighed. “She used to smile at me like that.”

“Tell her,” Kara said with conviction. “Tell Maggie she comes first. That she’s enough.”

“Why?”

“Trust me, Alex. If you have a shot at getting Maggie back, it starts there.”

Alex’s heart thudded painfully in her chest. “Did Maggie tell you that?”

“Not in so many words, but she deserves to hear you say it. As soon as the case is over, you and Maggie sit down and talk. For the love of Rao, you two need to talk.”

“What aren’t you telling me?”

Kara looked caught and on the verge of spilling… something, but then she shook her head. “I can’t say. Not yet. You will hate me for a hot minute when you find out, but once you understand why I didn’t tell you… you’ll believe I made the right choice.”

Alex glared. The intimidating stare broke Winn in seconds, but Kara was made of tougher stuff. “If you know something about Maggie…”

Kara’s phone pinged, and she slipped it out of her pocket so fast Alex suspected a burst of superspeed to avoid the topic. “I have to go.”

“How convenient.”

“Seriously. I have to go.” Kara leaned over and kissed Alex on the cheek before meeting her eyes. “I am sorry. About the way I treated Maggie, the way I treated your relationship.”

Alex’s ire melted at the sincerity in her sister’s eyes. “Thanks.”

Kara hopped off the couch and grabbed one of the pizza boxes for the road. “And as soon as this case is over… Talk. To. Maggie. Promise me.”

Her brow furrowed, and Alex wondered what in the hell Kara wasn’t sharing. But something about the moment felt like hope, and Alex clung to it. “I promise.”
“Can I talk to her?”

“Who?” Drained, Maggie rested her head against the back of the couch while Jamie sat curled up on her lap. Holding her soothed the edges of Maggie’s raw, jagged nerves, and Jamie would be lucky if she let her go anytime soon.

“Supergirl? I think she’s worried about us, and I want to tell her we’re okay.”

“That you are staying with me?” Maggie guessed, and Jamie nodded beneath Maggie’s chin.

“Yeah.”

“I’m sure she would like to hear that.” Maggie rocked them gently, feeling Jamie grow heavier in her arms. “I’ll arrange another meeting.”

Jamie played with her new watch, similar to Maggie’s own, and the band clicked softly as she rotated it on her wrist. The sight of it made Maggie feel better, knowing Supergirl’s protection was a button push away. “Couldn’t you just call Kara on the phone?”

Surprise rippled through Maggie’s frame and she went still. “Um…”

“The glasses are a stupid disguise.” Jamie yawned and snuggled further into Maggie, getting more comfortable.

A wide, proud grin sprang to Maggie’s lips, and she bent her head, kissing the top of Jamie’s. “That’s my girl. Don’t tell anyone though. We have to protect her, and her family, the way she protects ours.”

“Okay. Should I tell her I know?”

Maggie closed her eyes. Plenty of fears hovered on the horizon, but for now she’d take this moment of peace and relish it. “Nah. That can be our little secret for now.”

Jamie didn’t answer, sliding into sleep in the safety of her mother’s arms, and Maggie soon followed.

Hours later, Maggie woke to a dark apartment. With a soft groan from sleeping in an awkward position, she gathered Jamie and carried her to bed. Jamie didn’t stir as Maggie tucked her in, but when Maggie kissed her forehead, her dark eyes fluttered open.

“Would you stay with me? Just for tonight?”

Maggie eyed the twin bed in bemusement, but she came around the other side and slipped beneath the Supergirl bedspread as Jamie scooted over to give her room. If Kara knew she was sleeping under her crest, Maggie would never hear the end of it. At least she could point out Kara’s disguise was blown by a six-year-old girl.

“Love you,” Jamie mumbled as she tumbled back into sleep.

“I love you too.”

Maggie held her, listening to Jamie’s deep, even breathing. The only thing keeping the moment from being perfect was a bigger bed and Alex, spooning Maggie from behind.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Thanks to Dani for the awesome banner! Give her some love on the Twitter post.
“Detective Sawyer?”

Maggie glanced up from her desk, spying a young, blonde man searching the bullpen. Paranoid in the wake of Blackwell’s threats, she slid her gun out of her drawer and clipped it to her belt as she stood. “I’m Sawyer.”

He offered her a perfunctory smile as he approached, and Maggie’s gaze swept over him, assessing. No visible weapons, and she was relatively certain she could subdue him under two seconds if he tried anything physical, but in a world populated with aliens, it was wise to expect the unexpected.

“What’s this about?” Maggie settled her hands on her hips when he reached her, her fingers brushing the butt of her service weapon.

“I’m with Tanner and Ortiz. The law firm? I have a few envelopes for you. If you would just sign—” He tried to hand her a clipboard, but Maggie pushed it down with a single finger.

“I’m being served? By whom?”

“No, ma’am. Mr. Ortiz was Aileen Connor’s attorney. He’s fulfilling her final will and testament. There is information here for her daughter, Jamie, and a letter from Ms. Connor for you.”

Maggie’s heart began to pound. “A letter?”

“Yes, ma’am.” He held out the envelopes, and Maggie accepted them before signing where he indicated.

“Thank you. My condolences on your loss. Mr. Ortiz will be in touch soon about Ms. Connor’s financials and final wishes regarding Jamie.” The runner gave her a parting smile.

“Sure. Thanks,” Maggie murmured as he departed, her attention already focused on the plain, white envelope with her name scrawled across the front in Aileen’s handwriting. She’d had beautiful penmanship, one of the many little things Maggie had liked about her.

Aware of a roomful of curious gazes directed her way, Maggie grabbed her keys from her desk and left the precinct, heading for her car in the parking lot. Heat rolled out in an oppressive wave when she jerked open the door, the sweltering summer day forcing her to shed her jacket before she slipped inside. The dark leather seat was hot under her legs.

Maggie cranked the ignition and set the air conditioner on high, belatedly realizing she should have examined her vehicle for explosives first. She lucked out, and her distracted state didn’t get her or anyone else killed by a car bomb courtesy of Blackwell’s thugs.

Wiping a nervous hand over her mouth, Maggie studied the envelopes with a mixture of anticipation and dread. She took a deep breath and got on with it, tearing into the envelope from the attorney. Full of legal mumbo jumbo, the pages outlined savings willed to Jamie, including a modest college fund Aileen opened eight years ago for a daughter she didn’t have yet. Maggie skimmed the document, noting she was executor of Jamie’s trust, and set it aside before scooping up the letter.

This one she opened with care. Maggie slid the letter out and unfolded it, tears catching in her eyelashes as Aileen reached out beyond the grave with answers Maggie assumed she’d never get.

Maggie,

*If you’re reading this, I’m gone, and you’ve discovered the secret I’ve kept from you too long.*
I see you in Jamie in millions of little ways every day. From her dimples to her stubbornness, our daughter inherited more of your genes than mine, I think. She has your beautiful, dark eyes, and whenever I look into them that is both a blessing and a curse. Not because of anything you’ve done, but because of what I did.

I knew you never wanted kids, Maggie, but I did. Desperately. I wanted a beautiful girl to be proud of, and when our paths crossed, I realized you were the one to give her to me. I misled you and myself, thinking you wouldn’t care if you didn’t know, but that wasn’t fair to you or Jamie. I understand that now, and I am so very sorry.

As much as I came to care for you during our time together, I broke things off when I learned I was pregnant. I never intended to force you into something you didn’t want, and yet I’m doing exactly that now. There was never any question you would step up, but you’d given me my dream. I didn’t want to deprive you of yours.

I leave Jamie in your care because I’m confident you will make sure she is loved and cared for whether she remains with you or you choose a family for her. You’ll do right by our daughter. Of this I have no doubt.

I write this letter after learning of your engagement. I’ve been thinking a lot about telling you lately, especially as Jamie grows increasingly curious about you, but I’ve decided to wait a bit longer so you and Alex can begin your lives together. If you’re reading this, then I guess I waited too long.

We made a beautiful, amazing little girl together, Maggie, and I wish I could be there to watch her grow into the beautiful, amazing woman she will become, but if she’s anything like you, I know she’ll be extraordinary.

Please forgive me and thank you, for everything.

Aileen

Maggie gasped, dragging air into her aching lungs. She wanted to be angry at Aileen for using her and keeping her from the truth, but how could she when Jamie was the result? How could she when she was keeping Jamie a secret from Alex?

Teardrops spattered the ink, making it run. Maggie tucked the letters into her glove compartment for safe keeping. Closing her eyes, she leaned her head back against the seat, letting the icy blast of the air conditioner erase all evidence she’d been crying.

A tap on the passenger window scared the hell out of her. Maggie jumped, accidentally honking the horn, and glared at Kara who gave her a cheeky wave on the other side of the glass. With a huff, Maggie turned off the car, pocketed her keys, and shoved the door open.

“You need something?” she sniped, embarrassed to be caught off guard. She ducked back into the car to grab her jacket before slamming the door.

“Sorry I startled you. You okay?” Dressed in her preppy, buttoned-down best, Kara looked out of place amongst the denim, t-shirts, and uniforms most sported in the police parking lot.

Defensive, Maggie crossed her arms even though her mood had nothing to do with Kara. Aileen’s letter left her raw, and she wasn’t up for a visit from Sunny Danvers right now. “Fine. What are you doing here?”

Kara seemed unperturbed by Maggie’s attitude, her ire bouncing off the Girl of Steel as useless as a bullet. “How did things go with Jamie?”
Tempted to tell Kara it was none of her business, Maggie recognized that wasn’t fair. Kara was protecting Jamie, and her advice had kept Maggie from making the biggest mistake of her life last night. Maggie supposed she owed her an update. “It was the hardest thing I ever did. Worse than walking away from Alex.”

Kara’s vivid blue eyes shined with worry. “Did you—”

“She chose me.” Maggie looked away, but the joy of Jamie’s decision brought a wisp of a smile to her lips. “She was pretty adamant about staying.” Aileen had been right about Jamie’s stubbornness. Those were Maggie’s genes at work, and she shuddered to imagine Jamie as a rebellious teenager. God knew she had given her aunt a devil of a time at that age.

“You’re honoring her choice, right?”

“Yeah. When it came down to it, I just… if she’d chosen another family, I’m not sure what I would have done.” Maggie swallowed, staring at her boots. “I never expected I would want a kid. I was so positive Jamie’s mom didn’t even tell me I had one.”

“What do you mean?”

“I got a letter from Aileen today. Apparently I was her DNA donor of choice. She wanted to get pregnant and liked my dimples, or something like that. She developed feelings for me at some point, but I must have been clearer about children sooner with her than with Alex. Aileen figured she was doing me a favor by not telling me.”

“Oh, Maggie…” Kara gently grabbed her wrist. “I’m sorry.”

Maggie shrugged off her concern. “It’s fine. I mean, she was right. But I… I missed out on six years with Jamie. Her first word. Her first steps. Nightmares and birthdays I wasn’t there to soothe or celebrate. I gave up Alex because I was standing in the way of the family she wanted. But now…”

“Hey.” Kara squeezed her wrist again, the pressure deceptively light for a woman capable of hefting a submarine out of the ocean. “When you and Alex broke up, you both made the best choices you could at the time. But things change. Circumstances, feelings… you did nothing wrong. Neither did Alex.”

“I know, but the what ifs won’t shut up. What if we’d tried harder? What if I had been more open to having kids? Now I want a family, but…” The thought of Jamie and Alex at the table after dinner, heads bent together as Alex helped Jamie with homework, hit Maggie with a longing so deep it took her breath away.

“Does this mean you want Alex back?”

“Of course I want her back.” The words were instantaneous; Maggie didn’t even stop to consider them. Wanting Alex was never the problem. “I told you, I have to be enough for someone. I don’t want Alex to want me because of Jamie. That’s not fair to any of us.”

Kara stepped closer, taking a quick look around before she slipped her glasses off. “You two need to talk. There are things you need to say to each other. Things you both need to hear. I think—”

“No, Kara. Don’t—” Maggie tried to brush past her, unwilling to put faith in a happy ending after all the pain she and Alex put each other through, but Kara caught her arm and held her still.

“Talk to her,” Kara insisted. “Please. If you’re not ready to tell her about Jamie, fine, but let Alex talk to you. Hear her out.”
“Did she say something to you?”

“She’s my sister. She says all kinds of things. But yeah. There’s a chance... you two can fix this. Eight months ago, you weren’t ready, and Alex wasn’t either. You’re both ready now.”

Maggie smirked. “You just got rid of me, Kara. You saying you want me back in your social circle again?” she goaded.

“Even if I didn’t, you make Alex crazy happy, and I can’t stand to watch her suffer like this. But you and me are making progress, right? We might even wind up friends. Stranger things have happened.” She grinned, and Maggie roll her eyes.

Not that she would admit it, but Maggie was shyly pleased at the possibility. “So why are you really here?”

“Snapper.”

“On your case again?”

“When isn’t he?”

Maggie snorted, but the warm affection that stirred at Kara’s antics was welcome. Maybe they could find some middle ground. A healthier place than before.

“Got anything you can share?” Kara clasped her hands in front of her and pretended to plead.

Considering her options, Maggie dipped her head. “I might be able to hook you up.”

“See? We’re totally becoming besties.” Kara winked and slipped her glasses back on.

“Don’t push it.”

***

Dressed as a stereotypical FBI agent, Alex prowled the sidewalk in her black power suit outside Lord Technologies. Her heels clicked smartly on the concrete while her gaze roamed the street and passing cars, looking for one NCPD-issued vehicle in particular.

Maggie hadn’t been happy when she’d called, and Alex didn’t blame her. She was horning in on the NCPD’s case. Again. Winn had found something solid to connect Max to Brian’s murder, and Alex refused to sit on that evidence another day—despite Maggie’s misgivings. It was time to rattle Max’s cage, and no one was more qualified to shake him down.

But Alex was well aware her motives here were not pure. As much as she wanted justice for Brian, she wanted protection for Maggie more. Blackwell killed a friend to send Maggie a message. Alex wouldn’t let Maggie be his next victim if she could help it.

“Danvers.”

Pivoting, Alex discovered Maggie sauntering up the sidewalk in her trademark leather jacket and jeans. Alex tried not to think about any of the times she’d grabbed those lapels and dragged Maggie in for a kiss. Her fingers twitched, itching to do it again, and Alex clenched her hands at her sides.

“Sawyer.”

“This must be Danvers sisters day. First a visit from Kara, now you.” The sun bounced off the gold shield clipped to Maggie’s waist as she came to a stop. She didn’t look pleased, but her voice was
surprisingly calm, calmer, in fact, than it had been on the phone before Alex hung up on her mid-rant. “Of course, I apparently missed you stopping by the precinct and pulling your FBI act to get all the Gold Rush case files the other day.”

Maggie stuck her hands on hips, canting her chin up, and Alex had a sense of deja vu as they stared at each other across sun-heated concrete. “Yeah, I heard about that stunt you pulled. From my captain.”

Alex shrugged, but she didn’t back down. “Thanks for coming.”

“Like you gave me a choice.”

Alex winced. She’d strong-armed Maggie into confronting Max before she was ready, but Alex knew in her gut this was the right play. “We have proof of Max’s involvement now.”

“Receipts for the rare chemical components in Brian’s system. So you said. It’s not enough to arrest Lord.”

“Max is arrogant. Too arrogant. He won’t stop until we stop him. We need to force him into speeding up his timeline or changing his plans. If Max rushes, he might make a mistake.”

Cocking a hip, Maggie studied Alex with interest. “You keep calling him Max. You two know each other?”

“We have history,” Alex answered dismissively. She was surprised his name had never come up while they were together, one of many things she and Maggie should have talked about and didn’t.

“History? What kind of history?”

Alex’s cheeks flamed at Maggie’s speculative tone. “Not… not that kind.”

Maggie tilted her head, and Alex recognized the skeptical glint in her eyes. She’d always been able to see right through her.

“Okay fine. We had one date, but…” Alex held up a finger before Maggie could interrupt. “I played him for the DEO, kept him occupied until J’onn could finish his recon.”

“You kept him occupied, huh?”

“I let him think he was wining and dining me. I’ll have you know, I spent way more time slamming Max’s face on flat surfaces than flirting with him.”

“So there was flirting.” Maggie crossed her arms, like she was settling in for a long interrogation.

Alex opened her mouth to defend herself only to close it when she caught on to Maggie’s game.

“You’re totally messing with me, aren’t you?”

The tiniest smile curved Maggie’s mouth, her dimples so faint Alex feared she imagined them. Alex squinted at her and tried to look threatening, but Maggie only chuckled.

The moment was achingly familiar, a reminder of the warm, easy teasing Alex had forsaken. She wanted it back, she wanted them back, but Alex didn’t know how to ask for another chance, let alone if Maggie would even want one.

Maggie seemed to realize they had slipped into old habits too, her smile falling away as her gaze did the same. “Alright, Danvers. But if you slam Lord’s head into a table without cause, I’ll arrest you
A dozen flirty responses came to mind at the challenge, but Alex bit her tongue. She hated this. They were on eggshells with each other, and Alex longed for the days when they shared everything, when they didn’t censor every word out of their mouths and clamp down on every emotion.

“I’ll be on my best behavior,” is what Alex settled on, earning her another glimmer of a smile. “Shall we?”

Maggie gestured to the door, and Alex opened it for her before following her inside. They approached the reception desk with their badges out and brandishing attitudes to match.

Alex expected to wait; Max liked his power trips, and he usually left her cooling her heels at reception awhile. So she was suspicious when they were shown to Max’s lab without delay.

They’d piqued his interest, or perhaps Maggie had, Alex considered darkly. Maggie was the wild card, and, for a second, Alex wondered if she should have come alone. Either Max was inquisitive about her working with a local cop, or he had done his homework on Maggie.

“Agent Danvers,” Max greeted, all smiles, extending both of his hands to take Alex’s. She shook his hand as perfunctorily as she could, but Max didn’t make it easy, refusing to let her go until Alex yanked her hand free. If only she had brought hand sanitizer.

His focus shifted to Maggie. “And you brought a friend. Who is the lovely lady with the pretty gold shield?”

With an irritated sigh, Alex made the introductions. “Maxwell Lord, Detective Maggie Sawyer, NCPD Science Division.” She kept her attention on Maggie, curious to see her reaction to meeting Max in the flesh. He could be charming when he made the effort, but she suspected Max would enjoy this encounter too much to be a gentleman about it.

Max took Maggie’s hand, cupping it between his own rather than shaking it. “Ah, yes. The good detective who turned Alex’s head and won her heart. You two are married now, right? How was the honeymoon?” He smiled, and Alex visualized tossing him out a window. A high one.

“You know why we’re here.” Maggie didn’t bat an eye, handling the dig better than Alex.

“Do I?” Max released Maggie and shrugged off his lab coat, revealing a tailored suit that likely cost as much as six months’ rent. “Would this have anything to do with that Gold Rush task force you’re running, Detective? Kara Danvers has landed a scoop or two on the case. Her articles have been… informative.”

Alex rolled her eyes. “Cut the crap, Max. Your guys messed up and used an experimental dose of Rush they shouldn’t have. We found some... ‘extras’... in that hot shot they used to kill an alien.”

A flicker of a frown came and went as Max tucked his hands in his pants pockets. “Extras? I have no idea what you are talking about.”

Alex met Maggie’s gaze, silently asking for permission. Maggie dipped her head in agreement, giving Alex the floor and following her lead.

“Someone tinkered with the typical formula, trying to prolong the life of the parasite in the drug. It’s a special little chemical compound, the ingredients of which Lord Technologies is the only business in the city to purchase in the last six months.”
Moving in for the kill, Alex crowded into his space, and Max took a step away from Maggie. He was still afraid of her, Alex noted, and a wicked smile sprang to her lips, complimenting the smirk on Maggie’s face. Max should be afraid, especially when his plans put Maggie in harm’s way. If anything happened to her, he couldn’t hide behind money or corporate lawyers. Alex would dismantle Lord Tech—and him—piece by piece.

If he saw the dark promise in her eyes, he didn’t acknowledge it. “We purchase lots of chemicals, Agent Danvers. You must be more specific.”

Alex didn’t bother. Max was neck deep in this. After all they’d been through during Myriad, she’d hoped Max turned a corner, but no such luck. “What the hell are you doing running drugs? You forget to renew your patents? Cash running short? Science not giving you kicks anymore?”

Max grinned. “I’m always about science, Alex. Our views on aliens aside, you and I have that in common. Our love for solving puzzles. Taking nature to the next level. Bending it to our will.” He stepped closer, close enough his breath ghosted over her cheek and she caught a whiff of his cloying aftershave. “We should have teamed up more. Imagine all the exciting discoveries we could have made together.”

Maggie shifted, her leather jacket creaking, like she might interfere, or maybe Max’s blatant flirting was getting under her skin. Shamelessly, Alex hoped for the latter, but Maggie did nothing except cross her arms.

“You couldn’t care less about drug running, so what’s this about?”

Shrugging, Max’s grin widened. He loved this part, letting Alex stew in her knowledge of his guilt while remaining smug and untouchable behind a veneer of plausible deniability. It was like catnip to him.

Easing back, Alex straightened her suit jacket. “I will find out what you’re up to,” she promised sweetly, “and when I do, I’m coming for you. Whatever you’re planning with Belamort, you won’t get away with it.”

“Belamort? Is that what’s in it? I heard it has some interesting effects. While you’re blissed out, you’re highly susceptible to suggestion. If you wanted someone to do your bidding for an extended period, a dose might do the trick.”

“Not for long,” Maggie chimed in. “The stuff only lasts for a few hours inside the human body. Cocaine prolongs that and makes the effects more intense, but the result is the same.”

Max pointed at her. “Pretty and smart. No wonder she got you to bat for the other team,” he told Alex. “At least my ego is assuaged knowing I never had a shot.”

“You never had a shot either way, Max.”

He clapped his hands over his heart, pretending Alex had wounded him. “See if I hold your hand next time while some space ray scrambles your brain.” His gaze slid to Maggie, but she apparently didn’t react the way he hoped, and he frowned. “Come on, Alex. I have thousands of people working for me. Any of them could have ordered these mysterious chemicals you mentioned.”

“You know Ian Blackwell,” Maggie remarked, and Alex admired the cool, collected figure she struck in the middle of Max’s office. “You attended the same college.”

Max’s smile was patronizing. “It was big college, Detective Sawyer. You can do better than—”
“Chemistry buddies, I heard. Liked to pull clever, little science pranks on the university staff. You went the straight and narrow, at least on the surface. Made a respectable name for yourself. Ian, on the other hand, saw the chance to make bank peddling enhanced drugs. You might have the bigger cash wad now, but he hit the millionaires’ club first.”

A burst of pride burned warm and sweet through Alex’s chest as Max’s smile twisted into a sneer. She loved watching Maggie work. People always underestimated her at their own peril. Maggie would make a hell of a DEO agent.

“Ian made some poor life choices,” Max allowed after a moment. “But I’d be careful what accusations you throw around, Detective Sawyer. Wouldn’t want you getting into trouble.”

Bristling, Alex got in his face. “Watch who you’re threatening.”

“That’s not a threat. Just some friendly advice. Although protecting the woman you tossed aside for something better? How noble, Agent Danvers.”

The barb struck home. Alex moved to bounce his face off the lab table, but Maggie’s sharp tone stopped her dead in her tracks.

“Alex, no. He’s not worth it.”

Max chuckled when Alex stepped back with effort. “Oh, still has you whipped, doesn’t she? Well, I heard the detective got around before she met you so she’s had lots of practice.”

“Sonofa–” Alex surged toward him again. She’d hurt Maggie enough, and she would be damned if she let Max add to her pain.

“Alex!” Maggie caught her arm, dragging her back toward the door. “We’re done here. Come on.”

“Always a pleasure, Agent Danvers,” Max goaded before his gaze returned to Maggie. “And be careful out there, Detective. The streets of National City can be mean to a cop. Wouldn’t want an innocent, little bystander to get hurt.”

The threat sounded vague to Alex’s ears, but Maggie tensed, her grip on Alex’s bicep turning painful. Before Alex could comment, Maggie let her go and charged at Max herself. Alex was so startled she almost didn’t catch Maggie in time.

“You come near her, and I swear to God, I will kill you,” Maggie snarled with a ferocity Alex had never seen from her before. She strained against Alex’s hold around her waist as Max settled on the edge of his desk, unperturbed. Alex knew if she turned Maggie loose, she’d hurt him. Badly. “You even think about going near Jamie, you bastard–”

Jamie. Now Alex had a name to go with the text that made Maggie smile. Her stomach sank, but she used more force, hauling Maggie away from Max before she ended her career. With a grunt of effort, Alex shoved Maggie into the hall and slammed the door behind them.

“What the hell was that?” Alex demanded.

Maggie jerked away, her dark eyes wild. Without a word, she spun on her heel and stormed off.

The slim thread Alex had been clinging to, hoping for a way to reconcile, unraveled with each step Maggie took. No way did Maggie react that violently over a casual girlfriend. Whoever Jamie was, Maggie loved her.
Alex let her head sink into her hand. She’d missed her chance.

***

“Tell me about Jamie.”

Winn paused, a barbecue chicken wing halfway to his mouth as Alex slid with quiet menace into the booth across from him. Her features were blank, terrifyingly so, and Winn searched for an escape route. The bar was half empty, too early for the regulars to be perched on their favorite stools, leaving Winn with no one to save him. He slowly set the wing down and wiped his hands on a napkin, stalling for time and praying for mercy.

“Alex, hey,” he greeted with weak enthusiasm. “What, what are you doing here?”

“Maggie and I went to see Maxwell Lord about the Gold Rush case today.” Alex’s tone was casual, but there was an edge to it, one that ruined Winn’s appetite. He pushed his basket of food away.

“Did he uh… did he give you guys anything?”

“We scared him enough that Max threatened Maggie, or more like someone Maggie cares about. Her name is Jamie.” Alex tilted her head, and arched her eyebrows, waiting for his reaction.

He slid his hands off the table, balling them into fists out of Alex’s line of sight. Max used to be his idol, but after Kara came out as Supergirl, Winn had seen Lord’s true, ugly colors. The thought of Max using his technological know-how and unlimited funds to harm Jamie or Maggie made him sick.

“Winn?” Alex prompted when he didn’t answer fast enough.

Kenny Rogers belted out of the jukebox in the corner, advising Winn to know when to hold ‘em and when to fold ‘em. Folding sounded like a fantastic idea. He gulped as Alex continued to glare.

“Look, Alex, I wanted to tell you, but Maggie asked me not to, and I agreed with her reasons.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Then tell me now.”

Winn scooted back, plastering himself against his seat. “What did Maggie say?” he squeaked.

“What do you think?”

An apology went unspoken as he eyed Alex in the dim light. She wasn’t reacting how he expected, and why come to him instead of Kara after learning the news? Unless...

“You only have a name, don’t you?”

Alex’s cheek pulsed when she clenched her jaw, and Winn couldn’t help a small smile of triumph. She was playing him, trying to make him confess, and she’d damn near pulled it off.

“Aww, you’re good.” Winn waggled a finger at her. “You nearly had me. Nope. Nuh-uh, Danvers. This is Maggie’s story to tell, not mine.”

Alex kept it up for another moment, but then her lethal demeanor dissolved and her posture slumped. “Fine. Maggie blurted her name when she went postal on Max. Who is she?”

“Alex, I want to tell you, but a promise is a promise.”

“Why does Maggie care if I know she’s fallen for another woman? I mean, why not flaunt that in my
face?”

Winn almost sprayed the table with a sip of beer. He choked instead, sputtering as Alex watched him flounder.

“Jamie isn’t…” Winn coughed again, his eyes watering. “She’s not Maggie’s girlfriend.”

Alex shook her head. “I saw how she reacted, Winn. I’ve never seen Maggie like that before. Not even when she was protecting me. Whoever Jamie is, Maggie loves her.”

“She does,” Winn admitted with a timid smile, thinking of all the photos on his phone he longed to share with Alex. “But it’s not… what you’re thinking.”

“What the hell is going on?” Alex slapped a palm on the table, making him jump. “You, Kara, J’onn… You’re keeping something from me. Something I need to know.” She leaned forward, trying to intimidate him again.

Winn knew it was an empty threat. At least he hoped so. He hitched his chin higher in defiance. Usually he’d cave under Alex’s intimidation tactics, but with Maggie and Jamie depending on him, he’d be damned if he crumbled.

“This isn’t the time to grow a pair, Winn. Who is Jamie? Why would Max use her as leverage against Maggie?”

“I can’t, Alex. I love you and Kara like family, but I love Maggie the same way. Don’t ask me to betray her trust. Just be patient.”

“Patient? First Brian, now Max is making threats. I wait to sort this out, Maggie could end up dead. So could Jamie–whoever the hell she is,” Alex seethed.

Her fears were Winn’s own, but there was little Alex could do that wasn’t already being done. “Maggie has protection, but if you force her to admit something she’s not ready to share? You’ll regret it. The case is almost over, Alex. Give Maggie time to wrap this up, and she’ll come to you. I know it.”

Sighing, Alex snagged one of his fries and took a half-hearted bite. “Bet you feel pretty smug you didn’t cave.”

Winn straightened, a little proud of himself as Alex slipped out of the booth and stood. “Maybe. You are intimidating as hell.” His smirk fell away when Alex put her hand next to his food and leaned in close, getting in his face.

“You’d have been a lot more badass without barbecue sauce all over your chin.” Alex slapped a napkin against his chest with more force than necessary and left him to his dinner.

***

Showered and dressed way too early, Maggie sat alone on her couch, nursing her coffee in the semi-darkness. She hadn’t slept worth a damn, and somewhere around four-thirty she gave up trying. Now she waited for the sun to rise, itching to start her day. The sooner she got moving, the sooner this whole mess would be over.

“What are you doing?”

Maggie started, surprised to find Jamie watching her from the hallway. Dressed in her Wonder
Woman pajamas, her hair mussed and sticking out at all angles, Jamie yawned into her fist and blinked sleepily at her.

“You don’t have to be up, kiddo. Go back to bed for a little while.”

“You don’t have to be up, either,” Jamie pointed out, shooting the dark windows a disgruntled look.

A thud against the front door had Maggie reaching for the gun on her hip. Jamie’s eyes rounded as Maggie slid the weapon free of the holster, and she did as she was told when Maggie gestured her toward the bedrooms.

Once Jamie was out of sight, Maggie approached the door, standing off to the side as she undid the deadbolt and swung it open. Her finger flexed on the trigger, but there was no one, just the newspaper on her doormat. Maggie leaned out, spying the kid who lived two floors down on his morning delivery route. She blew out a shaky breath and rolled her eyes before shoving the gun back in the holster. Max and Blackwell had her spooked.

She snatched up the paper, spying Kara’s byline under the top story as she stepped back inside and locked the door. Apparently the tip Maggie gave her earned Kara a spot in the Tribune and CatCo Magazine.

Jamie poked her head around the corner again when she heard the lock turn. “Can I come out now?”

“Yeah. Only the dangerous morning edition. Sorry.” Maggie waved the paper at her then tossed it on the kitchen table, ignoring her thudding heart rate as her adrenaline rush began to fade.

“It’s okay.” Jamie padded after Maggie in her socks, clutching her threadbare rabbit under her arm as she followed Maggie into the kitchen. “Does this happen to you a lot?”

Maggie swallowed as she poured another cup of coffee, her third of the morning already. “Why? Rethinking moving in with another family?” She twitched, sloshing coffee everywhere when Jamie smacked her on the hip with her stuffed animal.

“*No,*” Jamie huffed.

Wiping up her mess with a paper towel, Maggie couldn’t help but smile at Jamie’s indignant expression. “Sorry,” she repeated as she tossed the soaked towel in the trash. “Tired and punchy, and it’s going to be a long day.”

Her anxiety eased further when Jamie wrapped small arms around Maggie’s waist, snuggling against her side but careful to avoid her firearm. “What’s this for?” Maggie asked.

“I heard you last night. You were moving around a lot and didn’t sleep.”

“Sorry. I tried to be quiet.” Maggie ran her fingers through Jamie’s hair, trying to tame the wayward strands. The last few days had taken a toll, and Maggie yearned for some time with just the two of them.

But before that could happen, Blackwell and Lord needed to be behind bars. The task force was so damn close. Maybe a week at most remained as they buttoned up loose ends to present an airtight case for the district attorney. Soon they’d bust the operation wide open, then maybe she and Jamie could get away a while. Take a proper vacation. She wondered if Jamie had ever been to Disneyland.

“Maggie?”
Maggie snapped out of her musings and glanced down into a pair of dark, worried eyes.

“Are you okay?”

It would be easy to brush off Jamie’s concern with a harmless white lie, but Maggie didn’t want to be that kind of parent. She steered Jamie to the kitchen table and sat her down, settling on the seat beside her.

“I’m sure you noticed I’ve been distracted the past few days, and I’m afraid that won’t get any better this week.”

Jamie pouted, tracing the pattern in the wood grain on the table. Maggie lightly chucked her under the chin, encouraging Jamie to look at her.

“This case is almost over though, and then I’ll be around so much you’ll be sick of me.”

“Is that why you couldn’t sleep? The case?”

“That’s a big part of it.” Telling Jamie about Max’s threats would only alarm her further, so Maggie kept them to herself for now. Jamie understood she needed protection, and that was what mattered most. “I interviewed a suspect yesterday and things got… intense. I kept turning the conversation around and around in my head, thinking of all the ways I could have handled it differently.”

Not the least of which had been blurting out Jamie’s name in front of Alex. Maggie had expected her to show up all night, demanding answers.

“Like when someone makes fun of you and you don’t think of a good comeback until the next day?”

Maggie smiled. “Kinda. No one is making fun of you, are they?”

Jamie shook her head, crushing her rabbit against her chest. “So what’s the other part?”

Of course Jamie caught that little slip. She was her daughter after all. Maggie took a deep breath.

“Alex. She’s been on my mind a lot.”

“You miss her?”

God, did she. The sight of Alex standing on the sidewalk in that power suit yesterday, looking so much like the first time they’d met, wouldn’t get out of Maggie’s mind. A thousand little things about Alex already haunted Maggie every day. The scent of her skin as they cuddled in bed on a rainy Sunday. Alex grumbling about yoga even though she never missed a class. The sounds Maggie coaxed out of her as they made love. She didn’t need one more ghost, one more specter of Alex flitting in and out of her thoughts.

“Um…” Maggie paused and collected herself. “Yeah. We’ve had to work together lately. It’s been hard.”

“Will I have to meet her? You put her number in my phone, and said I should call her if something bad happens, but it seems weird to call someone I’ve never met.”

“I haven’t told Alex about you yet.”

“Why?” Jamie’s features scrunched in confusion.

“It’s…”
“Complicated?” Jamie must have remembered that word from their earlier conversation. The term was still sadly fitting.

“Complicated. But I’m going to soon. As soon as the case is over. And I’m sure she will want to meet you, if that’s okay?”

Jamie shrugged one shoulder. “I guess.”

Sitting back in surprise, Maggie took in Jamie’s stubborn features. “You don’t want to meet Kara’s sister? Supergirl’s sister?”

“She hurt you. I don’t like her.”

“Oh, sweetie, no. Alex is a good person, it just… didn’t work out. Like your mom and me, sometimes, people don’t want the same things, or don’t realize they want the same things, and they let each other go.”

“What did you and mom not want?”

Jamie’s innocent question stabbed Maggie straight through the heart. “Uh… We had different plans for our future, same as, same as Alex and I. I let Alex go because she would be happier without me, and she did the same for me.” Maggie wasn’t sure how convincing she was with tears in her eyes.

“Like you offering to let me live with another family?”

Maggie nodded. “We want the best for the people we love most, even though sometimes it hurts to give it to them. You’ll like Alex. And she’ll love you,” she assured, her voice roughening with emotion.

Jamie seemed skeptical, but she didn’t argue further. “Are you going to be late getting home again?”

“I’m afraid so. J’onn will babysit, though, and after a few more days, the case will be over. Maybe we can go on vacation then, huh? Go somewhere fun?”

“I’d rather have you here.” Jamie’s lips pursed, and she hugged her rabbit closer. “You’re always working.”

Maggie knew Jamie would tire of her schedule sooner or later, but she’d been hoping for later. “Soon, kiddo. I swear.”

“Sure. I need to get ready for art camp.” Sulking, Jamie slid off the chair and left. Maggie watched her go, helpless. At least she’d found a summer activity Jamie could enjoy while Maggie was at work. If only Jamie didn’t need a squad of DEO agents with her.

Was this motherhood? Constantly swinging between highs and lows, feeling like a good parent one moment and the worst the next?

With a sigh, Maggie snagged a corner of the paper, tugging it over to skim Kara’s article. Concern bloomed as she read it, and Maggie realized she’d been careless with Kara, giving her all the exclusives about the case. Max made a passing comment about it. No doubt Blackwell had noticed too. They might wonder how much more Kara knew. At least Kara had that whole bulletproof thing going for her. Regardless, Maggie had inadvertently painted another target on someone she cared about.

She slipped her phone out of her pocket, texting her worries to Kara and giving her a heads up to be
careful. A few seconds later, Kara replied and blew off her concerns with the hubris of someone largely invulnerable, but thanked Maggie for caring. She swore to keep an eye out for Blackwell’s henchmen.

Perhaps with x-ray vision, Kara would see them coming.

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Maggie sighed as she set her phone on the metal shelf jutting out the side of the nondescript delivery truck housing their surveillance suite, the picture Jamie texted her from art camp still in her mind’s eye. The colors had been darker than the pastels Jamie favored, the sky behind the blood-red rose cloudy and ominous.

“Everything okay?” Winn asked.

“Yeah, fine. Let’s get this over with,” Maggie said, reaching for her headphones. The truck swayed on its shocks as someone stepped on the bumper, and Maggie scowled. It was hours before someone was supposed to relieve them.

The door swung open, and Maggie’s heart rate ratcheted up to pounding at the sight of Alex, framed by the low glow of the streetlight. Her face was in shadow, but from the stiff way she held her shoulders under her favorite motorcycle jacket, Maggie knew the confrontation she had anticipated all last night was here.

“Winn, can you give us a minute?”

Winn’s expression was a perfect mirror of Maggie’s internal panic as he glanced back and forth between the two of them. “Um… sure?”

“Was that a question or an answer?” Alex deadpanned.

As much as Maggie didn’t want to be left alone with Alex, she took pity on him. “It’s fine, Winn. This won’t take long.”

He didn’t look convinced, but he nodded. “If this truck starts rocking, I’m coming back in here.” Winn paused, realizing how that sounded. “On second thought, maybe—”

“No, Winn.” Alex crossed her arms, impatience radiating from every lean line of her body.

“No. Right.” Winn grabbed his bag and hustled out, slipping past Alex in the narrow space with a grimace on his face as he tried to avoid touching her. He shot them both a final, nervous look before closing the door.

Silence descended, thick and heavy in his absence. Maggie gestured around the truck. “Now’s not a good time. We have bad guys to catch.”

“I need to talk to you.”

Maggie took a fortifying breath and met Alex’s gaze, frowning at her exhausted and strung out appearance. “Fine,” she grossed. “What’s on your mind, Danvers?”

“You,” Alex admitted, and Maggie’s stomach somersaulted in surprise. With a sigh, Alex raked a hand through her hair and leaned her hip against the console. “Found out today J’onn assigned our elite agents to an off-the-books protective detail. Usually I’d be in that roster, but not this time. This time, I’m being shut out. Details about the mission are under a level of security clearance even I don’t
Maggie said nothing.

“You’re the subject, aren’t you? Why else would J’onn keep this from me? Did Blackwell try something else? Did Max?”

“Alex…”

“I still love you,” Alex blurted. “When I told you forever that day on the promenade, I meant it. Just because we’re not together anymore doesn’t mean those feelings vanish or even fade, Maggie. If one of them is threatening you—”

“I can take care of myself.” Maggie cleared her throat, hearing how breathless she sounded. Alex’s words were bittersweet. Part of her soaked them up, but they were trapped in an untenable reality where nothing would change.

“You don’t have to do this alone.”

Maggie stood, growing agitated as Alex loomed over her. “I’m not alone, Danvers. I have the entire NCPD to back me up. The DEO has a team on this now. I have Winn, hell, I have Kara. I’m good. The case is over in a few days. Maybe sooner if you let me get back to work.”

“It only takes a second for Blackwell to get to you.”

“You think I don’t know that?” Maggie snapped. “I’ve been a cop longer than you’ve been an agent. Don’t lecture me.”

“And what about Jamie?”

Maggie’s breath caught hearing Alex say her name.

“I don’t know who she is to you, but I saw the way you threatened Max over her yesterday. You love her, and you’re afraid for her. You need me, Maggie. I can help you. Help both of you. Don’t leave me in the cold on this. Please. Talk to me.”

Those three little words held more weight than Alex realized. “A surveillance truck with the worst drug runners in the city two blocks away isn’t the place to talk about this. I appreciate you care, Alex, but I’m not your responsibility anymore. You don’t need to play hero out of some sense of obligation.” Tears glittered in Alex’s eyes, and Maggie looked away. She toyed with her headphones, trying to stay strong despite the shaking in her hands. “You’ve said everything there is to say, and now you need to leave so I can work.”

“Maybe you’ve said everything, but I haven’t,” Alex ground out.

When Maggie glanced at her again, Alex was trembling too. Kara had begged her to let Alex have her say, and whatever was on Alex’s mind it was clearly eating her alive. And damn it, seeing Alex in pain still tore Maggie to pieces. “Ok, fine. Tell me.”

Alex closed her eyes, and her tears slipped free as she lowered her head. “I can’t. I can’t.” She turned to go, grabbing the door handle, but Maggie was faster. Catching Alex by the shoulder, she spun her back around, pressing Alex against the door.

“Tell me.” Maggie’s voice dropped lower, softer, and Alex’s shoulders slumped in surrender.
“I… I screwed up. And I don’t know… I don’t know how to fix it. I thought I was straight before I met you. I thought I wanted a family.” Alex tipped her head back to stare at the ceiling. “That’s the deal, right? When you’re a woman? You’re supposed to want the house with the picket fence and the 2.5 kids, right? And… I did.”

“I know.” Maggie’s heart ached anew.

“All my life, I thought that’s what I wanted, what I was supposed to have, and then… then we got engaged, and I got scared. So scared… And I started withdrawing from you, picking fights over stupid things… I didn’t even realize why I was doing it. I love you. I love you more than anything, but when you said you didn’t want kids…” Alex slammed her head against the door in frustration.

“Hey, hey, stop that. You don’t want Winn to storm back in here,” Maggie half-teased. She slid her hands through Alex’s hair to cup the back of her head, forcing Alex to look at her. “What are you trying to tell me? That you got cold feet?”

“Everything spiraled. Kara was a mess. Dad was still missing. And there were so many wedding details. So many. And I just… I just I…” Alex gasped, struggling to breathe.

“Do you… have you changed your mind about kids?”

“No.” Alex shook her head, and Maggie wasn’t sure if she felt crushed or relieved. “I want kids. The thought of having a son or daughter with you… I want that. I want it so much.”

“Alex…” Maggie’s own tears spilled free as Jamie’s name crowded onto the tip of her tongue.

“But I want you more,” Alex sobbed. “I want you, Maggie. If that means no children, if that means we’re the cool aunts to Winn’s, or Lena’s, or James’ kids in the future, I can live with that, but I can’t live without you.”

Maggie went still.

“You’re enough. You’re more than enough. It took losing you for me to see that. When you asked me if I was ready to give up on us, I didn’t get it. I didn’t comprehend the magnitude of what I was letting go, but you, you did. I finally understand, and I want you. I want us. Now. Forever. Nothing will change that.”

“Alex…” Maggie tried again, only to be silenced with a desperate kiss. Alex’s hands tangled in her hair to hold her still, but Maggie wasn’t going anywhere. The kiss erased any doubt, searing through the fog of hurt and reigniting a fire Maggie feared she’d never feel again.

Her fingers slid down Alex’s shoulders to grip Alex’s jacket and drew her closer, reveling, for a timeless second, in Alex’s body pressed against hers again.

But they couldn’t do this. Not here. Not yet.

Not until Alex knew the rest.

Maggie pulled away with effort. Alex’s lips chased hers, and Maggie fought the urge to lose herself in Alex again. Finally, Alex opened her eyes, her expression uncertain.

“You’re not the only one who made mistakes, Alex.” Maggie stroked the lapel of Alex’s jacket, smoothing it back into place. “I thought… I was... so sure I didn’t want kids—”

The radio on Maggie’s hip squawked, and they both jumped.
“Sawyer, they cleared out. You’ll want to see this.”

Alex snorted at the interruption, because of course there was one, but Maggie cursed. She ripped the radio off her belt.

“Be there in a second, Hawkins.” Maggie sighed, tightening her grip on the device and wishing she could fling it across the truck, wishing she had time to tell Alex all the things she needed to hear. “I’m sorry. I have to go.”

“No problem,” Alex murmured and turned to flee. The dejected set of her shoulders made Maggie’s stomach hurt. She reached out, catching Alex by the arm.

“Tomorrow morning. Coffee.” Maggie swallowed as Alex’s head came up and their eyes locked. “Ten AM. Our,” she gulped, “our favorite coffee shop. There’s something I need to tell you. We can’t talk about any kind of, of a future, together, until you know.”

Alex hesitated. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” Maggie said with a flicker of a smile. “It’s not bad, just unexpected. But it will be a shock and… and we need to talk about it.”

“Are you.. saying we have a chance?”

The radio squawked again.

“I’m coming,” Maggie snarled at Hawkins before he could speak. “Jesus.”

Alex chuckled at Maggie’s indignation, and the sound did giddy things to Maggie’s insides. Behind her tears, Alex looked hopeful, and Maggie couldn’t resist kissing her softly, promising with action rather than words. Tomorrow, Alex would learn the whole truth.

And maybe, just maybe, they could be a family.

“See you tomorrow, Danvers,” Maggie said when they parted. She brushed past Alex and hopped out of the truck.

Winn was sitting on the curb, grinning from ear to ear as she approached.

“ Heard all that did you?” Maggie asked.

He tapped his bluetooth headset and smirked.

Maggie shook her head, pausing as she drew even with him. “You tell anyone, and you’ll have to answer to me.” She jerked her thumb over her shoulder, knowing, without looking, Alex was standing in the door, glowering at Winn. “And her.”

“Um, yes, ma’am. Ma’ams.”

Maggie shook her head again as she walked down the block, but she didn’t stop smiling for the rest of the night.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Note: Things get intense for a character or two in parts of this chapter. We don’t want to spoil anything, but if you’re worried about potential triggers, feel free to reach out in advance to zennie or boxer on Twitter with questions before you proceed.

THANKS to Dani for the awesome banner! Give some BIG LOVE on the Twitter post.
The DEO lab was silent save for the soft footfalls of Alex’s boots as she paced the tile floor. The morning sun peered through the high windows, warming her back through her standard black polo, but Alex was too distracted to notice. Personnel filed in for first shift, but so far she had the lab to herself.

Alex hadn’t slept a second last night, too excited, too hopeful, too scared to let her head touch the pillow on the bed she’d once shared with Maggie. Her body still giddy from their heated kisses in the surveillance truck, and her heart lighter than it had been in months, Alex warred with the desire to go to Maggie now. The hell with coffee and waiting to talk. She didn’t want to go another day, another
hour, without Maggie Sawyer in her life if she could help it.

For a few precious moments in that surveillance truck, Alex had been whole again. She prayed whatever news Maggie had to tell her didn’t change that, didn’t shatter her all over again.

Pivoting, Alex started back across the lab only to crash headlong into her super-suited sister. Alex bounced off her with a curse, flailing in vain to stay upright.

“Morning!” Kara greeted with a blinding smile, her golden curls shimmering in the early light. She snagged Alex’s bicep to keep her on her feet, and Alex couldn’t decide if she was grateful or annoyed by the rescue.

“I hate it when you sneak up on me like that.”

Amused, Kara crossed her arms, her cape swishing behind her. “I didn’t sneak. Maybe if you weren’t prowling your lab like a caged panther, you would have heard me come in. What’s up? Your text said you needed to talk.”

Alex glanced at her watch and sighed. “Shouldn’t you be in your editorial meeting right now?”

“My sister wants to talk after weeks of being mad at me. That warranted blowing Snapper off for one morning.” Kara’s smile gentled to take any sting out of the rebuke, and Alex’s irritation melted away.

“Sorry.” Alex stepped forward and hugged her, clinging to her with all her strength for a long moment. At least this part of her life was stabilizing, leaving them stronger for it. “I appreciate you coming.”

“Always. Everything okay?” Kara leaned back, eyeing her critically.

“I don’t know. I don’t know what to think. And that’s all I’ve been doing. Thinking. All night, just... thinking. I can’t stop thinking.” Alex resumed pacing, rubbing her palms together as Kara’s brow crinkled in confusion.

“About Maggie?”

Alex recognized she must sound like a broken record these days, capable of playing a single tune. “I did something stupid, and a little rash. Maybe a lot rash,” she added sheepishly.

“What did you do?”

“I’ve been losing my mind worrying about her, and then I learned J’onn assigned a contingent of agents to some secret protective detail without telling me. I… I built up a head of steam and went to see her last night.”

Kara groaned and pinched the bridge of her nose. “Wait. Wasn’t Maggie on surveillance with Winn last night?”

“I sorta crashed that.”

“Their surveillance.”

“Yeah.”

“On the Gold Rush Case.”

“Yeah,” Alex repeated, wincing. It was a wonder Maggie hadn’t thrown her out on the street and
slammed the door in her face.

Kara dragged a hand through her curls and blew out a frustrated breath. “Are you trying to make Maggie take out a restraining order against you? What did she say?”

“Not much.” Alex watched her sister’s features crumple in disappointment. “I mean, it’s hard to talk while you’re kissing.” She shrugged, nonchalant, only to duck when Kara smacked her with the corner of her cape.

“Alexl You suck! How could you scare me like that?”

The light smacks continued until Alex scrambled away, laughing for the first time in weeks. It felt amazing, bleeding off a fraction of her anxiety.

“So what happened?”

“I did what you told me to. I told her everything I was feeling, how I messed up, and how I didn’t need children, I just wanted her. And then I kissed her.” Alex couldn’t keep the smile from her face, but she didn’t want to.

“So now what?” Crossing her arms again, Kara pretended to sulk, but Alex wasn’t fooled. There was joy in her blue eyes, and Kara’s lips twitched in an effort not to smile. She was happy for her, for both of them, and Kara’s support of her relationship meant more than Alex could say.

“We’re having coffee in a few hours. Maggie said she has something to tell me, something huge. She swears it’s nothing bad, but… I don’t know, Kara. After last night, we have a chance, and I’m worried whatever this is will ruin it. I don’t know what to expect, and I’m scared.”

Kara came closer, putting her hands on Alex’s shoulders. “You told her what was on your heart, Alex. Now it’s Maggie’s turn. Just… hear her out today, okay?”

She knew, Alex realized. Whatever secret Maggie had to share, Kara was privy to it. Alex searched her sister’s eyes, seeing no fear or deception in them, only love. She wanted to ask, to demand the truth, but Kara was right. Maggie deserved to tell Alex herself.

“I will,” Alex promised, looking forward to it despite her anxiety, to seeing those cherished dimples smiling at her again. “Don’t suppose you could hang for a while? Keep me company while I work on this antidote?”

“And keep you from freaking out over Maggie? Sure. I’ve missed spending time with my big sister,” Kara confessed with a charmed smile.

Alex pulled her into another hug. “Your big sister has missed you too.”

***

“Hey!” Jamie swiped at Maggie’s hand, too little, too late, as Maggie snagged a corner of Jamie’s second Pop-Tart. She eyed the neon blue and purple frosting for a moment before popping it in her mouth while Jamie looked on, scandalized.

The sweetness was almost overwhelming, but she’d had worse, like the ubiquitous sticky buns Kara brought to the apartment all too often when Maggie still lived with Alex. “That’s not so bad.”

“Told you.”
Maggie pretended to go for more, but Jamie deprived her, cramming the last two pieces into her mouth. Her cheeks bulged like a hamster.

“You brat.” Maggie laughed as she refilled Jamie’s milk, adding a splash of it to her coffee before returning it to the fridge.

“You’re in a good mood,” Jamie observed, somehow getting the words out around all that food.

“Don’t talk with your mouth full,” Maggie cautioned, both amused by Jamie’s antics and half concerned she might choke. “And yeah, I guess I am.”

Jamie washed the rest of her Pop-Tart down with her milk. “Did something happen?”

Her serious tone brought Maggie back to earth, toppling her off the high she’d been riding since last night. Maggie sank down beside Jamie’s chair and squeezed her denim-clad knee. “I, ah, I’m… going to meet up with Alex this morning.”

Jamie’s brow furrowed. “Really?”

“Yeah. She stopped by work unexpectedly yesterday, but we didn’t have much time to talk, so we’re getting coffee later.”

“Did you tell her about me?”

“I will today.” Maggie hesitated, seeing the stubborn cast to Jamie’s features. “What’s wrong?”

“Is the case over?”

“Not yet. Almost. I know I said I would wait, but some circumstances changed and I… I need to tell her now. Okay?”

“Okay.” Jamie shrugged, leaving Maggie unconvinced.

“You sure? If things go well, I can bring her by after camp to meet you. Would you like that?”

Jamie bit her lip, her gaze searching Maggie’s face. “Would you?” she asked finally.

Her reluctance gave Maggie pause, and she tilted her head to the side and smiled softly. “Yeah. Yeah, I would. You are very important to me, and so is Alex.” Maggie allowed herself a moment to imagine that first meeting. Jamie tentative and shy, Alex trying, in her own geeky way, to find common ground. But Alex would win Jamie over, of that Maggie was sure.

Like mother, like daughter.

“Does this mean you’re getting married now? That you’ll want to start another family?”

“Sweetie, no.” Maggie shook her head, blaming herself for Jamie’s paranoia about being left behind or given away. She’d tried to do the right thing, and Maggie didn’t regret going to any lengths to keep Jamie safe, but she’d scarred her regardless, at least for the short term.

“Listen to me. You are my family. You’re my daughter, and I love you. Nothing will change that. No matter what happens or doesn’t happen with Alex.”

“But you love Alex too.”

“I do. That’s why I want you to meet. It’s important to me that the two people I love most in this
world get to know each other so we can… so we can maybe…” Maggie swallowed hard, trying not to picture them as a family, but dear God, she wanted that reality now, more than anything.

“What if she doesn’t like me?” Jamie asked, and Maggie realized what was at the heart of Jamie’s fears. That Maggie would have to choose, and Jamie would end up displaced once again.

Maggie knew that fear, remembering the time her aunt dated a divorced guy in town and how her stomach had churned every time her aunt doted on his kids. It hadn’t ended the way Maggie had feared; his presence had been good for her aunt, and when he’d moved away for work, Maggie had even missed him.

“That won’t happen.” Maggie leaned closer, lowering her voice like she was sharing a huge secret. “I have it on very good authority Agent Alex Danvers can’t resist our dimples.”

“Yeah?”

“I promise. She’s going to love you just as much as I do.”

A smile threatened the corners of Jamie’s lips, and Maggie poked her in the belly button to usher it along. Jamie giggled and squirmed, so Maggie tickled her further, eliciting more peels of laughter and finally a hug that steadied them both.

“I’ll meet Alex,” Jamie said into Maggie’s neck, her breath warm and smelling like sugar and strawberries.

“Thank you. And you’ll like her if you give her half a chance. Fair warning though. She’s a big ole nerd. She loves science almost as much as you do.”

“Hey!” Jamie leaned back, indignant, as someone knocked. Maggie grinned and kissed her on the forehead before getting to her feet.

To be safe, her fingers settled on the butt of her weapon as Maggie went to the door, careful to stand out of the line of fire. “Who is it?”

“You friendly neighborhood shape-shifting babysitter.”

Maggie snorted and unlocked the door, and J’onn greeted her with a knowing smirk. He knew about the coffee date somehow. She could see it all over his face.

“Don’t say it.”

“Alex was at the DEO early this morning. Her thoughts were quite loud, louder than yours, and… not work-related.” He mock-shuddered before pulling Maggie in for a light hug. “I hope you two work it out. It would be good for you. For both of you.”

Maggie rolled her eyes as he stepped inside. “Thanks for taking Jamie to camp. I need to handle a few things at the precinct before I, uh, get coffee.” Jamie waved at J’onn from the table. “Sorry. She’s running a little behind.”

“You distracted me,” Jamie accused, sticking her tongue out. The Pop-Tarts had turned it a garish purple color.

“Yeah, sure, kiddo.” Maggie snagged her messenger bag from the table and pulled Jamie off her chair and into another hug. “Have a good day at camp.”
“Have a good date with Alex.”

A blush warmed Maggie’s skin. “Um, it’s not a date.”

“Yeah, sure, Maggie,” Jamie parroted back, her expression smug. She gave Maggie one last squeeze before glancing up at J’onn. “I need to brush my teeth and get my bag.” She darted away, shouting, “Bye, Maggie,” over her shoulder as she disappeared into her bedroom.

“She is definitely your daughter.”

Maggie wasn’t sure if J’onn meant that as a compliment or an insult. Maybe some combination of both.

He laughed when she scowled at him and waved her out the door. “Go. I’ve got this. Tell Alex I said hi.” He winked, and Maggie’s blush remained fixed in place as she left.

Taking the stairs, Maggie hurried to the parking garage. If traffic was light and nobody caught her as she dropped off the files, she would have just enough time to check in with Captain Dawson before meeting Alex. Her stomach erupted with butterflies, and Maggie was half tempted to blow off the precinct and go directly to the DEO. Hell, maybe that’s exactly what she should–

A thick arm snaked around Maggie’s waist from behind, pinning her arms at her sides as a sweet-smelling cloth smothered her mouth and nose. Maggie fought the hold, kicking back and connecting with legs the size and density of tree trunks. He didn’t even flinch, hefting her off the ground like she weighed nothing.

Chloroform could take up to five minutes to incapacitate her, but the edges of Maggie’s vision were already beginning to blur. Not chloroform then, or some enhanced version of it. Blackwell’s chemistry degree at work.

He’d come for her, but Maggie couldn’t let him take Jamie.

She slammed her head back, stars bursting behind her eyelids as she collided with a hard, solid mass. The grip on her didn’t budge. At all. Whoever grabbed her wasn’t human.

Panic rising, Maggie made one last, desperate bid for freedom as her captor hauled her across the garage toward a black SUV. She tried to reach Kara’s watch, but the arms holding her refused to yield an inch. By the time the alien jerked open the door and threw her inside, the effects of the drug were too powerful to fight.

Maggie plunged into darkness, Jamie’s name dying in her throat.

***

Taking a shortcut through the alley, Kara moved at top human speed to make her appointment in time. She’d stayed with Alex as long as she dared, but if she missed this interview, Snapper would have her hide.

She was almost to the sidewalk when strong arms wrapped around her neck and waist, raising her off the asphalt in a crushing bearhug. Even with her superhearing, Kara hadn’t heard him coming, and if she’d been an Earth female, his speed and strength would have subdued her instantly. Unfortunately for him, she was anything but.

Kara levitated, hearing a curse behind her ear and catching her attacker off guard. Up and over, Kara flipped them both, squashing the alien between her body of steel and the unforgiving asphalt. His
grip loosened enough to drive a hard elbow into his stomach, just like Alex taught her, and Kara smiled in grim satisfaction at his sharp omph of pain.

Rolling, Kara processed he was K’hund before she landed a solid punch across his face. His thick head cracked against the ground, knocking him unconscious.

“Not the way I expected to start my workday, but never let it be said I can’t multitask.”

Kara stood, dusting herself off before reaching for her earpiece to signal the DEO for a pickup team. Maggie had been right about the target on her back. Blackwell must not think much of her exclusives.

She froze, her body going cold all over. If Blackwell had come for her…

Maggie… Jamie…

Kara didn’t bother to change before leaping for the clouds.

***

“... said you wanted us to buy time…”

“... like this… an NCPD detective…”

“... at your office... getting too close…”

Voices amplified and faded on the edges of Maggie’s awareness. Familiarity nagged at her, but she struggled to put a name to them. She shifted, and chilled metal struck the back of her bicep. When had she taken off her jacket?

“... move our base of operations and put out a few false leads. Without their lead detective, they’ll run in circles awhile.”

“You better be right.”

Her eyes blinked open, then slammed closed as a bright light stabbed through her retinas. “Max?”

His name was thick on her tongue, and Maggie wasn’t sure she spoken it aloud, but silence descended around her. “Oh, Alex is going to kill you.”

“Alex?” Blackwell. Maggie had heard his gruff voice on surveillance tapes way too often. “Who the hell is Alex?”

“Nobody you need to worry about,” Max said.

“Gonna kill you,” Maggie repeated, prying her eyes open again to find Maxwell Lord standing there in one of his thousand-dollar suits, out of place in a rusted and rotting warehouse. A drip of water fell from a rafter above, and Max eyed the growing puddle at his feet with a sneer. “I won’t even lift a hand to stop her this time. Hell, I might help.”

“That seems… rather vindictive of you, Detective. And here I thought you were on the side of law and order, not the vigilante justice all too common in our fair city of late.”

Maggie tried to shrug, but heavy, clawed hands pressed down on her shoulders, holding in her place. “What can I say? Supergirl is growing on me.” Her gaze fixed on Blackwell; his suit was off the rack, cheaper and loose, and his watch didn’t gleam the way Max’s did.
Watch. Her fuzzy brain realized her’s was still on her wrist, but she didn’t grab for it with everyone focused on her. She needed a distraction. “He’s going to make you the fall guy,” she told Blackwell. “Max hasn’t gotten his hands dirty. He might skate, but you... yours are filthy.”

A blow rang through her head as Blackwell sucker punched her. He was lighter and quicker on his feet than she expected.

“You’re right, I do like to get my hands dirty. You’ve caused me a lot of trouble, Sawyer. Maybe I should get a little payback. Take my pound of flesh.”

The metallic taste of blood filled her mouth, and Maggie spat it out, aiming for Blackwell’s shoes. It splattered on the cuff of his trousers, and he surged forward. Max caught his wrist before he could do any more damage.

“She’s trying to get under your skin, Ian. Don’t give her the pleasure.”

Max crouched until he was eye-level with her. “You know, I don’t believe in murdering a member of National City’s finest. Killing is such an unsavory business, and I find killing a new mother to be especially... distasteful.”

Jamie. Fear thundered through Maggie’s body, clearing the last of the cobwebs, and she searched the shadows in vain for her daughter. If they’d taken her...

“Lucky for you, I draw the line at murdering children.”

Her attention snapped back on Max, and their gazes locked for a timeless moment. Her life might be forfeit, but he would let Jamie live. She could see the silent promise in his eyes, and much to her surprise, Maggie believed him. Max gave her a faint nod, a brief glimmer of regret on his features, but then it was gone.

He swept his arm wide to indicate Blackwell and his thugs. “I’m afraid, however, my colleagues don’t hold the NCPD in such high esteem.” He stood, running his hands over his jacket to brush off the dust that had settled on it. “It’s a shame, really, but I’m sure Alex will find someone more... suitable.”

At the mention of her name, Maggie took her chance, surging up and escaping the hands holding her down. Claws tore through her t-shirt, scraping her shoulders and sending pain flaring across her skin. She was quickly yanked back toward the chair, but Maggie had time to double up, bringing her hands together as she worked the cover of the watch, feeling it spring open.

“Take care of her, but don’t touch the daughter,” Max commanded as he strode away, not even sparing Maggie a backward glance.

“Happy to.” Blackwell selected a syringe off an old metal desk and turned to her, a sadistic smile on his face. “Ready to feel the Rush, Detective Sawyer?”

***

“I need eyes on Maggie and Jamie,” Kara demanded over the comms.

Winn slid up in his chair, snapped out of his boredom by the fear in Kara’s voice. He increased the volume on his headset to hear her better over the wind. “What happened?”

“Blackwell sent one of his goons after me. A K’hund. If they came for me, you know they’ll go for Maggie, and she won’t stand a chance against an alien like that.”
Swearing under his breath, Winn typed a command and had a response seconds later. “Uh… J’onn is with Jamie at camp. Everything is fine there, but… Oh God. Kara, the team on Maggie’s apartment says they never saw her leave.”

“He’s got her, Winn. I’ll start there and branch out.”

“But she’s wearing the watch! Why doesn’t she trigger–”

“She might not be able to.”

Dark thoughts threatened, and Winn scrubbed his hands through his short hair. Think, he needed to think. “I’ll search every security feed around Maggie’s apartment. See if I can’t spot how they got her out undetected.”

His fingers sped over the keyboard, and windows sprang open across the monitors. “I’m tapped in. Her car is there, but…”

“Quiet.” The whoosh of Kara flying filled his ears, and Winn froze, hardly daring to breath. “I’ve got the beacon. Send backup. The NCPD and DEO.” She rattled off an address, and he typed it into the 911 system.

Useless to Kara, he reached for the phone to summon J’onn.

“I’m heading out to meet Maggie for coffee.” Alex appeared beside him, her gaze darting over the monitors and feeds with casual interest. Winn could see her reflection in his computer screen, a wide, happy smile on her face he hadn’t seen in months. She turned to go, and Winn reached out, snagging her wrist.

“Alex, wait…”

***

Claws sunk into Maggie’s shoulders to hold her in place, but she still struggled violently. She just needed to buy a few more seconds. Kara was coming. She had to be.

“Hope you made custody arrangements for that new kid of yours, Sawyer. At least you’ll slide out of this world nice and easy. Easier than you deserve. You’ll enjoy the ride and won’t feel a thing by the time your heart explodes.” Blackwell gripped her wrist when she tried to swing at him and slammed it down on the armrest. Maggie resorted to begging, willing to do whatever it took to survive, to see Jamie and Alex again.

A cold pinprick in her arm, then a hot, thick sensation swept through her blood as the drug jacked into her system like quicksilver. Maggie’s eyes rolled back in her head as the first wave of tremors gripped her body, making her shudder. No ordinary dose. A lethal one.

The alien let her go, and Maggie fell to the floor at Blackwell’s feet, splashing into a puddle of rainwater. His laugh echoed inside her skull as she crawled toward the door, clinging to the dream of Alex and Jamie. Of the family she would never have…

A wounded sound keened in the back of Maggie’s throat, and she collapsed in the dust, the Rush dragging her into its addictive thrall.

Not even Supergirl could save her now.

***
Wood beams shattered as Kara punched through the roof of the warehouse. She struck the ground with enough force to send cracks skittering through the concrete, toppling several of Blackwell’s men off their feet.

They turned their guns on her, and Kara strode forward into the line of fire, ignoring the bullets bouncing off her chest, her attention fixed on the small figure in a gray t-shirt sprawled on the dirty floor. The sight of Maggie, clothes torn and bloody, made Kara’s breath catch, and for a sickening moment, she feared she was too late.

Then she heard Maggie’s heart, racing fast and getting faster.

“No,” Kara whispered, realizing what Blackwell had done.

Her eyes went white hot, and she plowed through the bad guys in seconds, not caring if the bodies she smashed into were alien or human. Sirens sounded in the distance, and Kara left Blackwell and his men scattered and groaning around her. She grabbed the discarded syringe on the floor, and gathered Maggie into her arms as quickly and gently as she could.

“Hang on, Maggie. Jamie and Alex need you. You have to hang on,” Kara pleaded as she flew them out of the warehouse and headed for the DEO as fast as she dared.

“Supergirl?” Alex’s voice in her ear was tentative, scared.

There was nothing Kara could say to make it better. “I’m on my way. Meet me in the medbay. Maggie needs your antidote.”

Maggie began to seize in her arms, and Kara tightened her grip, holding her closer. She could see the DEO tower looming in the distance, and she pushed herself harder, buying Maggie every second she could. Kara didn’t want to think about what it would do to Alex to lose her, or how Jamie would cope losing another mother now that she and Maggie were so close.

Alex’s breath hitched on the other end of the comms, but then Kara heard rapid footfalls as her sister surged into action. “Kara, it isn’t tested.”

“We don’t have a choice, Alex.”

***

The thunder of her boots on the stairs was nothing compared to the blood roaring in her ears as Alex ran to her lab. Her hands fumbled as she grabbed the needed vial, and for a second, she imagined it slipping through her fingers and crashing to the floor.

That would be the perfect metaphor for her life.

But Alex secured it firmly and sprinted to the medbay. A team was already scrambling, setting up a crash cart and laying out instruments. Alex snapped on surgical gloves, picked up a syringe, and filled it with the antidote, calculating the dosage in her head. Her hands were steady even if her emotions were anything but, no physical sign the outcome of the next few minutes might destroy her.

Now all they needed was the patient. Alex glanced out the window of the medbay at the launch doors, both dreading and anticipating Kara’s arrival with Alex’s world in her arms.

It wasn’t the first time she’d been here, but when Hank Henshaw shot Maggie during his attack on L-Corp, he’d unwittingly changed the course of Maggie and Alex’s lives forever. That brush with death had ended in a kiss, propelling them down a path of self-discovery and happiness neither had
ever expected.

And now Alex was here again, Maggie’s life on the line once more. They had come full circle, and Alex prayed this didn’t mean they had reached the end.

Then there was no time left to think as the launch doors swished open, and Kara was a blur of color, coming in hot and heading right for the medbay.

Alex’s composure threatened to shatter as Kara laid Maggie on the gurney. Her clothes torn, her back bloodied, and her lip busted, Maggie’s small body jumped and twisted, ravaged by convulsions. The nurses struggled to restrain her wrists and ankles to protect the team and their patient. Alex slipped an oxygen mask over Maggie’s mouth and nose, cataloging her vitals as members of the team rattled them off around her.

Kara passed a syringe to a nurse and stepped back, hugging herself. “The seizures started a few blocks ago. Alex, I’m...”

Alex shook her head, unwilling to hear whatever Kara had to say. Maggie needed all her focus.

“Come on, Sawyer,” Alex murmured. “Don’t you die on me. Not now.”

Maggie’s pulse was off the charts as the Belamort and cocaine jacked her system up. Her heart couldn’t take much more, and Alex reached for the antidote. Untested or not, it was their only chance. Alex pulled the cap off with her teeth and spit it out. She wiped down the side of Maggie’s bicep with alcohol, spying the small, telltale smear of gold residue in the crook of her arm.

Alex plunged the needle in, injecting the antidote directly into Maggie’s veins. Heat radiated off the skin beneath Alex’s fingertips and she called for ice packs, but the nurses were way ahead, one already sliding a cooling blanket over Maggie’s body. Despite the seizures, another got an IV line in on the second try, flooding Maggie’s system with cool saline and lorazepam to calm the spasms and Maggie’s racing heart.

“Her vitals aren’t stabilizing,” said Dr. Hamilton as she hurried in, and Alex glared at her for stating the obvious.

“We just pushed the benzodiazepine, and the antidote should kill off the Belamort.”

“If it works.”

Alex ignored her, not needing her worst fears verbalized. “Once the Belamort stops enhancing the effects of the cocaine, it...”

“She doesn’t have that long. We need her temperature and heart rate down now.”

“Should I...?” Kara drew in a breath, prepared to freeze Maggie if needed.

“No! The shock would kill her,” Alex snapped as Hamilton placed more ice packs around Maggie’s head and neck. Maggie’s seizures tapered off and her heart rate ticked down, but Hamilton was right. The antidote was working, but not fast enough.

Alex sagged against the gurney, her brain working feverishly to find another solution. In a moment of weakness, she ran her gloved fingers through Maggie’s hair to soothe them both, wishing she could crawl up on the sheets beside her and hold Maggie until this was over, one way or the other. Today should have been their new beginning, not the end of everything, and her breath hitched in a sob.
The medical team’s movements slowed as they exhausted the last of their options, but Maggie’s heart continued to beat too fast, growing increasingly erratic. Alex didn’t know what she would do when it stopped.

“Mom!”

The wail drew everyone’s attention toward the door, and Alex went still, the breath knocked from her lungs. Winn, tears tracking down his face, was trying to hold back a squirming little girl Alex had seen a thousand times in her dreams. She had Maggie’s hair, her nose, her warm, fathomless eyes...

“Jamie, no!” Winn tried to catch her as she broke free and ran to Maggie’s bedside. The child slipped between nurses to clasp Maggie’s hand, sobbing uncontrollably. Her grief was palpable, a perfect mirror of Alex’s own.

“Mom, no. Don’t leave me. You can’t leave me,” Jamie pleaded over and over, stroking the skin of Maggie’s arm. “I can’t lose you too, Maggie. You have to stay. Please stay. I love you, please stay.”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry,” Winn cooed as he swept her up in his arms, forcing Jamie to turn Maggie loose. She wailed again, kicking and screaming as he carried her toward the door.

“Alex. Alex!” Kara’s voice broke through Alex’s paralysis, and she turned to look at her sister in confusion. “Maggie. Do something!”

Alex blinked, her gaze sweeping over Maggie as Jamie’s sobs echoed in the hall. “Stay,” Alex whispered, echoing Jamie’s words. They needed time. Just a little more time for the antidote to work. “I need a stasis pod.”

“On it.” A burst of wind signaled Kara’s departure.

“Clear a space,” Alex directed, her voice gaining strength as her thoughts sharpened.

“Alex, you’re only prolonging the inevitable,” Hamilton said with sympathy.

“Look how hard Maggie is fighting,” Alex ground out. “She can make it. We need to stabilize her system… counteract the drugs. That little girl needs her… her…” She couldn’t say it out loud. That made it too real, and Alex could only handle one crisis at a time. “We can scrub Maggie’s blood. Treat her more methodically. All we need is time, and stasis buys us that.”

Hamilton gave her a curt nod, willing to follow Alex’s lead.

The floor was barely cleared before Kara returned with a pod designed from Fort Rozz’s schematics. Alex yanked off Maggie’s electrodes and oxygen mask as Hamilton prepped the device, unsealing the lid with a hiss.

“We need to put her under slowly so as not to traumatize her heart further,” Hamilton cautioned. “She might not survive the…”

“Out of the way.” Alex pulled out Maggie’s IV and scooped her off the gurney herself, cradling her as she turned and laid Maggie inside. She could still hear Jamie screaming for her mother, and Alex hoped Maggie could to. “Don’t give up. She needs you. We both need you.”

Alex kissed Maggie’s forehead a final time and stepped back, sealing the lid. Kara wrapped her up in a hug as Hamilton activated the pod and the glass frosted over, almost obscuring Maggie from view.

Five of the longest minutes of Alex’s life later, Maggie had reached full stasis, her temperature and
heart rate low, steady, and stable. They’d bought themselves some time, now they needed to find a miracle.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the late posting. This chapter gave us fits.

THANKS to Dani for the awesome banner! Give some BIG LOVE on the Twitter post.
The improvements were incremental, but they were improvements. Alex seized on each one with a fraction of relief as she reviewed Maggie’s latest vitals. The antidote had battled the Belamort into a draw over the last hour, but the stasis pod was buying them time to win the war. Alex’s plan was working, but there were still a million things to do to ensure Maggie survived with no lasting damage or addiction.

Maggie wasn’t out of the woods. Not by a long shot. Alex wouldn’t rest until she was.

Exhaustion dragged on her limbs as Alex tore herself away from Maggie’s side. Maggie needed her in the lab right now, not hovering and helpless. Alex nodded to the nurse as she left. “Stay with her. Call me if there’s any change.”

The nurse flashed her a comforting smile.

Alex stepped into the hallway and stopped in her tracks when she saw Winn leaning against the wall, waiting for her. The scene with Jamie had been forced back, out of her mind, as she focused on saving Maggie’s life, but now it came surging forward, every excruciating detail.

Thoughts of treatments and procedures scattered, swept away in a rising tide of confusion and pain.

Winn glanced up, springing off the wall and nearly colliding with Alex as she came at him. His hands rose in defense. “I’m sorry,” he blurted, his eyes rimmed red and mournful. “Alex, I’m so sorry.”

Snapping off her gloves, Alex flung them aside, bearing down as Winn stumbled away from her.

“You have every right to be mad, but—”

“You’re damn right I’m mad,” Alex snarled, shoving Winn until he was cowering against the wall. “I asked you…” Her hand shook as she raised it, and Alex fisted it between them to stop from doing something they would both regret.

“Don’t kill me…” he whimpered.

A strong hand wrapped around Alex’s wrist and yanked her away from him.

“Winn, go. Alex, we need to talk.” Kara’s grip was unbreakable as she propelled them down the hallway.

But Winn didn’t run. As Kara dragged her around a corner, Alex saw him slump against the wall and bury his head in his hands.

***

Alex prowled among the concrete forms meant to withstand the assault of superpowered aliens, her fists clenching and unclenching.

“You need your hands. To help with Maggie,” Kara reminded her as Alex squared up like she
would take a swing.

“You said we need to talk. So talk. Actually,” Alex rounded on her, pointing, accusing, “the time to talk was days ago, Kara. Or weeks, depending on when you knew.” Muscles twitched in Alex’s jaw, rage coiling and rippling beneath the surface, but her eyes shone with unshed tears.

“Alex…”

“How long have you known?”

Kara hesitated. There was no right answer, none that would soothe her sister. Just when they were almost normal again...

“How long?”

“A while, okay? You weren’t supposed to find out like this.”

Alex whirled and paced the length of the room, and for a second, Kara was afraid she would leave, but Alex wasn’t done. “That girl…” Alex’s hand chopped the air wildly in the general direction of the medbay. “She looked exactly like Maggie. She called Maggie mom.”

“Yeah. She did.”

“You’re telling me Maggie… that Maggie… has a child?” Harsh breaths punctuated Alex’s words as she fought to get the question out, her expression pleading with Kara to tell her she was wrong. That her eyes and ears were lying to her. Alex’s head shook minutely, already denying the truth Kara feared would crush her.

“That girl is Jamie.” Kara drew in a breath and let it out, bracing herself. “And yes, she—”

“—No!” Alex threw her hands up and turned, the door sliding open behind her.

With a burst of superspeed, Kara caught Alex’s arm before she could run. “Alex, you have to let me explain.”

“Explain what? What is there to explain, Kara? Huh?” Alex tried to yank free, but Kara held on. “Let me go.”

“Not yet. Please, Alex.”

“Fine. Explain why you let me be miserable for months, thinking we ended things because Maggie didn’t want children when she had a kid the whole time. And my friends… my sister knew and didn’t tell me. Explain that.” Her voice broke, but anger burned behind the tears in her eyes. “Explain it,” she demanded.

“Alex, I swear to Rao, it isn’t what you are thinking.”

“Really? Because I’m thinking Maggie was fine with kids, she just didn’t want them with me.”

“That’s not true. Maggie wouldn’t do that to you.” Kara released Alex’s arm, a small gesture of good faith.

At least Alex didn’t bolt. She folded her arms across her chest, glaring at Kara with narrowed eyes.

“Maggie didn’t know,” Kara promised. “Not when you were together. She found out two months ago.”
“Two months? There’s no way Jamie isn’t directly, genetically, biologically related to Maggie. How could Maggie not know? You telling me she gave birth and forgot? Got cloned by aliens or some secret government agency?”

Sarcasm laced Alex’s words, but Kara snorted with a bitter laughter. “Actually… it was kind of like that. The alien thing, not the government thing.” Alex’s glare didn’t relent, and Kara hurried to the point. “Maggie dated a Yarian several years ago, and Yarians can procreate with human females. Jamie’s mom, her birth mother, died, and Maggie discovered she had a daughter when she got custody.”

Kara watched her words penetrate the layers of denial and hurt, and Alex drew in a shaky breath.

“So Maggie never knew?”

Sighing in relief, Kara shook her head.

“Then you and everyone else found out? And no one told me? Nobody thought that was something I deserved to know?” Alex spat, continuing to pace. “The woman I love and three of the people I trust most kept this a secret from me. Why?”

“It wasn’t my secret to tell. Or Winn’s or J’onn’s…”

“Oh, so J’onn knows too? What? Did I miss a briefing? You should have said something,” Alex spat, continuing to pace. “The woman I love and three of the people I trust most kept this a secret from me. Why?”

“Maggie asked us not to say anything. She needed t—”

“I would have gone to her, Kara. In a heartbeat. I would have been there for her, for both of them…”

“That’s what Maggie was afraid of.” Kara immediately regretted her words when Alex flinched.

“Afraid? Maggie didn’t want me around her kid?” Alex paled, her eyes squeezing shut. “She didn’t want me back,” she realized.

Alex’s voice sounded so small and unsure, the last vestiges of hope draining from her. Kara stepped forward and rubbed her hands up and down Alex’s arms.

“No, Alex, Maggie wanted you back. She wants you back. But… she worried you would only want her because she had a child. Because she checked all your boxes for the perfect wife.”

Alex sucked in a pained breath. “She said that?”

“I wanted to tell you about Jamie. I thought it would fix everything. But Maggie, she… said she wasn’t enough for you. You broke up because you wanted something more than her, and Jamie didn’t change that. Maggie wanted you to want her, and not because she had a child.”

All the fight Alex had left drained in a rush, and Kara tightened her hold to keep Alex on her feet.

“She thought I didn’t want her, just kids.” Alex raised her eyes to meet Kara’s, and Kara saw the pieces come together for her, and it was heartbreaking. “That’s why you pushed me to tell Maggie how I felt.”

“She needed to hear it. For you two to have a chance, she needed to hear it.”

Alex’s shoulders trembled beneath Kara’s fingers, and Kara reached out to pull her into a hug, but
Alex resisted. She straightened her back and blinked away tears. “I have to go. I have work to do.”

“Alex, wait, there’s more you need to know…” But the doors already slid open and Alex stepped out into the hallway.

“Not… right now, Kara. I can’t take anymore right now.”

The doors hissed shut a moment later, and Kara took a swing at the concrete, raising a cloud of dust as it pulverized under her fist.

***

“He’s on his way up now, Sir.”

J’onn nodded at Agent Vasquez and headed toward the elevators. Maggie’s captain had insisted on coming to the DEO to give a status report and demanded to see his detective. J’onn had been too rattled to tell him no.

Jamie’s young screams had shaken him, reminding J’onn of another time, another planet. His daughters had screamed for him like that the last time he’d seen them, and he felt as powerless to do something now as he had then.

It didn’t help matters everyone’s thoughts were bombarding his own. Winn’s grief. Kara’s worry. Jamie’s fear. J’onn closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to force them from his mind, but Alex’s anger was too potent to ignore. Guilt sat leaden in his stomach for all the times he’d kept quiet about Jamie, even if it had been the right choice.

Alex deserved better than to find out like this.

The doors parted, and J’onn came to attention. Dawson’s concern preceded him off the elevator, but the cold determination radiating off the man as he approached took J’onn by surprise. Dawson had more on his mind than Maggie’s well-being.

“Captain.” J’onn offered his hand, and Dawson shook it. They’d spoken on the phone more than once, but never in person.

“Director J’onzz. How is she?”

J’onn gestured toward the stairs so they would have a few moments to talk. “Not good. Blackwell or one of his associates injected Maggie with a hot shot of Gold Rush. Supergirl got her here as fast as possible, but as you’re aware, even a regular dose can be lethal.”

“Is Sawyer alive?”

“Yes. Alex… one of my chief scientists, has been developing an antidote. It made headway against the Belamort in Maggie’s system, but it wasn’t working fast enough. We’ve placed Maggie in stasis while we develop alternative solutions.”

“Alex Danvers?” Dawson asked, his eyes shrewd as J’onn nodded. “Jesus, this is a shit show all around, isn’t it?”

J’onn couldn’t disagree.

They reached the landing by the launch pad, stopping for a moment so Dawson could catch his breath. His gaze roamed the room, taking in the DEO for the first time, but he appeared unimpressed.
“And Sawyer’s kid? Jamie?”

“Jamie was with me when we received word. I brought her here. She’s understandably traumatized so close to losing her other mother. An agent she trusts is with her now.”

Dawson ran his fingers over his thick mustache, smoothing it down in what looked like a distracted habit. “I appreciate what you’re doing for them, Director. Sawyer has always spoken highly of you.”

“Likewise. And Maggie is family. She’ll have the full resources of the DEO behind her recovery. I suspect you feel the same way.”

“I do. Maggie is one of my best detectives, and I will rain the might of the NCPD down on the bastards that did this.” He hesitated before he asked, “Can I see her?”

“Of course. We’re headed that way now.” J’onn gestured to the next set of steps and they resumed climbing. “But I’m sensing something else on your mind, Captain. You came to see me about more than Maggie’s condition.”

Dawson shot him a look of alarm before his featured cleared. “That’s right. Forgot you’re Martian. Sawyer said you were some kind of psychic. Must be handy in your line of work.”

“Not so much today with emotions running this high.” J’onn took a breath, feeling Alex’s thoughts focus as Kara settled her sister somewhat. Thank God they were back on better terms. Alex would need Kara to get through this.

“You should know Supergirl put Blackwell and his men in the ER. Not that I’m complaining, but four of them are being wheeled into surgery right about now. They’re expected to make it, but she didn’t pull her punches.”

“With all due respect, Captain, if Supergirl didn’t pull her punches, those men would be dead, and there would be no bodies to recover. They’d have burned up passing through the atmosphere.”

They stopped again in front of the medbay windows, and Dawson stepped closer to the glass.

“Aww, damn,” he whispered.

The captain resembled a worried father, but J’onn heard the angry thoughts stewing beneath the surface. Dawson wanted justice for Maggie, and he would achieve it by whatever means necessary. J’onn waited him out, giving him a moment.

“Do you know what I’m thinking right now?” Dawson asked after a minute of silence.

“I do.”

Dawson turned to face him. “We don’t have the resources, Director. I throw Maxwell Lord in a cell, and he’ll be out with his lawyers, money, or tech before we slam the door. Sawyer did not suffer so that bastard could skate free.”

“We’ll handle Max,” J’onn vowed, looking forward to it. The DEO needed to round him up soon. If Max knew Maggie survived, he would run, and Dawson was right. Max had too many damn resources at his disposal. They should have kept him locked up in the desert.

“From what Maggie has told me, I bet Danvers would like that honor.”

The corner of J’onn’s mouth twitched into a brittle smile. “I would be hard pressed to stop her.”
“Speaking of Danvers, I have something for her.” Dawson slipped a thumb drive out of his pocket and passed it to J’onn. “Maggie left it with me. Think there is a file on there for the kid too.”

J’onn eyed the device before carefully wrapping his fingers around it. “Maggie isn’t dead, Captain. If these are her final words…”

“She told me if something happened and she couldn’t talk to Alex, I was to get this to her. I promised Sawyer I would.”

J’onn nodded. “I’ll see Alex gets it.”

“Appreciate it.” With a sigh, Dawson returned his attention to Maggie. “Take good care of her, Director.”

“You have my word.”

***

Winn stared at his computer monitor, seeing status updates from a dozen DEO teams but processing little. Every time he closed his eyes, he saw Jamie running to Maggie, pleading with her not to die. The moment was seared onto the back of his eyelids.

After his confrontation with Alex in the hallway, distracting himself with work had sounded like a good plan, but so far the effort was a bust. Maggie was fighting for her life on the floor above him. Jamie had withdrawn into herself, on the brink of losing the only family she had left. And Alex…

Alex.

Winn took a sip of tepid water from a bottle, trying in vain to quell his nausea. Alex had trusted him, and he’d wounded her with that trust. As much as she’d terrified him a short while ago, Winn didn’t blame her for wanting to wring his neck. Part of him almost wished she’d hit him, craving punishment for what he’d done.

Kara slumped in the chair next to him with a heavy sigh, and Winn searched her features for a sign of how things went.


She pursed her lips in sympathy. “I’d give her a wide berth for a few days, but Alex isn’t on the warpath anymore. She’ll probably blow up again, but right now she’s devastated. And scared.”

“We all are. Alex is never going to forgive us. Forgive me.” Winn looked back at his monitor, skimming the reports to make sure no teams were in distress. He couldn’t handle failing anyone else today.

“She will,” Kara promised. “When Alex hears all the facts? When she gets to know Jamie? She’ll come around.”

Winn nodded, unconvinced.

They sat in silence, agents coming and going like it was a normal day. Winn resented how oblivious they were to the trauma some of them were enduring. Kara scooted closer, and her hand was warm where it settled comfortingly on his back.

“Where’s Jamie?” Kara asked, her voice low. “I thought she was with J’onn, but he’s with Maggie’s
captain.”

“We’ve been trading her back and forth, but Jaime asked me to leave her with Maggie. She wanted to stay close to her mom. The nurses are keeping an eye on her.”

“How’s she doing?”

“She stopped screaming. Now she just sits there. Staring.” Winn glanced at Kara, her eyes vivid and blue as they met his own. “I’m sorry I brought Jamie in there. I didn’t think. Alex… God. What did I do?”

“Jamie had a right to be there with Maggie.”

“But the look on Alex’s face…”

Kara slid her hand across his shoulder blades and pulled him into a one-armed hug. “I know.” She sighed again. “If I’d kept better tabs on Maggie… Gotten there faster…”

“You did all you could, Kara.”

“Did I? After treating Maggie like crap when she and Alex were together? What if I didn’t push hard enough? What if some part of me still resents Maggie’s role in Alex’s life? They were working things out, Winn. They talked last night and had a date to talk this morning. I think Maggie was going to tell Alex everything.”

Winn groaned. He didn’t need to know that. It made this so much worse. “Kara, you nearly broke the sound barrier getting Maggie here. The Air Force and the FAA already lodged complaints. Homeland Security wasn’t amused with you clocking those speeds through downtown, either.”

Kara leaned her head on his shoulder, her hair tickling the side of his jaw. “I had to. She’s Alex’s world. I should have done more. Taken off work. Watched Maggie 24/7…”

“Have you met Maggie? She wouldn’t go for that. You made sure she was under your protection. The watch saved her. You saved her.”

“Rao, I hope so.” Kara worried her bottom lip with her teeth and shook her head. “If only Maggie could talk. Alex needs to hear about Jamie from her.”

“Maybe she can.” J’on came up behind them, a flash drive in his hand. “Where’s your sister?”

***

Alex paused at the entrance to the medical bay, another vial of antidote tight in her grip. It took all of her courage to step inside, slip on a pair of gloves, and inject more into the IV snaking under the lid of the pod.

Maggie’s heart was barely beating, and Alex found it hard to breathe in the long pause between blips on the monitor, afraid each would be the last.

The soft swoosh of the pump filled the emptiness. Alex knelt by the pod and ran her fingers over every inch of tubing, watching the sluggish flow of blood as it circulated from Maggie’s veins through the scrubber and back again. She did it a second time, and then a third, until there was nothing left for her to do.

The work didn’t soothe the thoughts swirling around her head. Maggie had a kid. Maggie hadn’t
wanted her to know. Alex wanted to be angry, and the sense of betrayal still burned in her chest. But her heart felt as cold and slow as Maggie’s, blunting the sharp edge of her temper.

Maggie had been right to keep Jamie from her.

Looking back, Alex saw how she tried to manipulate Maggie, tried to pressure her into a family. All the pain she’d put Maggie through with her father. Maggie had no reason to trust her motives. If she had shown up on Maggie’s doorstep when Jamie fell into her life… Alex could imagine how that would have played out, how that would have made Maggie feel.

“I’m sorry,” Alex whispered.

She straightened, wobbling a little, and ran her hand through her hair. Her fingers drifted down to settle on the curve of the glass. Maggie looked peaceful, like she was sleeping, her features composed and calm. Alex couldn’t help but feel like she was standing over Maggie’s coffin, saying her final goodbye, and she sucked in a sharp breath.

“You’re Alex.”

Her heart leapt into her throat, and Alex tore her gaze from Maggie to glance down into a pair of beautiful brown eyes. She stared, struck mute, as Jamie regarded her with faint curiosity. When she tilted her head, resembling Maggie so much it hurt, Alex looked away.

Yeah,” she choked out, before risking another glimpse.

But Jamie had moved on, retreating to the other side of the stasis pod to peer inside at her mother. Her little fingers rested on the chilled glass, and her sniffles were loud and heartbreaking in the hushed medbay.

With no idea what to do, what to say, Alex resisted the temptation to fetch J’onn, Winn, or Kara. She couldn’t run from this. Sooner or later, she had to face Maggie had a little girl, and right now, that little girl needed her.

Alex snapped off her gloves and threw them in the trash. Cautious, she circled the pod and sat down on a stool to be at Jamie’s eye level. Alex studied her, snatching a much-needed moment to take Jamie in. She was so like Maggie in a million little ways, and Alex could scarcely believe she was real.

“My other mom got really sick, but she wasn’t in a machine like this one.” Jamie’s voice was hoarse and unexpected, her breath fogging the glass as she watched Maggie sleep.

“I heard. Supergirl told me.”

“No,” Alex vowed without hesitation. She wouldn’t let that happen. “Maggie just needs to… rest for a while.”

Jamie turned her head then, meeting Alex’s gaze, and this time Alex didn’t shy away, captivated. This was Maggie’s biological daughter. Her daughter. When Maggie confessed she had something huge to tell her, Alex never expected this.

“I’m sorry about your other mom.”

“Thank you.” With one last, lingering look for Maggie, Jamie approached Alex and climbed up to sit
on another stool. Her feet didn’t come anywhere near the floor, and an unconscious smile flickered over Alex’s lips.

“C’mere.” Alex snagged the lip of the seat and rolled Jamie closer before adjusting the setting. The stool sank with a soft hiss until Jamie’s small tennis shoes touched the tiles. Alex noted they had little House of El crests on them and her heart clenched. Maggie must have hated buying those. “How’s that? Better?”

Jamie nodded and offered Alex a weak smile for the first time, barely forming a pair of perfect dimples.

The sight stole Alex’s breath, and Jamie’s features blurred with sudden tears. “I’m sorry,” Alex gasped. “I don’t think I can do this.” She started to stand, to get away, but Jamie’s small hand brushed hers and Alex froze in place.

“Please, don’t go.”

Alex wavered before sitting back down. Jamie’s fingers were cold from resting against the pod, and Alex didn’t think, wrapping her hands around Jamie’s, warming them. They were so small…

“Sorry,” she said again. “You look so much like her, and this whole thing is just—”

“Maggie didn’t get the chance to tell you about me, did she?” Jamie surmised with a wisdom beyond her years.

Alex shook her head. “We were supposed to meet this morning. I think she was going to tell me then.”

“She was. Maggie was nervous about it, but she was happy too. She was being silly at breakfast. Even stole a piece of my Pop-Tart.” Jamie looked fleetingly offended, like Maggie every time she lost a bet. Alex didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

Jamie glanced wistfully at the pod again. “Maggie always told me if anything bad happened, I should come to you. She put your address and number in my phone. Said you’d take care of me. Find me a new home. But I don’t want a new home. I want to stay with Maggie.”

The words reverberated through Alex, calming the fear gripping her since her talk with Kara. Maggie might not have told Alex the truth, but she had entrusted her with something infinitely more precious: Jamie herself.

They had been so close. An hour, maybe less, and they would have met for coffee. Maggie would have told her about Jamie, and they would have started figuring out their future together. As a family. Alex had to believe that, had to believe it was still possible.

Jamie lapsed into silence, and Alex slid her hand through Jamie’s soft hair, tucking it behind her ear. “You’re happy with her?” She had to know. “Is Maggie a good mom?”

Jamie nodded emphatically. “She says she’s not very good at it, but she is. She’s great and I…” Her lip quivered. “I never called her mom, not when she could hear me. What if she never wakes up? What if she never knows I wanted to…”

“Oh, sweetie.” Instinctively, Alex scooped Jaime up as she sobbed, pulling her onto her lap. “Maggie knows. She knows. And I promise you, I promise you I will do everything I can to make sure you get her back.”
Alex continued to murmur soothing words, rocking them back and forth. One of the nurses gave her a box of tissues, and Jamie blew her nose and wiped her eyes, but she never left the comfort of Alex’s arms. Sometime later she fell asleep, her head tucked beneath Alex’s chin.

“Alex?” J’onn spoke her name softly from the door, and Alex gave him a watery smile over Jamie’s head.

Shifting the slight weight, Alex carried Jamie to the bed beside Maggie’s pod and tucked a blanket around her. Jamie whimpered, her hand clenching the air, until Alex picked a ragged stuffed animal off the floor and placed it in her arms. Jamie clutched the toy tighter and slipped into a restless sleep.

Alex watched her a moment longer, glancing up to include Maggie in her gaze before she reluctantly turned away. She followed J’onn out into the hall.

“What do you want?” she asked in a clipped tone.

“I have something you need to see.”

***

Alex stepped inside her seldom-used office and shut the door. The thumb drive was warm in her palm, and as she booted up her laptop, she eyed it like a stick of old, weeping dynamite, afraid whatever was on it would blow her world to pieces.

She plugged the drive in and selected the folder with her name on it, ignoring the one for Jamie. Her heart began to pound when she saw the contents. Alex expected a letter. She had a thumb drive of her own in her desk, filled with messages for friends and family in case there was a mission Alex didn’t survive.

But there was no letter. Only a video.

Alex double clicked the icon and the video player sprang open. Maggie was in a bedroom Alex didn’t recognize, frozen in a grainy frame with her finger blurred in the foreground. It was mostly dark, and Maggie wore the black t-shirt she loved to sleep in, her features makeup free and beautiful. Something about the setting felt late. Quiet.

Intimate.

The mouse hovered over the play button while Alex tried to convince herself these wouldn’t be the last words she ever heard Maggie speak.

She pressed play.

“Hey, Danvers.” Maggie’s smile was contrite, her dimples faint in the weak light cast by the lamp on her nightstand. Her voice was low, with the hint of rasp it always took on when she was tired. “It’s late. Or early, I guess. Depends on how you look at it.” She shrugged her shoulders, a half-grin twisting her lips before her expression turned serious again.

“Jamie’s asleep, but my mind won’t stop spinning with all the things you should know, all the things I haven’t told you. So here I am, making this damn video in the middle of the night on my phone and hoping you never see it. I uh, I got this letter from Aileen, Jamie’s mom, and it gave me some needed answers. I guess that’s what this video is about. Answers.”

Alex stepped back to lean against the wall, wrapping her arms around herself. Something in the quiet tone of Maggie’s voice sounded so final, and Alex wasn’t sure she was strong enough to handle
Maggie saying goodbye.

“The task force is wrapping up. A few more days, and I hope to talk with you about everything face-to-face. But I once told you bad things happen all the time in our line of work. With Max and Blackwell out there… Something bad seems like a real possibility. I figured I better leave you with answers just in case.”

Maggie rubbed a finger beneath her lower lip, something she often did when she was nervous. “I’m sorry, Alex. If this is the way you find out about Jamie… I’m so sorry. I can’t tell you how many times I wanted to pick up the phone and call you during all this. To ask you to come over and meet my kid. To see if maybe we could…” She took a shaky breath and looked away, tears gathering in her dark eyes.

“I chose to put Jamie first. Above everything I wanted. Above you. She’d just lost her mother and gotten dumped on a complete stranger. I couldn’t turn my back on her. I wouldn’t be like my mom and dad and make my child feel as unwanted as I was. But I wasn’t sure I could handle this whole parenting thing, you know? Let alone if Jamie would want to stick around.”

Her eyes shifted to the side, and Maggie sighed before fixing back on the phone. “I hope you understand. I didn’t call because I needed time to figure out how to be a mom. If you’d been here, Jamie and I would have leaned on you instead of learning to lean on each other. And we did learn. It was hard as hell sometimes, but we did it.”

“I walked away from you because I was sure I didn’t want kids, and I didn’t want to be in the way of your dreams. I never imagined myself as a mom, never saw kids in my future. And if Jamie hadn’t come into my life, I wouldn’t have changed my mind about that.”

Maggie swallowed thickly, and the tears she’d been fighting became too numerous to stop. “But Jamie… she’s a pretty amazing kid, Alex. She started wrapping me around her little finger from day one. I love her so much it hurts, and the thought of not being there to watch her grow up…”

Alex covered her mouth, trying to hold back a sob, but Maggie couldn’t. She lowered her head and closed her eyes, struggling for almost a full minute before she could continue. A part of Alex wanted to hold on to some shred of anger, but a bigger part wanted to reach through the screen and hold Maggie.

“I really hope you never see this,” Maggie whispered brokenly. “I hope we get to talk. That I can make you understand I didn’t keep her from you to hurt you. That’s the last thing I ever wanted to do.” Her chin quivered as she dragged in a deep, shaking breath. “And don’t be mad at Winn, J’onn, and Kara. They put Jamie first because I asked them to. They hated lying to you, but it gave us time, for Jamie and I to get close, closer than I ever thought we would. It shocks the hell out me, but I love being her mom. You and that kid are the best things that ever happened to me.”

Maggie wiped her eyes, but tears continued to streak down her face. “I don’t have a right to ask you a favor, but if something happens, can you take care of her for me? I’m not asking you to adopt Jamie or anything. You’re going to meet a woman someday who is just as crazy about you as I am.” She grimaced, as if saying those words hurt.

“You’ll have that family you always wanted. I’m just… I know you’ll make sure Jamie has a good home. Maybe one with that dog and picket fence we dreamed about. Just make sure she’s with someone who will love her more than anything. Who will love her as much as I do. But… if you do decide…” Maggie’s features crumpled, and so did Alex’s. “If you decide to keep her, I couldn’t ask for anyone better to be her mom, Alex.”
Scrubbing at her face, Maggie looked directly into the camera, locking eyes with Alex across distance and time. “I love you. I never stopped loving you. And I want you to be happy. You hear me? Be happy, Alex. You deserve it. And thank you, for everything you’ve done for me. For everything I know you’ll do for Jamie.”

Maggie nodded, but Alex could barely see her now through her own tears.

“Hope I see you around, Danvers. But not for a long time, okay?” With one last pained smile, the screen went dark.

At least she didn’t say goodbye, Alex thought as she slid down the wall, drawing her knees to her chest as sobs wracked her frame. A few minutes passed in misery before warm, strong arms slip around her.

“I’ve got you,” J’onn murmured as she turned into him, clutching at him for dear life. “I’ve got you, Alex.”
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Thanks to Dani for the awesome banner! Like the original Twitter post.

With a gasp, Alex hurtled out of an anguished dream into the dimly lit confines of her office. Laying
there, panting and clammy, she tried to collect her wits. She didn’t remember falling asleep, or J’onn apparently carrying her to the small, black leather couch. The only thing she remembered was a grainy video of Maggie and the agony that followed.

Hope I see you around, Danvers. But not for a long time, okay?

The memory propelled Alex off the couch, and she nearly tripped in a blanket someone had thrown over her as she ran toward the medbay. J’onn, Winn, or Kara would have woken her if Maggie’s condition deteriorated, right? Or would they think they were doing her a kindness, letting Maggie slip away and sparing Alex the pain of watching her go?

Fear wound tighter in her chest until Alex skidded to a stop in the doorway. Her knees almost buckled when she found her sister keeping watch in her absence.

Kara flashed her a small, hesitant smile and brought a finger to her lips before Alex could speak. Jamie was fast asleep in her lap, her head resting on Kara’s shoulder. Kara had covered her with a corner of her cape to keep Jamie warm, and Alex didn’t know what to make of them. A thin tendril of jealousy snaked through her, but Alex brushed it aside. She had other things to worry about.

Nauseous from too much adrenaline, too little sleep, and no food since breakfast, Alex wiped a hand over her mouth as she approached the stasis pod. Her gaze swept Maggie’s vitals signs. There was negligible improvement, but Maggie was holding her own.

“You’re not going anywhere, Sawyer,” Alex pledged in a whisper, staring through the frosted glass while Maggie slept on, unaware. Alex ached to touch her, to hold her hand, to sweep her thumb over Maggie’s jaw...

The chair creaked when Kara stood. She laid Jamie, still clutching her threadbare rabbit, onto the bed and tucked her in. Alex eyed them, struck by the soft, charmed look on Kara’s features. Her blue eyes were full of affection as she swept a lock of hair from Jamie’s cheek.

Kara jerked her chin toward the doorway, and Alex followed her into the quiet, empty hall. They faced each other, unsure where to begin.

“Thank you.” Alex figured that was a good place to start. “For staying with her. With them.”

Kara shrugged, the gesture stiff and uncomfortable. “I thought you’d want me to. You get any rest?”

Alex slumped against the concrete wall and bent at the waist, setting her hands on her knees as she willed her nerves to stop jangling. “Some. What time is it?”

“A little past one. Dr. Hamilton came by an hour ago. She’s staying the night in her office in case you need her, but she said Maggie is hanging in there for now.”

Alex nodded. She owed Hamilton a drink when this was over. Something expensive.

“When was the last time you ate?” Kara drifted closer, and Alex straightened, too tired to bristle at being mothered.

“I had toast this morning. Yesterday morning,” Alex corrected with a grimace. “I was too excited to eat.”

Kara gripped her shoulders, and Alex swayed on her feet, struggling not to come apart at the seams again. Maggie needed her to hold it together and so did Jamie. Any more meltdowns would have to wait.
“I’m sorry,” Kara murmured, and Alex’s gaze flicked to her sister’s face. “I didn’t say that earlier, but I am sorry, Alex. I never imagined you’d find out about Jamie like this. I knew you’d be upset when Maggie told you, but—”

“I get it. I don’t like it, but I get it.” Alex tunneled a hand through her hair and let her head thump back against the wall. “And Maggie told me not to be mad at you. That you were just trying to help.”

“So... does that mean you’re not mad anymore?” Kara tone lightened with a hint of cautious teasing. Alex glared, but the effort lacked menace. “I’m still mad, but a tad less. Just a tad.”

She was coming to grips with Maggie’s choices and why the people Alex loved had honored them. They’d put Jamie first, and that meant Alex came last. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but Alex suspected she would have done the same. That knowledge was cold comfort though, and it sure as hell didn’t stop the truth from clawing up her insides like a bitch.

“Fair enough, but I’m here for the three of you. No matter what. Tell me what to do. How can I help?”

Alex sighed. “Jamie. She’ll need clothes. If you could...”

Kara stepped back, jumping at the chance to be useful. “I’ll get a few days worth. And something for Maggie to wear when she wakes up. You get food. Eat something. That’s an order.”

At least Kara said when not if, Alex mused. A thought struck her as Kara turned to leave. “And get Pop-Tarts.”

“Pop-Tarts?” Kara’s brow crinkled. “Aren’t you too old for those?”

“Says the superhero with several flavors in her pantry. They aren’t for me. You’ll probably find some at Maggie’s place. Jamie likes them, I guess.”

Kara’s gaze softened, and she looked at Alex much like she’d looked at Jamie a few minutes earlier. “Maggie has the cutest kid, doesn’t she?”

“She’s beautiful,” Alex confessed in a hushed voice, and for a moment, she let go of her hurt, desperately needing her sister. “God, Kara, Maggie has a child. That beautiful little girl looks just like her. When I pictured having a daughter with Maggie, Jamie is exactly what I dreamed of. And then... just when I let that dream go if it meant getting Maggie back, this happens. And now, I might not... Kara, what if I’m left with nothing?”

Her breath choked into a sob, and Alex didn’t resist when Kara pulled her into a hug and squeezed as hard as she could.

“Don’t give up on those dreams, Alex. Any of them. Maggie will make it, and you two will get your happy ending. Okay?”

“I hope so.” Alex fist ed her hands in Kara’s cape, clinging to that hope with everything she had.

***

The lock snapped with a ping as Kara forced open Maggie’s balcony door. Below, National City was eerily quiet this time of night. Kara held her breath, waiting for an alarm to sound or a neighbor to investigate, but there was nothing but the wind, the distant ocean, and the low murmur of television sets keeping people company while they couldn’t sleep.
“I’ll just have the DEO fix that,” she muttered, closing the door behind her.

Using her x-ray vision, Kara located a duffle bag in the coat closet. She retrieved it and tucked two boxes of Pop-Tarts from the pantry inside, approving of the flavors. Wildlicious Wild Berry was the best.

A quick trip to the hall bath netted her Jamie’s toiletries. Kara scowled when she spotted Wonder Woman on the pink handle of Jamie’s tiny toothbrush.

“I thought I was your favorite...” Kara grumbled. With a huff, she put the toothbrush in a plastic holder and stuffed it in the bag.

Maggie’s bedroom was next. The bonsai trees and travel books that occupied shelves in Alex’s apartment were nowhere to be seen. A stack of unpacked boxes sat in the corner, coated with dust. No photos or art adorned the walls. Hotel rooms had more style and personality.

Maggie slept here, nothing more.

Kara packed the essentials first. Jeans, boots, and a black henley followed. She trailed her fingers over Maggie’s clothes. Her taste was so similar to Alex’s it made Kara smile and shake her head. The pair did love their tees and flannels.

Finished collecting Maggie’s things from the master bath and eager to get back to Alex, Kara wandered down the hall to Jamie’s room. She turned on the light, and a soft snort escaped.

The walls were painted sky blue and dotted with white, puffy clouds. Kara’s crest was the focal point on the navy bedspread, on proud display in the center of Jamie’s twin bed. Kara smirked, mollified about the toothbrush.

“Take that, Wonder Woman.”

Kara could well imagine Maggie’s face when she paid for all this, and she chuckled.

It struck her then, why Maggie’s room was so empty, and her smile faded. Maggie had given Jamie everything she needed to feel at home, even when those sacrifices came at Maggie’s expense. She’d often done the same with Alex, giving of herself again and again, even if it meant having nothing left for herself.

Maggie was a good mother. A good cop. A good fiancée and friend. The world couldn’t afford to lose her. Alex and Jamie couldn’t.

Kara couldn’t.

The emotions she’d stuffed down since finding Maggie on that warehouse floor rushed over her, and Kara sank onto the edge of the bed. Alone, where Alex couldn’t see how scared she was, Kara let the tears come. She cried for Maggie, alone in the dark and fighting to stay alive. For Jamie, watching another parent suffer and possibly die. For Alex, and the agony her sister was in.

And Kara cried for the girl who’d lost her world and was terrified of losing the only person who made this one feel like home. Because if Alex lost Maggie now, again, she would never recover, never be the same.

***

Alex’s cheek was cold, as was her arm through her long-sleeve DEO polo. She blinked awake and
lifted her head, the muscles in her neck protesting her awkward position. Early morning sunlight streamed through the windows, bathing the curves of Maggie’s face in a soft glow just inches from Alex’s fingertips. She must have fallen back asleep slumped over the pod, as close as she could get absent opening the lid and joining Maggie in stasis.

It was her least favorite way to wake up beside Maggie, Alex decided, as her mind wandered over happier memories, mornings wrapped in Maggie’s arms, pressed into the mattress by the weight of her as she lowered her head for a kiss.

She hated remembering what it was like to be happy.

Straightening, Alex closed her eyes and stretched her arms above her head, hearing her vertebrae pop one-by-one. She drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly, willing her mind to focus, for Maggie. For Jamie.

Her eyes snapped open to find Jamie sitting cross-legged on the bed where Kara left her. Hunched over a sketchpad almost too big for her, the small, steady scrape of her pencil on the page was barely audible over the low hum of the pod’s exhaust.

Jamie’s brow furrowed in concentration was an echo of Maggie, and Alex wondered if the ache at seeing reflections of the mother in the child would ever go away. If only Maggie were awake, it might not be so sharp, so painful, like the tip of a knife slowly pushed between her ribs.

“Morning,” Alex greeted hesitantly.

Jamie didn’t look up, her focus consumed by her drawing, her tongue peeking out between her teeth. Finally, she acknowledged Alex’s words with an observation. “That looked uncomfortable.”

Alex chuckled. “It was. I, ah, didn’t mean to fall asleep. How long have you been up?”

“A while.” Jamie shrugged a shoulder, her attitude years beyond her age, and Alex got a glimpse of what she might be like as a teenager. Heaven help Maggie, and her, if she got to be so lucky.

Maggie’s vitals were steady, but the lack of improvement was worrisome. Steady meant not dying, but not recovering either. Schooling her expression when she caught Jamie sneaking a glance at her, Alex shook off her remaining lethargy. Time to get back to work and make Maggie better.

After breakfast, Alex amended, when Jamie’s stomach growled.

Alex spied a duffle bag sitting in the corner and snagged it, feeling a sharp, cardboard edge stab her hip. “Supergirl brought you some supplies. Clean clothes in case you want to shower and change after breakfast.”

“Can I take a bath?” Jamie asked as she closed her sketchbook and slid it into a small backpack, zipping it shut with more force than needed. Her arms crossed her chest and her lips curled into a pout.

Alex stifled a grin, sure Jamie wouldn’t appreciate being told she was cute when she was being stubborn. Maggie hadn’t. “I’m sure that can be arranged.” Alex tried to remember if there was anything in the DEO resembling a tub. “You need a hand?”

“No.” Jamie rolled over and slid down, her legs dangling, nowhere near long enough to reach the ground. She dropped the last foot and landed heavily, and Alex couldn’t suppress a quiet giggle. Jamie’s attempt at an intimidating glare was so obviously copied from Maggie, it nearly made Alex laugh harder. “These beds are high,” she complained.
“We’ll get you a comfortable chair and, um, a stepstool.”

Jamie stared at her for a moment, unsure if she was being made fun of, before she walked closer to Alex and eyed the quiet hall beyond the door. Her bright blue hoodie popped against the grim colors and high walls, making her seem impossibly small.

Alex reached out her hand, and her heart swelled at the small gesture of trust when Jamie took it and let Alex guide her.

The few agents moving about at this hour smiled and said hi, and each response from Jamie was a bit brighter. By the time they reached the break room, a spot of normalcy with a worn couch, tables, and kitchen appliances, Jamie’s mood had lightened considerably.

There were two boxes of Pop-Tarts in the duffle, and Alex held them up for Jamie. “So which one is your favorite?”

“That one.” Jamie indicated the rainbow-decorated box. “Are you going to have one too?”

“I haven’t had breakfast yet,” Alex mused as she set a plate down beside Jamie’s glass of milk. She picked up the boxes again, pretending to weigh the pros and cons of the different flavors. She hadn’t had a Pop-Tart in years. “Which one should I have?”

“Maggie likes that one.” Jamie pointed to the strawberry-flavored variety, not, Alex noted, her favorite.

“Is that right?” The notion that Maggie Sawyer, of dry, double-toasted bagels and vegan ice cream fame, would have a favorite Pop-Tart flavor amused Alex to no end.

“Yeah. She pretended to like the other kind cuz I like it, but I can tell.” Breaking the pastry into pieces on her plate, Jamie demolished her breakfast, leaving a smear of reddish-purple filling across her cheek as she tried to shove an over-large piece into her mouth.

“Well, I’ll try your favorite first, if you don’t mind sharing.” That earned her an eye roll, but with less attitude than before. Alex joined her at the table and shifted one of her pastries to Jamie’s empty plate. She would have to send Kara out for a real meal soon. Something that resembled protein rather than cardboard with icing on top. “So you like to draw?”

“Yeah.”

No details were forthcoming, and Jamie drew a napkin across her face, getting most of the filling off, before returning her attention to her plate as the awkward silence intensified.

Alex’s fingers drummed on her coffee mug as she picked at her Pop-Tart. She could do this. Jamie was a child, not an 8-foot alien, although facing off with marauders was very appealing right about now.

“When I came in last night, you were snuggled in Supergirl’s cape. You like Supergirl?”

“Yeah.” The look Jamie shot Alex was a mixture of concern and exasperation. She hesitated, her expression scrunching up before asking, “Why do you call your sister Supergirl?”

Alex almost sprayed her coffee across the table as she choked on it. As it was, she set the cup down so hard the hot liquid sloshed out. That, at least, earned her a laugh from Jamie and a glimpse of those dimples on full display. Alex did her best not to stare.
“What, what do you mean?” Alex grabbed a handful of napkins and mopped up the coffee.

“Aunt Kara’s your sister, right?”

Alex nodded. She needed the full story of how ‘Aunt Kara’ came to be. Maybe she could turn on the Kryptonite emitters in the training room for that conversation.

“And Kara is Supergirl. So your sister is Supergirl.”

“Why do you think Kara is Supergirl?”

“She has the same smile. And scar.” She gestured toward her own eyebrow. “And the glasses don’t help.”

“Did Maggie…”

“No.”

Alex didn’t even try to hide her smile as she shook her head in disbelief. “You really are Maggie’s daughter.”

“Everybody says that. I don’t know what it means.”

“It means you are too observant for your own good, just like your mom.”

Mom. The word reverberated through her head, and the desire to see Maggie constricted Alex’s chest painfully. All she wanted was to sit with Maggie over a beer and hear about Jamie and their life together. To talk about their future and whether Alex might have a place in it.

A small voice interrupted her thoughts. “She’s not getting better, is she?”

Definitely too observant. “Not as quickly as we want her to,” Alex answered as truthfully as she could. “We’re doing everything we can to help her.”

“The other doctors said that, but Mom still died.” Her fear surfaced in those dark eyes, and Alex’s heart wrenched. Jamie blinked back tears and hitched her chin higher. “If she’s going to die, you should tell me.”

Alex knelt by Jamie. “I will not let that happen,” she vowed, promising herself almost as much as Jamie. “I said the same thing to your mom once. I meant it then and I mean it now. She will be okay.”

“But she’s not getting better.”

“Hey, listen.” Her hands rubbed Jamie’s trembling shoulders until Jamie met Alex’s eyes. “One time, I was in a really bad spot and I, I thought I was going to die. And Maggie, she told me I was a badass…”

Jamie’s snort of laughter made Alex wince. “Don’t tell your mom I used a bad word in front of you, okay?”

Jamie nodded.

“Anyway, Maggie told me I was tough, and that I had to hold on until she could save me. And I did, and she did. Your mom, she’s tough too.”
“She’s a badass?” Jamie’s eyes twinkled, and Alex groaned, knowing she was screwed.

“Yes, that. But it’s good. It means she’s a fighter. She just has to hold on until we can help her. You and me, we’ll save her. We’ll find a way.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

Jamie slid out of her chair and into Alex’s arms, wrapping her in a tight hug. “Thank you,” she whispered.

“You’re welcome.” Alex spared a moment to pray to Rao and every deity she could think of that she wouldn’t let Jamie down. Or herself. “You know, I’m not only doing this for you. I want your mom to get better too.”

“I know.” Jamie leaned back and gave Alex a speculative look before glancing over her shoulder. “Hi, Uncle J’onn.”

“Morning, Jamie. Can I borrow Alex for a minute?”

“Sure.”

Jamie hopped back on the chair and resumed eating, and Alex marveled a little at the resilience of children. Standing on shaky legs, Alex scrubbed at her face and snagged what was left of her coffee before joining J’onn outside the door.

“What’s going on?” she asked, keeping her voice low.

“I’m authorizing an, ah, extra-legal enforcement action against Maxwell Lord with the NCPD’s blessing.” J’onn’s expression turned steely, and his mouth thinned to a hard line. “He will not escape the consequences of his actions. We’re heading out in 15 minutes. There’s a place on the team if you want in.”

Alex hesitated, torn between her desire to break down Max’s door and the need to watch over Maggie and Jamie. As much as she wanted vengeance, until she could throw Maggie’s survival in Max’s face, it would be bittersweet at best.

“You… go ahead. I’m needed here.”

J’onn nodded, and Alex glimpsed a flicker of pride in his eyes. He patted her shoulder as he left, and Alex watched him go, resisting the urge to follow.

***

Winn curled his fingers around the collar of his tactical vest, tugging it down to keep it from rubbing the bottom of his throat. How Alex wore hers like a second skin was beyond him. Bulky and cinched too tight, the vest restricted his movements and his breathing, but J’onn had insisted he suit up if he wanted to come along. Winn had jumped at the chance to do something.

It beat sitting around the DEO feeling sorry for himself and avoiding Alex.

Out of his element with a gun heavy and strapped to his right thigh, Winn adjusted his earpiece, listening to the other team of agents across town settling into position outside Max’s penthouse. He couldn’t help Maggie medically, but he could do this. He could set aside his cowardice and terror for
a few minutes to get justice for her by storming a super villain’s lab.

On second thought when he put it like that...

“Stay behind me,” J’onn ordered in a low rasp.

Winn gave him a short nod. Too late to rethink this plan now.

With a sharp hand signal, the team surged into coordinated action, using alien tech to bypass security and enter the building undetected. Winn brought up the rear, bumbling along behind them with his hand resting awkwardly on his sidearm. He was almost afraid to touch it, worried the slightest pressure might cost him a toe or a foot.

The agents fanned out, leaving Winn exposed as they traversed the bright, glassed-in lobby, and Winn scrambled to keep up with J’onn. If things went sideways, he wanted to be next to the guy who could fly.

They were prepared for armed resistance, a security force outfitted to the nines with Max’s enhanced weapons and body armor. What they found were four, decrepit security guards and no one else. Even the staff was missing, Max having given them the day off.

“Son-of-a-bitch!” J’onn hissed in a rare flash of anger. He slapped a computer monitor off one of Max’s lab tables, sending it crashing into the wall with a boom. “We should have moved on him sooner.”

The team at Max’s penthouse reported similar results. The place was empty.

Max was in the wind.

Alex was going to be pissed.

“I bet he bolted the moment Blackwell tried to kill Maggie. He might even think she’s dead.” Winn gripped his collar again, giving it another forceful tug. “Even Max couldn’t have gone far.”

“With his resources and cash flow? We’ll be lucky if he’s still on the planet.”

“He can’t get away with this,” Winn protested. “Max had a hand in those overdoses. In Brian’s death. He tried to take Maggie from us, and he still might.” His voice rose until he was almost shouting.

“What would you suggest, Agent Schott? He’s gone, and we’re already outside the lines storming his lab and home.”

Winn glanced around, his gaze landing on the destroyed monitor. “Then what’s one more line to cross? Take his computers. Anything he has at home too.”

J’onn eyed him. “Max will have wiped them or taken them with him.”

“No. Max will travel light. Pick up tech on the way or have it waiting for him. And yeah, he wiped his drives, but give me a crack at them. I’ll find him. Max will pay for what he did to Maggie.”

After a moment, J’onn nodded and relayed orders to his teams. Winn would get his shot at redemption, and he was ready to make the most of it. He jerked the plug out of the nearest CPU.

“You can run, Max, but you can’t hide. Not from me.”
Alex finished tying her boots and straightened, flipping a damp lock of hair away from her eyes. A shower made her feel more human, but no epiphany regarding Maggie’s treatment had come to her as she’d lingered beneath the hot spray.

The best minds in the DEO were working on a solution, but it wasn’t enough. Not yet. Alex couldn’t bear facing Jamie again without an inkling of good news.

Someone ripped open their locker a few rows over and threw something inside it. The bang made Alex jump, and she reached for a weapon she wasn’t wearing. Scowling, Alex strode toward the commotion, building up a head of steam. Maybe putting some damn rookie in their place would make her feel better. Give all her frustration an outlet.

But there was no rookie. Just Winn, sitting on a bench with his head in his hands.

Rather than his typical slacks and cardigan, he wore DEO black, a holster strapped to his thigh even though it was empty. He must have thrown his helmet against the back of his locker, and Alex spotted the faint impression where it had dented the metal. She hesitated, her anger simmering, but then Winn utterly disarmed her with a sniffle.

It had to be one of the most pathetic sounds she’d ever heard. Alex rolled her eyes at herself, her ire fading by the second. Winn was a damn puppy, and Alex couldn’t kick him when he was down, even if part of her wanted to.

“What happened?” she demanded.

Winn started, and Alex half expected to peel him off the ceiling he jumped so high. He looked up at her then away, unable to hold her gaze.

“Max bolted before we got there. J’onn is having a team bring me all Max’s servers, handheld devices, and computers. I’ll go through them until I figure out where he is. He won’t get away.”

The news Max had slipped through their fingers was disappointing but not surprising, but if there was something to find, Winn would find it. Maybe by then Maggie would be awake, and Alex could have the satisfaction of dealing with Max herself...

“That do anything right,” Winn whispered. “Can’t save my friends. Can’t protect them...” He seemed both dejected and determined as he studied the floor between his boots. Alex wished she didn’t know how that combination felt.

“Max isn’t on you.”

“Maybe not, but plenty else is.” Winn ripped off the velcro strips holding his tactical vest to his body and shed his gear, dropping the loaded vest on top of his helmet. He sighed, his shoulders slumping, and Alex couldn’t take it anymore. Not with Maggie’s voice, begging her not to be mad at him, in the back of her mind.

“I’m sorry,” Alex ground out. “I shouldn’t have come at you like that earlier.”

Winn kept his eyes on the floor, his gaze boring into the concrete. “I had it coming. Sorry I kept Jamie a secret from you. For what it’s worth, Maggie didn’t much like it either.”

Alex believed him, but his silence regarding Jamie still stung. She struggled not to hold all this against him. “It’s okay.”
“None of this is okay.” Winn’s lower lip began to tremble. “Listen… if uh… This might not be the time to say this, but if Maggie doesn’t make it…”

“Winn—”

“If Maggie doesn’t make it,” he persisted, “I uh… if you…” He tipped his head back for a moment, trying to hold tears at bay, and his Adam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed. “I just want you to know I’ll take Jamie. If you can’t. If that would be too hard on you…”

Winn couldn’t have made Alex’s heart ache more if he’d crushed it in his fist. She closed her eyes.

“I love that kid, Alex. I won’t let her go into the system. Jamie won’t go through what I did. If you don’t think you can…”

“Maggie isn’t going anywhere,” Alex insisted.

“God, I hope not, but… if she does, I’ll step up. Gladly. For all three of you.”

It wasn’t hard to imagine Winn as a dad, chasing a gaggle of rugrats around the park, helping them with their homework, being the good listener he’d been for Alex time and again. Jamie would be lucky to have a father like him, but the thought of anyone else raising Maggie’s child in her absence…

Alex would as soon cut off her own arm as give Jamie up. Adopting Jamie wouldn’t be a choice, it would be a given.

Blowing out a weary breath, Alex joined him on the bench. Winn eyed her, suspicious and wary, but he didn’t shy away.

“I appreciate that, and I’m sure Maggie does too, but let’s focus on getting her better and back with Jamie, okay? And on finding Max and making him pay for what he did to her.”

They lapsed into another tense silence, and the questions swirling in Alex’s head grew too loud to ignore. Winn owed her answers and now was as good a time as any to get them.

“Kara told me about Jamie’s mom. How Maggie took Jamie in.” Alex bit her lip, aware of Winn’s steady gaze on her profile. “Is Maggie happy? Having a child?”

A flicker of a sad smile crossed Winn’s lips. He reached into his back pocket and drew out his phone. “I don’t know if Maggie told you, but when you two ended things, she crashed on my couch for a week while she searched for a new place. We were friends while you were together, of course, but after… We got closer. Maggie and I had more in common than we realized.”

Alex stared at him. She had no idea, but she was pathetically grateful Winn had been there for Maggie when she hadn’t.

“We started hanging out. Pool one night here. Dinner one night there. I think I’m the only one who saw what the breakup did to both of you. The toll it took.” Winn sniffled again. “It sucked.”

He unlocked his phone and skimmed through his photos. “Don’t tell Maggie, because she’ll give me a hard time if she…” Winn paused, blinking back fresh tears. “Somewhere during the last eight months, she became my best friend. When Jamie came into her life, Maggie was so scared she would mess the kid up, but she was willing to try for Jamie’s sake. And Maggie didn’t want to be like her parents. She wanted no part in making a kid feel unwanted.”
Alex said nothing, letting him talk.

“Anyway, it was something to see as Maggie and Jamie got to know each other. Discovering all the ways they’re alike and different. Jamie wants to be a cop like Maggie. How cute is that?”

A soft, wounded sound slipped out, and Winn shot Alex a look of apology.

“Sorry. It’s just... They never expected to love each other as much as they do. And they do love each other, Alex. A lot. You want to know if Maggie’s happy?” Winn stopped surfing and turned the phone around. “I don’t know about you, but I’ve never seen Maggie smile like this before.”

Alex took the phone, mesmerized. Maggie’s dark eyes were warm as she watched something, or someone, Alex couldn’t see. Her smile was breathtaking, radiating love in every nuance of her expression. Alex fell in love with her all over again.

She had seen that smile before, but it had been a long time ago. Too long.

“She wanted to tell you, Alex, but they needed time together. The whole bonding thing, you know? Maggie was afraid they would never click, that she wasn’t capable, but they did. Faster than she ever imagined.”

Alex swiped again, discovering a photo of Jamie, Maggie, and Winn, all mugging for the camera. It was the kind of shot you framed, everyone happy, a moment of joy captured and preserved. Two devastating sets of dimples smiled at up at her, and Alex took a ragged breath.

“Thank you,” she whispered, meeting his eyes through her tears. “For showing me this. For being there for them.”

Winn nodded. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry I couldn’t tell you. But you know I love you, right? That I didn’t mean to hurt you like this?”

Unable to resist the urge, Alex tugged him into a hug. She turned her head, kissing him on the cheek, and his stubble scratched her chin. “I love you too.”

***

Cursing J’onn under her breath for all the lead in the DEO’s walls, Kara prowled the building searching for Jamie. A nurse had lost track of her, and Kara had found her panicking at the prospect of telling Alex. Rightly so.

She could check the surveillance feeds, but J’onn was in a surly mood thanks to Max, Winn had passed out in the break room, and Vasquez always got touchy when Kara hovered. Better to hunt a missing six-year-old the old-fashioned way.

At least Alex was heads down in her lab and had no idea Jamie was AWOL. The last thing Alex needed was another reason to worry.
Kara found Jamie on the landing pad a few minutes later. Her head was bent over her sketchpad, but from Jamie’s vantage point, she could look up and see directly into the medbay, allowing her to keep tabs on her mother even outside. Kara adjusted her glasses and hurried up the steps at human speed.

“You hiding out here?” Kara breezed through the doors as they opened, and Jamie frowned a little. She’d changed into an outfit Kara had fetched from the apartment, a black, long-sleeve tee and jeans. She resembled Maggie more than ever.

“The medbay smells funny,” Jamie said as Kara sat down beside her. “And the bed is uncomfortable.”

Kara nodded. “The air is sterile. They sanitize it regularly to help the patients.”

“But Mom can’t breathe that air in the pod.”

She was such a smart kid. Kara wrapped an arm around Jamie’s shoulders. “Maggie has her own oxygen supply, but she doesn’t need much air in stasis.”

“I know. Alex explained it earlier.” Jamie sighed. “I just want Mom to wake up.”

“She will when she’s all better.” Kara leaned over to see what Jamie was drawing, and her heart stuttered. Alex, in all her badass, scientific glory, leaned against her workstation. A detailed microscope was beside her as she reviewed data on the tablet in her hands. Jamie had captured Alex to perfection, from the tilt of her head to the weary but determined look in her eyes.

“Alex loves Maggie a lot, doesn’t she?” Jamie asked unexpectedly.

“She does. Very, very much.”

“Then why didn’t they get married?”

Kara’s eyes went wide, and her reflection in the launch doors would have made her laugh if she weren’t so alarmed. Jamie glanced up at her again, waiting for an explanation as Kara floundered to find one. “Um… well… uh...”

“Maggie said it was complicated.”

Kara nodded vigorously. “That’s… Yeah. Complicated is a good word for it. But uh… Well, there were lots of reasons, I mean, okay, one main reason, but… things have changed. If Maggie… when, when Maggie wakes up, maybe...”

“I think Mom wants us to be a family. Her, me, and Alex.” Jamie returned her attention to her picture, biting her lip as she formed a shadow along Alex’s jawline.

Kara stared at Jamie’s profile, trying to decipher how Jamie felt about the idea, but like her hair, dimples, and eyes, Jamie also inherited her mother’s unflappable poker face. “Would you be okay with that?”

Jamie shrugged one shoulder and kept drawing.

“Hey.” Kara tugged her closer, urging Jamie to look at her once more. “You can talk to me, okay?”

“I’ve never had a family,” Jamie confessed after a minute. “It was always just me and my mom. I used to wonder what it might be like if Maggie lived with us, but I never said anything.”

“You and your mom were a family,” Kara insisted.
“You know what I mean.” Jamie rolled her eyes. That gesture was all Maggie too, but it was way cuter on Jamie than when Maggie used it on Supergirl.

Kara sighed, feeling her way carefully. One wrong word and she could damage Maggie’s progress with Jamie or harm the future Alex always wanted.

“Listen, don’t judge Alex based on the way she is right now, okay? She’s worried about Maggie, and she’s doing everything she can to make her better. She doesn’t have much time for us.”

“We had Pop-Tarts together this morning.” Jamie slid the tip of her pencil up to add a highlight to Alex’s right eye. “Your sister is really pretty.”

A slow, sweet smile curved Kara’s lips at the compliment. “She is. Looks like she’s fun to draw, too.” Kara wondered if Alex knew she was Jamie’s latest subject.

“I’m drawing pictures of her for Mom, so she can see how hard Alex worked to save her when she wakes up.”

Kara’s breath caught, and she blinked back tears. She prayed to Rao Maggie would see those sketches, would see how Alex wore herself to the bone to bring her back. They loved each other so much, and if Fate ripped them apart now...

“And I guess it would be okay.”

Kara glanced at Jamie again. “What?”

“If Alex, me, and Maggie became a family.”

“I think nothing would make Maggie happier than having all of you together,” Kara said seriously. It was easy to picture them at school recitals, birthday parties, the holidays… She was startled by how much she wanted a place in that reality. Her own precious family on Earth, expanded by two.

“It would be kinda cool.”

Kara frowned, not sure what Jamie meant. “What would be cool?”

“Having Supergirl as my aunt.” Jamie shot her a sideways glance but kept sketching, even as a sliver of a grin emerged.

Panic flared and died just as fast. Kara snorted and shook her head, kissing the crown of Jamie’s. “No one pulls anything over on you Sawyer girls, do they? And you know what? Supergirl thinks it’d be pretty cool to have you as a niece.”

Jamie smirked as she began Alex’s earrings.

***

The chill from Maggie’s pod made Alex shiver as she reviewed the latest lab results on her tablet. Kara and Jamie were in the break room drawing together. Winn and J’onn were tracking Max. Everyone was doing something worthwhile, but Alex could only spin her wheels.

She raked her fingers over her scalp, digging them in as she willed her brain to find a solution. While the antidote was fighting the Belamort, stasis also kept the parasite alive. It would have died off long before now under normal conditions, but Maggie’s body couldn’t afford to let the Belamort run its course. She was trapped in a slow-motion death spiral.
There were hopeful signs, but not enough. Much of the cocaine had been scrubbed from Maggie’s blood, but her organs had absorbed enough that the Belamort had to be neutralized before they’d risk waking her. At this rate, Jamie would be in college before Maggie was revived.

Alex set her tablet aside and hung her head. She would figure this out, damn it. She had to.

The quiet crept into her awareness and Alex glanced up, startled to find herself alone with Maggie for the first time in two days. She seized the opportunity.

Alex rolled her stool closer to Maggie’s pod and pressed a button on the console to activate a microphone inside it. “I know you’re tired, but you have to keep fighting, Maggie. Just a little longer.”

Leaning forward, Alex rested her forehead against the cold glass. “When you wake up, and you’re going to wake up, we have a lot to talk about. We’re probably gonna yell… and cry…”

Alex took a breath, her gaze worshiping Maggie’s peaceful features.

“But that’s okay. We’ll get the hurt out. Both of us. Because under all that pain is love, and, God, I love you.” Alex swallowed thickly, amazed she had tears left to shed at this point.

“You once told me you couldn’t imagine your life without me in it. Well I’ve lived my life without you and it’s hell. I need you. Jamie needs you.”

Alex laid her hand on the glass next to Maggie’s cheek, her thumb stroking the cool surface. “She wants to call you mom, Maggie, and I want to see your face when she does.” Alex huffed out a soft, hurting laugh. “I want that chance you promised me, so you can’t die on me. You’re a badass, Sawyer. You hold on for me, okay?”

Footsteps sounded in the hall, and Alex knew she was out of time.

“I love you. More than anything in this world. Stay with me, and I’ll devote the rest of my life to making you and Jamie happy.”

Someone walked in, and Alex killed the mic. She wiped her eyes, taking a moment to get hold of herself. Warm hands slid over her shoulders and squeezed, startling her, but Alex recognized the familiar touch instantly.

“Mom?”

Eliza, wrapped her in a hug from behind, her light perfume drifting over Alex and steadying her nerves. “I’m here, sweetie. Now let’s find a way to bring Maggie home.”
Sorry this was a bit later than we hoped. zennie's work and travel was a bit crazy in March.

Thanks to Dani for the awesome banner! Like the original Twitter post.
Alex swiveled on her stool, nudging herself along with a booted foot while Eliza paced the lab. Her mother had been lost in Maggie’s chart and Alex’s notes for the last ten minutes, immersing herself in details Alex knew by rote.

Brow furrowed sharp and deep, Eliza swiped to the next screen and kept reading. Alex dropped her gaze. No doubt she’d done a list of things wrong. She braced herself for her mother’s judgment.

“Stasis was a brilliant move.”

Blinking at the unexpected praise, Alex glanced up. “It’s keeping the Belamort alive.”
“It is keeping Maggie alive. The hot shot they gave her… those men wanted her dead, Alex. If Kara had taken Maggie to any hospital, in any city, to any doctor but you, I would be here for her funeral, not her treatment.”

Alex flinched.

“Sorry. It’s just… you were up against impossible odds, and you saved her. Despite what National City has been led to believe, Maggie Sawyer is still among the land of the living thanks to you.”

Kara’s cover story, run with Snapper and Lena’s permission, claimed Maggie died at an area hospital yesterday. Alex didn’t think for a second the news would lull Max into a false sense of security, but they had to try. Was he aware Maggie was at the DEO? Or did he skip town to let the heat die down, certain Maggie met her demise on the filthy floor of that empty warehouse?

Her hands curled into fists on her knees. Max better enjoy his freedom while it lasted because when she caught up with him…

“You okay?”

Alex’s attention snapped back on Eliza. “Fine,” she ground out, flexing her fingers and willing them to relax. “So what did I do wrong? How did I screw up the antidote?”

“You didn’t screw up anything, sweetie. I might have used some different compounds, but they would have achieved the same result.” Eliza set the tablet on the counter and tucked her hands into the pockets of her lab coat.

“I messed up somewhere, or Maggie would be awake. She would be well.”

“Maggie is stable. We have time and resources to save her. Let’s consider ourselves fortunate under the circumstances.”

Alex jerked to her feet, the stool banging against her workstation. Her fingers raked through her hair before lacing behind her head. “She can’t stay in stasis forever, and nobody knows what prolonged exposure to Belamort could do. We should bring her out sooner rather than later. There has to be something. I have to do something.”

“Alex…”

“Mom, I don’t need a lecture—”

“Too bad. Rush blindly ahead with something like this, and you could make it worse or kill her. You know that; it’s why you put her into stasis. Stop beating yourself up, Alexandra. Stop thinking you aren’t working hard enough, fast enough, smart enough.”

In no mood to be mothered or reined in, Alex swapped places with Eliza, pacing the length of her lab with determined strides as Eliza settled on the stool. “You don’t understand.”

“So explain it to me. What happened? Something is eating at you. Something more than Maggie’s condition.”

Alex shook her head, not sure where to begin. “We were supposed to meet. Have coffee and talk. I was an hour away from getting Maggie back. An hour. Then Max and Blackwell ripped her away…”

Eliza sat up a little straighter. “You were going to reconcile?”
Alex flapped her hands against her sides. “I don’t know. Maybe. I’d hoped. But now we might never get the chance.”

“There’s still a chance, Alex, but don’t waste it by doing Maggie more harm than good. We need to be patient, methodical.”

Eliza’s calm had the opposite effect on Alex. She didn’t need patience. She needed results. She needed Maggie, needed to save her for herself and for Jamie. Every second Maggie was in that damn pod was one too many, and Alex couldn’t shake the feeling they were running out of time.

“This isn’t just about me. Jamie needs her too.” Alex swept her arm toward the medbay.

“Jamie?” Eliza cocked her head, confused, and Alex stopped in her tracks.

“J’onn didn’t tell you when he called?”

“Tell me what? Who is Jamie?” Eliza stood, drifting closer in concern.

Alex scoffed. “You’ve got to be kidding me. At least I’m no longer the last to know.”

“Know what? Alex, what’s going on?”

“Jamie…” Alex sighed. “Jamie is Maggie’s daughter.”

“Her… what?”

“You should sit down again for this.”

***

Kara trailed her target at a discrete distance, following him through a bustling hallway at National City Memorial Hospital. When he stopped outside room 632, she ducked into a small waiting room a few doors down and across the hall. She had the space to herself, so Kara slid her glasses down to eye him with her x-ray vision.

A uniformed NCPD officer was on guard, and he blocked the man from entering, demanding ID. Bills exchanged hands, and just like that, the guard left his post, wandering several feet away from the door.

Thank Rao it wasn’t so easy to get to Maggie, or she’d be dead, her life forfeited by a fellow cop for a few lousy bucks. Kara noted his badge number, vowing to make sure this was his last day on the job.

“Mr. Blackwell? Your attorney sent me.” Wearing a wrinkled, knock-off Gucci suit and sporting too much stubble for the early hour, the newcomer deserved the skeptical look Blackwell gave him.

“Who the hell are you?”

“You can, ah, call me Mr. Smith.”

Blackwell had seen better days. The bruises Kara had inflicted on his face were a mottled yellow and purple. His body had fared worse with a shoulder-to-wrist cast and splints on most of his fingers preventing him from using his hands. There were more injuries beneath the sheets.

Kara couldn’t help wondering what Maggie would think about Supergirl’s reckless display of power on her behalf. Alex believed Blackwell deserved every ounce of pain and more, but Kara vacillated
between remorse and satisfaction, at times darkly pleased she exacted some measure of revenge for what he’d put Maggie through.

She remembered the crunch when she’d slapped the gun from his hand, the cries as she burst through the ranks of men. She had no choice but to disarm them, and no time to waste. It was hard to regret putting Maggie’s life above theirs. She was family, and family came first.

“I don’t deal with ‘attorneys’ who use pseudonyms,” Blackwell sneered.

“Yes, well…” Smith glanced around and slunk closer, his voice dropping to a whisper. “I was sent by an associate with your best interests at heart. Between you and me, your high-priced law firm represents a certain tech company founder, and they are… debating their loyalties. On one hand, there’s the low-life drug dealer caught injecting a lethal dose of Rush into a decorated NCPD detective. On the other, a respectable businessman and entrepreneur whose involvement is merely circumstantial.”

Blackwell bristled. “Fuck Maxwell Lord. I’ve paid that firm good money for years. They can earn it now.”

“That’s one point of view. Not, from what I gather, the prevailing one.”

“Tell your associate to fix it then. I’ll make it worth his, or, I guess, her, while.”

Blackwell chuckled as if the idea a female attorney was a joke. Kara decided she wouldn’t waste anymore guilt on him.

An older woman joined her in the waiting room and settled into a chair to surf her phone. Trying to be inconspicuous, Kara wandered over to a rack of pamphlets and plucked a brochure out at random, faking interest in her options for gastric bypass.

“Easier said than done. Especially given your relative position vis-à-vis the murder of one of the NCPD’s finest.” Smith hesitated, pursing his lips, and Kara winced. The cover story regarding Maggie’s “death” was necessary, but it felt like tempting Fate to put it out there.

“If you could offer something to even the playing field a little… something to implicate Lord, for example, that might help.”

“No. No way. Max is too careful, and even if I had something, I don’t know you. You could be a cop or a snitch.”

Smith shrugged. “Have it your way. Sounds like you prefer to rot in jail while Lord lives it up off-planet, beyond the reach of Earth’s laws.”

“Pfft. Goes to show how much you know Max. Like he’d live among the aliens he despises.”

“You think he’s still on-planet?”

“I guarantee it.” Blackwell jammed a working finger onto the call button. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, that hot brunette nurse just came on shift,” he said with a lecherous grin, “and I need a sponge bath.”

Kara put the brochure back and stepped into the hall, giving the nurse walking by a sympathetic smile. It widened when she waved a large, male orderly over and informed him Mr. Blackwell was requesting a bath, slipping the orderly a twenty for his trouble. At least she bribed for the better good.

Smith nodded to the guard as he strode out of Blackwell’s room, heading for the elevator. Kara
loitered long enough to see the doors slide shut before slipping into the stairwell. With a burst of superspeed, she caught up to him in the parking garage.

“So… that was a bust, huh?” Kara matched his strides as they walked toward a black van in the corner.

Smith’s face twisted and morphed, his body growing taller and broader as J’onn surfaced from the disguise. “Oh, I don’t know. He confirmed Max is on-planet, which means he’s within reach.”

“Heaven help him if Alex gets to him first. She’ll reach out and touch him, all right.”

“Alex won’t hurt him.”

“Have you met my sister?”

J’onn smirked. “Fair point, but I doubt she’d cause lasting damage. Bruises heal, after all.”

“So long as Maggie survives. If she doesn’t…” Kara shook her head, unwilling to contemplate that outcome.

J’onn pivoted to a stop next to the driver side door. “How are you holding up?”

“Me?” Kara scoffed. “I’m not the one in the pod. Or Alex, seeing Maggie like that, losing sleep and desperate for a way to save her. Or Jamie, scared she’s going to lose her other mother—”

“No, but you and Maggie grew closer before all this, and watching her, Jamie, and your sister suffer can’t be easy.” J’onn put his hands on her shoulders. “If you need to talk…”

Kara managed a weak smile for his concern. “Thanks, but I need to find Max. It’s the least I can do for them. Supergirl will keep an eye and ear out for him, but Kara Danvers has the power of the press to help the task force.”

J’onn squeezed Kara’s shoulders with enough strength to make her feel it. “Maggie would be proud of the work you’re doing with the NCPD right now.”

“I hope so. I never respected them the way I should have, especially her. All the effort they put into building a case… How many times have I just crashed in?”

“There’s room for both the police and Supergirl, Kara. If you hadn’t crashed in the other day, Maggie wouldn’t be here. Maybe when she wakes up, the two of you can find a better balance for all involved.”

“Yeah.”

Kara sighed as a silver SUV pulled into a space on the other side of the lot. Blackwell’s legal team climbed out of the back seat in their designer suits and headed inside.

“Should I stick around? Listen in?”

“No. I planted a listening device.” J’onn stepped away and opened the van door. “If I know Alex, she’s sequestered with your mom, developing a cure, and Winn is up to his neck in Max’s tech. Don’t suppose you could take a break from being an ace reporter and superhero to be aunt Kara for a while?”

That sounded like the best offer she’d had in days. Kara flashed him another smile. “I think that could be arranged.”
“My God. She looks just like Maggie.”

“Yeah.” Alex crossed her arms as Eliza stepped closer to the window, taking Jamie in. Eliza’s gaze softened as she watched Jamie draw at Maggie’s side, unaware of their perusal.

“Oh, Alex. She’s beautiful.”

Alex’s expression was wistful as she stared at her reflection in the glass. “Just wait until she smiles at you. It’s like half warm hug, half dagger to the heart.”

Eliza leaned back and looked at her with alarm.

Alex shrugged, self conscious, the tears she was so tired of crying returning. “Jamie is a walking, talking dream come true, Mom. But she has Maggie’s dimples. Her eyes. She even tilts her head like Maggie. All those things are precious, and adorable, and they remind me of everything I stand to lose. I just… can’t…”

“I know,” Eliza murmured, and Alex met her gaze. “Seeing the parent in the child in a million wonderful, excruciating ways.” She stroked a hand through Alex’s hair and cupped her cheek.

Alex’s breath hitched. “Did I… with Dad? You’d look at me and…”

“See him?” Eliza nodded, a tear breaking free she dashed away. “It was a blessing to see so much of him in you, Alex, but sometimes…”

“Yeah,” Alex said again, understanding things about her mother, about their relationship, for the first time.

“But I can’t imagine what you must be feeling. To nearly lose Maggie and discover she has a biological child in practically the same moment? I don’t understand. How could she keep a secret like this from you?” Anger crept into Eliza’s tone.

“Maggie had her reasons. She was going to tell me when we met for coffee, but it’s… complicated, and right now it doesn’t even matter. All that matters is making Maggie better.”

“We will, sweetie.”

Alex pressed her fingers against the glass, her gaze lingering on Jamie as she made wide arcs across the paper with her pencil. “If I hadn’t been such an idiot, Maggie wouldn’t be in that pod. We’d be married and raising Jamie together, as a family.”

Eliza gently grabbed Alex’s shoulder and spun her around. “I know you’re scared, and you’re hurt, and you’re afraid to have hope. You think all this is punishment for something you’ve done, but, Alexandra, Maggie has a chance because of you. You and I will make the most of it, and God willing, you’ll get Maggie back and that family.”

Alex twisted her mouth, trying to keep her lower lip from trembling. “I’m really glad you’re here,” she whispered.

“There’s no place else I’d be.” Eliza drew her into a hug, and the world was suddenly a little steadier.

“So, if I get that family… You ready to be a grandmother?”
Eliza released a tiny squeak of surprise, and Alex chuckled through her tears.

***

“Any luck?” J’onn asked, sticking his head in the conference room.

Winn tossed another useless iPad on the pile. He’d been through almost thirty from Lord Technologies after scouring the tech in Max’s penthouse. Eyes burning from hours staring at code creeping across the console, Winn craved a decent meal and a long nap. One that lasted a week.

He picked up another tablet, heaving a dejected sigh. “None. You? How’d it go with Blackwell?”

J’onn strolled up to the table, gaze sweeping over stacks of computers and devices with a frown. “He didn’t give us much, but we suspect Max is still on-planet, at least.”

“There’s a surprise,” Winn grumbled. “Should’ve figured he wouldn’t turn to aliens for help. Max likes their technology, but that’s all aliens are good for in his book.”

J’onn crossed his arms, muscles bulging in his short sleeve polo. “While I appreciate your thoroughness, perhaps your time would be better spent—”

“I’m not giving up.” Winn grabbed his almost empty can of soda and took a swig, grimacing as the final sip of Dr. Pepper went down warm and flat. “I’ll search every device in this room a thousand times if I have to. I owe Maggie and Alex.”

“They wouldn’t want you wasting time on a lost cause, Agent Schott.”

“It’s not a lost cause. It can’t be.” Winn threw his can into the recycling bin, and it toppled off the existing heap and onto the floor.

J’onn gripped the back of the chair across from him, his frown morphing into a scowl. “I understand Jamie has been asking for you. Why don’t you take a break? Visit with her a while?”

Winn stared at the devices littering the black table. J’onn had offered him a team to go through everything, but Winn didn’t trust anyone but himself for this task. He’d barely scratched the surface, and sooner or later the NCPD or some government agency would come calling about their unlawful seizure of Lord Tech’s property.

“I’ll check on her in a bit. Kara’s with her now, anyway.”

“Winn…”

“I can’t look her in the eye. Not until I find the man responsible for putting her mother in that pod.” Winn disconnected one tablet and plugged another into his laptop. He swore as the data scrolled past. Another dead end.

“Jamie doesn’t need justice. She needs her family. She needs you.”

Winn would give anything for a night with Jamie and Maggie on the couch, watching Disney movies and demolishing a big bowl of popcorn together. J’onn was right, they were his family, and he damn well wouldn’t let Maxwell Lord get away with hurting them.

“Later,” Winn promised, meaning it. “Soon as I’m done with this stack.”

J’onn pursed his lips, but he didn’t argue further. “Since you smell like you haven’t left this room in at least a day, you should know Eliza is in Alex’s lab.”
Winn sniffed his sweater before his head bobbed up in surprise. “Eliza Danvers? You think she can help?”

“Alex and her mother are formidable scientists. Put them together on a cause this important? I wouldn’t bet against them.”

A tired smile flitted over Winn’s lips. “Good call, Papa Bear.”

“I told you to stop calling me that.”

“You love it.” Winn’s grin twitched wider as he detached the iPad and set it aside, grabbing another.

J’onn sighed and settled his hands on his hips. “Maybe we’re going about this wrong. You admired Max once.”

“Don’t remind me.”

“What if you could channel that hero worship into something useful? Stop trying to find a needle in a haystack, Agent Schott. Start thinking like your idol.”

“Former. Former idol.” Winn set the iPad down. “You’re talking about profiling. We have agents for that. Trained and experienced agents.”

“And they’re working on the problem, but none know Max like you. He’s on-planet. Where would you go if you were Maxwell Lord? Where would you hide? How would you hide?”

A dozen ideas sprang to mind. Winn didn’t consider why it was easy to get into an evil bastard’s head like Max. If being the son of the Toyman helped him this once, he’d take it. “I might have a few guesses.”

***

Jamie’s view from the command center gave her a direct line of sight into Alex’s lab, and she took advantage, her pencil darting over the page. Kara snuck a peek over her shoulder, smiling when she noticed Eliza was the subject this time, her face haloed by blonde hair in marked contrast to Alex’s dark waves.

They were bent over their microscopes, occasionally scratching incomprehensible notes or muttering to themselves.

They’d been at it for three days.

Kara had seen them like this many times, first with Eliza and Jeremiah and now with Eliza and Alex. As unsettled as their relationship sometimes was, Kara wondered if mother and daughter realized how much they had in common when lost in their science.

They were Maggie’s best hope, and Kara sighed quietly, wishing there was more she could do than playing babysitter.

Watching from the sidelines sucked. No wonder Alex got cranky about it.

Aware of her presence, Jamie leaned back to study her upside down. Worry swam in her dark eyes, and she looked pale, as if a week away from the sun had been months. “They’re working so hard. Do you…” Jamie swallowed. “Do you think they’ll be able to make Mom better?”

Caught between the desire to reassure and the knowledge false hope would be devastating, Kara
hesitated. “You know, Alex is a superhero too. She’s saved me from worse situations.”

“Alex saved you?” A note of disbelief colored Jamie’s question, and she swung around in her chair. “But you’re Supergirl.”

“Even Supergirl needs help sometimes. I flew into space once, and without gravity, I wasn’t able to fly back down. Alex, well, she came and got me. She saved me because she… always finds a way.” Kara glanced over the back of Jamie’s chair at the determined set of Alex’s shoulders, her clenched jaw. “She’ll find a way to help Maggie. Alex won’t stop until she does.”

“I hope so.” Jamie opened her arms wide, and Kara drew her in, giving her a big hug.

A flurry of activity caught Kara’s eye. Alex snatched her notebook and ran to a whiteboard, drawing Eliza from her work. Numbers and formulas soon filled the board, and Eliza corrected and modified components as Alex scribbled.

Kara eavesdropped as she set Jamie back in the chair.

“It could work,” Eliza said. “But the calculations have to be precise. There’s no way to test it.”

Alex nodded. “We only have one shot. If this fails, she’ll…” Her words choked off, and Eliza rested her hand on Alex’s shoulder in wordless comfort.

“We’ll make it count, then. What do we need to do?”

Filling a test tube rack with samples from refrigerated storage, Alex hunched over a table and Eliza joined her. Kara suspected they were in for a long night, but maybe their hard work was paying off.

“Jamie, why don’t we get out of here for a while? There’s a park down the street, and I happen to know the guy who runs the ice cream truck. He always gives me extra large scoops.”

Jamie hesitated, clearly torn.

“It’s okay.” Kara reached out her hand. “Alex will call me if anything changes. I can get us back in a heartbeat.”

With one last, long look at Alex, Jamie nodded and took Kara’s hand. “Are we gonna fly there?”

“You want to?”

Jamie shrugged, but she seemed excited by the prospect. “Sure. I don’t think Mom would like it though.”

Kara swept Jamie up in her arms. This she could do to help. “I won’t tell if you won’t.”

***

Eliza would never forget the first time she’d laid eyes on Maggie Sawyer.

Maggie had been injured and barely conscious in Kara’s arms, but Eliza had known who she was with no introductions. Alex had described her to perfection, and when Maggie managed a meager smile at Alex’s concern, her dimples were a dead giveaway. Alex had nearly tripped over her own feet at the sight of them.

What Eliza wouldn’t give to see one of those lovely smiles now.
Alone in the medbay, she studied Maggie through the frosted glass of the stasis pod. The medical team would arrive soon and so would Alex. In the next half hour, Maggie would either live or die. As much faith as Eliza had in the solution they’d developed over the last two days and nights, the choice was ultimately up to Maggie.

Eliza tucked her hands into the pockets of her lab coat, having come to say her piece just in case. “I knew you and Alex got engaged too soon, but I could hardly begrudge you the same reckless abandon as me and Jeremiah. And you were so good together. No one ever made Alex as happy as you did.”

Unnerved by the unnatural stillness of Maggie’s features, Eliza sighed and looked away. “I’m not happy you kept Jamie a secret from her, but as a mother, I understand why you did. But if you love Alex even half as much as I think you still do, I hope you’ll give her another chance when this is over. She loves you so much, and I know she’ll love Jamie as her own.”

Eliza inched closer. “I’ve prayed for you two,” she whispered. “Prayed for some kind of middle ground you both could reach. Jamie is that middle ground, Maggie. The three of you could be a family now, and I couldn’t ask for a better daughter-in-law or more adorable grandchild.”

She set one hand on the glass, wincing at the chill. “Don’t give up, Maggie. You’re loved, and needed, and when we start to revive you, you better fight like hell to come back to us, you hear me?”

“Who are you?”

Startled, Eliza gasped, whirling to find Jamie behind her. She was clutching a worn, stuffed rabbit by one foot, her brown eyes both curious and wary. As much as she’d craved the opportunity, Eliza had yet to speak to her. She thought Jamie was with Alex, learning the details of what they were about to attempt.

“Hi,” Eliza breathed, awed by the child in the flesh. She extended her hand. “I’m Eliza.”

Jamie seemed pleased to be treated as an adult, and she shook Eliza’s hand with a firm grip. “Jamie.”

“I know. Alex has told me all about you.”

“You know Alex?” Jamie perked up, shuffling closer in her Supergirl shoes. Eliza’s heart melted at the sight.

“She’s my daughter.”

“Wow. You raised Alex and Supergirl?”

“Um…” Caught flat-footed, Eliza blinked, unsure how to respond.

“She did,” Alex drawled, coming to the rescue as she swept into the medbay. She shot Eliza a weak smirk. “I thought you were drawing with Kara in the break room. I’ve been looking for you,” she told Jamie.

“Kara had a super emergency. Agent Vasquez was showing me the armory.”

Alex’s left eyebrow quirked sharply, and Eliza snickered a little, watching them with a bittersweet smile.

“She did, huh?” Alex knelt in front of Jamie. “Listen, can we go somewhere and talk?”
Jamie stared at her for a tense moment, her small shoulders stiffening. Her sudden fear was palpable, expanding to fill the room. “About Mom?”

“Yeah.” Alex’s hand trembled when she reached up to tuck a lock of Jamie’s dark hair behind her ear. “Walk with me?”

Alex held out her hand, and Jamie hesitantly took it.

“We’ll be back in a few minutes.”

There was a world of pain in Alex’s beautiful brown eyes, and Eliza hoped what they were about to do would alleviate it rather than make it a million times worse.

“Take your time, sweetie.”

***

Her hands wouldn’t stop shaking.

Jamie had to feel the tremble in Alex’s fingers. She was clutching them tight, almost too tight, with her above-average strength, but Alex didn’t mind the pain. It forced her mind to think about other things.

Not Maggie. Not about her odds or the million and a half things that could go wrong when they started to revive her.

“Do you live here?”

The unexpected question distracted her for a split second, and Alex’s foot caught the next step. She gripped the rail to keep from tripping as they left the medbay behind. Something about the Sawyer girls had a propensity to make her forget how to walk.

“Uh… no. I have an apartment a few blocks from here. Why?”

“You never leave. You’ve been here the whole time Maggie’s been sick.” Jamie looked up at her with those soulful brown eyes that saw too much. The tips of the ears on her stuffed rabbit scraped the stairs as they ascended.

“I can’t leave your mom. I need to stay close, to just… be here. Does that makes sense?”

Jamie nodded, her features pensive as they reached the landing pad and stepped outside.

Fresh air washed over them as the doors opened. The muggy morning was a welcome respite from the persistent chill in the lab and medbay, but Alex was still cold. If she failed to bring Maggie back, she was terrified she might never be warm again.

The doors closed behind them, and Alex scooped Jamie into her arms, settling her against her hip. Jamie wasn’t an infant by any stretch, and her weight pulled at Alex’s muscles, but Alex had enough conditioning to support her for a spell.

“What’s wrong?” Jamie wrapped her arms around Alex’s neck and her legs around Alex’s waist, hooking her ankles on the other side.

Alex struggled for words to explain what was about to happen.

“Am I going to lose both my moms?”
Alex’s heart clenched, and she tightened her hold before brushing her lips over Jamie’s temple. “Not if I can help it. I love Maggie more than anything, okay? I won’t let her go without a hell… a heck of a fight.”

Jamie tucked herself against Alex’s body.

“Here’s the thing,” Alex said as they watched a stunning sunrise spread further over the city, glinting off steel and glass. “We found a way to make Maggie better.”

“Yeah?” Jamie sounded skeptical.

“Yeah. It’s just… there are risks. Some serious ones.” Alex didn’t want to sugar coat things. Jamie was too perceptive, and if things went badly...

“So Maggie might die?”

Alex took a shallow breath at the mere thought. “She could. Or the remaining drugs in her system might cause damage to her heart and brain.”

Jamie lapsed into silence, and Alex continued to hold her, ignoring the growing burn in her arms.

“There’s no choice, is there?” Jamie guessed.

“No, there isn’t it. But I promise you, no matter what happens… You’re not alone. I’m here, all right?”

“Maggie said you would be.” Jamie leaned back, meeting Alex’s eyes again. She studied her for a silent, intense moment, and Alex endured her scrutiny without complaint. “What happens if Mom gets better?”

“What do you mean?”

“Are you going to leave her again? Will I not see you anymore?”

A tremulous smile quirked the corner of Alex’s mouth. “I’d like to come around and visit you both. Would that be okay?”

Jamie sniffled and gradually nodded. “You have to promise though.”

“Promise what?”

“You have to make her happy. No more making her sad.”

“Deal,” Alex whispered, and Jamie reached out to wipe a tear from Alex’s cheek.

“You’ll save her, Alex. I know you will. You’re a badass.”

Alex huffed out a hurting laugh and pulled Jamie into a hug. “So how about it? What do you say we go wake up your mom?”

Jamie’s small body drew in a shaky breath. “Okay.”

***

A soft beep filtered through the heavy blackness. Repetitive and insistent, the sound wouldn’t let her rest. Her brow furrowed with annoyance, and pain unexpectedly rippled through her muscles, a
hundred minor aches and agonies.

There was a warm, calloused hand holding hers, an anchor in a storm of stimuli. She would recognize those calluses anywhere. They’d skimmed her cheeks, slid up her thighs, burned themselves into her memory and soul. She missed them, the rough with the soft, the heat behind both.

Forcing her eyes open, Maggie squinted into a harsh light above. The air smelled of bleach, the sheets and blankets covering her reeking of it. Her first thought was a hospital, but when she detected the subtler scent of Alex’s shampoo, everything came roaring back.

Blackwell. The warehouse. The seductive thrall of the Rush cascading through her veins. Her last anguished thoughts of Jamie and Alex, thinking she would never see them again, never see them together.

Maggie turned her head, and the monitor stuttered as her heart skipped a beat. Alex was by her side, her forehead resting in the crook of her arm. All Maggie could see was a mess of auburn hair, and she fought sore muscles and a tangle of wires and tubes to reach across her body and run her fingers through it.

Alex stirred, taking a deep breath and angling toward her like it was the most natural thing in the world.

Jesus, she missed this. Touching Alex, waking next to her every morning and breathing her in. She couldn’t believe she still had a chance to have that back.

Alex lifted her head, her eyes glazed and rimmed with red. She blinked then slid up in her chair, her senses sharpening.

“Sleeping on the job, Danvers?” Maggie croaked, cracking a weak, chapped smile.

“Maggie…” Alex whispered her name like a benediction. Her own smile sprang to her lips, tenuous and hopeful. “Hey, you.”

“Hey.” Echoes of another time in this very room, when their roles had been reversed, made Maggie’s grin falter.

“You scared the hell out me, Sawyer.”

“Scared the hell out of me too.” Maggie’s gaze worshiped the tired angles of Alex’s face, but even exhausted, Alex was captivating. Her thumb stroked the back of Alex’s hand, still holding hers tight.

Alex did a visual sweep of the monitors before meeting Maggie’s eyes again. “How are you feeling?”

“Like I got hit by an 18-wheeler. Could be worse, I guess.”

“A lot worse,” Alex agreed in a hushed voice.

Maggie had no idea how long she’d been out, but even a day was enough to bring the two most important people in her life crashing into each other’s orbit. “Guess you know what I wanted to talk to you about over coffee, huh?”

They stared at each other for an uncertain moment, then Alex looked away and let go of Maggie’s hand.
Maggie winced at the loss of contact, the room growing colder as Alex withdrew her affection and warmth. She wanted to reach for her, but she didn’t dare.

“She’s just like you. Smart. Perceptive. Beautiful...” Alex’s ensuing smile was brittle and broken, and Maggie despised herself for hurting her.

“Alex… I never meant to...”

“Jamie has barely left your side since she got here.”

Maggie closed her eyes at the news, hot tears welling up and spilling over. “She’s okay? Max promised not to hurt her...”

Alex said nothing, and Maggie’s eyes fluttered back open in alarm, but Alex looked angry rather than upset. “Max was there? When they...?”

Maggie nodded, noting the tension creeping into Alex’s jaw, the way her gaze hardened a second before she looked away again.

“Jamie’s fine.” Alex took another unsteady breath. “Blackwell is in custody with a few broken bones, but Max is in the wind. Winn is trying to track him down.”

“Did you break those bones?”

“No. I would have done worse. I guess Supergirl was more focused on saving you than not hurting him.”

“Kara came through in the clutch, huh?”

“Yeah.”

They fell into another long, uncomfortable silence.

“Do you hate me?” Maggie had to know.

Alex grimaced. “Maggie...”

“Mom?”

Maggie’s breath caught, her attention shifting to the doorway where Jamie stood beside a smiling Kara. She would swear Jamie seemed taller, older, but then the illusion vanished as Jamie sprinted toward the bed like the little girl she was, a wide, happy grin on her face.

“Mom!”

With effort, Maggie sat up as Jamie scrambled onto the bed and threw herself into Maggie’s arms. Maggie winced, her body sore and her daughter’s above average strength hurting more than a little, but she endured the pain gladly as she squeezed her back.

“Hey, kiddo.” Maggie buried her face in Jamie’s hair, half laughing, half sobbing at the chance to hold her again. She’d thought that last hug in their kitchen was all she would ever get. “You called me mom,” she teased, leaning back to palm Jamie’s face despite the IV in her right hand.

“Is that okay?” Matching tears swam in Jamie’s dark eyes, but she kept grinning from ear-to-ear, her dimples deep.
“Is that okay? Are you kidding?” Maggie swept Jamie’s hair behind her ears before kissing her on the head. “I love it, and I love you. I was so scared I wouldn’t see you again.”

“Me too, but Alex saved you. She wouldn’t let you go.”

They both glanced toward the door where Alex had retreated to Kara’s side. Kara’s hand was on Alex’s shoulder, and Alex watched their reunion with a pained smile. She took a ragged breath, and without a word, she abruptly turned, brushing past Kara and disappearing into the hall.

Maggie swallowed hard, aching to follow, to explain, to beg...

“She’ll be okay,” Kara promised, coming closer. “Give her a little time.”

Maggie wasn’t convinced, but she nodded. “Thank you. For coming to get me.”

“Sorry I wasn’t there a few seconds sooner.”

“Even if you’d been a few seconds too late, you came for me. That’s all that matters. Thank you,” Maggie said again, more grateful than Kara would ever realize.

Kara patted Maggie’s leg through her blanket and winked at Jamie. “I’ll check on Alex. Get some rest. Both of you.”

Jamie began babbling as soon as Kara left. “I missed you. I missed you every day. And you were right. Alex is awesome. And her mom is cool too.”

Exhausted and heart heavy, Maggie sank into her pillows, taking Jamie with her. Her gaze darted back to the empty doorway. “You think Alex is awesome, huh?”

“And she’s so pretty. I drew you a bunch of pictures of her while you slept.” Jamie wiggled into a more comfortable position, careful to avoid Maggie’s IV and the wires connecting her to the monitors. She yawned and laid her head on Maggie’s shoulder before continuing her endless list of all things Alex. Jamie sounded smitten, and a flicker of a smile crossed Maggie’s lips.

All she had wanted was for Jamie to like Alex, and for Alex to meet Jamie. Why did the universe seem so determined to bring them together only to keep ripping them apart? Maggie would give anything to go back, to make that coffee date and make all this right.

“Now that you’re awake, does this mean we’ll be a family? You, me, and Alex?” Jamie asked before yawning again.

“I don’t know. Things are still… complicated, kiddo.”

“But you love her, and she loves you. Isn’t that enough?” Jamie asked innocently.

Love hadn’t been enough the first time, and with so much hurt between them now...

Maggie blinked away more tears, resting her cheek on Jamie’s soft hair. “I don’t know,” she said again in a whisper, too afraid to admit the likely truth.

She and Alex were out of chances.
Chapter Notes

Light trigger warning here. Maggie did the drugs, now she's doing the withdraw. Be warned.

Thanks to Dani for the awesome banner! Like the original Twitter post.
Mist spattered the DEO’s windows, the late afternoon skies having turned stormy and gray to suit Alex’s mood. Sucking in deep, gasping breaths, she tangled her hands in her hair, balling them into fists as she fled, replaying the moment she’d just witnessed. That she’d been terrified would never happen.

Maggie and Jamie. Together.

She had visualized their reunion hundreds of times, but nothing prepared her for the love between them in person. The unbridled joy in Maggie’s eyes when Jamie had called her mom...

Alex had glimpsed that joy when they were together, but never quite so radiant, so euphoric. Maggie
had barely spared her a glance while she soaked in Jamie’s presence.

*You’re all the family I need.*

Maggie’s words echoed in Alex’s ears, a cruel taunt of the love and devotion she had cast aside. Jamie was the family Maggie needed now, and the hope Alex had cultivated through the past dark days dwindled. Maybe she was deluding herself to think they could recover from the pain they’d put each other through. Maybe her assumptions about their coffee date had been wrong from the start.

Maybe there was no place for her in the family she’d always wanted.

Alex slammed through a set of double doors and into the break room. The agents eating an early dinner exchanged glances and left, slipping past Kara as she followed Alex inside.

“Hey.” Kara’s voice was gentle when she caught Alex’s arm and tried to wrap her in a hug, but Alex pushed away, unable to hold still.

“I…” Alex couldn’t go on, her words caught beneath her tears.

“What’s wrong?” Kara sounded genuinely confused. “Maggie’s awake. I thought you’d be happy.”

“I am,” Alex choked out. “It’s just… it was too much. Seeing them like that. It was too much.”

“Oh,” Kara breathed. “I guess that could overwhelm you a bit.”

Alex scoffed.

“Or a lot,” Kara amended. She came closer as Alex crossed her arms and paced.

“Did you see the way Jamie lit up when she saw Maggie? The look on Maggie’s face when Jamie called her mom?”

“I saw.” Kara’s smile was soft and hesitant.

“They’ve become a family, the family I always wanted, except…” Alex drew in a stuttering breath, “they did it without me. There’s no room for me.”

This time Kara caught Alex and didn’t let her pull away. “No. Maggie wanted to meet for coffee. She planned to tell you about Jamie so you could try again.”

“What if it all in my head, Kara? What if Maggie wanted to tell me about Jamie, but didn’t want me back?”

“Alez, that’s–”

“I hurt her so much. Why should she let me back into her life? Trust me around her kid?”

Kara gave Alex a small shake. “Stop doing this to yourself. Go talk to her. Ask her what she was going to tell you instead of obsessing over ‘what ifs.’”

“She’s with Jamie. They need time...”

“Maggie needs you.” Kara dipped her head to catch Alex’s eye. “If there’s one thing I’ve learned about Maggie Sawyer the past two months, it’s she has a bigger heart than I ever imagined. She loves you—she loves you both. She looked devastated when you left.”
“I don’t know.”

“I understand. You’re exhausted and not thinking clearly. But trust me. There’s room for you, you just have to claim it. Go talk to Maggie.”

Kara sounded so sure, and her confidence bolstered Alex’s hopes. She let out a long sigh and shook her arms out. “I wouldn’t be intruding?”

Rolling her eyes, Kara spun Alex and shoved her toward the door.

“Okay, okay. Lay off the superstrength.” A nervous laugh rippled from Alex’s chest, but it released some of her tension.

Winn blocked their path as they came through the door, his eyes bloodshot and raw. Alex didn’t think anyone could look worse than she did, but Winn gave her a run for the money.

“What’s wrong?”

“I got a lead. On Max.”

Alex and Kara froze.

“But you, you gotta go now. Like right now. There’s not much time. If I’m right, he’s going to touch down in Argentina in half an hour.” Winn glanced at his watch. “Make that 28 minutes.”

“Where’s he going?” Alex’s hope for a moment with Maggie and Jamie fled, anger rushing in to fill the void.

“I don’t know. I haven’t cracked his aliases yet. But I think he has an hour layover in Buenos Aires. You can beat him there if you go now.”

“You think? Maggie just woke up, Winn. I don’t need you to think, I need you to know.”

“Max is covering his tracks, deploying decoys to use points and credit cards for flights and hotels and…” Winn shook his head. “But this time someone used his points to reserve a private, luxury lounge at Ezeiza International. It’s him, Alex. I know it’s him.”

Alex nodded at the determination in his voice. “Give me two minutes to grab my gear.” She pivoted toward the locker room only to have Kara grab her arm.

“I’ll get Max. You stay here for Maggie. You need to talk, and she’ll start to go into withdrawal—”

“No, Kara, Max is mine.”

“Alex!”

“He was there when Blackwell tried to kill her. Max was there. No way that sonofabitch slips away again. If he finds out Maggie is alive…”

Kara didn’t look happy, but she clenched her jaw and nodded in resignation. “I’ll fly you.”

Alex turned to Winn. “Scramble a jet. Have a team meet us and let J’onn know where we’re going.” She paused, swallowing past the lump in her throat to deliver her final instructions. “And… and tell Maggie… tell her I’m sorry. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“Be careful!” Winn called after them.
The lumbersome 787 touched down with a heavy lurch. The weight of a plane full of tourists and their overstuffed bags was nothing like the sleek, private jets Max typically enjoyed. Traveling coach was not his idea of a good time, and he throttled his impatience while waiting to taxi to the gate. At least he had the aisle seat. He snatched his case from under the row in front of him and stood, blocking in the passengers across from him.

In a few hours, Max could stop running and continue his work while the heat died down. From the moment of Blackwell’s arrest, he’d taken to the air and crisscrossed the globe, changing aliases at every turn. It kept the feds chasing their tails while his associates readied his lab and compound for an extended stay.

No doubt Alex was on the warpath, crazy with grief. A pang of remorse made Max’s stomach ache, but there was little help for it. Sawyer had had to die. She’d known too much.

People shuffled forward, and Max side-stepped a woman pulling her backpack from the overhead compartment. Sneering, he hurried off the plane and strode toward the lounge awaiting him. It was an oasis of calm amid a hellish day, before he caught a private jet for the final leg of his trip.

Max slipped inside, finding a snifter of Louis XIII cognac waiting beside an Eames leather lounger. He picked up the Waterford glass, and the late afternoon light refracted off the crystal and sent a dizzying prism of color across the far wall. Reminded of Alex, he smirked as he sat and took his first sip.

A few minutes later, the heavy security door slid open behind him with a quiet snick. Without bothering to turn, Max held up his glass and swirled the remainder of the contents. “Be a dear and top me off, will you?”

“Oh, I’ll do more than that,” a low, sultry voice purred. Max frowned, trying to shake off a sense of déjà vu.

The expensive cognac filled his glass to overflowing and splashed onto his arm, staining the white linen. The rest emptied into his lap.

“What the hell?” he snarled, jerking to his feet, slinging alcohol everywhere. He pivoted, ready to unleash hell, only to stop cold.

Alex.

The last time Alex had come for him wearing full combat gear, things had not ended well.

“Agent Danvers. Your pouring accuracy could use a little work.” Liquid dripped from Max’s pant leg and pooled in his shoes, but he hid his distaste behind a smarmy smile. “Where should I file the paperwork to get reimbursed for the thousand dollars of cognac you just wasted?”

“You won’t need money where you’re going.” The sweetness in her voice was knife-sharp.

Max chuckled and saluted Alex with his drink. “And where would that be? The charming hospitality of your alien prison again? I think not. You didn’t have grounds to hold me then and you don’t have grounds to hold me now.”

Alex didn’t reply to his taunt, but her grip on the decanter tightened, and Max half-expected it to shatter. One wrong word and she would explode, but that was his best option. Make a scene, draw
attention, get the masses to record him being led away beaten and bloodied. No way to sweep his disappearance under the rug then.

“I guess condolences are in order. It’s a shame about Detective Sawyer. Tragic way to die.” Max tsked, ignoring the chill that swept down his spine as Alex’s gaze hardened into something truly terrifying. “On the bright side, at least you didn’t get stuck playing the grieving widow at some pompous police ceremony. You dodged a bullet there.”

“You done?” Alex was still as stone. She didn’t even blink.

He’d break her. Max had every confidence. He just needed the perfect button to push, or to press this one harder. “You’re not a widow, but there is an orphan, right?”

Alex’s chin tipped up in defiance. Almost an afterthought, she placed the decanter on the small end table and took a menacing step toward him.

“How is little Jamie coping? You know about Jamie, I assume? Sawyer finally trust you with that secret?” Smug, Max sauntered closer to the danger, his soaked trousers clinging to his legs. “Your ex was quite the stud. Turned you on to girls. Sired a child with another woman. Maggie must have been a hell of a lay—”

Her hand whipped out, knocking the snifter from his grip. The glass shattered against the wall, alcohol splashing into his face and burning his nostrils.

“Keep her name out of your mouth,” Alex seethed.

Max braced for the blows, for the violence he was about to bring upon himself. “Must be tough, Alex, knowing if you’d married Maggie, you’d be a mother now. You’d have had the perfect, pretty little family. That was your dream, wasn’t it?” He stared directly into her eyes, enjoying the rage burning in those dark depths. “But you threw that away, didn’t you? You threw Maggie away, and that’s why she died like trash on a filthy warehouse floor.”

Alex slammed him against the wall with enough force to rattle Max’s bones. He winced, prepared for the first punch, but it never came. She smiled at him instead, the gesture far from reassuring.

“You know who really dodged a bullet, Max? You. Because if Maggie had died on that warehouse floor, we wouldn’t be having this discussion. You’d be dead.”

Fear stabbed through Max’s gut, and he searched Alex’s eyes for the lie. It wasn’t possible. He’d seen Blackwell inject a lethal dose of Rush into Sawyer’s veins before leaving the warehouse. Nobody survived that. Nobody. “You’re bluffing.”

“Am I?” Her left eyebrow rose in a perfect arch, the wicked smile never slipping from her lips. She leaned in, and he caught a whiff of gunpowder and chemicals. “You promised Maggie you wouldn’t kill Jamie, and that’s the only reason you get to live.”

His brain worked feverishly for a solution, a way out.

“You underestimated Maggie Sawyer, Max. Now you’ll spend the rest of your days regretting it.”

***

Kara fiddled with a corner of her cape, itching to get back to the DEO. They had been waylaid trying to leave the terminal, stopped by airport security and members of the Fuerzas Armadas de la República. Max must have had made friends with the locals if armed soldiers were part of their
Pissed at the delay, Alex went toe-to-toe with the biggest and baddest of them. Thankfully, J’onn arrived and stepped in to defuse the standoff before Alex had snapped and started a brawl.

That had been hours ago.

Now everyone was in a room screaming at each other. Kara had stopped listening, choosing to eye the planes departing into the night for destinations unknown as she stayed out of sight in Max’s private lounge. The carpet still reeked of alcohol.

A short time later the door swished open and Alex strode inside. Jaw clenched, she joined Kara at the windows, settling her hands on her hips as she stared at the lights speeding down the runway.

“You look like someone ran over your favorite leather jacket. What’s wrong?”

Kara’s superhearing picked up the sound of Alex’s teeth grinding. “Some government... lawyer... is throwing a wrench in things. They heard we were coming somehow and are refusing to let our jet land until they quote, ‘cross every t and dot every i’ where Max is concerned.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Do I look like I’m kidding?”

“Not particularly, no.” Kara released her cape and laced her fingers, unable to stop herself from fidgeting under Alex’s steely glare. “So now what?”

“I should have let you take care of him. You could have dumped his sorry ass somewhere over the Pacific.”

Kara winced. “If the government and lawyers are involved now, they would have been apoplectic if Supergirl had flown in and snatched Maxwell Lord from their airport. How long a delay are we talking?”

“Long enough. The transport is still twelve hours out. It’ll take us even longer to fly Max back. I’ll return to National City late tomorrow night. If I’m lucky.”

“Alex—”

“I know, Kara,” Alex growled, shutting down Kara’s arguments before she could make them. “Trust me, I know. Winn says Maggie is asleep again, but when she wakes up...”

“She’ll be in withdrawal.”

“Yeah.” Alex closed her eyes, muttering a curse under breath. “Mom and I... we minimized the side effects. The worst will be over in twelve hours, a day, tops, but until then, Maggie will have it rough.”

“Alex, you should be there. Maggie, and Jamie, will need you.”

“You don’t think I know that?” Alex snapped before burying her head in her hands. “I can’t stop screwing up when it comes to her. It’s like... my brain only half functions, and I do these stupid things. Things I don’t think through. Maggie will be in hell, and I won’t be there to help her through it.”

“You don’t have to stay. I can fly you back.”
“No, I…” Alex sighed. “I have to see this through. Max gave up his import operation. It’s located in Berisso, about an hour’s drive from here. We have to partner with the local authorities to shut it down. They’re expecting another shipment of Belamort tonight.”

“I can’t believe he told you,” Kara murmured, brow furrowing.

“He wanted to keep breathing.” Alex crossed her arms. “Max still owes me plenty of answers, but that’s a start.”

“Are we sure the Argentinian government will go for us interfering in their jurisdiction? They don’t seem happy we’re here.”

“Like I give a damn.”

“Alex, I can shut down Max’s side business and still have time to take you back to the DEO.”

“No. Maggie almost died for this, Kara. We have to do it by the book, just like she would. I’m not leaving anything to chance. No technicality for Max’s lawyers to exploit. No tiny crevice for Max to slither through. He’s going down and he’s staying down.”

“He’s not going to–”

“This case almost took her from me, Kara. I owe her this.”

Kara flattened her mouth into a fine line and shook her head. “You sure that’s it? This isn’t you hiding from your feelings? Staying away from Maggie until you can handle everything?”

Alex took a deep breath, and Kara braced for a nasty, defensive reply, but Alex caught her off guard.

“I came so close to losing her. I want to…” Alex fist her hand and pressed it to her lips before correcting herself, “I need to make someone pay for that. Do you understand?”

With a slow, resigned nod, Kara gave in. “You don’t trust me to handle this.”

“I trust you. I trust you with my life.” Alex’s voice wavered and broke. “If this were anyone else, I wouldn’t think twice, but it’s Maggie. It’s Maggie. If something were to happen and Max got away with it again? I’d never forgive myself.”

Kara sighed. “Rao, you’re stubborn.”

Alex didn’t dispute the claim. “There is something you can do.”

“Anything.”

“Go back and be there for her. Help look after Jamie and make sure Dr. Hamilton does everything she can to keep Maggie comfortable.”

“You know she will. So will Eliza. She adores Maggie.”

“I’d just… I’d feel better with you there. If I can’t be there, you’re the next best thing.”

Warmth bloomed in Kara’s chest at the sentiment, chasing away some of the heartache and doubts. “Be careful, Alex. And tell that lawyer to move his ass dotting those i’s and crossing those t’s or he’ll answer to Supergirl. I need my sister home, and so does the woman she loves.”

A ghost of a smile flitted over Alex’s lips before she hugged Kara with every ounce of strength in
her fragile human body. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

***

Cold fingers wrapped around her wrist, and Maggie jolted awake, grabbing someone’s hand and nearly wrenching the IV out of her own. Cursing, she fought the tangle of blankets, tubes, and wires tying her to the bed.


Maggie slammed her eyes shut against the harsh, artificial light in the medbay. Her skin slick and clammy, she shuddered, taking shallow breaths when her stomach threatened to revolt. With a groan, she curled in on herself, tendrils of nausea snaking up her throat.

“Easy, sweetheart. I’ll give you something for the queasiness, okay?”

Gritting her teeth, Maggie focused on her breathing, enduring several torturous minutes before the drugs flooded her system and she relaxed.

“I didn’t mean to startle you. Alex is the same way. I should have known better.”

“Alex?” Maggie croaked, cracking open her eyes again with caution.

“Winn got a lead on Max so she and J’onn went to Buenos Aires to bring him in. They left last night.” There was a hint of disapproval in Eliza’s tone.

Maggie nodded. It was a better explanation than Alex never wanted to see her again, at least. “Where’s Jamie?”

Eliza handed her a small cup full of ice chips. “Suck on those to settle your stomach.”

Maggie’s hands shook as they wrapped around the beige plastic and spooned some ice into her mouth. It tasted almost as good as top-shelf tequila under the circumstances. She rolled the frozen shards over her tongue, wetting her parched throat.

“Jamie is fine. Kara took her out for an early breakfast and to pick up more clothes.”

Another spoonful, and Maggie set the cup on the tray table before sinking into her pillows. Her reflection stared back at her in the medbay windows, and Maggie grimaced at her dark, glassy eyes and sallow skin. She was death warmed over.

An awkward, silent minute passed while Maggie collected her wits. Self conscious and acutely aware the woman who was almost her mother-in-law was hovering, Maggie searched for a benign topic. “So um… How long was I asleep?”

“Since we brought you out of stasis or since the warehouse?”

“Stasis?” Maggie blurted. That was new information. Wasn’t it? She tried to shake the fog blanketing her mind, but it persisted, along with a sense her nerves were jacked into an electric socket. Her whole body jangled, and Maggie glanced up at her IV bag, half expecting to find she was mainlining espresso.

“You’ve been asleep roughly another twelve hours. Kara first brought you to the DEO eight days
Eight days. She hadn’t been there for Jamie for eight damn days. Maggie wiped the slimy sweat off her forehead with the back of her wrist. “What’s wrong with me? Some kind of stasis hangover or something? I didn’t feel like this last night.”


Maggie stared at her as the dots connected. She should have recognized the symptoms. She’d seen them enough. “I’m in withdrawal.”

“I’m afraid so.”

Her breathing sped up, and Maggie’s hands clutched at the sheets. She’d interviewed dozens of strung-out victims, each willing to say anything, do anything for another fix, another fantasy. Some were so desperate they didn’t remember their own name.

One dose of Rush was all it took. Users got hooked and stayed hooked. Blackwell hadn’t killed her, but he’d condemned her all the same. There was no treatment. No way Dawson would let her stay on the force. No way anyone would trust her with...

“Oh God,” Maggie whispered in a strangled voice.

The stool creaked as Eliza got to her feet again and moved closer. “Maggie, listen to me. Your pulse and respiration are rising. You need to calm down, all right? Do you want a sedative?”

“Calm down? Do you know what Belamort does to a host?” Maggie snapped, tears threatening as her heart thudded in her ears. “They’ll take my badge, Eliza. They’ll take Jamie.”

Eliza grabbed her hand, holding on tight. “No one will take Jamie from you. Trust me, Maggie.”

Maggie shook her head, picturing the ravaged bodies in the hospital’s long-term care ward. The first victims were still there, still suffering, still craving, even after months.

“Okay, if you can’t trust me, trust Alex. You’re going to have a tough day, but in eight to ten hours you’ll start to feel like yourself again. We’ll do our best to alleviate your symptoms until then, but Alex took measures to reduce your dependence on the Belamort. She made sure it wouldn’t hold sway over you long term, okay?”

“Yeah?” Maggie despised how weak she sounded. How scared. God damn Blackwell and Lord for doing this to her.

“You think my Alexandra would leave anything to chance when it comes to you? We developed new treatments to combat the overdoses, a means to remedy your addiction to the drug.”

Maggie clung to Eliza until her panic ebbed. A soft, loving kiss on her temple and long fingers drifting through her hair soothed Maggie further. She’d missed Eliza and their deepening relationship, missed being treated like someone’s daughter again.

One more thing Maggie had lost when she’d left her life with Alex behind. She didn’t dare hope she could get it all back. Not after this.

“Should I call Kara and have her bring Jamie back?”

“No. She doesn’t need to see me like this.”
“I spoke with Jamie before they left. She is prepared for your symptoms and quite determined to stay with you. I don’t think even Supergirl could keep her away.”

A sad, shaky smile came to Maggie’s lips. God, that kid had become everything to her. Jamie’s devotion healed fissures in Maggie’s soul she thought no one could touch, not even Alex. Images uncoiled, hallucinations so vivid, so solid, Maggie doubted her own reality. For a long moment, she fought to keep them in. “I imagined them, you know? On the Rush? Jamie… Alex…”

Eliza stepped back, but she didn’t let Maggie go, tilting her head to make eye contact. “That’s what Rush does. It taps into your subconscious hopes and dreams. Makes them real.”

“So real.” Maggie remembered the seductive heat slithering through her veins, the way it swallowed up her terror and grief and submerged her in rapture. She shivered with want, aching to experience it again.

“Want to talk about it?”

Maggie ran her forefinger along her bottom lip, weighing the offer. “I’ve heard stories from Gold Rush addicts. They fantasize they can fly like Superman or land the girl of their dreams. Me? I saw Christmas Eve.”

Her lower lip began to tremble.

“I don’t know where we were, but it was snowing, and it was late. There was a beautiful tree dripping with white lights in the corner. Wrapping paper all over the floor where Jamie had demolished her presents. We had just hung stockings, laughing at some dumb joke Alex made while we ate Santa’s cookies. It was just the three of us, huddled on a couch under this old, plaid blanket in front of a fire so real I could feel it on the soles of my feet.”

Maggie drew a ragged breath. “It sounds so simple and domestic, but for the first time in my life… I was content. It was perfect. Perfect. I wanted to live in that moment. Die in that moment. We were a family…”

Eliza started to say more, but the patter of little feet reached them, heralding Jamie’s return.

“You’re awake again!” Jamie hurried over and attempted to hop onto the bed. Eliza caught her, giving her a boost.

Maggie was quick to wipe her eyes and manage a meager smile before Jamie hugged her. “Hey, you.”

Eliza stroked a hand down Jamie’s back while the other cupped Maggie’s shoulder, drawing Maggie’s attention back to her. “That moment wasn’t a fantasy, Maggie. It was a goal.” She kissed Jamie on the crown of her head, and with a last, affectionate pat on Maggie’s arm, Eliza left them alone.

***

Her phone buzzed, drawing Eliza’s focus from the slide beneath the microscope. She eyed the device resting on the countertop, debating if she was in the right mindset to talk.

There was little doubt who was calling. Eliza took her time stripping off her gloves and tossing them in the trash, letting Alex stew. With a glower for the photo of her daughter on the caller I.D., Eliza scooped up the phone before it switched to voicemail.
“Finally,” she greeted.

There was a protracted, uncomfortable silence on the end of the line before Alex cleared her throat. “How is she?”

Eliza stepped away from the agents behind her, angling for a shred of privacy. “You would know if you were here.”

“Mom, don’t. Max is in custody and his import operation is ashes. We’re navigating the last few extradition protocols now and then I’ll be on my way. Just... tell me how Maggie’s doing.”

From her vantage point by the windows, Eliza saw Kara leave, blasting off into the cloudless sky for a super emergency. Kara’s defense of her sister has done little to assuage Eliza’s frustration with Alex’s choices. “I don’t understand why you had to go. Kara and J’onn could have handled Max. Maggie needs you.”

Alex’s breath hitched, then Eliza heard footfalls as Alex moved from one location to another. A gust of wind whipped over the receiver, and she assumed Alex stepped outside. “How bad is it? The withdrawal?”

“Not good. Dr. Hamilton and I are managing her symptoms as best we can, but Maggie is miserable. And she’s scared, Alex. Maggie is worried she’s an addict now, that she’ll lose Jamie.”

Alex hissed out a curse. “That’s not going to happen. Today will be ugly, but from here on any desire Maggie has for Belamort should be minimal. In a few weeks, the drug likely won’t cross her mind at all.”

“She has more to worry about than physical effects. The psychological impact the Rush inflicts can be just as debilitating. What she lived under the drug’s influence might be harder for Maggie to move past, especially if…” Eliza bit back the rest of what she wanted to say.

“Especially if what?” Alex pressed. “Did Maggie tell you what she saw on Rush?”

“She did.”

“Do I want to know?”

“It’s not my place to share. Ask Maggie yourself when you find the courage.”

“Mom—”

“You ran, Alex. You weren’t ready to deal with the reality of Maggie and Jamie, so you ran.”

“Max hurt her,” Alex ground out. “And he has unlimited funds to hire every mercenary in the solar system to try again if he found out she was alive. I’m here so I can personally put him in a cell. Make sure he never touches her again. I’m where I have to be.”

Eliza heard the anguish and remembered how Alex always had to make the hard decisions. Mollified somewhat, she softened her stance. “Fine, but promise me. Promise me you’ll talk this out with her, Alexandra.”

“I promise. And you’re right. Part of me got overwhelmed by the sight of them together. I needed a minute to process, to get my head on straight, but then Winn, and Max, and everything happened so fast...”
Maggie wasn’t the only one who was miserable. Notes of regret and frustration were heavy in Alex’s voice.

“You can’t keep running from her,” Eliza said.

“I won’t. I swear. When I get back, Maggie is my sole focus. I’ll be there every second she’ll let me. Okay?”

Tempted to remind Alex the worst would be over by then, Eliza decided there was no point pouring salt in the wound. “I’m not the one you need to convince.”

Alex swallowed, saying nothing for several moments. When she spoke again, she sounded at the end of her tether. “I have to go. It looks like we’re cleared to take off. I’ll be home in about fifteen hours.”

“Have a safe flight, sweetie.” Eliza disconnected before Alex could say more. She was being too hard on her, but damn it, Alex was not making this easy.

***

Alex stalked the cabin. Her lean frame bowed with fatigue, she prowled the interior of the jet in search of vulnerabilities.

Max was restrained in back, surrounded by four armed agents. While J’onn wouldn’t put anything past him, Max had few options for escape. Alex needed rest, but she stayed on the move, like she would drown under the weight of the world if she stopped swimming.

He didn’t need to read her mind to know who occupied her thoughts. Now that Max was in custody, Alex both dreaded and longed to reunite with Maggie, stewing over the heavy talk they needed to have and soon.

Alex passed him again, agitation rolling off her in waves. J’onn snagged her utility belt, yanking her back with little effort and into the seat beside him. She fell more than sat, shooting him a withering glare that might have been intimidating if it hadn’t been accompanied by a pronounced pout.

“I need to check the perimeter,” she huffed.

“You’re barely on your feet, Agent Danvers, and you’ve checked the perimeter. By my estimations, you’ve checked it thirty-three times.”

Alex dropped her head back against the seat. She was operating on sheer cussedness now, and it was both exasperating and endearing.

“Rest, Alex.”

“When Max is secure in a cell at the DEO.”

“We have another seven hours until that happens. When was the last time you slept?”

“Sir–”

“You want me to make it an order?” J’onn quirked an eyebrow when Alex scowled. “If you won’t sleep, then do something productive at least. Out with it.”

A frown flitted over Alex’s lips. She glanced toward the back of the plane, checking on Max by rote. “Out with what?”
“You’ve ranted at your sister. Railed at Agent Schott. It’s my turn to endure your ire over Jamie.”

There was a wealth of pain in her brown eyes when they met his again, but Alex shook her head. “Forget it.”

“I hurt you. While I never intended to, I suspected that would be the outcome of my actions. I am sorry.”

Her shoulders rose and fell with a weary sigh. “There would have been no secrets to keep if I hadn’t…” Alex bit her lip, staring at the floor with enough intensity to burn a hole through it if she possessed her sister’s abilities. “Maggie once told me, the first time I really messed up, that I got one. One more chance. I blew it. I blew it to hell and back.”

“Alex—”

“Yeah, you hurt me,” she confessed, “and I’m angry. But I brought this on myself. I can’t blame you for where I ended up. Mom said Maggie is miserable, and scared, and I’m not there. I’m here. I let my ego and my anger get the better of me instead of facing my damn feelings. I let Maggie down. Again.”

J’onn studied her. The direct approach wouldn’t work as long as she was caught in a vicious cycle of self-loathing. Alex had been coddled long enough, he decided. Time for a change in tactics. “Fine. I know better than to talk you out of wallowing when you’re like this. Waste of breath.”

She bristled at his altered approach. “Well… you could try a little.”

“Why bother?” J’onn crossed his arms, affecting an air of boredom. “Either you pull your head out of your ass and do everything in your power to win Maggie back, or you keep doing… this. How’s that working out for you?”

Alex opened her mouth to defend herself only to snap it closed.

“You should be celebrating. The one thing that pushed you apart is no longer an issue. You still love each other. Maggie is alive and on the mend. And yet you’d rather pout over your mistakes than embrace the possibilities.”

“Kara pouts. I don’t pout,” Alex argued, despite evidence to the contrary, and J’onn struggled to suppress a faint smirk.

“Could have fooled me.”

Her scowl returned in full measure.

“So what is it going to be? Surrender, or fight to come home to your family every night?”

Alex’s breath caught.

“You’re family. Has a nice ring to it, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah, but—”

“Do what you’re damn good at, Alex. Fight. Don’t give up on the future you want with Maggie.”

Alex slouched in her seat, thinking over what he said so loudly J’onn heard every word. Half an hour passed before she shifted and laid her head on his shoulder. Alex offered her hand,
palm up, and J’onn laced their fingers. His love for her swelled, sweet and strong, as powerful as anything he’d felt for his own flesh and blood. Maybe he’d walk her down the aisle yet.

“Thanks for the kick in the ass.”

“My pleasure.”

***

“Oops.” Kara pivoted as she walked into the medbay, turning her back as Maggie tossed on a fresh t-shirt with zero concern for modesty. Not that Kara could blame her. If she had abs that defined, she’d show them off too. She cleared her throat and scratched her eyebrow, staring at the setting sun through the windows.

“You can relax, Kara. I’m decent.”

Kara glanced over her shoulder to confirm before facing her again with a frown. Maggie sat on the edge of her bio bed, wrestling on a pair of socks. Besides her heather gray t-shirt, she’d also changed into the jeans Kara fetched for her several nights ago. “Going somewhere?”

“I’ve stopped sweating like a pig. Not sure my legs will hold me up in the shower yet, but I can wear something other than these flimsy gowns.” Maggie picked up the article of clothing in question and flung it at the stasis pod. It landed on the glass and slipped off, fluttering to the floor.

“Got cabin fever?”

Maggie’s glare was almost as impressive as Alex’s, but Kara sauntered closer, unintimidated.

“How about the rest of your symptoms? Any better?”

Forced to take a break after only one sock, Maggie shrugged and rested her hands on her knees. “Nausea is gone, thank God. They took the IV out fifteen minutes ago, but only because I threatened to rip it out myself. Jamie wanted nothing to do with needles so she went off to pester Winn, I guess.”

Kara crossed her arms over her crest. “You’re not giving Eliza trouble, are you?”

“Why? You gonna spank me for being mean to your mom?” Maggie shook her head when Kara arched an eyebrow. “Sorry. These symptoms are leaving me… short-tempered.”

“You don’t say.”

Maggie snorted. “I’m going stir crazy, Kara. I’m ready to climb the walls in here. My mind spins and spins over my mistakes, over everything I should have said to Alex before everything went to hell. And while I’d die for Jamie, one more game of **Chutes and Ladders** I might snap and kill someone.”

Kara gave her a sympathetic grin. “Speaking of Alex… she’s on her way back with Max. We shut down his import operation in Argentina. Your task force was a complete success. Congratulations.”

Maggie absorbed the news, but her features remained neutral, revealing nothing of what she was thinking. “I heard, but I wouldn’t have stopped a damn thing without you and the DEO.”

“There’s nothing wrong with a little inter-agency cooperation. You and your team did outstanding work, Maggie. The case against Blackwell is airtight, and we learned about Max because of you.”

Kara leaned against the bed. “You should be happy. They’ll be no more Gold Rush overdoses. No
more addicts.”

“Just me. I get to be the last, huh?”

Kara blanched at the misstep, picturing the withering glare Cat used to shoot her when she said or did something particularly dumb. “Give me a second to pry my foot out of my mouth...”

“It’s fine. Well, not fine, but it’s not your fault. At least I’m not going through this for nothing. The people who killed Brian and the others will pay.” Maggie swept a lock of hair behind her ear, and Kara noticed her hand trembled.

“So do you, um...” Kara bit her lip.

“Want another fix?” Maggie guessed. Kara nodded with reluctance. “Yeah. Yeah, I do. If Belamort were a person, I’d punch them in the face, then make out with them.”

That was more description than Kara wanted. “I’m sorry.”

“The punching desire is new though. I’m taking that as a good sign.” Maggie sighed and bent over, getting her other sock on at last.

“If I’d just been a few seconds faster,” Kara lamented.

“Don’t beat yourself up. I don’t blame you, and you shouldn’t blame yourself. My job comes with risks. Blackwell was closing in. I should have been more careful, but I was worried more about Jamie, and I... I let myself get distracted over Alex.”

They said nothing for a moment.

“Listen,” Kara began with caution, “you know Alex wants to be here, right? You understand why she ran off to deal with Max...”

“I understand she ran off, but this time I can’t blame her. I sent her running.”

“Maggie—”

Jamie rounded the corner, a small styrofoam cup in one hand and a medium cup in the other. Kara let her defense of Alex go for now, but she and Maggie weren’t done with this conversation. Not by a long shot.

Cheeks sunken in a pronounced pucker, Jamie attempted, with little success, to suck something through her straw. She offered the taller cup to Maggie.

“What you got there?” Kara asked.

“A milkshake. Vegan vanilla bean. Eliza said Mom could have it.”

Maggie tilted her head and smiled. Her gaze turned soft and full of affection, transforming her haggard appearance into something radiant. “Mom. Not sure I’ll ever get tired of hearing that. Do I have the best kid or what?”

“The best,” Kara agreed, charmed by the pair. “Although, hello? Where’s mine?”

“I have it! One extra-large, double chocolate espresso shake for the Kryptonian.” Winn followed Jamie into the room, thrusting a cup nearly the size of a half gallon of milk into Kara’s hands, not that she was complaining. He turned to Maggie with a sheepish smile, his eyes sparkling for the first time
in days. “Hey, you.”

Kara stepped out of the way, sucking on her own straw as she gave the friends room to reunite. Winn drew Maggie into a long hug, releasing a happy groan of relief as she returned the embrace.

“It’s good to see you. I mean, you look terrible, but it’s good to see you,” Winn teased as he leaned back.

“I’m going through withdrawal from a highly addictive alien parasite. What’s your excuse?” Maggie scratched the thick stubble on Winn’s jaw, eyeing his messy hair with a grimace.

Winn swatted her hand away and smoothed a hand over his growing beard, but he kept smiling. “I’ve been chasing bad guys while you’ve been sleeping on the job, Sawyer.”

“Oh, really?” she fired back. “So you were too busy to shower?”

Winn glanced at Kara in alarm and she shrugged, siding with Maggie on this one.

“What? I used deodorant.”

“Not enough.” Maggie took a small sip of her shake, risking her first solid food in over a week.

“So can we go home now?” Jamie asked, her tone bordering on a whine.

Like a soap bubble, the lighter mood burst and vanished.

Maggie slipped off her bed to kneel on wobbly legs in front of Jamie. “Not yet, kiddo. I don’t… I can’t trust myself yet. But if you want to go home, we can find someone to watch over you tonight. You don’t have to stay here.”

“I’m not leaving you alone.” Jamie shuffled forward and wrapped her arms around Maggie’s neck.

Alex should have been there, and Kara cursed her sister for missing the moment. Alex had missed too much already.

“I could… look after you,” Winn offered.

Maggie rubbed her hands up and down Jamie’s back before shifting to meet her eyes. “I’ll be okay. You can hang with your uncle Winn tonight—”

“I meant both of you.”

Everyone looked at Winn as he chewed on the end of his straw. “What? What else can they do for you? And you’d sleep better in your own bed. If there’s a problem, we just summon Kara with your watch. Easy peasy.”

Maggie turned her attention on Kara, her dark eyes pleading.

“Oh… I… Alex will… She would…” Kara backed up a step, holding out her hands, even with a huge milkshake in one, attempting to ward off that potent look.

“Please, Kara?” Jamie added, throwing in a brutal pout that wilted Kara’s resistance even further.

“That is not fair.”

A tiny smirk appeared on Maggie’s mouth, framed by a single dimple. A second later, Jamie’s
features mirrored her mother’s.

“C’mon,” Kara wailed. “Winn, help me out! Do you see this? We’re talking… emotional kryptonite.”

“It’s the dimples,” Winn agreed around a mouthful of shake. “If Alex can’t resist them, what makes you think you can?”

Kara rolled her eyes. “Okay! I’ll be on call, but you still have to get through Eliza, and she taught Alex everything she knows.”

Jamie threw herself at Kara, hugging her around the waist and squeezing harder than a human child could muster. “Thank you.”

Alex was going to kill her. Revive her then kill her again. Kara’s fingers drifted through Jamie’s soft hair as Winn helped Maggie to her feet. Her ego took some solace in knowing Alex would fare worse against those double dimples. She’d fold like a cheap lawn chair when it was her turn.

***

Feet heavy as cinder blocks, Alex trudged out of the elevator and into the DEO. She kept her head down, refusing to make eye contact with a single agent as she moved with deliberate steps toward the medbay. If some rookie stopped her despite the don’t-fuck-with-me vibe she emitted, Alex would not be responsible for her actions.

Max excelled at getting under her skin. Locked away at the desert facility, he’d landed a few more verbal jabs at her expense before she’d given up and left him for the night. Max still owed her answers about his role in the drug ring, but Maggie deserved to drag them out of him first.

While satisfying to leave Max in his cell as he hurled insults after her, being around him had soured Alex’s mood. She just wanted to see Maggie. Seeing Maggie would make everything better.

Alex glanced at her watch. It was past late, creeping past one A.M. With any luck, Maggie was asleep, the worst of her side effects over. If Jamie wasn’t curled up at Maggie’s side, Alex would pull up a chair and join her. While her back might not appreciate another night of contortion, Alex’s soul didn’t care.

Her boots squeaked on the tile floor as she skidded to a stop in the doorway.

The medbay was empty.

Fear spiked, driving through Alex’s skull and splintering through her veins. Jamie’s bag and art supplies were gone, and Maggie…

“Maggie,” she whispered, staggering back into the hallway and bolting for her lab.

Eliza was turning off the lights when Alex rounded the corner.

“Where is she?” Alex demanded. “Where’s Maggie? Mom—”

“Calm down. Everything is fine, Alex. Maggie went home.”

Alex gasped in a lungful of air, unsure if she was relieved or enraged by the development. “Home? What do you mean home?”

“Maggie wanted to sleep in her own bed tonight, and we had little recourse to hold her here.”
“She’s in withdrawal!” Alex snarled. “She needs to be monitored, treated, protected from herself!”

“You weren’t here to stop her.”

Alex rocked back on her heels, the verbal blow landing with as much impact as a slap to the face. “Is that what this is about? You’re putting Maggie at risk to teach me a lesson?”

“None of this is actually about you, sweetie.” Dark circles had formed beneath Eliza’s blue eyes, and most of her makeup had worn off hours ago. She looked exhausted, older than Alex had ever seen her before. “Maggie can make her own decisions. Most of her symptoms disappeared in about nine to ten hours as we suspected they would. She still had some tremors, but–”

“And what about her addiction? Is she craving it? The Rush?”

Eliza pursed her lips.

“And you let her go? We were keeping her here for three more days. That was the plan.”

“Keep your voice down, Alex. Winn is with them. Kara’s checked on them many times. Did you think we’d just throw Maggie out into the street?”

Alex slumped against the wall.

Taking a deep breath, Eliza released it with an aggrieved sigh. “It has been a long day. You’re running on fumes. Go home and get some sleep. Visit Maggie and Jamie tomorrow when you’ll be in a better frame of mind.”

“If they were here, I’d be in a better frame of mind right now.” Eliza was right, but Alex resented being deprived of the one thing she’d looked forward to all day. “Damn it,” she hissed.

Eliza clasped Alex’s hands. “If you won’t rest for me, or Kara, or yourself, then rest for Maggie. She needs you at your best, and you know Maggie would want you to.”

Alex scrunched her nose, both pissed and impressed with Eliza’s ploy. “Low blow, Mom. Using Maggie against me.”

“Bet you thought you got your ruthless streak from your father. And something tells me Maggie would approve.” Eliza kissed Alex on the cheek. “Sweet dreams, Alexandra.”

Without another word, Eliza departed, leaving Alex to simmer in her disappointment as her mother’s footfalls echoed in the empty hallway.

There was nothing left for Alex to do but go home to her empty apartment.

Alone.

***

A breeze stirred the curtains as Maggie shuffled barefoot toward her kitchen. National City was dark and hushed beyond the open balcony doors, but she heard the white noise of the wind and the occasional truck rumbling by on the street below. She paused when an unfamiliar sound reached her ears, puzzling out the source before she placed it and smiled.

Someone was hovering, but Maggie didn’t mind.

Inside the apartment, things were less quiet as Winn snored with gusto on the sofa. Like Jamie, he’d
been out like a light when his head hit the pillow a few hours ago. Maggie hadn’t enjoyed the same luck, her mind too preoccupied with a certain DEO agent to let her sleep.

Worse than the Rush, Maggie craved Alex. Her system still jonesed for a hit of the alien drug, but she’d been more sorely tempted by a bottle of scotch at the end of a grueling day. Belamort she could resist. Alex Danvers was another story.

Warm from a long shower, Maggie puttered around her kitchen in cotton shorts and a t-shirt, scrounging up a packet of peanut butter crackers and pouring a glass of water. She sat at the kitchen table, nibbling on a cracker after taking pains to open the crinkling package without waking Winn. Not a gourmet meal by any stretch, but hopefully enough to mute her hunger pangs.

The pages of Jamie’s sketchbook stirred in the breeze. Maggie polished off another cracker, took a sip of water, then wiped her hands on her shorts before snagging the corner of the book and pulling it closer. A half-finished drawing of Eliza covered the page.

“Hard to believe I have such a talented kid,” Maggie whispered.

She thumbed back a few weeks, reviewing the last twenty or so drawings. Most she’d seen, but there was a new one of a pony she assumed was J’onn. Maggie chuckled at the animal’s baleful stare and turned the page.

Then her humor vanished.

The perspective was low, a child’s point of view, looking up at Maggie’s bloodied, lifeless features as she lay on a medbay gurney. Doctors and nurses were faceless blurs around her, but Kara and Alex stood out in sharp relief. The grief in Kara’s eyes as she watched Alex work was so real it seemed to leap from the paper.

But it was Alex’s expression that twisted Maggie’s guts. She stared at Jamie, confusion and shock etched in every line of her face.

The moment they met, Maggie realized.

Bad enough Alex didn’t learn the truth from Maggie herself, but to discover it like this? Coming face-to-face with Jamie while Maggie lay dying between them? Her guilt deepened, and she brushed the remaining crackers away, losing her appetite.

“Over coffee would have been better.”

Maggie turned in her seat to discover Kara on the balcony, her cape billowing in the wind. She stepped inside, sparing a glance for Winn before joining Maggie at the table.

“Sorry to barge in.”

“I knew you were there. You were flapping.”

Kara’s head rocked back. “Flapping? You make me sound like a bat. Or a pigeon.”

“It’s a bird. It’s a plane,” Maggie drawled with little enthusiasm. “Keep your voice down. Winn is sleeping.”

“So I hear. Winn sleeps like a rock. I once yanked the door off my refrigerator by accident while he slept on my couch. He never stopped snoring.” Pulling out a chair, Kara swept her cape aside and sat next to her.
Maggie’s gaze returned to the sketchpad. “Did you see this?”

Kara studied the drawing. “I encouraged her to sketch it, actually. Jamie needed an outlet for her feelings. Painting often helps me deal with mine.” She touched the edge of the page. “It’s some of her best work. Jamie captured the chaos and emotion of the moment.”

“Is this really how Alex found out?”

“Yeah. Her expression says it all, doesn’t it?”

Maggie groaned, raking her hands through her damp hair. “No wonder Alex bolted from the medbay when she saw me and Jamie. Jesus, Kara...”

A strong arm slipped across Maggie’s shoulders and tugged her closer. “Alex knows you didn’t mean for her to find out like that. She was upset, and yes, that’s an understatement, but nothing has changed for her, Maggie.”

“Look at her face. That’s betrayal. That’s... that’s *agony*.”

“Maybe, but what’s this then?” Kara turned the page.

Forever preserved in pencil, Alex slept with her upper body draped over Maggie’s pod and her cheek pressed against the frosted glass. Maggie clamped a hand over her mouth to suppress a sob.

“That? That’s love. And so is this.” Kara flipped the page again, revealing a sketch of herself keeping solemn watch at Maggie’s bedside. One of Alex followed, bent over her microscope. Then J’onn standing guard at the medbay windows. Winn surrounded by stacks of computers. Eliza and Alex, huddled over formulas as they struggled to save Maggie’s life.

But it was the last drawing that stole Maggie’s breath.

“She finished it.” Kara gave a little shake of her head. “Jamie wasn’t sure she should draw it, but I thought you’d want to see it.”

It was the only sketch Jamie had ever done of herself, a reflection in the side of Maggie’s pod she’d committed to memory and brought to life in lead. Cradled in Alex’s lap, Jamie clutched her favorite stuffed rabbit, her Supergirl shoes on her small feet. Alex’s chin rested in Jamie’s hair.

The sketch blurred with tears.

“Like the sneakers,” Kara added, deadpan.

Maggie spluttered out a laugh even as she cried.

“Alex loves you. As hurt as she is about Jamie, she still loves you more than anything, Maggie.”

The evidence was in front of her in black and white. Maggie traced Alex’s jaw before drifting her fingers over the texture of Jamie’s hair. She looked up, meeting Kara’s blue eyes at close range.

“Where is she?”

“On her way to her apartment.” A grin twitched at Kara’s mouth, and she arched an eyebrow, daring Maggie to take a leap of faith. “Want a lift?”
Chapter Notes

Thanks to Dani for the awesome banner! Like the original Twitter post.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Maggie was about to throw up.
Slumping against the back of the elevator in Alex’s apartment building, she bent at the waist and pleaded with her stomach to settle. While withdrawal or Kara’s dizzying flight through the streets of National City could shoulder the responsibility for her nausea, Maggie had to concede her nerves were mostly to blame.

The elevator pinged too soon and she straightened, shaking her hands to sling off some anxiety. Kara had offered to tag along, to be an intermediary, but what Maggie needed to say to Alex, she needed to say in private.

Alex had made her apologies and admitted her mistakes. It was time Maggie did the same.

The door slid open, and Maggie stepped out on trembling legs. A quiet, familiar hallway greeted her, the smell bringing a rush of memories to the surface. They’d lugged boxes this way when she’d moved in. Giggled getting off the elevator after dates or a joint case. Kissed against the wall when they’d been so hungry for each other they didn’t wait to get inside.

Jesus, if the hall was this bad, the apartment was going to kill her.

Maggie wiped her sweating palms on her jeans then swept a nervous hand across her mouth as she reached Alex’s door. She lifted her fist to knock, her knuckles hovering in hesitation. This was a bad idea. It was late. Alex needed rest...

“What are you…?” Alex surged forward in concern, her long stride unsteady. “Are you okay? Is it the Belamort? Do you need—”

Alex looked hellish, her clothes rumpled and eyes dark and deep-set against her pale skin. As she approached, Maggie noticed Alex’s hands shaking, rustling the plastic bag. How had Alex snuck up on her in this condition? She resembled a patient in the throes of withdrawal more than Maggie did.

Brain broken by the sight of her, Maggie took a second to stop gawking and get her tongue working. “I-I-I need to uh, to talk to you.”

Alex stared at her for an unsettling moment. “Sure. Um...”

Their fingers brushed when Alex handed Maggie the bag to fumble with her keys and shoulder the door open. They were both breathing fast, the sound loud and harsh in the vacant hallway.

Once inside, Alex shut and locked the door, taking the bag and crossing to the kitchen to throw the ice cream into the freezer. She didn’t bother with the lights. The moon and city illuminated the apartment plenty, bathing their exhausted features in gold and gray. The scotch Alex set on the counter to crack open later, probably the instant Maggie left.

Maggie didn’t dare glance at the bed that had been their oasis away from the world, at the sofa where they’d cuddled and made love, but she did draw the scent of home into her lungs, having missed it desperately. Against her will, her eyes brimmed with tears, blurring Alex as she came closer. Maggie had expected this to be hard, but reality was so much worse.
“I’m sorry,” Alex said.

Maggie paused, those same words catching in her throat. That was her opening line. “For what?”

“For not being there for you today. The addiction, the withdrawal… I should have let Kara go after Max. I belonged here, with you.”

“Alex…”

“I wanted to stay, but I had to be sure you were safe and you are. Max is in a holding cell at the desert facility. We shut down his import operation. It’s over. He can’t hurt you ever again.”

“Alex,” Maggie repeated with more force when Alex appeared she would continue. “You don’t have to apologize. I get it. I would’ve done the same thing if the roles were reversed.”

“Oh,” Alex slid her hands into her back pockets, her shoulders hunching. “Uh, but you—”

“I’m the one who is sorry. I can hardly blame you for running off after what I did.” Maggie pivoted, her tennis shoes squeaking on the kitchen floor, and began to pace, her path taking her to the fireplace and back to the island. “I’ve made some huge mistakes, but you… you were the biggest. The worst.”

Alex’s breath hitched, and Maggie hurried to explain.

“I mean, the situation we found ourselves in. Not, not loving you. Loving you was the one thing I did right. But leaving you…” Maggie shook her head. “I screwed up. I screwed everything up. I didn’t want a family, so I lost the only family I ever wanted.” She tunneled her hands through her windswept hair, refusing to meet Alex’s eyes. She was too close to coming apart, and whether she found compassion or condemnation in Alex’s gaze, Maggie couldn’t handle either.

“I was so damn sure I… I walked away from the best fucking thing to ever happen to me. Then the universe was all, ‘Surprise, Sawyer! Here’s a daughter you didn’t know you had!’”

Alex stepped forward, into her path, but Maggie swerved and came to a stop by the coffee table, her hands knitting in front of her. She didn’t know what Kara and the others had told Alex about Jamie so she started from the beginning.

“Jamie got dumped with me. She was mourning Aileen, her… real mom.”

“Maggie,” Alex attempted to interrupt, but Maggie waved her off.

“She had no family, and I could relate to that, you know? Jamie needed me. How could I turn her away? Treat my child like my family treated me? Make her feel as unwanted as I did?”

“You couldn’t,” Alex said softly.

“I couldn’t. So I took her in, and I tried to be a decent parent. After leaving you because you needed a child, a family… the fucking irony, huh?” Maggie shot Alex a bitter smile. “I wanted to call you. That first night and every night after. I wanted to call. I thought maybe you’d want me again if I…”

Alex flinched, a tiny whimper of pain escaping.

“Which was why I didn’t. I wasn’t enough for you on my own, and I didn’t want you to want me for Jamie.”
“That’s—” Alex reached for her, but Maggie evaded her grasp and resumed pacing, faster and more agitated than before.

“My reasons weren’t all selfish. Jamie was mine. My daughter. I—I needed to see if we could work, to get to know her. If you’d been there...”

“You don’t owe me any more explanation. I watched the—”

“But I do. Because I fell head over heels for that kid, Alex. She’s not what I pictured for my life, what I dreamed about, but now I can’t imagine my life without her in it. Jamie smiles at me, and it makes my whole damn day. I watch Disney movies with her instead of going to the bar. We went to the zoo, Alex. The zoo. And I love all of it. I love her.”

From the corner of her eye, Maggie saw Alex’s mouth twist, almost as if she was suppressing a smile, but Maggie chalked it up to wishful thinking. She skidded to a stop and faced her at last. “If I hadn’t been so stubborn, if I’d given the idea of kids with you a real chance...” Maggie exhaled, something shattering inside her. “I’d be your wife,” she choked out. “The three of us would be a family. And I—I was going to tell you about Jamie. That morning over coffee. I swear to God, Alex.”

Alex’s throat rippled as she swallowed. “I know.”

Maggie dropped her head at the sadness, at the sheen of unshed tears, in Alex’s eyes. “I understand if you, if you despise me now. The way you found out about Jamie... it was cruel. And unnecessary. I should have—”

“Maggie...”

“If you never want to talk to me again, I understand.”

“Maggie...” Alex tried again, stepping closer.

“I came tonight because you deserve an apology. Not because... I realize any chance we had, I blew —”

“Have dinner with me Friday night.”

Maggie blinked and sucked in a sharp breath. Her mouth moved, but no words emerged as she tried and failed to process the sudden shift in the conversation. “Wh-What?”

“Have dinner with me. Friday night. We’ll order in. Or go out. There’s that sushi place you like...” Alex shrugged, bouncing once on the balls of her feet. “Just... have dinner with me.”

“Did you just...”

“Ask you out? Yeah, yeah, I did.” Alex’s voice grew stronger, more sure. She smirked, her whiskey eyes full of mischief. “I mean, I could have let you keep going with that whole,” she waved her hand at Maggie, “but it seemed kinda pointless.”

“Pointless?” Maggie furrowed her brow, rocking back on her heels at the insult.

“Well, not pointless, just...” Alex bit the inside of her cheek, her mouth twisting again. “Look, we have a lot to talk about, a lot of pain and hurt and guilt to work through, but... I miss you, and this past week, I almost lost you. If all this teaches me nothing else, I’ve learned beyond a shadow of a doubt I don’t want to waste another second of my life without you. I meant what I said in the surveillance truck. I do want you, Maggie. More than anything, I want you.”
Maggie let the words sink in before she asked, softly, in disbelief, “You don’t hate me?”

“I could never hate you. Never. You are the most important thing to me on this world or any other.” Alex stepped into her, cupping Maggie’s jaw, her thumb stroking Maggie’s cheek. “Please. Have dinner with me Friday night.”

“Christ, Danvers.” Maggie’s head swum as Alex’s touch warmed her skin. “You really…” She shook her head slightly, afraid to do anything that would dislodge Alex’s hand. “I come to throw myself at your mercy and you–you…”

“I like to keep you guessing.”

A laugh stumbled past Maggie’s tears as Alex brought their foreheads together.

“Mission accomplished.” A hesitant smile sprang to Maggie’s lips, hope sputtering weakly back to life in her chest. “Are you sure?”

“Never more sure of anything in my life. I love you,” Alex said, her tone reverent. “And I’m willing to put in the work to get back what we had and make it better if you are. So how about it, Sawyer? Meet me halfway. Have dinner with me?”

“You’re crazy,” Maggie whispered, but she couldn’t stop smiling.

“Probably. Is that a yes?”

A hundred reasons to say no rushed onto Maggie’s tongue, but there was only one answer she could live with. Maggie nodded and pulled Alex into a hug, burying her face against the warm skin of Alex’s neck.

“Yeah?” Alex asked, her voice timid but hopeful.

“Yeah.”

***

After hellish months of separation and days spent teetering on the brink of losing her, holding Maggie was heaven.

Alex greedily drank in the feel of her, drawing the smell of her shampoo into her lungs as she nuzzled under Maggie’s hair to brush her lips against the shell of Maggie’s ear. Maggie shifted deeper into the embrace, sinking into Alex with a gentle sigh.

It was like coming home, and Alex swore she’d never let Maggie go again.

“You don’t know… how much… I–I’ve wanted this… God, Maggie, I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have…”

Fingers ghosted over her lips to silence her rambling. Alex let her eyes drift closed at the touch as she breathed in the stillness of the hour. Maggie’s heat seemed to seep into the cold, aching fractures in Alex’s heart, warming her in a way nothing had for months. Tension fled her body, leaving Alex swaying in place. Only Maggie’s strong arms, tightening around her, held her upright.

“You are out on your feet,” Maggie scolded, and the worry in her voice was the best thing Alex had heard all week.

“It’s been a crazy few days.”
Maggie scoffed at the understatement. “You need rest, Alex. I… I should go. Get back to Jamie and let you sleep.” Maggie shifted to disentangle herself.

“Sleep with me?” Alex murmured, her words almost unintelligible.

“Excuse me?” Maggie abruptly leaned back and met her eyes, but a bemused smile teased her lips. Alex fought the temptation to kiss her and never stop.

“Stay and sleep with me. Just for a few hours?” Alex didn’t bother to hide the pleading in her voice. “I just… I really need to hold you tonight. Please?”

“Alex—”

“Tell me you don’t want that as much as I do. Tell me you don’t miss waking up in my arms.”

Maggie’s hand trembled as she brushed Alex’s hair back from her eyes, and Alex turned her cheek into the caress, soaking up the contact. “Of course I do. Every day.”

“Then stay.”

Maggie shook her head. “The Belamort…”

“I’ll be here for you. I’m not going anywhere,” Alex vowed. “You’re right, I need sleep, but I need you so I can rest. You keep the nightmares away, Maggie. You always did.” Alex noted the faint gleam of sweat on Maggie’s forehead and the pain lines around her eyes that had yet to fade. “Let me do the same for you.”

“But Jamie…”

“Text Winn. She’ll be fine. I’ll take you home in the morning.” Alex was ready to beg if she had to. “Stay.”

“We can’t rush this, Alex.” Maggie sounded stern, but her shoulders relaxed, and Alex knew she was close to relenting.

“We won’t. We’ll have all the talks, all the fights, and we’ll take it slow. Glacial,” Alex teased. She ran her hands down Maggie’s bare arms before capturing her hands and tugging her toward the bed. Maggie’s expression softened, and Alex’s stomach tumbled in delight as Maggie allowed Alex to lead her up the steps without further protest.

While Maggie texted Winn, Alex tried to forget the last time they shared the bed as she fished something for them to sleep in out of the dresser. That desperate, grief-fueled night was no longer their coda. It was merely a bump in the road on their journey now, and Alex was determined to make that journey last a lifetime.

She held up the Hello, Sunshine shirt Maggie had worn after their first night together. Maggie rolled her eyes and chuckled with exhaustion when Alex handed it to her. Happy memories of those first heady days rushed in, and the brief brush of Maggie’s fingers over the worn cotton suggested she was similarly affected.

The choice of attire was fitting. Tonight was another new beginning.

Maggie turned and tugged her shirt off as she shuffled to the other side of the bed, giving Alex a sobering glimpse of the bandages on her shoulders. They were thankfully pristine before disappearing from view under the orange t-shirt. Alex made a mental note to change them in the
morning. While the shallow puncture wounds weren’t serious, she didn’t want them to leave a single scar on Maggie’s beautiful skin if she could help it.

After a quick change of her own, Alex focused on calming the excited flutter in her gut as she threw back the covers. Maggie did the same, but she hesitated, her dark eyes darting around the apartment.

“You okay?” Alex asked as she settled in bed and propped herself against the headboard.

“Yes. It’s just weird,” Maggie muttered before she shook her head and climbed in.

Their eyes locked. Alex patted her shoulder in invitation and held her breath until Maggie accepted, cuddling warm and solid against Alex’s side.

“What’s weird?” Alex stroked her fingers through Maggie’s hair, feeling her exhale against the v-neck of Alex’s shirt.

“Just… being here. It—this was home. For a while. Never thought I’d see it again.”

Memories of their breakup swarmed, and Alex glanced around her apartment with fresh eyes. Books and files were stacked on shelves previously occupied by Maggie’s bonsai trees, reminders of how the space had hollowed out over the last few months and become Alex’s crash pad. It had stopped feeling like home the instant the door had clicked closed behind Maggie for the last time.

If it felt like that to Alex, she couldn’t imagine how it felt to Maggie, seeing herself erased from the space they’d shared and built together.

Maybe this wasn’t quite the new beginning Alex had hoped for. Her mind started to spin on all the ways their past could trip them up here.

“C’mere.” Maggie’s drowsy voice was muffled, but it was enough to bring Alex’s thundering thoughts to a skidding halt. She tugged on Alex’s shirt, urging both of them to slide down the bed and settle more comfortably on the pillows.

Alex decided she would worry later as she complied and Maggie snuggled closer in reward. Tonight, Maggie was here, and that was enough. “Roll over. I want to hold you.”

“Since when did you become the big spoon?” Maggie joked, but she obeyed without complaint.

Alex molded against Maggie’s back, her heat the perfect weapon to combat the chill of the sheets. Maggie captured one of Alex’s hands and entwined their fingers. Fatigue weighed heavy on her, dragging Alex toward sleep, but she fought it a few minutes longer. She wanted to enjoy the moment as long as possible.

“You and me?” Maggie asked into the quiet. She sounded unsure and a little afraid. “You really think we can make it?”

Alex tightened her hold and tangled their feet. “If you want this even half as much as I do? I’d like to see anyone or anything stop us.”

They were so close to coming out the other side of this trial by fire, scorched and scarred, but together. Alex prayed they’d make it, prayed she would never lose sight of how much they mattered again.

“I love you, Maggie Sawyer,” Alex pledged as she kissed Maggie’s shoulder.
“I love you too, Alex Danvers,” Maggie whispered, a faint smile in her tone.

With a wide smile of her own, Alex succumbed to sleep.

***

High above Alex’s apartment, Kara hovered in the moonlight and the warm summer breeze. She’d remained after dropping Maggie off at the lobby, compelled to stay and offer what protection she could, but her powers were useless to the two women below. Broken and hurting, the only thing that could save Alex and Maggie was each other.

And they’d thrown each other a lifeline.

The pair had a chance now, and knowing them, they’d make it count. Kara was proud of Alex for the way she’d handled herself tonight. She was proud of both of them.

A gust of wind sent her cape fluttering and snapping around her, disturbing the peace and quiet. Kara rolled her eyes, recalling Maggie’s snarky comment earlier.

“Flapping,” she huffed. ‘I’m so sure.”

Lingering a few minutes longer, Kara listened to their heartbeats slow and syncopate as Alex and Maggie surrendered to exhaustion. When she was satisfied all was at it should be, Kara let a soft, pleased smile dance across her lips and left them to their dreams.

Chapter End Notes

We had a lot more written for this chapter, but decided to keep it focused on this moment. Hopefully that will speed our next chapter. And thanks for being patient, folks--real life and family issues have been cutting into our writing time, zennie’s in particular.

We’ll try to be quicker with additional chapters, and yes, there is more to come. Stay tuned, and thanks.
Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings again. Discussions of addiction and withdraw. Be warned.

Thanks to Dani for the awesome banner! Like the original Twitter post.
Warm and languid beneath crisp sheets, Maggie woke nestled in a big, comfortable bed. A strong arm circled her waist, the fingers splayed wide and possessive over her lower stomach, and the curves pressed against Maggie’s back were solid and decidedly feminine.

Alex.

Maggie grinned. She would know that body anywhere. The tension in Alex’s hold suggested she was awake, and Maggie received confirmation when Alex’s thumb traced a strip of exposed skin between Maggie’s nightshirt and her underwear.

Heat pulsed through her as the slow, deliberate contact continued. Maggie swallowed thickly and covered Alex’s hand with her own, eager to see what Alex would do when Maggie pushed their hands lower.

Her mental cobwebs melted, reduced to tiny embers by her arousal, leaving Maggie with a sharp, clear picture of where she was.

When she was.

Her breath hitched.

The scene seemed plucked from the happiest time of Maggie’s life, before everything had crumbled and slipped through her fingers. She sat up, grimacing when her eyes snapped open to harsh, mid-morning sunlight. The bed, the apartment, Alex… they were all like she left them. The only thing out of place was her.

“Morning,” Alex drawled in a sleepy voice.

Maggie turned her head, searching Alex’s features. She was on her side, her short, auburn hair disheveled and splayed against the gray of her pillow. Maggie itched to run her fingers through it, the desire almost painful.

But Alex wasn’t real.

None of this was real. It couldn’t be.

Alex slid her hand over the curve of Maggie’s hip, her brow furrowing when Maggie didn’t answer. “You okay?”

Maggie whimpered and tried to jerk away, but Alex moved faster, clamping down on her hip. The fingertips bruising Maggie’s skin were callused and familiar, even the sheets smelled like Alex’s shower gel, but the rational part of Maggie’s brain refused to accept the moment as anything other than a delusion, another Rush-fueled hallucination.


What had she done? Had she slipped past Winn in the middle of the night to score another fix? Maggie grabbed Alex’s wrist and attempted to pry her off, trying to escape the drug’s hold. Her other hand stiff-armed Alex when she moved closer. She wouldn’t give in to the illusion. Not again.

They tussled in the center of the bed, Maggie desperate to flee and Alex determined to stop her. In the end, Maggie’s police training and panic were no match for Alex’s skills. She found herself subdued, pinned to the mattress, Alex’s weight holding her down.
“You’re okay,” Alex repeated, breathing hard. She squeezed Maggie’s wrists with enough force to make Maggie wince. “See? This is real. You’re not on Rush, you’re here with me. There’s no euphoria. No bliss, right?”

Maggie could argue that point. Alex felt pretty damn blissful on top of her, even with the fear clawing at Maggie’s brain. She shook her head even as Alex’s words began to penetrate, logic scrambling to take hold.

“Remember last night?” Alex kept her tone even and coaxing. “You came over late. We talked. I asked you to stay. To sleep with me?”

Memories surfaced, wrestling for order before giving ground and clicking into place. Jamie’s drawings. Her flight across the city with Kara. Apologizing to Alex...

“You asked me out,” Maggie mumbled.

“I am really glad you remember that. Do you remember how you answered?”

Maggie stared at her, a sliver of a smile making the corners of her mouth tick up. She nodded. Alex blew out a breath and sagged against her.

“I’m sorry. God, I’m sorry.” Mortification brought a different kind of heat to Maggie’s skin, and she sensed her face flaming red. “I thought I was…”

“Yeah.” Alex’s soulful brown eyes were stricken.

Unnerved by her confusion and violent reaction, Maggie tried to pull away again, but Alex wasn’t having it. She let Maggie’s wrists go to wrap her in a hug, tangling their legs and rolling them over onto their sides. Alex felt sinfully good, her body soft and warm in all the right places, the strength in her arms enough to hold Maggie together.

“I’m sorry. I should have anticipated something like this. But you’re safe, and this is real, Maggie. You didn’t sneak out and score more Rush, okay? You slept like a log in my arms all night.”

Tears sparkled in Maggie’s eyelashes before she blinked them away. Her hands fisted in the back of Alex’s shirt as she clung to her for dear life. “It’s not your fault. I’m just…”

“Scared,” Alex said the word when Maggie couldn’t. She smoothed her hands over Maggie’s back. “I would be too. You like being in control, and you’re afraid what Blackwell did takes that control away. But you’re strong enough to fight this, and if ever you can’t? Me, Winn, J’onn, and Kara will be there to help.”

Maggie tucked her forehead into the curve of Alex’s neck and breathed her in. “My kid needs me, Alex. What if I–”

“You won’t.” Alex raised up on her elbow. “I don’t doubt you for a second. You are the most…” She took a short, choppy breath. “I have never met a stronger, more determined woman than Detective Maggie Sawyer.”

Maggie’s chin trembled as she gave Alex a weak smile. She suspected ‘determined’ was Alex’s polite term for ‘stubborn.’ “You’re Supergirl’s sister, Danvers.”

“So I would know,” Alex fired back easily.
“Nerd,” Maggie accused, her tone full of gratitude and affection. One hand turned loose of Alex’s shirt to cup her jaw. Sunlight warmed her back, but Alex’s heat took care of the rest. Maggie began to steady as fear yielded ground to something far sweeter.

“Guilty, but I’m your nerd.” Alex brought their foreheads together, and Maggie was tempted to kiss her, every inch of her.

“Still?”

“Always,” Alex whispered. Maggie started to say more, but Alex closed the distance, kissing her too fleetingly for Maggie’s taste, before pulling away.

They stared at one another, and Maggie could tell Alex was battling the desire to do it again. The air charged, crackling with a familiar, sensual energy. They were on shaky ground, still trying to find their new footing with each other, but Maggie’s body craved the intimacy.

“I uh…” The words were strangled and rough, and Alex cleared her throat. “I should fix breakfast. You need… you need food. Especially after yesterday.”

“Don’t burn the kitchen down,” Maggie managed to joke.

“Don’t distract me.” Heated memories floated between them, not helping with their self control. With one last glance at Maggie’s mouth, Alex let her go with palpable reluctance.

The bed got a lot colder when Alex left. With a sigh, Maggie ran a hand through her hair and picked her phone off the nightstand, noting the late morning hour. She texted Winn to check on him and Jamie, feeling the tug to get back to her daughter.

While she waited for his reply, Maggie took several deep, calming breaths as Alex puttered around the kitchen. If she hadn’t flipped the hell out, there was little doubt what she and Alex would be doing right now. Maggie wasn’t sure if she should be disappointed or relieved things hadn’t progressed that far.

Her phone buzzed. Winn promised they were fine. He and Jamie were at the National City Children’s Museum. The thought of them geeking out over science exhibits together made Maggie smile.

*Take lots of pictures,* she typed. *And don’t let Jamie have too much sugar. I’ll be home in a few hours.*

*Yes, Mom,* Winn replied a moment later with a photo of him and Jamie sticking their tongues out at the camera.

Maggie chuckled as she saved the picture to her camera roll. *Brats.*

*You and Alex okay?* Winn asked, the simple question holding a wealth of worry and love.

Maggie glanced up in time to see Alex’s gaze skitter away as she busied herself with the coffeemaker.

*We’re working on it.*

***

Alex looked away, busted. It was hard not to stare when Maggie looked that beautiful, all disheveled
and soft, her toned legs tangled in the sheets. The sunlight spilled over Maggie’s petite body and cast her in a golden glow.

*Hello, Sunshine* was right.

With a smirk, Alex fussed with the coffeemaker, needing the caffeine as much as the distraction. She could feel Maggie’s eyes on her, and Alex’s skin prickled with awareness, still eager for the intimacy she’d somehow managed to resist.

At least the physical part of their relationship didn’t need repair. Far from broken, it appeared stronger than ever. It would have been so easy to give in, to let that spark roar into a conflagration. Alex had seen the hunger in Maggie’s eyes and ached to sate it.

But desire had never been their problem.

Stomach grumbling, Alex yanked the refrigerator door open. She expected to scrounge for something that wasn’t expired or covered in mold after a week of living at the DEO, but fruit, eggs, and bacon lined her shelves. Alex peeled a yellow post-it note off the front of a new container of half-and-half and snorted.

*Take care of yourself and EAT SOMETHING.*

*You’re welcome,*

-K

“Idiot,” Alex murmured under her breath, but she smiled, charmed by Kara’s thoughtfulness.

She grabbed what she needed and returned to the island as the scent of coffee began to waft through the apartment. Alex retrieved a knife and cutting board and sliced up an orange as Maggie slipped from the bed.

Their routine was so familiar, so ordinary, that for a few, precious minutes Alex almost forgot Maggie didn’t belong here anymore. Like their life together hadn’t fractured and they had grown away and apart. Maggie had someone more important waiting for her at home now. They didn’t even have the day together, only a few hours, and Alex didn’t want to waste them.

“What’s wrong?” Maggie paused on the steps.

“Nothing.” Alex fetched two mugs from a cabinet. She pushed the scotch on the island aside as she set them down, resisting the temptation to add a splash to her coffee. When she risked another glimpse, Maggie was studying her.

“You told me you wanted to make this work, Alex. Pushing down your feelings won’t accomplish that,” Maggie said gently.

Alex leaned into the counter, searching for the words to explain. “The last eight months have…” She splayed her arms wide. “Full of suck.”

Maggie’s lips twitched at the description.

“But this morning, I woke up happy. You were in my arms, in my bed. You don’t know how much I missed this, how much I missed you. It was a dream come true.” Alex regretted her comparison when Maggie winced. “I mean, I know there’s no magic, fairy-tale ending that will make everything right...”
“But you want one anyway?” Maggie guessed.

Alex shrugged and poured their coffee, avoiding Maggie’s eyes. “I just… want to be happy again. For one morning, at least.”

Maggie joined her on the opposite side of the island. “Me too.”

“But?” Alex prompted when Maggie didn’t continue, her features pensive.

“But we can’t ignore what’s happened.” Maggie’s fingers drummed on the counter, betraying her nerves. “Last night, you offered me a shot at a lifetime of mornings. I want that shot.”

“I want that too.”

“So the sooner we start working through all that, the sooner we might get that happy ending.”

Maggie always picked her words carefully, and today was no different. Alex heard words of hope and encouragement, but also hedging and holding back. They might want the same thing, but the path forward lead through a field criss-crossed with barbed wire and filled with emotional landmines.

In the harsh light of day, away from the distraction of Maggie’s warm body in her arms, their challenges seemed daunting, almost insurmountable. Alex saw the same realization in Maggie’s haunted eyes.

So much for fairy-tale romances that ended with ‘And they lived happily ever after’ after the confessions of love and a kiss.

Stiffening, Alex started to pull back until Maggie’s hand caught hers and squeezed, grounding her.

“I hope we can,” Maggie explained, “but we won’t know until we try.”

Alex swallowed her disappointment, and Maggie gave her a soft, encouraging smile, her eyes full of understanding, like that night in the bar when Alex had found her courage to come out. Alex cupped Maggie’s jaw and ran her fingers along Maggie’s cheek, doing what she couldn’t so long ago. Maggie turned her head to brush her lips across Alex’s palm.

Just that light touch jolted through Alex, and suddenly a minefield didn’t seem so bad if a lifetime with Maggie was the reward on the other side. After all, nothing could be as bad as eight months of separation, and eight days waiting to see if Maggie would live or die.

Alex could do this. She had to. “So we start now?”

“Yeah,” Maggie breathed, nodding.

“Can we do breakfast first?” Alex nudged the cutting board toward Maggie. “Start with that. I’ll make eggs and bacon if you fix our coffee.”

“Deal.”

They worked in companionable silence for a few minutes. Alex scrambled the eggs and microwaved the bacon, hurrying the process so they both could get some needed food. She glanced up when Maggie brushed against her hip, setting a mug down on the counter beside her. She smelled like oranges, fitting given the color of her shirt.

“How are you feeling?”
Maggie hesitated. “Physically or emotionally?” she asked with a weak laugh.

“Let’s start with physically.”

“Figures you’d play doctor.” Maggie shrugged when Alex arched an eyebrow. “Feels like I ran a marathon and collapsed at the finish line. Then the other runners ran over me. And maybe the pace car.”

Alex grimaced. “I have something I can give you. It’ll hit you like a Mack truck though. You’ll have to sleep it off.”

“Later.” Maggie lingered, watching Alex finish with the eggs but saying nothing more on the subject.

Alex turned off the stove and set the skillet aside. “Are you…” She bit her lip, aware she was inching toward one of those landmines that had the potential to blow up in her face.

“Craving Rush?” Maggie met her gaze again, and Alex knew the answer without Maggie saying a thing. “I didn’t notice when I first woke up. I was too wrapped up, I guess, and then I was too busy freaking out. But yeah, yeah, I am.”

“You’re likely going to feel that… need… worse today,” Alex said slowly, flinching when Maggie’s gaze jerked to hers. “Not because it’s stronger or you’re weaker, but because the withdrawal symptoms won’t distract you as much as they did yesterday.”

“Great,” Maggie said tightly.

Plating their breakfast, Alex urged Maggie toward the table. They settled across from each other, but neither dug in right away. Maggie tightened her grip on the fork in her hand, her jaw clenching.

“You can tell me,” Alex prompted. “How it feels. What you need.”

Maggie didn’t answer at first. She cut into her eggs and shoveled some into her mouth, chewing mechanically. “It’s like an itch,” she said after swallowing a few bites. “That niggling thought you forgot something, but physical.”

Alex toyed with her food, the soft scrape of silverware as they ate the only sound.

“Your mom said you did something to… help, but people addicted to Rush don’t recover. The craving never stops. It controls their life.” Maggie raised her head, and Alex saw the glitter of tears in her eyes. “What if…”

“I know you, Maggie. You’ve got this. And that craving will wane every day. It’s going to get a lot easier to fight soon.” If Alex could promise nothing else, she could promise that.

“I can’t offer you a future, or Jamie a home, if I can’t.” Maggie confessed quietly, and the way she tried to hide the tremble of fear in her voice squeezed Alex’s heart. “All of this,” her expressive hands swept the air to indicate the apartment and Alex, “could be for nothing. I could be left with nothing…”

Alex swallowed a swell of guilt, the knowledge her actions added to the real reason for Maggie’s pain. “You won’t be.”

Maggie scrubbed both hands through her disheveled hair. “I’m an addict, Alex.”
“You were given a highly addictive drug, but that doesn’t make you–”

“Yes. Yes, it does. Don’t sugarcoat this. Not with me. We both know one hit of Rush is all it takes.” Her finger stabbed at the table, rattling their plates. “Blackwell and Lord. They made it that way on purpose. They made sure my life was over, one way or another, when they put that garbage in my veins.” Her dark eyes were hard and black as obsidian when they met Alex’s.

“Maggie, calm down. Mood instability is a side effect of your withdrawal…”

“I don’t want to calm down. I was jacked full of an alien parasite and cocaine and left like a dog to die twitching in the dirt.” Maggie’s voice wavered.

Alex’s stomach heaved at the visual, at the raw pain rippling over Maggie’s features.

“You were right. We should have pretended for one morning.” Maggie shoved back from the table, but Alex chased her down, grabbing her arm as Maggie fled to the bedroom to gather her things.

“Let me go, Alex,” Maggie snarled, trying to twist out of Alex’s grip.

“Tell me.” Alex sensed Maggie was hiding something more, something awful.

“I can’t.”

Alex caught Maggie’s other bicep and pulled her dangerously close, dipping her head to see under the fall of dark hair that hid Maggie’s face. “I’m here,” Alex promised. “You can tell me anything.”

“I…”

“Please? Let me help.”

“I…” Maggie’s throat bobbed as she swallowed, her cheeks flushed hot with humiliation. “I begged…”

“Oh, Maggie.”

“I begged him, Alex. I begged Blackwell not to kill me.” She shook her head to dispel the memory as tears caught in her eyelashes. “The thought of never seeing Jamie again…” Her voice cracked on a sob.

“Hey, hey.” Guiding her back to the chair, Alex knelt between Maggie’s parted knees and gripped her hips. “Listen to me. You did what you had to do. Do not be ashamed of that.”

“He broke me, put that poison…”

“Because of you, we caught him. Him and Max both. They’ll never hurt you or anyone else again.”

“It’s too late. It’s still going to kill me, just slower and more painfully.” Maggie palmed Alex’s face, searching for any hint of judgement or reprobation. “I just wanted to see you and Jamie together. Just once. I’d have done anything to see you together just once…”

Alex shushed her, pulling Maggie into a crushing hug. “You are not going to die. You bought time, Maggie. Time for Kara to get to you. Time for us to save you.”

Maggie burrowed into Alex as they slid to the floor, a deep shuddering sob wracking her body. Both crying now, Alex cradled Maggie as she fractured and broke in her arms.
“I wanted to see you happy. You and Jamie with the family you deserve…” Maggie forced out in a hurting, halting voice.

In all the time they had been together, Maggie had never once come apart like this. Alex hadn’t known she was capable. “We can have that, Maggie, we can,” Alex whispered. “But only if you’re here with us. You're the family we deserve.”

Maggie shook her head in immediate denial, and Alex ached for her. Maggie’s last thoughts had been about their happiness and not her own. After everything, she still didn’t see how integral to that happiness she was, for both of them.

“I–I begged too. I begged you to come back to me. I couldn’t lose you again. It would have destroyed me.”

Maggie’s head continued to shake, and Alex wasn’t even sure Maggie was listening. “And Jamie worried she would never get to call you mom. She adores you, and she’s not the only one. You aren’t alone, and you won’t be alone. No matter what happens.”

“I’ve heard that before.” Maggie’s words were faint and muffled, so quiet Alex wasn’t sure she intended to be heard. Alex’s own words filled her ears, taunting her, ‘I love you… I want to be your wife… Forever.’

Tightening her hold on Maggie, her body seeming smaller and thinner than ever, Alex pledged to face down the hard stuff without complaint. Maybe she didn’t deserve a happy ending, but Maggie did, and Alex would do whatever it took to make sure Maggie got one.

Sometime later the sobs quieted, the shivering eased, and Maggie’s breathing slowed and evened out. “You falling asleep on me, Sawyer?” Alex teased, smiling gently when Maggie lifted her head and blinked drowsily.

“Sorry. About all of that.”

“It’s okay. You’ve had a bitch of a week. And there’s nothing to be sorry about.” Alex ran her fingers through Maggie’s hair. “You don’t have to pretend you aren’t scared. Just know I’m here. We’ll get through this.”

Maggie straightened, her hands reaching automatically to wrap around Alex’s waist even though her expression was somber. “Don’t make promises we don’t know if you can keep. But you’re right. I can’t let Blackwell take any more from me, not Jamie, not my job, not... not my chance with you.”

“He won’t,” Alex told her, vowing in her heart to be there for Maggie, no matter what.

Maggie sniffled. “Think I ruined breakfast.”

Alex scrounged another smile. “I can make more, Sawyer. Unless all this was an excuse to avoid my cooking.”

Scoffing, Maggie shook her head.

“Why don’t you get cleaned up? I’ll make us another round then change those bandages, okay?” Alex’s hand skimmed over Maggie’s right shoulder and smoothed down her back, detecting the gauze and tape beneath the orange fabric.

“Anytime.”

***

“How do you know your way around here so well?”

Still mulling over Maggie’s vague text, Winn didn’t fully process Jamie’s question. Kara seemed to think everything was hunky-dory with Maggie and Alex after last night, but Winn felt a trickle of worry in his guts.

“I come here all the time,” he murmured with a distracted glance at his phone screen. Should he push Maggie for more details? Text Alex to see if she gave him a similar answer? Send Kara over to take a peek with her handy x-ray vision?

“To the Children’s Museum?” Jamie’s tone was skeptical. Her hand was warm and small in his as they strolled toward the geology exhibit ahead. “But you don’t have kids.”

“So?” Winn pursed his lips and stuck his phone back in his pocket. He’d pry more out of Maggie later, in person. After everything she and Alex had been through to make it back to each other, he wouldn’t let them flake now if he could help it.

“It’s a children’s museum,” Jamie repeated, a hint of amusement creeping into her young tone.

The point Jamie was none-too-subtly driving home finally penetrated. Winn balked and pivoted to face her with mock outrage. “Are you implying I’m too old for the Children’s Museum, young lady?”

Jamie giggled, the sound music to Winn’s ears after too many tears the last week.

“I’ll have you know, I am a proud kid at heart. You should see my action figure collection.”

“You mean like dolls?”

“Action figures,” Winn insisted. Kara had made a similar dig about his toy-covered desk at CatCo. No one ever appreciated him. “See if I let you play with them now.”

Jamie rolled her eyes and tugged on his hand. “Come on. I want to see the geodes. We talked about them in science before summer break.”

“I’m down with that plan. Geodes are cool.” Gamely, Winn followed, tucking his concerns for Maggie and Alex into the back of his mind to give Jamie his full attention. Her Supergirl sneakers squeaked from time to time on the flagstone floor, but she didn’t seem to notice.

“Mom brought me here once when I was little.”

“When you were little, huh?” Winn suppressed a smile. Jamie rarely mentioned Aileen, so now wasn’t the time to tease. “Did she like science?”

“Not really. We went to the art museum a lot. That’s where Maggie took her on their first date.”

They reached the exhibit, and Jamie broke away to run toward two large geodes sparkling in the middle of the room. Winn trailed after, wishing he was small enough to crawl through the rock and cave formations around them. Kids got all the fun stuff.

Jamie fumbled with her cell phone and took a few pictures. Winn suspected she would draw the
purple crystals later.

“So… did your mom talk about Maggie a lot?” Winn asked when he joined her.

Jamie shrugged and snapped another photo, getting as close to a clump of amethyst as she could. “She thought I should know about my other mom. What she was like.”

“Did you ever ask to meet Maggie?”

Jamie’s features were far too pensive when she glanced up at him. She nodded. “Mom always said no.”

Winn did his best not to judge Aileen for her choices, but it was damn hard. Maggie had missed out on too many things and so had Jamie. “Did she ever say why?”

Small shoulders rose and fell in another shrug. “She said Maggie had her life and we had ours. I just figured Maggie didn’t want us.”

Alarms went off in Winn’s head. He dropped to one knee next to Jamie, catching her elbow and urging her to look at him. “You don’t believe that now, right? Maggie loves you. If she’d known about you, she would have been there.”

“I know.” Jamie’s dark gaze didn’t waver. “I just… I don’t understand why Mom kept me a secret from her.”

“I don’t either, but your mom never meant to hurt you or Maggie.”

“Really?” Jamie didn’t seem so sure.

Winn nodded and scooped Jamie into his arms before standing again, settling her against his hip. She took advantage and grabbed another picture of the geode from her higher perspective.

“I bet Maggie would take you to the art museum. So would Alex. Or if they’re too busy, I’m always happy to spend time with you, kiddo.”

“Kara promised to take me next week, but thank you.” Jamie kissed him on the cheek.

Winn glanced at his shoes, half expecting to find himself melting into a pile of goo. “Anytime.”

He wandered over to another part of the exhibit, Jamie still firmly in his arms.

“So will Mom stay over at Alex’s more now?” Jamie asked, running curious fingers over a slab of sandstone.

“Maybe,” Winn hedged. “They need some time together to work things out, but it doesn’t mean Maggie doesn’t want to hang out with you too, okay?”

“I know,” Jamie said again. “It’s complicated. They need to talk.”

Winn sighed, relieved Jamie didn’t appear upset with the development.

“And they probably want to have sex.”

A passing mother shot Winn a look of alarm as he froze, all the blood draining from his face. He scrambled for a reply but felt no shame when he chose to chicken out. “I’ll um… I’ll leave that conversation to Maggie.”
“Why?”

“Just gonna.” Winn changed direction, moving back the way they came when he realized they were headed toward an exhibit on the human body. Not where he wanted to go. At all. “Want to check out the dinosaurs?”

Jamie’s brow crinkled in confusion. “We did already.”

“Let’s go again!”

***

“You okay?”

Alex’s concern warmed Maggie more than the midday sun as they climbed the small set of steps to Maggie’s apartment building. Maggie nodded, shooting Alex a quick, shy smile as she opened the front door and they stepped into the heavily air-conditioned lobby. Neither had spoken on the ride over, both too exhausted to worry about the words left unspoken.

They’d tackled enough emotional baggage for one day.

“You don’t have to come up,” Maggie told her when they reached the elevators. She pushed the up button and waited to see which car descended first. “I promise not to skip out and find a dealer as soon as you leave the building.”

Alex grimaced at the joke. “I’m not worried, but I’d like to see you to your door, if that’s okay?”

Maggie nodded again. The offer had been for form anyway. She wanted to see Alex with Jamie. This morning reminded her of how close she’d come to never having the chance, and the glimpse she’d gotten of them together in the medbay two days ago was nowhere near enough. While the need for Rush sang in her blood like a siren’s call, Maggie yearned for more than the drug could offer. Screw hyper-realistic fantasies when she could have the real thing.

The elevator arrived and they climbed on. Maggie pressed the number for her floor then stepped back, her breath stuttering when Alex’s hand settled hot and solid in the small of her back. Her body soaked up the contact, greedy for more, and Maggie shivered when Alex’s hand skimmed up her spine a moment later.

“Cold?”

“Fine,” Maggie lied. *Just miss your hands on me*, she almost confessed.

Maggie studied their blurry reflection in the door as the elevator ascended, the doubts she’d wrestled with all morning rising with each passing floor. If their Hail Mary play stood a prayer of saving their relationship, Maggie needed to pour every ounce of her courage and faith into the effort, but she found herself holding back. They’d both dropped the ball so many times.

“You seem like you’re thinking about something serious,” Alex murmured. “Penny for your thoughts.”

“Just… thinking about football metaphors.”

Alex’s left eyebrow lifted, but Maggie didn’t elaborate.

The doors parted a minute later. Emotions a mess and muscles aching, Maggie struggled to get her
keys out of her pocket as they headed down the hall. When they her reached apartment, Maggie hooked her her thumb at the door.

“This is me.”

Alex bit her lip and nodded. “Winn will stay another day. Kara said she’d stop by tonight.”

The need for a babysitter chafed, but the prospect of being unsupervised while her addiction was still raging was even less palatable. Maggie unlocked the door and turned to Alex. “You, um… you want to come in?”

Alex’s gaze flicked to the door, longing clear in her eyes. She slid her hands into her back pockets and rocked on the heels of her boots. “Maybe next time.”

Maggie blinked, caught off guard. “Jamie is here.”

“Yeah. I uh… I figured.” Alex gave her a tight smile. “You two should spend time together.”

“We will, but you can say hi, Danvers. Jamie would love to see you.” Disappointment swelled in Maggie’s chest, but she did her best to hide it, confused by Alex’s reluctance.

“Next time,” Alex promised.

Maggie tilted her head. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Not… I just…” Alex rolled her eyes at her inability to form a complete sentence. “Look, I, I want to get to know Jamie.”

“Of course.”

Alex’s waffled her head back and forth. “I meant, I can’t wait to get to know her, to get know the two of you together, to watch you be a mom, but…”

“But?” A pang of panic made Maggie’s stomach hurt.

“But right now, what matters most is getting to know you again. I want you to understand I’m here for you, Maggie. Whether or not Jamie was in the picture, I’d still be standing right here.”

Alex stepped closer, her eyes intense and pleading. “I meant what I said in the surveillance truck. You are enough. You’re everything.”

For the second time in less than twenty-four hours, Alex left Maggie speechless. She wanted to believe what Alex was saying, but Maggie’s stubborn fears wouldn’t let her. Maybe they never would.

“Jamie hasn’t changed that, okay? She’s just… an amazing bonus. So I’ll stay out here,” Alex continued, “outside the family you two have together. I won’t try to be part of that until you trust what I feel for you.”

Maggie nodded, managing a smile. “I… needed to hear you say that. I didn’t know I needed it, but I did. But Jamie adores you, Alex, just like I expected she would. I won’t keep you from seeing each other.”

“She likes me?” Alex’s throat bobbed with a rough swallow.

“Are you kidding? Jamie thinks you’re the best thing since Pop-Tarts.”
That wrung a startled, bashful laugh from Alex, and her subsequent smile was so beautiful it robbed Maggie of the will to breathe.

God, she still loved her. Alex was her ride or die. The love of her life. If it were just Maggie’s feelings on the line, she would risk everything for that smile without regret. Toss aside reason and good sense for one last chance at forever.

But she had Jamie now. What would it do to her if she invested in Alex as a parent and Alex changed her mind again? If Alex decided she wanted more kids... a child of her own instead...

Maggie’s heart had been broken so many times it expected pain, anticipated when it would inevitably shatter because she’d been fool enough to let someone close again. Alex breaking Maggie was one thing, but she would be damned if she let her do that to Jamie.

Alex always had the best intentions, but not always the best results.

“What’s wrong?” Alex’s smile faded. She always saw too much, read Maggie too well.

“Nothing,” Maggie lied, shutting Alex out. She needed to think things through using her head instead of her heart, and Maggie couldn’t do that with Alex there confusing both. “I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“I’ll be here even if the world is ending.” Alex kept her tone light, but her eyes were serious.

Maggie stood on tiptoe to leave a soft, parting kiss on Alex’s jaw. “Don’t tempt Fate, Danvers,” she cautioned in a whisper.

With one last, lingering glance, Maggie turned away and slipped inside her apartment.

Only to be met by a whirlwind, Jamie flinging herself into Maggie’s arms and nearly knocking her over.

“Oof,” Maggie wheezed out, adjusting her grip to keep Jamie from sliding. “Hey, kiddo, how was the museum?”

Jamie already had her phone out, flipping through pictures and talking a mile a minute about geodes and dinosaurs and how Winn wouldn’t take her to the biology exhibit no matter how many times she said please.

“Oh yeah?” Maggie raised an eyebrow at Winn over Jamie’s head, almost afraid to ask when Winn paled and shook his head.

“Yeah. And he wouldn’t let me get ice cream because I got a brownie with my lunch,” Jamie pouted. “Now that you’re home, can we go to the park and get ice cream?”

“I think we have some in the freezer,” Maggie replied, ruffling Jamie’s hair to distract her from the faint tremor in her voice. They had arrested too many Rush dealers in parks just like the one down the block, and a wave of raw need swept through Maggie at the thought of scoring another hit. For a moment, it blanked out every other emotion, boiling her down to a singular, awful want.

Jamie’s voice broke through, tinged with hurt. “But I want ice cream in a cone, with sprinkles on it.”

“Maybe later. Kara can take you.”

“I want you to take me.”
With a sigh, Maggie lowered them both so she could set Jamie on the floor and look her in the eye. She sucked in a calming breath, wondering how to explain her addiction to a six-year-old. “I know Eliza told you a little about, about, the side effects of what happened to me. With the drug. Didn’t she?”

Jamie nodded, her mood turning more solemn. “She said you needed to with–withdraw.” She stumbled over the word, and Maggie’s heart clenched. Jamie had already been through too much in her short life. She didn’t need this ugly lesson too.

“Do you understand what that means?” Maggie heard Winn move from the kitchen to the dining room, drifting closer but not too close, affording them an illusion of privacy.

“Sure.” Jamie nodded enthusiastically. “You’re supposed to be moody and shaky and tired. But that was yesterday. You’re better today, aren’t you?”

Anger surged through Maggie at the men who’d done this to her, at herself for not being able to stop them. She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to rein it in. If Blackwell had been in front of her, Maggie would have gone for his jugular. “I am. I am better but… but I’m not over it. Not all the way. I’m still… sick.”

“Oh. So when will you be?”

“I don’t know. It might–it might take a while. Longer than I want it to. I’m sorry.” Fresh tears sprang to her eyes as the shame she pushed down this morning rose again, tightening her chest in a vice. “I’m trying, I’m really…”

Thin arms wrapped around her neck as Jamie used her full weight to pull Maggie into a hug. “Don’t cry, Mom. We can have ice cream here. And popcorn for dinner.” Her tone was contrite.

Maggie wiped at her eyes, a smile coming to her lips. “We can’t have popcorn for dinner.”

“We have to have popcorn for the movie.”

“You want to watch a movie, huh?”

“Yup. That’s what Mom always did when I was sick. We’ll camp out on the couch and watch movies so you can rest and feel better.” Jamie caught her hand and tugged, her above-average strength jerking Maggie forward.

Maggie allowed herself to be led, letting her worries about Alex and their future go for just a little while. Wrung out, scared, and hurting, Maggie thought Jamie’s plan sounded pathetically appealing.

Jamie patted the leather. “Lay down,” she ordered in a stern voice. “I’ll get you a pillow and a blanket. Uncle Winn, get Mom some ice cream.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Winn met Maggie’s gaze and they shared a private, bemused smile.

Jamie returned dragging a blanket from Maggie’s bed and her pillow. Maggie couldn’t stop smiling as Jamie made her comfortable, even going so far as to pull off Maggie’s tennis shoes before tucking her in.

“Better?” Jamie asked.

“I’ll get dinner.” Jamie wandered off like she had plans for a five course meal instead of the bag of microwave popcorn she retrieved from the pantry.

Winn handed Maggie a bowl of vegan rocky road and a glass of water. He kept his voice low when he asked, “Everything okay?”

“Not yet,” Maggie admitted, watching Jamie with fond eyes. “But better than yesterday.”

Winn squeezed her shoulder. “Something tells me you’re about to get all the TLC you need.”

Almost, Maggie thought, aching for Alex as she snuggled into the couch and waited for Jamie to return.

***

The world was too quiet for Alex’s loud thoughts.

Alone in the gathering gray in her apartment, Alex sat on the couch, staring into the lengthening shadows as the sun set over National City. She didn’t open the new bottle of scotch in her hands, picking absently at the label with her thumbnail instead. While her mind spun, ice melted in the tumbler on the coffee table.

J’onn had ordered her not to step foot inside the DEO until Monday, her family wasn’t answering their phones, and Winn was where Alex would give anything to be.

Alex plunked the bottle next to her glass and stood. Tunneling her hands through her hair, she searched the apartment for a distraction only to find more reminders of the woman she couldn’t get off her mind. On any given day, memories of Maggie lingered like ghosts to haunt her, but tonight they were too real and raw. They raked over Alex’s nerves, inflaming her already guilty conscience.

Maggie was having second thoughts. Alex had seen it in her eyes, read it in Maggie’s body language through a thousand little tells. Looking around, Alex’s mistakes confronted her from every corner. It had been easy for Maggie to agree to a date in the dark, but in the cold light of day, she would have remembered the fights. The yelling. The crying…

She would have remembered all the reasons giving Alex another chance was a bad idea.

Alex gave into a sliver of temptation and drew her phone from her pocket. Whatever they were to each other now, she was still the primary physician on Maggie’s case. With Maggie’s fears fresh on her mind, Alex texted Winn to check on her.

He answered two minutes later with a simple photo.

*The Fox and the Hound* was on the TV, but Maggie wasn’t watching. Curled up against the arm of a leather sofa, she was fast asleep, her hand resting protectively on Jamie’s shoulder. Jamie was stretched out beside her, tucked under a light blue blanket and using Maggie’s thigh as a pillow. Unlike her mother, Jamie was awake, staring at the screen with rapt attention as she snacked on popcorn.

Alex’s throat tightened at the sight. They could be *her* family. She could be there, snuggled under the blanket and taking care of them both. She had to hold on to them. Fix what she’d broken. Convince Maggie to go on that date tomorrow and every date thereafter.

*Thank you*, Alex replied. The picture soothed some of her anxieties enough to let her breathe easier. She didn’t have the guts to ask Winn what Maggie said about last night or this morning.
The walls closing in, Alex shoved her phone into her pocket and grabbed her jacket off the back of a chair. She couldn’t form a plan here, not surrounded by the spectre of failure. Maybe a ride to the beach on the Ducati would clear her head.

She slipped her jacket on and grabbed her keys from the mantle. Unlocking the door, Alex swung it open only to jerk back with a yip of surprise. “Don’t do that!”

“Don’t do what, sweetie? Knock?” Eliza lowered her fist from where she was about to tap on the door. She had a large pizza box in her other hand and a bottle of wine tucked under her arm.

Alex floundered for a response when Eliza crowded her in the doorway, forcing Alex to back up and let her mother in.

“Bad time?” Eliza asked politely as she brushed past her. “Were you on your way to see Maggie?”

With one last, longing look at the hall, Alex shut the door. “No, I… She’s sleeping.”

Eliza’s gaze darted to the bedroom.

“At home. Her home,” Alex clarified.

“I heard she came to see you last night.”

Alex stuffed her hands into the pockets of her leather jacket. “She did.”

Eliza dropped the pizza box onto the island counter and set the wine beside it. “Are you going to make your mother beg for details? What happened?”

“She apologized for all the stuff with Jamie.”

When Alex didn’t elaborate, Eliza flapped her arms against her legs. “And?”

“You never took this kind of interest in the guys I dated,” Alex pointed out.

“Neither did you.” Eliza’s smile was smug.

Alex had to admit, as far as comebacks went, that was a good one. She joined Eliza at the island, fetching plates, napkins, and glasses. “Where’s Kara?”

“Patrolling. She told me to tell you she’ll check in tomorrow. Oh, and that’s she proud of you.”

“For what?” Alex paused mid-twist with the corkscrew.

“You wanted Kara invested in your relationship, Alex. Be careful what you wish for. And your sister was just looking out for you both.”

Alex yanked the cork free with more force than necessary. She poured the wine through an aerator and handed the first glass to her mother. “Then why the questions if you know the answers?”

“I was hoping I wouldn’t have to come across like a meddling mom.” Eliza rotated the stem of her glass between her fingers. “But you don’t look like someone who got the second chance she wanted. What’s wrong? Where were you off to?”
Alex sipped her wine. “I needed to clear my head, and I couldn’t do that here.”

Eliza glanced around. “In your empty apartment?”

“It’s not empty.” Alex leaned against the counter. “I’m drowning in things I’d rather forget here. I mean, there are good memories. The night Maggie admitted she liked me. The first time we…” Alex cleared her throat and clammed up when she realized what she was about to say.

“Played Monopoly?” Eliza suggested with a smirk. “I assume bad memories are overshadowing the good tonight?”

Alex scrubbed her blushing face with both hands. “Yeah. I woke up with Maggie in my arms this morning, and I was happier than I’ve been in a long time. For a few, precious minutes, I let myself believe we could fix everything. That it would be easy because we loved each other so much. Then Maggie woke up confused. She knew she didn’t belong here and she…”

“She what?”

“Maggie flipped out, Mom. Thought she was on Rush. That being here, with me, was all an illusion.”

“Oh, sweetie…” Eliza breathed, all trace of amusement gone.

“I calmed her down. Fixed breakfast. But then… I think it all caught up to her. The breakup, Jamie, the addiction, almost dying… Being in my space couldn’t have helped.” Alex sighed and opened the box of pizza. “She fell apart. I’ve never seen her like that.”

Eliza picked up a slice and set it on her plate, but Alex didn’t touch it. “What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know what I can do.” Alex gazed around the apartment, at the vacant spaces she never filled after Maggie left. “Should I find a new place so Maggie could be more comfortable? Or take time off? Help with Jamie?” She huffed out a breath and reached for her wine again. “All that assumes Maggie even wants to spend time with me.”

Eliza patted Alex’s hand where it rested on the counter, tearing Alex out of her spiraling thoughts. One glance at her mother’s sympathetic expression told her she looked as pathetic as she felt.

“Sorry. You came over here expecting good news and found me even more a mess than I was last night.”

“Actually, I came over to apologize.”

Alex’s head came up in surprise. “For what?”

“I won’t pretend I didn’t want to hear about Maggie, but I realized I was too hard on your the other day. About Max. About leaving when you did.”

Alex shrugged, self conscious. “It’s okay. I imagine it must get frustrating. Watching me sabotage my happiness all the time.”

Eliza was quiet a moment. “Not frustrating, sweetie. Heartbreaking. You’re always drawing lines in the sand. Putting limits on how happy you’re allowed to be.”

The assessment was too on the money. Alex squirmed under the penetrating blue of Eliza’s eyes, choosing instead to stare into the depths of her wine.
“And whenever you cross that line, it’s a point of no return for you. Just when everything you want is right there within your grasp…”

“I destroy it before it can destroy me.” Alex set her wine down, losing her taste for it. She resisted the temptation to fetch the bottle of scotch instead.

“As a mother, that’s unbearable to watch. To see your child deprive herself of happiness because she’s so afraid of being hurt. But I was tired, and I was unduly harsh when I should have been supportive…”

“No,” Alex countered. “You were right. I should have stayed. Maggie said she understood, that she would have done the same, but that’s not true. She always put me first. Even over the law. Few things matter more to Maggie than that.”

Alex sagged against the island, hypnotized by the sun’s final, blood red rays glinting off her glass. “If I’m going to get Maggie back, if I have a prayer of keeping her, I have to stop being afraid of being happy.”

Eliza gripped Alex’s wrist. “We’ve both held ourselves back since we lost Jeremiah. I understand that fear, Alex. That if you let yourself experience genuine joy again that someone, or something, will come along and rip it away from you.”

“Yeah,” Alex breathed.

“If this is a pep talk, it sucks.”

Eliza ignored the jab. “What I can promise, is you’ll never know how happy you can be or for how long if you keep running. Life is so short, Alexandra. Don’t waste it being afraid when you could spend it loving Maggie. You deserve that. So does she.”

“But Maggie is on the fence, Mom. Last night she agreed to a date, but today she had second thoughts. I love her so much it hurts, but how do I convince her I won’t bolt again when I’ve done it twice now? Three times if you count chasing after Max. And Jamie is in the picture. Maggie has two hearts to protect from me.”

“You’re doing it now. Stop trying to talk yourself out of this.”

“That’s… no. I’m not. Not with this.” Frustrated, Alex moved away from the counter to pace her small kitchen. “Maggie is hesitant about me, and she has good reason to be. I can swear to the moon and back I won’t bail again, but it’s just meaningless words now.”

Eliza studied Alex like she was an equation to puzzle out. “Then convince her with actions.”

“How?” Alex asked, wary of the answer.

“Have you thought about therapy? Talking to one of the psychiatrists at the DEO?”

“Mom,” Alex groaned.

“I’m serious, Alex. You’re aware of your propensity to sabotage yourself. Talk to someone who can help you stop doing that.”

“I’m not letting some government shrink psychoanalyze me.”
“You just said words weren’t enough. Do you want Maggie back or not?” Eliza disregarded the scathing glance Alex shot her way as she continued to pace. “Actions speak louder, Alex. Maggie needs assurance you won’t run again, and I think you do too.”

Alex balked. “You really think getting my head shrunk will make Maggie feel better about us?”

Eliza got to her feet and circled the island. “She would understand how big a step it would be for you. It sends a message you’ll do whatever it takes, but if you’re not willing...”

“I…” Alex winced at how neatly Eliza had boxed her in. “I didn’t say that.”

“So you’ll schedule a session?”

Alex blew out a frustrated breath, nerves making the wine sour in her empty stomach. “There’s a lot of... stuff... I don’t want to talk about.”

“I get that, but is Maggie worth it?”

The answer was instantaneous. Alex closed her eyes and nodded. “Fine. I’ll... make an appointment tomorrow.”

Eliza’s hands were warm when they gripped Alex’s bare arms and squeezed. “Listen, I planned to head back to Midvale after Maggie’s checkup.”

Alex glanced up at her, thrown by the abrupt shift in the conversation. “Oh. I... sure. You need to get back to your life.” She tried not to sound as disappointed as she was.

“Actually, I don’t. Most of my work I can do from the DEO for a few weeks if you’re okay with me sticking around.”

Shy pleasure stole through Alex at the offer. “You don’t have to do that for me.”

“I want to. You’re not the only one who needs to work on things, Alex. I wasn’t there for you when your relationship with Maggie ended, and I should have been. Please, let me be here for you now.”

Alex pulled her mother into a hug, resting her chin on Eliza’s shoulder. “I’d like that.”

“If you’re serious about moving, I could help you search for a new place. Some place closer to the ocean. With a spare bedroom for your mother, of course,” she teased.

A smile flickered over Alex’s lips as she tightened her hold. “I’d like that too.”

“You’ll figure things out, Alex. I have faith in you, in both of you.”

Alex squeezed her eyes shut and held on, praying her mom was right.
Chapter Notes

Okay, so we've been working on this for a while and have decided to half the chapter at a little over 6k words. We're well into chapter 17 so hopefully it won't be more than a couple of weeks or so before we finish it. Enjoy!

Thanks to Dani for the awesome banner! Link to original Twitter post.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Lost in thought and half awake, Maggie stared into the depths of her coffee cup. The ceramic mug had long since cooled between her palms, and Maggie winced at the tepid temperature when she took a distracted sip.

“Need a reheat?”

Startled by Kara’s appearance at her elbow, Maggie flinched. For someone she often equated with an alien wrecking ball, Kara was damn quiet when she put her mind to it. Maggie set the mug back on the table, afraid to hold it while Kara zapped it. “Sure.”

Kara slid her glasses down and fired a quick burst of heat vision into the coffee. When she finished, a
tendril of steam wafted lazily toward the ceiling. “Ms. Grant liked her lattes scalding hot. Pretty sure that trick is why I outlasted all her other assistants.”

A weak smirk was all Maggie could muster.

With a sigh, Kara settled into the chair opposite her. No supersuit this morning, she looked young and human in a pair of khakis and a denim button down for work. Maggie was a slob in comparison, still in the gray cotton shorts and black tank top she’d worn to bed.

“How are you feeling?” Kara prodded with caution, and Maggie gave her props for resisting the urge this long. “I heard you last night. You tossed and turned for hours. Was the Rush keeping you awake or something else?”

Jamie joined them in the kitchen, granting Maggie a momentary reprieve from answering. Still in her Wonder Woman pj’s, Jamie went to the pantry and plucked her favorite Pop-Tarts from a box on a lower shelf. Maggie watched her wrestle off the wrapper with a fond smile that grew wider when Jamie slid the stepstool over to the counter, climbed it, and plunked two in the toaster. She had quite the self sufficient six-year-old.

“Had a lot on my mind.” Maggie faced Kara again. Those otherworldly blue eyes were intent on her, seeing more than Maggie wanted her to see.

Much to Maggie’s surprise, Kara still didn’t push. Not yet. “The craving any better this morning?”

Maggie shrugged and took another sip of her coffee, burning the tip of her tongue this time. “Some. It’s there, nagging at me, but, I don’t know. Seems weaker.” It had been a relief not to feel that vicious pull when she woke up. She’d had hankerings for ice cream more potent than what she was experiencing now.

“Good.”

Their gazes fenced for a moment until Maggie looked away.

“Eliza texted last night. She wants me at the DEO at 4:00 for my checkup.” Maggie wasn’t in the mood for more needles, but the prospect of facing Alex’s mother was even less appealing.

“Maggie, I get I’m not your first choice of confidants, but you can talk to me. If it’s about Alex–”

The toaster popped and Jamie retrieved her pastries. She placed them on a plate fetched from the drying rack before climbing down and joining them at the table. One treat she kept for herself, the other she slid onto Maggie’s plate, pushing aside a small pile of cold scrambled eggs.

A faint, bewildered smile came to Maggie’s lips. “What’s this?”

“A Pop-Tart.” Jamie looked at Maggie as if she’d lost her mind, and Kara ducked her head to hide a fleeting grin.

Maggie poked Jamie in the belly and got an adorable scowl in return. “I know that, silly, but it’s your favorite kind. Why are you giving me one?”

“You don’t look good.”

“Gee, thanks,” Maggie answered drolly, “and here I thought I felt better for a change.”

“Not sick. Sad.” Jamie nudged the corner of the Pop-Tart with her finger, encouraging Maggie to
Maggie’s stomach sank. She hadn’t done the best job hiding her conflicted feelings about Alex, but she simply didn’t have the energy beyond wrestling with what she wanted to do versus what she needed to do on top of her addiction.

“What’s wrong?” Jamie asked around a mouthful of Wildlicious Wild Berry.

“I’m okay. Just… a lot on my mind, kiddo.” Maggie broke off a corner of the Pop-Tart and nibbled it with little enthusiasm.

“About Alex?”

Maggie darted a self-conscious glance at Kara.

“You know… Why don’t I clean up the kitchen?” Kara pushed back from the table and stood, towering over mother and daughter. The offer was polite, but Kara was capable of hearing them whisper ten blocks away. Any privacy her departure offered was an illusion, but Maggie would take what she could get.

Once Kara was loading the dishwasher and wiping down the counters, Maggie sighed and took Jamie’s hand.

“Yeah. About Alex.”

“But why are you sad? You’re getting back together, right?”

Up all night, thoughts spinning in an agonized loop, Maggie had finally made the choice to call things off. Better to end it now before Alex inevitably bailed, or Maggie’s trust issues pushed her away like all the rest. The definition of insanity was doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Maggie couldn’t afford to lose her mind over Alex Danvers again. Not with Jamie in the mix.

“I um… I don’t know. There’s a lot of…” Maggie had to stop, blowing out a shaky breath as her throat tightened and tears welled. She’d made her choice, but it hurt like hell.

“Mom?” Jamie set the rest of her Pop-Tart down beside Maggie’s and laid her small hand on Maggie’s bare knee. Her fingers were sticky with strawberry jam.

“Sorry,” Maggie ground out, sniffling a little. Kara was too quiet in the kitchen, and Maggie dreaded the conversation between them when they were alone again. “I love Alex. I always will, but uh… I’m not sure we’re good for each other.”

“But you love her.”

“I do, but sometimes… sometimes you can love someone with your whole heart and soul, but it’s just not meant to be.”

Jamie’s frown deepened. “I thought we would be a family. I, I wanted us to be.”

Maggie sucked down a cold breath, Jamie’s words and the tremor in her young voice making her doubt her decision. “Jamie…”

“You haven’t even tried yet, Mom.”

“We did try. We didn’t work.”
“Why? You never tell me why. What was so complicated?”

Kara’s gaze was stricken when Maggie glanced at her again. “Um… I’ll patrol for a few minutes. Let you two talk.”

“You can’t leave,” Jamie told her. “Mom can’t be alone.”

Kara crossed to them in the blink of an eye, already changed into her suit as wind rushed over them and stirred their hair. “She’s not. Maggie has you. Use your watch. If Maggie goes anywhere, you can call me back. But knowing your mom, she’ll stay right here.”

Kara’s hand was warm on Maggie’s shoulder when it squeezed in reassurance. Then she was gone, the curtains on either side of the balcony door billowing in her wake.

Maggie swallowed and patted her lap. It was time she and Jamie talked about this. “C’mere.”

Jamie approached warily, but she crawled up and sat sideways on Maggie’s lap all the same. Maggie slipped her arms around her daughter’s waist and took a deep breath, willing the nerves swarming like a kicked beehive in her stomach to settle.

“I want you to understand something first, okay? I am so glad you came into my life. I wish it had happened under different circumstances, that I’d been there to watch you grow up, but never doubt for a single second how much I love you.”

“Okay,” Jamie said with reluctance.

Maggie searched for the right words and realized there weren’t any. She could only be honest. “Alex ended things with me because she wanted a family and I didn’t.”

Jamie shifted to look at Maggie more fully. “But—”

“There was a time in my life where I didn’t want kids. I had my future mapped out in my head and children weren’t part of that plan. Aileen knew that. That’s why she didn’t tell me about you even though I wish she would have.”

“Then why did you take me?” Jamie seemed surprisingly calm, and somehow that set Maggie more on edge.

“Because I know what it’s like when family doesn’t want you. I couldn’t let you feel that way.” Maggie stroked her fingers through Jamie’s silky hair, sweeping it back and tucking it behind Jamie’s ear. “Not when I could do something about it. And you’re mine. I’m responsible for you.”

Jamie stared, and Maggie saw a hundred questions in her eyes before she blinked and dropped her gaze.

“But now,” Maggie continued, feeling her way carefully, “I can’t imagine the life I wanted before. The life I want now is the one I have with you. You changed… *everything*, Jamie. For the better. You make me happy. You’ve healed me in ways you’ll never understand. And I hope… I hope I’ve done the same for you.”

“Are you sorry I came to live with you?”

“No.” Maggie’s tone was emphatic. “Never. And while I was scared out of my mind at the time, and still am a little, I don’t regret this. I don’t regret you. I will *never* regret you.”
“So mom wasn’t embarrassed about me?”

“Embarrassed?” Maggie dipped her head when Jamie tried to look away again.

“She kept me a secret from you. No matter how many times I asked, she wouldn’t let me meet you, or even call you. I figured I embarrassed her. That she thought you wouldn’t like me.”

“Oh, sweetie, no.” Maggie gathered Jamie closer. “I’m sorry you ever felt that way. Your mom believed she was doing the right thing by not telling me, but I hate I missed out on so much with you.”

“But if Alex wants a family, we can be her family now, right?”

Maggie sighed. “It’s not that simple. Alex… she is… the bravest woman I know with protecting other people. She’ll throw herself into the line of fire to save a stranger, but when it comes to herself? She’s afraid to be too happy, and when she gets close, she panics. I know that doesn’t make a lot of sense. It’s one of those things you’ll understand when you get older.”

“She’s scared of getting what she wants because she is afraid she’ll lose it, that someone will rip it away,” Jamie said with quiet understanding.

Maggie’s throat rippled on a harsh swallow and her vision of Jamie blurred with fresh tears. She rubbed Jamie’s back, gutted her kid comprehend that by age six. “Yeah. She’s done it a few times now.”

They sat in silence for a moment while Jamie picked at a blue thread on the hem of her pajama top.

“And honestly…” Maggie put her chin on Jamie’s shoulder. “I’m no better. My parents… they threw me away when I was fourteen. Ever since, I expect people to leave me. So when Alex called things off… I’d been waiting for it. Expecting it. If she hadn’t, I might have messed things up between us anyway. I always do.”

“Why did your parents throw you away? Because you’re gay?”

Maggie nodded.

Jamie’s nose wrinkled in disgust. “So you’re afraid Alex will run, and Alex is afraid of being happy?”

“Yeah. Those two things really don’t work well together.”

“Can’t you both stop being afraid?”

If only it were that easy. Maggie wished to God it was. “Neither of us has managed so far. Like it or not, some things are ingrained in us. So deep we can’t get them out.”

Jamie shifted again, curling up against Maggie’s chest. “I loved my mom.”

“I know,” Maggie murmured, curious at the abrupt turn in the conversation.

“I’d do anything to have her back. You shouldn’t give up on Alex. Not when she’s still here and you still love her.”

Maggie winced as Jamie’s words struck home, railing on her already guilty conscience. The knowledge she was going to hurt Alex later weighed heavy on her, and Jamie just added another pound or twenty to the pain. “I told you, kiddo, it’s not that simple.”
“Mom used to say anything was simple if you make it that way.”

A fond, sad smile shaped Maggie’s lips. “Yeah. Seem to remember her saying that about an IKEA bookcase I helped her put together. Didn’t believe it then, and I don’t believe it now.”

“But I really like Alex. I don’t want you to break up again.”

For a string of heartbeats, Maggie didn’t respond, grief welling up to choke her. At least Rush had given her a taste of a life with Jamie and Alex, one perfect moment. To give up that dream...

Jamie’s arms slipped around Maggie in wordless comfort.

“Just think about it, okay? Please?” Jamie pleaded.

“I will,” Maggie promised. She suspected she would think of nothing else all day.

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Legs hammering, lungs burning, Alex sprinted the last few yards up the beach, throwing sand with every step. She dropped her head, braced her hands on her knees, and sucked in several lungfuls of air. Finally, she straightened, grit scraping her skin as she dragged her arm across her forehead to wipe at the sweat.

Her mom had woken her early with coffee and bagels before dragging her out for an hour of apartment hunting as soon as she was dressed. Condo showings, she corrected herself with a grimace, since her mom had decided she needed to stop renting and actually buy a home.

Alex had begged off as quickly as possible, saying she wanted some time alone before going to the DEO to make an appointment with the therapist. In reality, the dull, beige, expressionless rooms, staged to look like someone lived there, reminded her too much of her current apartment and the space she wanted to leave.

She paused to take stock of her surroundings and frowned at the unfamiliar grove of trees and thick underbrush screening the stretch of beach where she stood. Forgoing her usual route on the boardwalk and even her headphones, she had charged alongside the surf, hoping the wind and waves would blank out the noise in her head.

It had worked, to a point. The anxiety about making her appointment had bled off somewhere around the third mile, but now the fear tightening her chest was about her date with Maggie. It had to be perfect, quiet, isolated, some place they could talk without interruptions. Tonight felt like her last shot, a make-or-break moment.

Hands above her head, Alex walked down the empty beach to cool off. She had burned through every possible location for their date already. Old restaurants they’d loved seemed tainted, and her apartment was too haunted by her mistakes. She needed something new. Something untouched by their past.

Her toe snagged the edge of a piece of wood, and Alex stumbled two steps before recovering her balance. Sticking her sneaker under a board, she flipped it over. An ancient real estate sign, the faded For Sale barely readable. Someone must have brought it there as fodder for a bonfire, or it got dragged in at high tide.

Except… set back in the brush, an old, ramshackle beach house jutted above the sand on pilings. Overgrown vines weaved through the steps to the deck and along the railing. The paint long since
faded and the windows covered in grime, a strong wind would probably bring the house crashing
down.

Alex swung around and took a deep breath, readying herself to return the way she had came. There
wasn’t a soul in sight and the beach curved out in front of her, sand shimmering in the sunlight where
the water had receded.

In the moonlight, lit by a bonfire, it would be beautiful. Alex could already imagine a thick blanket, a
picnic basket weighing down one corner, a radio another.

Decision made, she topped a small dune and walked along the trees, casting glances at the old house
as she did so. It wasn’t in as bad of shape as it had looked initially, and the driveway snaking
behind the house was partially cleared. She could park just off the beach and bring Maggie to this
spot for their date.

Making her way back, she inhaled deeply, drawing in a lungful of ocean air. The familiar smell
centered her in the moment, and a small twinge of nostalgia grew into a sudden yet deep longing.

Alex missed living near the water, missed the waves lulling her to sleep, missed the peace of surfing
at dawn.

Maybe she could get her board out of storage when she found a new place and reclaim things she
used to love. It had to be part of the path to happiness.

Speaking of paths to happiness, she had an appointment to make. The muscles in her back and neck
tightened so fast and so hard her teeth clicked together. At least she had a few more miles to get back
to her apartment.

On a whim, she paused by the For Sale sign and snapped a quick picture of the faded phone number
before breaking into a run.

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“Everything okay?”

Maggie nearly inhaled her toothbrush. Coughing, she bent over the sink and spit out her toothpaste
before rinsing out her mouth. She tossed the toothbrush in the holder and faced Kara’s reflection in
the mirror. “You did that on purpose. Did you hover in here or something?”

Kara’s answering smirk at the allegation was weak at best. “Maybe you’re just distracted.”

That was one word for it, Maggie had to admit. Her conversation with Jamie had thrown Maggie’s
head and heart back into conflict, and their constant warring was wearing her out. Maggie flicked off
the bathroom light and Kara stepped aside to let her pass before following her into the living room.

The shower in the hall bath was on as Jamie got ready for camp. Winn would be by to spend the day
with Maggie soon, but as much as she adored him, Maggie itched for some privacy, even if being left
alone with her thoughts wasn’t a good idea.

Trying to stall for time, Maggie scooped up the TV remote and put on some mindless game show in
the background. Kara stood there in her supersuit, waiting for Jamie or waiting Maggie out, Maggie
couldn’t be sure.

“ Took you a while this morning,” Maggie murmured as she sat down on the couch. “How did
Supergirl save the day this time?”
“House fire. It was easy to put out, but then there was a four car collision on Otto Binder Bridge.”

Maggie nodded, her nose twitching at the smell of soot and ash on Kara’s cape. “No rampaging aliens or diabolical super villains, huh?”

“That’s usually after lunch,” Kara replied deadpan, but she sounded tired. “So are we pretending I didn’t hear what you said about Alex before I left?”

“Figured you’d eavesdrop outside the building.” Maggie wouldn’t look at her.

Kara huffed out an exasperated breath before scooping up her cape and sitting in the armchair beside the couch. “That was a private conversation between you and Jamie that I knew you didn’t want me to hear.”

Maggie faced her then. Kara wore a faint frown on her pretty features, a familiar crinkle between her eyebrows. “Just say it. Whatever is on your mind, spit it out.”

“Jamie is right. Alex loves you, Maggie. I don’t understand what happened since the night before last to make you doubt that—”

“I don’t doubt that. That’s not up for debate.”

“Then what is? Why are you suddenly second guessing? This is what you wanted.”

Maggie slumped back against the sofa and stared at the ceiling. “Let’s say reality set in and leave it at that. I know you want Alex to be happy—”

“When are you going to understand this isn’t just about Alex? After all you’ve been through, you two deserve this. You deserve to be happy and so does Jamie.”

Biting her tongue, Maggie fought the temptation to take out her grief and frustration on the Girl of Steel, but just because Kara was bulletproof didn’t mean she deserved abuse. “Look, I appreciate that you care. I do. But right now, this is between me and your sister, okay?”

Kara opened her mouth to respond only to think twice and close it. She gave Maggie a tight nod. “Can I say one more thing though?”

“Like I could stop you.”

Kara ignored Maggie’s prickly tone. “You have a ton of things on your mind. Whatever you’re considering with Alex, you don’t have to decide today. Wait until you’re on steadier footing.”

“You’re trying to buy her time.”

“I am,” Kara snapped with a flash of heat. “Give yourself a damn break, Maggie. Let’s get you over the hump with the Rush before you make any life choices you’ll regret.”

Maggie was spared from responding by a knock at the door. “That must be Winn.”

“No. It’s your captain.” Kara gracefully swept to her feet and headed for the door.

“What?” Maggie bolted off the couch and nearly face-planted into her coffee table in her haste. She snatched a hoodie off the back of the couch and slipped it on, zipping it to her neck. The captain would have to deal with her bare legs, but being braless in a tank top in front of her superior officer screamed impropriety.
The look on Dawson’s face when Supergirl opened the door was almost worth it. His bushy gray eyebrows shot high up his forehead and his gaze darted to the door number as if he’d knocked on Supergirl’s apartment by mistake.

“Captain Dawson,” Kara greeted formally. She held out a hand, and he shook it.

“Supergirl.” Dawson nodded politely before his eyes slid to Maggie and he relaxed. “Sawyer.”

“Sir.”

“Please, come in.” Kara ushered him inside and closed the door. “Coffee?”

“Uh, I’m fine, thank you.” Dawson gave Maggie a look, and she shrugged as she ran her fingers through her hair, hoping it looked halfway presentable.

“Ready,” Jamie announced as she came into the living room, her backpack full of art supplies already on her small shoulders and her damp hair pulled back in a ponytail. “Can we go to the zoo on Sunday? I still want to see the–” She broke off when she spotted the captain.

“Yes,” Maggie muttered, distracted, before gesturing at Dawson. “Um… Jamie, this is Captain Dawson, my boss. Captain, my daughter, Jamie.”

It still felt foreign to say my daughter, but a hint of pride infused Maggie’s voice.

Dawson beamed as he approached. “Pleased to meet you, young lady. Maggie has told me a lot about you.”

“Hi.” Jamie turned bashful, attaching herself to Maggie’s leg, but she shook the captain’s hand when he offered it. “I saw you at the DEO when Mom was sick.”

Maggie twitched at the news. Everyone had neglected to tell her about that visit.

“Had to make sure she was in good hands.” Dawson gave Jamie a wink. She smiled, warming up to him.

“We should get going or we’ll be late. We’ll just…” Kara pointed toward the sliding glass door and made a swooping motion with her hand.

“Wait. No.” Maggie realized belatedly that Kara taking Jamie to camp didn’t involve a means of transportation as boring as the bus. “No way am I letting you,” Maggie made the same motion, “with my kid.”

“I’ve flown with Supergirl before.” Jamie adjusted her backpack, unaware of the potential fallout from that statement. Kara winced when Maggie glared at her.

“Seriously? You took her flying without my permission?” Maggie advanced an intimidating step toward her, and Kara gathered the corners of her cape, fidgeting a little under her ire.

“You were in stasis, and Jamie needed cheering up so we, we went for ice cream.”

“You couldn’t use the stairs?” Maggie growled, and Dawson chuckled.

“Come on, Maggie. You know I won’t drop her.” Kara sounded offended by the very idea.

“Not intentionally, but what if some nutcase takes a shot at you? Or some big, bad alien tries to knock Supergirl out of the sky while she’s holding my daughter?”
Kara opened her mouth to protest only to shut it a half second later. “Fine. We’ll take the elevator, but then can I fly her if we stay low?”

“What’s low?”

Kara flapped her cape in exasperation. “I don’t know. Nothing higher than a semi?”

“Please, Mom?” Jamie’s dark eyes were wide and imploring when she looked up at Maggie, and Maggie’s resistance crumbled with disgusting ease. She had to admit, flying with Kara was kinda fun when you were up for it, and Jamie deserved to have some after the stress of the last week.

“No higher than a semi,” Maggie warned Kara.

Jamie clapped her hands in excitement.

“Unless we need to fly over a semi, then we’ll go a little… right.” Kara wilted under Maggie’s resumed glare. “Hug your mom, Jamie, and we’ll get going.”

Jamie complied, throwing her arms around Maggie’s waist and squeezing. “Thank you, Mom. Love you.”

Maggie melted like always at the declaration. Jesus, she was a pushover. “Love you too and do not encourage Supergirl to fly higher.” Maggie kissed her on the crown of her head.

“You’re no fun,” Jamie groused, but she looked amused rather than disappointed.

“Agent Schott will be by shortly.” Kara took Jamie’s hand and led her to the front door before she glanced back. “Think about what I said, okay? You don’t have to make any big decisions right now.”

With both Jamie and Kara staring at her with dual looks of disapproval, Maggie nodded.

“Captain Dawson.” Kara gave him a parting smile, and Jamie offered a little wave he returned. A moment later, they were gone.

“Didn’t know you and Supergirl were so well acquainted.” Dawson slipped a messenger bag off his shoulder and settled on the couch.

“We’ve crossed paths on a handful of cases. She was the one who saved me.” Maggie sank into a leather chair beside the sofa, tucking her legs under her.

Dawson nodded. “Worse allies for an officer to have than Supergirl, although not everyone on the force is a fan.”

“She’s learning,” Maggie said defensively.

Dawson dismissed the topic with a wave of his hand. “So how are you doing, Sawyer? You look better than I thought you would.”

“I am. The urge isn’t so… persistent today. I have a checkup at the DEO later.”

“Good. Those DEO docs tell me that urge should continue to fade.”

“That’s what they say. Just have to tough it out until then. They’re keeping me under a microscope for now. Not allowed to be alone for more than a few minutes at a time.”
“That must chafe.” Dawson smirked and Maggie replied in kind.

“Beats being dead, I guess. Alex… Agent Danvers,” Maggie corrected, “said they’d found a way to treat the other victims. How’s that going?”

Dawson hesitated. “Slow. You know multiple hits of the drug reinforce the brain’s need for it. They have a longer road to walk than you hopefully do, but at least they have a path out of the addiction now. A lot of it will be up to them.”

They were quiet a moment.

Clutching a throw pillow to her chest like a shield, Maggie finally bit the bullet. “So why the house call? Am I suspended for this?”

His eyebrows shot skyward again. “For what? I don’t have enough PR problems? I should let go of my only lesbian cop with a cute-as-a-button kid? One who damn near gave her life to shut down the largest drug smuggling operation this city has ever seen? Yeah, that seems smart.”

Heat spread up Maggie’s neck to flush across her features at his praise. She kept her eyes down, staring at Jamie’s latest sketch of Winn on the coffee table. “So I’m not in trouble?”

“You did nothing wrong.”

“Then why do I feel you are here to give me the come-to-Jesus speech, Captain?”

Dawson studied her in pensive silence before heaving a weary sigh. “You’re on limited duty for a month while you recover. You’ll work from home. Wrap up this case in a tidy bow for the prosecutor’s office. Then you get a second month riding your desk. You can consult on cases for the science division, but our cold case squad could use your help. Their caseload is obscene.”

“Thought I did nothing wrong? Why am I being sidelined?” Maggie couldn’t keep a hint of anger from creeping into her tone. One month she’d expected. Two was overkill. She would go out of her freaking mind.

“You went through a hell of a thing, Sawyer, and you still have a fight on your hands. There is no shame in taking the time to get sorted, get your head in a good place.”

“I’ll do my sessions with the department shrink. I know the drill.”

“You’ll do more than that. One appointment a week for the next six months.”

Maggie stiffened. “Are you kidding?”

“Do I look like I’m kidding? Sawyer, you are the most talented detective I have encountered in my thirty-five years on the force, but let’s face facts. You were exposed to a highly addictive drug with known, profound psychological effects. I’d bet my pension on you kicking this thing’s ass, but my first responsibility has to be to the NCPD.”

Maggie flung the pillow into the chair as she stood and paced. “So I suppose I piss in a cup before every session while I’m at it? Gotta make sure I’m not using, right?”

“Or after. The brass aren’t picky.”

“Screw that.”

Dawson got to his feet. “Let me repeat myself. You are an exceptional detective, and I’m doing this
because I don’t want there to be any doubt amongst your peers and subordinates you’re clear of this Rush crap. If it gives you an extra incentive to stay clean these first few weeks, all the better.”

“Captain—”

“This is non-negotiable. Mandatory drug testing once a week. Don’t like pissing in a cup? A blood sample will do.”

“You think I care what my peers think? I’m just a diversity hire to them, anyway. They couldn’t care less about my solve rate. And as for subordinates, I don’t have any—”

“Yet.” Dawson looked smug when Maggie paused in confusion. He turned and picked up his bag, rooting around inside it until he slipped out a manual and handed it to Maggie.

The book was heavy, the pages pristine and the spine never cracked. Maggie glanced down at the title and frowned. It was a study guide for the sergeant's exam. “What’s this for?”

“Lieutenant Kizer notified me he’s leaving the department next year. He’s taking over for an uncle who is retiring as sheriff of some backwater speck on the map in South Dakota. Gave me the heads up on Wednesday. He leaves in nine months, soon as the uncle finishes out his contract.”

“What does that have to do with me?”

“You’re gonna replace him.”

Maggie blinked. Surely she hadn’t heard him correctly. “Sir…”

“You got a month and a half to study. Make sergeant. I could technically promote you straight into Kizer’s role, but things’ll go smoother if you’re already showing the chops for the job.”

“Wh…” Maggie shook her head, blindsided and scrambling to make sense of what was happening. “I don’t… I’m not…”

“Best detective in 35 years.” Dawson tapped the edge of the book with each word to punctuate his point. “I am not playing politics and putting some guy in the position whose only claim to it is time served on the job. I want the best as my right hand. That’s you, Maggie. Take the test. Let’s show those assholes what a diversity hire can do.”

She’d thought about taking the exam when the task force was over. Another project to keep her mind off Alex. If tonight went the way she expected it to, she’d still need the distraction.

“You’re serious?” Maggie thumbed through the pages.

“Already talked to the chief about it. Things aren’t what they were five years ago. We’ve living in a sci-fi movie now. Hate crimes toward aliens are way up, and we got some of them breaking the law with powers we don’t know how to fight. I trust you to protect and serve that population as well as the citizens of National City.”

“The aliens are citizens of this city too, powers or not,” Maggie corrected, thinking of Jamie.

Dawson grinned, his expression bordering on paternal. “Now imagine all the good you could do them as lieutenant of the science division? Think about it, Sawyer. And Dr. Arnold will see you at HQ for your first session on Monday at ten am. Don’t be late.”

Maggie stewed as he collected his things. She couldn’t decide if she was pissed or pleased. “You’d
really bet your pension on me?”

Once Dawson had his bag slung over his shoulder he came closer, gripping Maggie’s arms in his beefy hands. “And sleep like a baby about it. You got this, Maggie. You will ace that exam. Then you and me will change the way the NCPD handles all cases involving aliens and things that go bump in the night.”

A flicker of a smile crossed Maggie’s lips. She’d borrowed Dawson’s favorite phrase the first time she had spoken to Alex. “Yes, Sir. Thank you for the faith.”

“You earned it.”

A key turned in the lock and Winn stepped inside, pausing when he saw them. “Uh, should I come back?”

“I was just leaving.” Dawson glanced back at Maggie. “We good?”

Maggie tucked the study guide under her arm and offered her hand. Dawson shook it. “We’re good.”

***

“J’onn is going to kick your butt,” Kara warned as Alex stepped off the elevator, defying orders to stay away from the DEO until Monday.

With a scowl, Alex brushed past her and headed for the medical wing. “I figured you’d be at CatCo and wouldn’t be here to tattle on me. You keeping tabs on me or something?”

“Or something.” Kara trailed after her sister with a frown. Alex had alerted Kara to her presence by cursing rather creatively in the parking garage then anxiously tapping her foot for forty floors. She appeared as agitated as she’d sounded, and Kara stressed about the source of Alex’s upset. “If you’re looking for Maggie, she won’t be here for another hour.”

Alex jerked around. “Why? Is everything okay? Is she all right?”

Kara held up her hands. “Maggie is fine. She has her check up, remember?”

A muscle in Alex’s cheek pulsed as she clenched her jaw. A second later, she was in motion again, striding down a long hall in her jeans and navy t-shirt. With a huff, Kara chased after her.

“Everything okay with you two?”

Alex pivoted again, and Kara barely drew up in time to keep from plowing into her and breaking a few of Alex’s bones. “Why? Did Maggie say something?”

“What is wrong with you? What’s that saying about being as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs?”

Alex’s lips flattened into a thin line at the description. “Maggie is having second thoughts, okay? I don’t blame her, but I, I have to convince her we can make this work. Mom had a suggestion last night, and I think she’s right, but...”

“But what?” Kara shuffled closer, curious, her cape swaying behind her.

A few agents walked by. Alex gripped Kara’s elbow and ushered her into an empty conference room. She flipped on the light and shut the door, giving them all the privacy the DEO afforded.
“I suppose I should have talked to you about this. What I’ll wind up sharing has a lot to do with you.” Alex crossed her arms, almost hugging her body, and her gaze lingered somewhere over Kara’s right shoulder rather than meet her eye.

“So talk to me,” Kara urged.

“I’m here to make an appointment with Dr. Tan.”

“Dr. Tan,” Kara repeated slowly. “The psychiatrist? The only person in the building who intimidates you more than Pam in HR? For who?”

“For me,” Alex growled with impatience. “I’m gonna spill all my mom, dad, and super-sister issues.”

A pang of hurt made Kara flinch and Alex noticed.

“Sorry. I’m just… feeling like that long-tailed cat, I guess. I mean, it’s no secret the Black Mercy dug up all kinds of stuff between us we never really talked about, and you know sometimes I feel… less than… when it comes to you.” Alex met Kara’s eyes then, her gaze full of apology. “My sister can touch the stars while I can barely get my shit together on the ground.”

“Alex,” Kara scolded. “You’re the best of all of us.”

“I’m not, Kara. There’s a lot of stuff I bury deep, and I like to think I brush it off and forget about it, but I don’t. It’s keeping me from being happy. I have to do something to fix it if I stand a chance with Maggie.”

Kara bit her lower lip, worried Alex might put herself through this for nothing if Maggie’s behavior that morning was any indication. “Are you sure?”

The tension in Alex’s shoulders eased but didn’t disappear entirely. “Yeah. Thought about it all last night and most of today. Even if Maggie…” Alex blew out a breath, struggling to prevent an onslaught of tears from falling.

With a mental prayer to Rao that Maggie would give Alex a chance, Kara pulled her sister into a hug. “I’m rooting for you two. You know that, right? I want you to be happy together.”

Alex squeezed Kara as hard as her human body would allow. “I know. It means the world you’re trying with her, Kara.”

They stepped back, and Alex wiped at her eyes. “Speaking of Maggie… can you do me a favor? Assuming our date doesn’t blow up in my face tonight, I could use a little help.”

Kara dredged up a grin to lighten Alex’s spirits. “Need some super assistance?”

“Something like that. Here’s what I was thinking…”

Chapter End Notes

We set up a few things in this chapter so what do you think is going to happen next? Guessedes and speculation welcomed in the comments.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

The moment of truth is here, and Maggie makes her decision. Let us know what you think.

Thanks to Dani for the awesome banner! Link to original Twitter post.
A heavy sigh reached her as Dr. Constance Tan stepped into her office to find Alex Danvers in front of her assistant’s desk, glancing at her watch impatiently. Rather than her trademark black DEO attire, Alex sported dark jeans and a leather jacket, and if the crumpled therapy flyer in her hands was any indication, she had been there for a while.

Constance would have known if she had such an illustrious appointment as the de facto second-in-command of the DEO, so this was a surprise visit. “Agent Danvers?”

Alex jumped like a startled cat and spun to face her, the flyer falling to the floor to lie forgotten at her feet. “Dr. Tan. Hey, I, uh…” She raked a hand through her hair, her gaze drifting toward the door.
Constance had the distinct impression Alex wanted to bolt. “I don’t remember us having an appointment.”

“We didn’t. We don’t. Not…” Alex knitted her fingers and huffed out a breath. “Not yet, anyway. I was looking for Emma. Your assistant. Not that you don’t know your assistant is Emma, but there is more than one Emma…” Alex trailed off. “You know what? I’ll come back later.”

“Agent Danvers,” Constance called, catching Alex inside the door before she could round the corner and run. “What did you mean by not yet?”

Alex hesitated, rocking on the heels of her boots for a moment before she swung around. “I uh, I came by to make one.”

Well, that was new. Constance’s left eyebrow arched above the silver rim of her glasses. “For yourself or another agent?”

“For… me.”

Constance said nothing as Alex drew in a deep breath, shaking out her shoulders like she was loosening up to step into a boxing ring.

“I think, I, eh, need to try this whole therapy thing.”

“Everyone can benefit from therapy, Agent Danvers. You have an extraordinarily difficult job. Talking about it, when it isn’t required to do so, could be therapeutic.”

Alex reluctantly drifted back into the room. “This isn’t about the DEO. It’s about me. There’s something I want to fix. Something… about me that’s… that’s damaged.” Her voice strengthened, and she stood taller.

Silence was Constance’s best tool, so she let it stretch while Alex worried her bottom lip with her teeth. She had heard about Alex’s coming out and subsequent broken engagement through the grapevine. Everyone in the DEO had.

Recent events with Alex’s ex-fiancee hadn’t escaped her attention either. Constance had expected the director to order a mandatory session or two for his top agent soon, but not… not this. Not Alex coming to her on her own. This was a pleasant and encouraging surprise.

“I’m not here about my sexuality, if that’s what you are thinking. I’m okay with that. More than okay even. It’s something… something else. I…” Alex’s gaze darted around the room and toward the open door again. “I should make an appointment and come back later.”

“Why wait?” Constancegestured toward her inner office. “I have time now, and you seem in the mood to talk.”

“Now?” Alex’s voice was a squeak.

“Why not?” Constance kept her tone casual, trying not to spook Alex anymore than she was already.

Alex hesitated again, longer this time. Finally, she spared another glance at her watch before nodding. “Yeah. Yeah, I have a few minutes.”

Constance fought to keep her mouth from twisting into a smile as Alex walked toward the inner office like a prisoner approaching the gallows. “Is it really so bad, talking to me?” she teased gently.
A nervous chuckle greeted her as Constance ushered Alex inside.

“Honestly?”

“In this room, honesty is necessary.” Constance shut the door.

“In that case,” Alex said as she settled onto the comfortable couch, “you intimidate the hell out of me, Doc.”

Even that was progress, Constance thought as she gathered her notepad and sat in her chair. “I’ll take that as a compliment coming from you.” She crossed her legs and relaxed, ready to get to work. “So what can I help you with today, Alex?”

***

If there was such a thing as a gold medal for restraint, Eliza decided she deserved one.

She popped the vial off the syringe and switched it for another, watching it fill with Maggie’s blood. Neither of them said a word in the painfully quiet medbay, although Eliza had tried to coax a conversation out of Maggie since her arrival half an hour earlier.

Tempted to demand a status report on Maggie’s feelings about Alex, Eliza had only tiptoed around the subject so far. Gleaning any details about Alex’s plans for their date had proven fruitless as well. Alex had left Maggie insufferably in the dark. Perhaps she had even done it on purpose knowing Eliza would pry.

“Almost done,” Eliza promised.

Maggie sighed.

Her petite frame dwarfed by the hospital gown, Maggie seemed small and broken. Nothing like a woman getting a second chance with the love of her life in a few hours. With Alex, Eliza had learned if she was quiet long enough her daughter would eventually fill the silence. But Maggie, Maggie was still, deep, and content to keep her secrets.

After a few more neutral questions only netted Eliza single-syllable replies, a change of tactics was in order.

“You are recovering faster than we expected.”

Maggie’s dark gaze flickered up to Eliza’s face at the praise but didn’t stay there, skittering off to search the empty room. “Not fast enough,” she murmured. “My captain stopped by earlier. The NCPD brass decided I should be on a short leash for the next couple of months.”

“I’m sure it’s just protocol. The drug has proven in the past to be… difficult for recovery.”

“Protocol. Right.” Maggie nodded, but she looked less than assured. “I smoked in my teens, maybe drink too much now, but I never did drugs. Never touched the stuff. I go to yoga. Eat organic. Switched to vegan ice cream. So much for mostly clean living, huh?”

“Alex dabbled.” Eliza said a mental apology to her daughter for divulging that secret, but she wanted to keep Maggie engaged. She pretended not to notice when Maggie’s head whipped around, even when the movement jerked the needle in her arm and Maggie winced. “She doesn’t know I’m aware, but for a time in college, she experimented.”
Maggie digested that, frowning a little. “She told me she got wild, but she never mentioned drugs.”

“Think she didn’t want me to judge her, and we both know I would have.” Eliza removed the needle and pressed a cotton ball against the injection site. “Hold that for me?”

Maggie placed her palm over the area as Eliza labeled the vials and set them on a tray. “Did she… did she get addicted to anything?”

Eliza tossed the syringe into a disposal bin before turning back to Maggie with a bandage. “I don’t think so. Kara and I worried we would have to intervene, but Alex suddenly stopped just when things were getting out of control. For years, I didn’t understand why.”

“J’onn recruited her,” Maggie guessed with a thin smile.

“He was keeping an eye on Alex. On all of us.”

Maggie sighed again as Eliza smoothed a bandaid over the crook of her arm, her gaze distant and morose.

“Hey.” Eliza ran her hand down Maggie’s shoulder. “Things are hard right now, but it’s only two months.”

“Two months sitting around my apartment with a babysitter. If I’m lucky.”

“Knowing you, it won’t be that long at all. And you can always spend more time with Jamie and Al-”

“I can’t even take my kid out for ice cream without a tagalong making sure I don’t score from some dealer in the park,” Maggie snapped, hopping off the exam table.

Eliza pursed her lips at the outburst, and Maggie closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose. “Sorry, I just…” Her words ended with a curt shake of her head.

“You have people you can talk to, people who care about you. You know that, right?”

“Yeah.” Maggie didn’t sound convinced.

Trying not to worry, Eliza crossed her arms and leaned back against the table. Maggie stripped off the gown, leaving her in her underwear as she dressed in full view of the medbay windows.

“No matter what happens with you and Alex, I’m one of those people, Maggie.”

Maggie hesitated as she slipped on her jacket, and Eliza heard her swallow hard. She stuffed her feet into her boots and came closer, offering Eliza a crooked smile. “You’ve always been really kind to me. More of a mother than my mother ever was.”

Eliza’s chest clenched. As nice as the sentiment was, Maggie’s tone sounded too much like goodbye. “I mean it. I’m here for you.”

“Even if I break your daughter’s heart?” Maggie cocked her head, giving her one last pained smile as she reached out and grabbed Eliza’s wrist and squeezed. “Take care of yourself, Eliza.”

Eliza watched her go, concerned she would never see Maggie Sawyer again and worried after tonight, neither would Alex.
Alex glared at her watch then at the elevator, jabbing the button again. The indicator burned steadily on the fifth floor, mocking her. With an exasperated growl, Alex headed for the stairs.

She was late, and Maggie was going to kill her. Or worse, refuse to go out with her at all.

Taking the steps two-at-a-time, Alex sprinted to the third floor, skidding to a stop in front of Maggie’s door. She ran her fingers through the still-damp ends of her hair and tried to arrange it into some semblance of order.

With one last, calming breath, she raised her hand and knocked. A few seconds later, the deadbolt slammed back, and the door jerked open to reveal a fuming Maggie. Fuming but beautiful, her hair falling in waves over her shoulders and her burgundy sweater fitting her like a glove.

“Hey.” Alex tucked her hands in her back pockets and gave Maggie a jerky shrug. “Sorry.”

“Super emergency?” Maggie guessed, her tone bordering on bitter.

“No. More of a… personal issue.” Alex studied the carpet between them for a moment, bracing for Maggie to call off their date, but Maggie said nothing. After what felt like an eternity, Alex dared a breath. “I’ll explain when we get where we’re going. Hey, Winn,” she added with a dip of her head, spotting him eavesdropping behind the couch.

“Hey, Alex.”

“You ready?” Maggie asked.

“Whenever you are. It’s cool out. You should grab a jacket.”

Maggie stepped back, her hand reaching behind the door, and a flash of fear sliced through Alex’s stomach. She could just shut the door and lock Alex out of her life, just like that.

“Maggie…”

“Alex!”

A pajama-clad body darted past Maggie and launched into Alex, sending them stumbling a few steps until Alex’s back hit the wall in the hallway.

“Oof. Did I get sacked by a six-year-old or a linebacker?” Alex teased, her mood brightening as Jamie giggled.

Feeling eyes on her, Alex risked a glance at Maggie. Tears threatened as Maggie stood in the doorway, frozen, watching them with an expression of immeasurable longing. For a fleeting moment, their eyes locked, and Alex would have sworn that Maggie wanted this as much as she did.

A sharp tug on Alex’s jacket brought her attention back to Jamie, and Alex knelt, tears brimming in her eyes when Jamie snaked her arms around Alex’s neck and gave her a hug. “Missed you, kiddo. You being good for your mom?”

Jamie nodded. “The best. I’m even sharing my Pop-Tarts.”

“Wow. When I ask my sister to share food, she threatens to melt my face.”

“That’s rude,” Jamie proclaimed and everyone laughed.
“That’s Kara sometimes. Fortunately, she has other redeeming qualities.” Alex leaned back and ruffled Jamie’s hair.

“Can you stay? I want to show you my room and my drawings.”

Alex hesitated, wishing she could say yes, but she shook her head. “Um… your mom and I really need to talk. Maybe later?”

“Sure,” Jamie answered slowly, “but you have to promise.”

“I promise,” Alex swore solemnly. She stood and Jamie backed away, her gaze taking them in.

“Have fun tonight.” Jamie crossed her arms, scowling like she meant business.

Alex’s mouth quirked and she saw Maggie’s do the same. “We’ll do our best.”

“Yeah, kids. Have fun,” Winn added with equal emphasis.

Maggie shot him a lethal glare, but she tugged her jacket on and stepped into the hallway. Jamie wrapped her arms around Maggie’s waist, and Maggie ran a hand through her dark hair with a soft sigh. “Don’t be hard on your Uncle Winn. Go to bed after the movie.”

“As long as we’re still going to the zoo this weekend.”

“We’re still going, but don’t blackmail me with good behavior. I’m a cop, remember?” Maggie kissed her on the head and released her, and in that moment, Alex glimpsed the future she wanted, the family she wanted.

Alex let that glimpse drive her determination when Maggie turned to face her with an uncertain look in her eyes. She had to salvage this. She had to, for all of them.

***

The sand was cold between Alex’s toes but Maggie’s hand was warm in hers. She led them down the moonlit beach as the Pacific crashed ashore to their right. With every step, Alex’s fear intensified as they drew closer and closer to a new beginning or a final ending.

Alex was half tempted to turn back, to take Maggie to the edge of the ocean and hold her one last time as they watched the waves roll in. If tonight was all she would ever get, she wanted to steal as many moments as possible.

They rounded a copse of trees to reveal a small, cheerful bonfire. Just as Alex had requested, Kara had laid out a blanket, cheese and fruit along with a bottle of white wine chilling on ice. A portable radio crooned some 80s ballad Alex was too distracted to place. There was also an unexpected bag of marshmallows and two sticks. Kara’s personal touch on the evening.

“Your super sister slumming it?”

It was the first thing Maggie had said since they’d left the car by the main road, and Alex didn’t miss the strain in her voice, the effort it took to sound casual.

“She owed me one.”

Alex dragged in a deep, aching breath and turned to face the moment. Maggie winced when their gazes met, tears already in her eyes. Alex’s stomach went cold as her suspicions were confirmed. “Listen—”
“Alex, I—”

They paused, sharing sad smiles.

“Before you…” Alex licked her parched lips. “Before you say what I’m pretty sure you’re going to say… Can I tell you something?”

Maggie lowered her head. They still held hands, and her thumb stroked the back of Alex’s knuckles, reverence in her touch. “I don’t want to do this. God, I don’t want to do this. I love you,” she ground out, “but—”

“Please.” Alex took an unsteady step closer. “I need to say this, and if it changes nothing, I get it. But… I have to. Please?” Maggie didn’t meet her eyes, but she nodded, and Alex sucked in another lungful of sea air. “The other night, when I told you there was nothing that could stop us if we wanted to be together, I realized… I was wrong. I can stop us.”

A tear slipped from Maggie’s chin, backlit by the fire as it fell to the blanket beneath their feet. The desperation in Alex’s chest expanded, making it hard to breathe, to think.

“I lost your trust. Hell, I threw it away.”

“I trust you,” Maggie insisted. “It’s not that, I—”

“With your life,” Alex agreed. “Even with Jamie’s, if something ever happened to you. But you can’t trust me with your heart anymore. I get that. I have a habit of sabotaging my own happiness. I get right to the edge of having everything I want and then I burn it all to the ground.”

Maggie reluctantly nodded.

“You don’t want to get burned again. To have Jamie hurt like I hurt you.” Alex stroked Maggie’s cheek, and Maggie released a soft sob and leaned into her touch.

“I’m sorry…”

“Don’t apologize. With things the way they are now, I understand.” Alex tipped Maggie’s chin up, gutted by the raw grief in her eyes, knowing she’d put it there, knowing everything was riding on the next few moments. “But what if… what if I could get your trust back?”

Maggie tilted her head, searching Alex’s features as a wave thundered into the tense silence, roaring onto the beach behind them. “How?”

“Words… won’t cut it anymore. My promises, no matter how much I mean them, are empty without something to back them up. Without a corresponding action.”

“What kind of action?” There was a flicker of hope in Maggie’s eyes, and Alex let it fuel her own.

“I’m broken in places where you need me to be strong. You need assurance I won’t run again. I need to know I won’t run again. It kills me I ruined what we had because I was afraid.”

“We both made mistakes. This isn’t all on you.”

Alex shook her head, refusing to share the blame. “No matter what you decide about us in the next few minutes, I have to do this. Whether it gives us another chance, or it honors what we had, I have to do this.”

Maggie squeezed Alex’s hand. “Do what, Danvers?”
“I wasn’t late tonight because of a super emergency or work at the DEO. I was late because I… because I started therapy.”

Alex heard Maggie’s breath catch. She tugged her a step closer, cradling her jaw and wiping away a few of her tears. “I was only going to schedule an appointment, but Dr. Tan kinda ambushed me. Figured I might as well start today, because the sooner I do, the sooner I can be better. For you.”

“You don’t have to do that, not for me,” Maggie argued.

“Why the hell not? I wouldn’t have done it for myself, Maggie. But for you, for us, I will go to sessions every day and twice on Sunday to fix this. To fix me.” Alex dredged up a wobbly smile, her future teetering on this last attempt to make things right. “I want to be the kind of woman Maggie Sawyer and her daughter can trust with their whole hearts.”

Her expression dazed, Maggie took a step back and her hand slipped from Alex’s grip. Alex’s stomach plummeted when Maggie turned away, but she didn’t leave, wrapping her arms around herself. The beach turned cold without Maggie’s warmth, and Alex shivered, waiting her out with growing dread.

A song ended on the radio and another began. The fire popped and crackled as the tide came and went. As the minutes stretched on, Alex was tempted to fall to her knees and beg if it would make a difference, but then Maggie finally spoke, her voice hushed.

“You hate therapy. You’d really do that to save us?”

“I’d do anything, even that. I won’t lie. Today’s session was hard, and they’ll only get harder. I’ve resisted confronting those parts of myself for so long, but… it’s time. Past time. If I had gone before, maybe we never would have reached this point, maybe I wouldn’t have fucked everything up.”

Maggie shook her head. “I’m an idiot.”

“What?” Alex took a half step forward.

“My captain stopped by this morning. He um, he ordered me into sessions with the department shrink.” Maggie hunched against the wind, too far from the fire.

“Isn’t that mandatory when an officer is injured on the job?”

Maggie nodded, her slim shoulders rising and falling in her leather jacket as she took a deep breath. “A few sessions, anyway. Dawson wants me to go once a week for the next six months.”

A tiny, piqued part of Alex wanted to give Dawson a piece of her mind, but the rest of her was too confused to care. “I don’t understand…”

Maggie faced her again then. Her eyes were clear now, the last of her tears drying on her cheeks. She ran her forefinger along her bottom lip, a telltale sign she was thinking through something. “Look, everybody brings baggage into a relationship, right? Some pack light, but not me. I need one of those hotel carts to lug mine around.”

Alex took another step toward her, trying to make sense of where Maggie was going with all this. “Maggie, you—”

“We both know I have trust issues.”

“You have every right not to trust me after what I did,” Alex protested.
Maggie waved off Alex’s declaration. “It’s not just now. When we were together, I was waiting for you to dump me, Danvers. I pushed. Tested you at every turn, waiting for you to bail on me like everyone else. You aren’t the only one who sabotages her happiness. Sooner or later, I would have torpedoed us. It’s what I always do in my relationships.”

“Maggie, no,” Alex tried again.

“I even did it with Jamie.” Maggie looked sick at the realization. “My motives were legit, but I thought she’d jump at the chance for a better family than me.”

The mere thought broke Alex’s heart, and she closed the distance between them. “You’re all the family Jamie wants. She stayed by your side every night at the DEO. Jamie loves you.”

“And I love her. I would do anything for that kid.” Maggie smiled tightly. “Even what you’re doing. The therapy thing. I don’t want her to grow up with a mother who spends every relationship she’s in waiting for the other person to leave.”

Alex held her breath as Maggie drew closer.

“I’m so used to going it alone it never occurred to me we could get help. That talking to someone could make us each… better. Could make us better. You taking this step? It’s huge, Alex. I’m willing to do the same. For Jamie. And for you.”

Us, Maggie said us. Alex’s heart leapt with hope, thudding against her ribs and making her see stars, but Maggie’s next words brought her crashing down to earth.

“But… there’s one thing that can still get between us, one thing unresolved. I have a question, and I need an honest answer before we go any further.”

Alex quickly nodded.

“Do you want more kids? Because I don’t know if I do, Alex, and if you want a big family, I don’t want to get in the way of that for you.”

“When I thought about having a family with you, I always assumed we’d have more than one.”

Maggie’s throat rippled on a rough swallow and she dropped her gaze.

“But the thing is… whenever I dreamed about that family, there was only one child. A beautiful little girl with your eyes and your smile. There are no words to describe what it was like when Jamie ran into the medbay that day. I thought I had to be hallucinating. I’d imagined her so many times and there she was, right in front of me. Before she even cried out for you, I knew. I knew. I knew who she was because I had seen her in every fantasy I had of a future with you.”

Maggie’s hand was cold when Alex caught it, intertwining their fingers loosely. “Maggie, I don’t need more kids. The one I’ve always wanted is already right here.”

“You don’t want a child of your own someday? One with your eyes? Your smile?” Maggie sounded almost wistful.

Alex shook her head. “I don’t need that. I never have. We’re both aware blood doesn’t make you family. Kara isn’t my biological sister, and I couldn’t love her more. And I adore Jamie, Maggie. She’s so much like you. Smart, a little too smart…” Alex rolled her eyes, and a laugh stumbled past Maggie’s lips. “Intuitive. Kind. Endlessly kind like her mother. For the record if you had… I would have taken her. Not because I wanted a child, but because she’s yours, and any child of yours I’m
going to love like she’s my own.”

Fresh tears brimmed in Maggie’s eyes, but there was a brightness to them that wasn’t there before. Her fingers gripped Alex’s tighter. “Alex, I know you want us to get back that forever we promised each other, but I can’t give that to you. Not right now.”

Alex closed her eyes in defeat only to have them snap open again when Maggie’s body brushed against hers, and Maggie’s hand cupped her cheek.

“But I can give you tonight. I can give you this date, and another date after this one. Let’s just… take things a day at a time. Work on ourselves. Work on us.”

“Baby steps?” Alex gasped, and Maggie nodded with a beautiful, watery smile. “I can do that. I can do that,” Alex repeated with a relieved sob. She pulled Maggie into her arms. “Thank you. Oh God, thank you for giving me a chance.”

Maggie’s hands fisted in Alex’s jacket. “I didn’t want to let you go, I just didn’t know how to get through this...”

Alex squeezed her tighter. “Me either, at first. When I took you home yesterday, I saw it, in your eyes. I was so sure I... but then I talked to mom. We probably owe her dinner. Therapy was her idea.”

Maggie released a breathless chuckle against Alex’s chest. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

The words were whispered but heartfelt, and the rush as the tension fled her body nearly buckled Alex’s knees. Only Maggie, held tight in her embrace, kept her standing. Alex’s eyelids fluttered shut, and she leaned into Maggie’s body, warm, solid and real. Neither let go.

Finally, Alex eased back and ran her hands through the soft waves of Maggie’s hair, the scent of her light perfume wafting over her. Alex knew everywhere Maggie dabbed it, what it tasted like when her tongue ran across those sensual places.

“We’re going to do this?” Alex asked, needing the confirmation. “We’re really going to try?”

“Yeah. Yeah, we are.” Maggie snuggled into her. “You know how you wanted to pretend like everything was fine the other day?” Her voice was thoughtful, nearly obscured by the music, the fire, and the waves.

“Yeah?”

“Can we do that for the rest of tonight? I just... I need this. I need us.” There was a hint of pleading in Maggie’s tone, and Alex tightened her hold.

“That’s the best offer I’ve had in months.” Alex nuzzled closer, breathing Maggie in, soaking up her heat.

The first song they’d ever danced to came on the radio, and Maggie eased them into a slow sway. Her palms slipped under Alex’s jacket to skim up her spine. “Shall we dance?”

The chills chasing over Alex’s skin had nothing to do with the cold night air. She brought their foreheads together. “Last time we danced wasn’t the best memory,” Alex murmured.
One lone dimple appeared as Maggie smiled. “Then let’s make a happier one. We can’t erase the bad stuff, but we can figure out how to be happy with each other again.”

Alex felt so unburdened she could float away if not for Maggie’s arms to ground her. “Yeah, but we’ll take things slow, just like I promised. Glacial.”

“Glacial, huh?” Maggie’s fingers sifted through Alex’s hair along the back of her neck. Alex loved when she did that, one of the million things about Maggie she’d missed.

“I can’t wait to get to know Maggie Sawyer all over again.”

“And you need to get to know Jamie. Seeing you with her tonight…” Maggie tucked her head against Alex’s shoulder.

“I shouldn’t admit this, I have a reputation and all, but I almost melted into a puddle of goo in your hallway when you two hugged.”

Maggie laughed, the sound music to Alex’s ears.

“You want to go with us?” Maggie asked.

Stepping back, Alex gave Maggie a lazy twirl, receiving another chuckle when she drew Maggie against her once more. “Go where?”

“To the zoo with us on Sunday. Our last visit got cut short. I promised her penguins, and I failed to deliver.”

“Shame on you,” Alex teased, and Maggie grinned.

“There were extenuating circumstances. Anyway… want to come?”

Alex’s first instinct was to say no, to prove to Maggie she was in this for her, but that too brief glimpse of mother and daughter earlier wasn’t enough. “You sure? Wouldn’t Jamie rather spend time with you?”

Maggie’s smile turned soft and sweet. “I will get the biggest hug when I get home for not breaking up with you. Jamie pleaded your case pretty hard this morning.”

“Really?” Alex drawled, trying to play it cool, but her throat tightened with emotion.

“Really.” Maggie’s tone made it clear she wasn’t buying Alex’s attempt to be suave. “It’d make her day if you came with us.”

“What about yours?” Alex couldn’t help but ask.

Maggie took a deep breath. “It might make mine too.”

Alex beamed, unable to keep the smile off her face, and Maggie snorted at her antics. “Is that our next date?”

“Mmm. Maybe not. I prefer to have you all to myself for our dates.”

Dates. Alex liked the sound of that. “I’d love to. I have to warn you though. I read all the plaques about the animals.”

“Course you do. Nerd.” Maggie’s eyes crinkled at the corners as she grinned. “Jamie reads them
“Does she?” Alex gloated. “You sure this is a good idea? Me and Jamie teaming up? Can you handle twice the nerd, Sawyer?”

“I’ll deal.” Maggie sighed, a contented little sound that warmed Alex’s soul. They were far from fixed, from perfect, but right now, this was enough.

“I can’t wait.”

***

Reluctant to see the night end, Alex tossed the picnic basket in the trunk and closed the tailgate. Maggie stood at the edge of the driveway, peering into the woods at the outline of the old, abandoned beach house in the moonlight.

“How did you find this place?”

Alex shrugged as she joined her. “Dumb luck. Literally stumbled on it while I was out for a run. Hard to believe no one bought it, tore it down and put up some sprawling beach condos or something. It’s in a prime spot.”

Maggie made a face. “That would be a waste. Bet it was gorgeous in its heyday.”

“Too bad its heyday was probably thirty years ago.” Alex offered her hand, and Maggie took it without hesitation. “Take you home?”

Maggie nodded, but her steps were slow as Alex walked her to the passenger side of the SUV.

“Tonight didn’t go like I thought it would,” Alex confessed as she opened the door.

“Disappointed?” Maggie joked.

“Well, I kind of expected to spend most of my evening crying into a bottle of scotch and regretting my life choices, so not really. Honestly, I feel like I’m dreaming, but if I am, don’t wake me up.”

“Me too. Should have known you’d come through with the eleventh-hour save. That is what you do best.”

Alex shrugged again, but the gesture was more bashful this time. She lingered when Maggie made no move to get in. “So, Sunday? Zoo?”

Maggie’s smile blossomed, dimpling her cheeks and making Alex weak in the knees. “Yeah. Sunday. Penguins with my nerds.”

Alex knew the dopey grin on her face wasn’t helping to dispel the description, but she couldn’t help it. She dropped Maggie’s hand reluctantly and started around the front of the car, digging in her pocket for her keys.

“Hey, Danvers?”

“Yeah?”

Maggie caught her arm and spun her around, pulling Alex against her as she leaned against the fender. Her mouth fastened on Alex’s, the deep, hungry kiss stealing Alex’s breath and all coherent thought. Maggie tasted like marshmallows and wine, and the scent of woodsmoke clung to her hair...
and coat.

Sinking into her was like coming home.

Alex attempted to pull back, but Maggie wasn’t having it. She kissed Alex with more heat, curving one hand behind her neck and tangling her fingers in Alex’s hair to keep her right where she wanted her.

Fingers ghosted up Alex’s spine as blunt fingernails scraped across her scalp, and a whimper escaped as Alex braced against the hood, her hands on either side of Maggie’s hips.

“What was that?” Alex gasped when Maggie finally let her up for air. Eyes shut, she leaned heavily into Maggie’s curves, her arms shaking as badly as her legs.

Maggie let out a shuddering breath, clearly as affected. “The kiss I can’t give you Sunday in front of Jamie. Or in the hallway of my apartment building tonight in case Winn hacked the security system.”

Alex blinked. “What happened to baby steps?”

Maggie’s breath teased her ear. “Are you complaining?”

“Hell no, but that wasn’t glacial.”

Smirking, Maggie appeared unrepentant. “Maybe I was factoring for global warming.”

Alex laughed, an explosion of air and pent-up tension. “Who’s the nerd now?”

Maggie shrugged. “Look at it this way, Sunday will be strictly PG, and it’ll be days before our next date. If that isn’t slow, I don’t know what is.”

Alex pushed off the car, surprised her legs held her weight. Her gaze strayed to Maggie’s mouth, and Maggie watched her, her eyes dark with anticipation. Alex leaned in, her lips stopping just shy of Maggie’s, and whispered, “Slow is gonna suck.”

Maggie laughed, the joyful sound freeing the last of the fears that had taken root in Alex’s heart. They could do this. They could make it. “Probably, Danvers, probably. Now take me home. I need to tell Jamie you’re going to the zoo and collect the biggest hug ever.”
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

THANKS to Dani for the awesome banner!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The elevator pinged and Alex gave Maggie a final shy, cute wave before it closed. Outside her door,
Maggie slumped against the wall, taking a minute to just breathe.

From the moment she’d woken up from Rush-fueled dreams… No, even before that. From the fateful moment she’d been introduced to Jamie, her life had been an out-of-control rollercoaster, careening over hills, plummeting into valleys, constantly threatening to go off the rails.

A few hours before, in this exact spot, she’d watched with dread as Alex and Jamie hugged, afraid those few, precious moments were their last, that a single glimpse of her dream come true would be all she’d ever get. But Alex, always with the last minute save, had come through. Her commitment to herself, to Maggie, to the possibility of their future together, had pulled them both back from the brink.

They had a fighting chance now. And they were nothing if not fighters.

The quiet of the empty hallway seeped into Maggie, and she let it center her. As Alex had talked about therapy, trust, and fixing herself, it had come to Maggie that she had let too much of her past impact her present. Alex had provided them both a way out, escape velocity to break away from the patterns of behavior that had held them in a destructive orbit.

Maggie’s regret and guilt over the breakup, over keeping Jamie a secret, over the way Alex had found out about Jamie… it was all dead weight, holding her back, preventing her from being happy. It was time to cut it loose, jettison it all, so she could move forward into a dreamed future with Alex and Jamie. It wouldn’t be easy, but it would be worth it.

Rush twinged in her blood at the reminder of those dreams. Maggie was alone, she could slip out and score, but the desire for the drug wasn’t as potent as the fire that burned from the taste of wine on Alex’s lips, from the lean weight of Alex pressing her against the car.

For the first time, Maggie believed with utter conviction she would beat the Rush. Nothing would get in the way of building a life, a family, with Alex. This time, she wasn’t looking forward to their lifetime of firsts; instead, Maggie looked forward to their next time, then the time after that.

Baby steps.

Speaking of, she turned, shoved her key into the lock, and stepped into her dark, silent apartment. The smell of microwave popcorn tainted the air, and Maggie wondered what Disney movie Jamie and Winn had watched.

Before she slipped off her jacket, a bright flashlight beam framed her in the doorway, bringing spots to her eyes.

“Is that a smile on your mom’s face, or what?” Winn asked.

The springs on the sofa squeaked as Jamie bounced up and down. “It is! It Is!”

It took all Maggie’s self control to school her expression into a scowl. “What did I say about going to bed after the movie?”

“But, Mom! Tell us how it went with Alex!”

Maggie flipped on the lights, revealing Winn and Jamie huddled under a blanket on the couch. She stalked over to where they sat and plopped down between them. “If Jamie has nightmares because you’ve been telling her ghost stories, you will regret it, Schott.”

“Would I do that?” Winn gulped at Maggie’s narrowed eyes then fumbled the flashlight off. “Okay, I
would totally do that, but in my defense, you took too long, and we got antsy…”

Jamie grabbed Maggie’s arm, yanking on it to get her attention. “What happened? We’ve been waiting forever.”

“You know what happened. We went on a date,” Maggie teased in a bland voice, charmed by Jamie’s excitement.

“But you were going to… and now you’re smiling. And happy.”

“You do look pretty happy, Sawyer.” Winn’s blue eyes were full of wary hope.

“Well…” Maggie paused, drawing the suspense out until Jamie poked her in the ribs, “we decided to give it another try.”

“I knew it!” Jamie screeched and launched herself into Maggie’s lap while Winn wrapped an arm around her shoulders, effectively squashing her.

“Uh-huh.” Maggie scooped Jamie up in her arms and stood. “Now it’s time for bed, kiddo. If you have scary dreams, wake your Uncle Winn.”

“Hey!” Winn grumbled.

Maggie rounded the corner into the hall. She flipped on Jamie’s light with her elbow then dropped her daughter onto the bed, making Jamie bounce and giggle. The sound lightened Maggie’s already buoyant mood, so she tickled Jamie’s ribs to hear more, eliciting an ear-splitting squeal of laughter.

“Shhhh. You’ll get us evicted,” Maggie scolded with a giggle of her own. She sat down on the edge of the bed, and Jamie scrambled to sit up beside her.

“You guys are really trying again?”

Maggie nodded, a fond smile on her lips. “You know I didn’t want to let her go. Alex gave me a good reason to hang on, to keep trying. And speaking of Alex… how would you feel if she came to the zoo with us Sunday?”

“For real?”

“Would that be okay? The three of us spending the day together?” Maggie held her breath as she combed her fingers through Jamie’s hair. She was certain Jamie would be happy about the development, but if she was wrong…

Jamie’s eyes teared. For a sickening moment, Maggie feared she’d misread everything, but then Jamie scurried back into her lap and wrapped strong little arms around Maggie’s neck. “More than okay,” Jamie murmured after a sniffle. “It’ll be the best day in a long time…”

Maggie’s arms circled Jamie’s back, and she closed her eyes, holding on tight. “Yeah. Me and my two favorite girls.”

“Don’t forget the otters.”

“What happened to the penguins?”

“Penguins are okay but otters are much cooler. We saw a film about them at camp. They play with stones and hold hands and…”
A huge yawn interrupted Jamie’s recitation, and Maggie chuckled and kissed the top of Jamie’s head as she settled Jamie under the covers. “My two favorite girls and otters then.”

Sunday couldn’t come soon enough.

****

“Thanks again for breakfast, sweetie. It almost makes up for you not calling me last night.”

Alex huffed out a weak laugh. Her shoulder brushed Eliza’s as they strolled down the beach, wading barefoot through the dregs of the cold morning tide. “Why do I get the feeling you’ll hold that over me for a while?” Alex murmured as she adjusted her grip on the tennis shoes dangling from her right hand.

“Do you blame me? I was climbing the walls waiting to hear how things went.” Eliza hooked her arm around Alex’s, giving her a playful tug closer.

Still on a high from her date with Maggie, Alex had been too restless to stay indoors after breakfast. A few surfers were out catching the early waves, but Alex and Eliza had the beach mostly to themselves. It had been a long time since they’d taken a morning walk like this together. Not since Alex had moved away from Midvale.

“Sorry,” Alex said for what she was certain had to be the thirtieth time since she’d picked Eliza up at her hotel. “I’m surprised you didn’t have Kara spying on us and reporting back to you in real time.”

“If she hadn’t been helping Clark with a little problem in Metropolis, I might have done just that. At least had her do a flyby last night to make sure you were okay.”

“You could have called.”

“And what if you were still with Maggie? I would have been the one apologizing and buying you breakfast.”

Alex smiled. “Almost doesn’t feel real, you know? That Maggie and I are trying again. That she’s giving me another shot.”

“Maggie loves you. She needed to see a way to make it work, and you gave her one. A good one. I’m happy she’s embracing her own therapy sessions. You’ll both emerge from all of this not only stronger as individuals, but as a couple.”

“I hope so. If I mess this up...”

“You won’t,” Eliza vowed. “You’re always at your best when the stakes are high, Alex.”

“No stakes higher than this.” Alex took a deep breath of the sand and surf, few things centering her like the sound and smell of the ocean. “Speaking of, don’t get too excited and start picking out china patterns or anything, but... Maggie invited me to the zoo tomorrow. With her and Jamie.”

Eliza stopped walking so Alex did the same. “Oh. That’s a big step.”

Her mother’s tone made Alex’s hackles rise, the faint note of judgment one Alex was all too familiar with. “It is, but it’s one I’m ready for. I was willing to wait as long as she needed, but...”

“But you’re eager to see them together,” Eliza guessed, her mood noticeably more subdued.
“I am.” Alex crossed her arms. “I’ve only gotten glimpses. I want to see Maggie as a mom. I want to get to know Jamie better. Is that wrong?”

“Of course not.”

Alex inched toward her mother as the tide licked at her heels. “Then what? Why don’t you approve?”

“I do approve. I’m sure Maggie is just as eager for you to have time with Jamie.”

“But?”

Eliza brushed a long lock of blonde hair behind her ear, and Alex waited for her to spit out whatever was on her mind, in no mood to be kept in suspense. “I just worry.”

“About?” Alex demanded, her tone sharpening.

With a sigh, Eliza linked her arm around Alex’s again and urged her back into a stroll. “When you talk about Jamie and Maggie… you often refer to them as your family. The family you want. The family you hope to have. The family you’ve always dreamed about.”

“So?”

“So... there is still very much another woman in Maggie and Jamie’s life right now.”

“What other woman?” Alex tried to jerk her arm free, but Eliza held tight.

“Jamie’s biological mother. It’s only been a few months since Jamie lost her. She’s still grieving, and Maggie, her other parent, is her rock right now.”

“Aileen,” Alex muttered. Kara had shared little about her, and part of Alex hadn’t wanted to learn more. Like any of Maggie’s former girlfriends, she tried not to give the woman much thought.

“You should tread lightly. Be careful not to assume your role with Maggie or Jamie is bigger than it should be right now. Jamie…” Eliza sighed again. “As hard as this might be to hear, Jamie doesn’t need another parent right now, Alex. In her mind, she still has two.”

Alex slowed to a stop again. “If I had been with Maggie when Aileen died…”

“But you weren’t. Honestly, things may have turned out better this way. Maggie and Jamie had a chance to bond, to learn how to love each other. They’ve stabilized after what had to be an incredibly difficult start. Adding you to the mix will unbalance things again. It doesn’t have to be in a bad way,” Eliza rushed to add when Alex started to argue. “Not if you’re careful.”

There were already too damn many obstacles between her and Maggie, and Alex railed against more. She turned away, squinting against the sun glinting off the waves. She didn’t want to tread carefully. She wanted to dive in headfirst.

Eliza came around her to stand at Alex’s side. “Do you want my advice? As a mother who had to deal with a child who lost a parent?”

Alex bristled. “Seriously?”

“If you don’t want to make the same mistakes,” Eliza said evenly. She reached out, resting her hand lightly on Alex’s tense bicep, and Alex resisted the urge to pull away. “Sweetie, you’re in a unique position to not only help Jamie but yourself.”
“Mom, our relationship has been better lately. I’d like to keep it that way. Can we—”

Eliza forged on. “Remember when we lost Jeremiah? You two were joined at the hip. He was your world, and then you and I had to figure out how to be a family without him. We’re still trying, Alex.”

Grief washed over her, fresh and raw, and Alex gritted her teeth. Knowing her father was actually still alive did little to dull the pain.

“You were overwhelmed at fifteen. Imagine being six. While you and I struggled to connect without Jeremiah, we still had each other. Jamie lost everything.”

“She gained Maggie,” Alex argued. That wasn’t nothing. Maggie was far from nothing.

Eliza squeezed Alex’s arm. “She did, thank God. They’re navigating how to be a family just like we did, but where you can empathize with Jamie, I relate to Maggie. She must have been terrified at the prospect of raising a child alone, let alone one who was a virtual stranger.”

Alex whirled on her. “We weren’t that bad. Dad and I were more alike, but—”

“No, Alex.”

Kara. Alex swallowed roughly. The parallels had missed her completely.

“There’s one more thing you need to keep in mind. Maybe the most important,” Eliza said.

Alex wasn’t sure she wanted to know.

“Remember when Kara came to live with us? When I gave her so much time and attention?”

Shame rose to rival her grief. Alex looked away again, the ocean blurring with tears. “I resented her,” she choked out.

“Jeremiah and I should have been more considerate of your feelings, but we gave so much of our focus to Kara… and when he died…”

“Kara had lost her world, Mom. Her family. You were—”

“Yes, I was, but by giving her all my time and attention, I lost you.”

Alex couldn’t deny it. “You think Jamie will resent me for taking Maggie’s time away from her?”

“Jamie wants Maggie to be happy, and she knows you make Maggie happy. Just be careful, Alex. More careful than I was. Draw on your own pain and experience to be there for Jamie in ways Maggie can’t. But you need to stop grasping after the future family you want and focus on what that family needs from you now.”

Slowly, Alex nodded. “Crawl before I run.”

“I know that’s hard for you.”

“Especially when it’s something I want this much.” Fears that had only whispered to Alex in the dark slithered into the light of day. “What if… what if Jamie never sees me as a parent? What if I’m never anything more to her than ‘Alex?’”

“Why would you think that?”
“Kara never…” Alex trailed off when Eliza lowered her head, giving Alex a glimpse of pain long suspected but never confirmed.

“I didn’t expect that from Kara. She was older. The situation was different.”

“You’re telling me you didn’t want her to? It’s always bothered me, feeling like we’re her replacement family. Like we never measure up to the original. Kara wouldn’t call you mom. She still calls me her adoptive sister sometimes. Like she has to make sure no one would mistake me as a member of the royal House of El,” Alex said bitterly.

Eliza stepped in front of her, gripping both of Alex’s shoulders and willing Alex to meet her gaze. “She doesn’t feel that way, sweetie.”

“I know Kara loves me. That she loves us both. But I also fear, deep down, even though she’s been part of our family longer than she was with her birth family, she’d toss us aside for them in a second if she could.”

“Alex…”

“Alura stuffed Kara into a pod, alone, and flung her across the stars. She had a hand in Krypton dying. All those aliens from Fort Rozz who wanted Kara dead because of her mother…”

“Alex…” Eliza tried again.

“Even after all that, Kara still wouldn’t call you ‘mom.’ You were more of a mother to her than Alura ever was. What if Jamie never fully accepts me like Kara never fully accepted us? What if I’m just second best again?”

Eliza pursed her lips. “So, given the option, you’d have turned Kara away? Never taken her into our family or had her for a sister?”

“I didn’t say that,” Alex groused.

“But she isn’t perfect. You seem to think she should be. That she should have done everything you wanted the way you wanted it.”

“That’s… no. That’s not what I meant.”

“There is no such thing as a perfect child, and definitely no such thing as a perfect parent. You’ll make mistakes, be they with Jamie or if you have another child with Maggie or someone else. We learn to love people as they are, Alex, warts and all. We balance between their needs and our own. You’ll find that balance with Jamie, just as you did with Kara, but my hope is you’ll find it faster considering Jamie’s needs ahead of your own.”

“And if Jamie never calls me mom?”

“It’s not the end of the world, and you won’t love that little girl any less.” Eliza drew Alex into a long, tight hug. “One last tiny piece of advice?”

Alex nodded as she settled her chin on Eliza’s shoulder.

“Worry more about how to be a mother before you worry about being called one.”

***

Lightly perspiring, Maggie leaned against the kitchen sink to catch her breath. After the longest
Saturday of her life, it was Sunday morning, and somehow she and Jamie were both running late.

Jamie had insisted on cleaning her room so she could show it off to Alex, and Maggie had realized the whole place was a bit of a mess, resulting in a mad dash to make the apartment more presentable. She still needed to toss on some light makeup, but Jamie hadn’t even showered yet.

“What time will Alex be here?” Jamie asked around one of the green apple slices Maggie insisted she eat with breakfast.

“Any minute now.” Maggie washed her hands and dried them on a dish towel. The apartment was as good as it was going to get. She’d done little in the way of decorating beyond Jamie’s room since they’d moved in, but now she wished she’d taken the time to buy a plant or something...

“Why are you so nervous? It’s just Alex.”

Maggie blinked at the question and turned around. “Nervous?”

Jamie shrugged. “You clean when you’re nervous.”

“You wanted to straighten up your room, so I…” Maggie trailed off when Jamie arched a skeptical eyebrow. Having a kid with her powers of perception was really annoying sometimes. Maggie crossed her arms to keep from fidgeting. “Fine. I’d be less nervous if you got a move on, young lady. We don’t want to be rude and keep Alex waiting.”

“Winn takes too long to get ready in the bathroom. He takes longer than you do,” Jamie groused, munching on another apple. Maggie sensed Jamie was stalling, wanting to greet Alex when she arrived. Not that Maggie blamed her. She’d craved this day for so long, and now that it was here, she could barely sit still.

Thwarting Jamie’s plan, Winn emerged from the hallway, hair sculpted and aftershave freshly applied. “All yours, Sassy Pants.” He approached Jamie at the table and gave her a quick kiss on the head before snagging an apple slice and turning to Maggie. “Sure you don’t want me to stick around until Alex gets here?”

“If something delayed her, she would have texted by now. She’ll be here any sec.” Maggie jerked her head at the door. “Go on. Go have a life for a day instead of being at the DEO or playing babysitter.”

Winn joined her in the kitchen. “You know I don’t mind, right?”

“I know.” Compelled, Maggie slid her arms around him and gave Winn a long, hard hug. “Thank you. For everything you’ve done these past few, crazy months. Thank you.”

“What are friends for, Sawyer?” Winn chided in a teasing tone.

“Stop it with the friends thing. You’re family.” Maggie stepped back, and Winn glanced away, his eyes brighter than they’d been a minute ago.

“Yeah, well. Back at ya.” He cuffed her on the shoulder, their shy gazes meeting before they both laughed.

“We’re so bad at this,” Maggie muttered.

“We’re getting better.” Winn hesitated before leaning over and chastely kissing Maggie on the cheek. “You three have fun today, okay? I expect a selfie of all of you at the penguin exhibit, or I will be
very upset.”

“Jamie’s animal of choice is otters now, Schott. Keep up.”

“What? When did that happen?”

Maggie’s phone chimed. She slipped it out of her back pocket, frowning when she saw a text from Alex. Close enough to catch the name on her screen, Winn lingered, waiting for Maggie to read it.

“Bad sign?” Maggie worried.

Winn offered her a weak smile. “Or she’s in the lobby on her way up?”

Maggie unlocked her phone and read the message.

*Can you meet me in the stairwell?*

Maggie’s heart lodged in her throat. If Alex was getting cold feet… *What’s wrong?*

*Nothing, and I’d really like to keep it that way. Please? Meet me?*

Biting her lip, Maggie’s gaze flicked to Winn. “Give me a few more minutes?”

“Yes. Everything okay?”

“Let’s hope so.”

Maggie tucked her feet into a pair of boots and grabbed her keys before slipping out, leaving Winn debating Jamie over the coolest *Finding Nemo* character. The walk to the stairwell wasn’t a short one, and her calves burned in her haste. When she shoved open the door, a puff of warm, stale air hit her in the face.

“Hey,” Alex greeted from the fourth step leading up to the next floor. In jeans and a thin, royal blue sweater, Alex certainly looked dressed for the zoo, but her tight smile did nothing to soothe Maggie’s nerves.

The door clunked shut behind her as Maggie stepped inside. “What’s up with the secret agent stuff?”

“Besides being one? I’ve been studying Yarian biology. Figured we should talk outside the radius of Jamie’s enhanced hearing.”

“She can hear this far?” Maggie asked in alarm.

“She’s half human, so probably not, but better safe than sorry.”

“So something is wrong. Something you don’t want her to hear,” Maggie accused.

Alex patted the step beside her in invitation. “We need to talk before I officially enter Jamie’s life as your girlfriend in a few minutes.”

With a heavy sigh, Maggie trudged over to the steps and sat beside Alex, leaving a safe distance between them. “Did you reconsider us since Friday night?”

“No,” Alex vowed with swift conviction. “No, Maggie. I want to be with you, and I’m willing to do whatever it takes to save what we have. This isn’t about us. Well, it is, but—”
“Then what’s going on, Alex?”

Alex’s shoulders rose and fell on a deep breath. “Me and my mother haven’t had the best relationship. I told you what happened when Kara came to live with us. When we thought Dad died.”

“Sure,” Maggie intoned.

“Well, lucky me, Mom has made up for her shortcomings then by being overly attentive now. She’s full of advice lately. First, she talked me into the therapy thing, and yesterday… yesterday she made me realize I was taking some things for granted.”

“Like?” Still sweating from cleaning, Maggie pushed up the long sleeves on her black t-shirt.

“Jamie. I was so focused on keeping you and me together that I didn’t stop to consider how all this would work. I’ve been more worried Jamie will figure out I’m a giant dork and want nothing to do with me…”

“Jamie likes dorks, Danvers. Maybe as much as I do.”

A flicker of a smile came and went on Alex’s lips. She stared at the smooth floor, the gray paint worn away in one spot below the bottom step from hundreds of shoes. “I’m ashamed to admit this, but other than being jealous, I haven’t given much thought to Jamie’s mom. Her other mom. It crossed my mind Jamie was grieving, but… not really, if that makes sense. And I didn’t consider how you two have been forging a relationship while Jamie’s mourning Aileen. I can’t imagine how hard that’s been for both of you.”

Maggie swallowed, recalling several nights she’d held Jamie in her bed as she cried herself to sleep. “She’s a brave kid. She tries to hide a lot of her pain.”

“Sounds like someone else I know.” Alex’s hand slid over the back of Maggie’s where it rested on her knee. The contact sent tingles racing along Maggie’s nerve endings, but there was something grounding about the touch, something steadying.

“She loved Aileen a hell of a lot. They were close,” Maggie murmured.

“While I might not know exactly how Jamie feels, I remember what it’s like to lose a parent as a kid. Are you sure me coming today is a good idea? I never want Jamie to think I’m trying to…”

“Take Aileen’s place?” The tension that had coiled in Maggie’s body at Alex’s first text dissolved away. This conversation wasn’t about them, but it was one they needed to have. She should have realized it herself, talked with Alex over the phone or met her for coffee yesterday.

Alex nodded. “I resented the hell out of Kara. I want us to be together more than anything, Maggie,” Alex paused, her eyes shining with tears, “but if I mess things up with Jamie, if she winds up resenting me—”

“You will mess up,” Maggie told her bluntly, and Alex’s gaze snapped up to hers, stricken. “So will I. We’re both going to mess up plenty of times. For a woman who tries so hard to be perfect, that’s hard to accept, but we can only do the best we can. And you’re right. We have to be careful with Jamie. If we get too wrapped up in each other, she could feel neglected. The three of us have to find a balance, but she always comes first now.”

“That’s why I thought we should talk.”
“But, Alex… maybe I’m the one who is selfish, but I don’t want to wait to include you in my and Jamie’s life.”

“I want to do right by you, Maggie. By both of you. I’ll follow your lead, but don’t ever, ever be afraid to tell me to back off. Tell me if I’m causing problems between you and Jamie, okay?”

“Okay.”

They shared hesitant smiles.

“You’re still coming to the zoo, right?” Maggie asked.

“I want to, but if you think—”

“I spent the morning cleaning up my kid’s room because she’s so freaking excited for you to see it. Jamie is more stoked about spending the day with you than she is seeing the penguins. Or otters. Or whatever animal she’s obsessing about this hot minute.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I want to see my girls together and happy. When Blackwell…” Maggie clenched her jaw, willing the man and the memory out of her head. She’d deal with him soon enough. “We both want you to come, Alex.”

Alex stroked the side of Maggie’s face. “Then let’s go to the zoo, Sawyer.”

Maggie nodded, feeling another brick slot into place, shoring up their shaky foundation. More conversations like this one, and maybe, just maybe, they’d build a life together yet.

***

Maggie and Alex had barely made it through the door before Jamie snagged Alex’s wrist and gave her a sharp tug inside. Alex stumbled several steps before she regained her footing and her dignity.

“Hey, Alex. Bye, Alex!” Winn joked, slipping out before Alex could respond.

“Don’t yank Alex’s arm out of the socket, kiddo. We want to go to the zoo, not the emergency room,” Maggie teased.

“Sorry.” Jamie’s strength slackened instantly.

Alex’s gaze swept over the apartment with naked curiosity as she tagged along. There was a stack of Disney Blu-rays on the coffee table. Blankets and pillows lay forgotten on the leather couch where Winn had spent the night. A small, navy jacket hung from one side of a kitchen chair, Maggie’s oversized police windbreaker on the other. The air smelled like coffee and strawberry Pop-Tarts.

“I’m used to it with Kara around.” Alex tossed a look over her shoulder. Maggie leaned against the door, watching them with a soft smile that never failed to make Alex’s pulse quicken. She lost sight of it as they rounded the corner into the hall.

“Mom’s room is down there, but this one is mine.” Jamie dragged Alex inside the first room and flipped on the light.

Alex froze. Kara’s crest was the focal point, looming large in the middle of a dark blue bedspread. The curtains matched. Even the lampshade was alight with tiny House of El logos.
Suspicious she was being punked, Alex turned to Jamie. The beaming, dimpled smile waiting for her was one hundred percent genuine. No joke then. Alex’s jaw worked, but nothing came out.

Maggie’s voice drifted by as she headed for her bedroom at the end of the hall. “Not one word about the decor, Danvers.”

And Alex thought Maggie had it bad with Jamie’s tennis shoes. She wiped a hand over her mouth, trying to stifle a snicker.

Jamie frowned. “What’s so funny?”

“Nothing. It’s, it’s, um... super.” Alex’s voice quivered with suppressed laughter.

“Mom let me pick everything out when we moved in. Even the furniture.”

“Wait, Maggie bought all this?” Alex had assumed everything was a holdover from Jamie’s previous life.

“Uh-huh. She wanted me to feel like this was my home too.”

Alex’s humor vanished when Jamie released her hand and scrambled over the bed to retrieve her backpack.

“Come here. I want to show you my drawings.”

Tucking her hands into her back pockets, Alex’s gaze roamed the room as she slowly rounded the bed. It wasn’t hard to picture Maggie sitting on the floor, cursing while she assembled the white, IKEA furniture. She’d have been exhausted after a hard day on the task force, but that wouldn’t have stopped her from doing what needed to be done for Jamie.

“Uncle Winn painted the walls,” Jamie added as an afterthought. She rooted around in her bag and slid out a sketchpad. “Uncle J’onn supervised.”

“Of course,” Alex murmured. Regret erupted like magma, making Alex’s skin feel hot and tight. If she hadn’t been such an idiot, she would have painted the walls. Helped Maggie with the furniture. Shared the expenses, the meals, the movies...

The memories.

She should have been here. She would have been if Maggie had told her about Jamie. If anyone had.

“Alex?” Jamie’s voice snapped Alex back to the moment. She tilted her head, her tiny feet dangling. “You okay?”

“Yeah. Just thinking.” Alex sighed.

“Do you not like my room?”

Alex sat next to Jamie, perversely amused to park her ass on Kara’s crest. “It’s amazing. Few things make Kara as happy as a smart little girl looking up to her.”

“I bet it’s kinda weird though. Your sister’s ‘S’ on everything.”

“Probably weirder for her.”

“Oh. Should I change it to Wonder Woman or something?”
“Don’t worry about it. It would crush Kara if she wasn’t your favorite superhero,” Alex teased.

“Don’t tell her Mom is my favorite then.”

“She is, huh?” Alex let go of her lingering bitterness. There would be plenty of chances to revisit it later, maybe even at her next appointment with Dr. Tan. The prospect of talking with Maggie about it made Alex’s stomach ache.

“She’s a badass.”

Alex grimaced. Sooner or later Jamie would get her in major trouble with that word.

“But Mom would make a cool superhero. See?” Jamie finished thumbing through the pages and turned the sketchpad around for Alex.

Alex took the book with numb fingers, drinking in details Jamie’s six-year-old hands shouldn’t be capable of bringing to life.

Maggie sported a version of Kara’s supersuit. An NCPD shield adorned Maggie’s chest, her dark hair windswept behind her along with a billowing cape. Rather than a skirt, Maggie wore pants, the tight fabric showcasing the lean muscle on her arms and legs.

Badass was right.

Another smile came unbidden to Alex’s lips. “How much do you want for this?”

“How much do you want for this?” Jamie glanced up at her in confusion.

“I’ll buy this off you.” Alex lowered her voice to a whisper. “Your first commission.”

“What’s a commission?” Jamie whispered back.

“How about twenty bucks?”

Jamie’s eyes bugged.

“Don’t even think about it,” Maggie drawled with impeccable timing as she leaned in the doorway.

“But she offered me twenty dollars!” Jamie protested.

Maggie’s lips twitched, but she managed not to smile. “Go finish getting ready, okay? Your otters are waiting.”

Jamie sighed theatrically but clomped off down the hall to the bathroom.

Alex slipped her phone out of her pocket and snapped a picture of the drawing. No way was she leaving without a copy.

“Anybody at my precinct sees that, you’re toast,” Maggie warned, but her eyes glittered with amusement. “She showed you her artwork, I see.”

Alex held up the sketchpad. “You make a sexy superhero, Detective Sawyer.”

Maggie snorted and shoved off the doorframe to join Alex on the bed. Their shoulders brushed as she sat down. Alex feared Maggie would move away, but she didn’t.
“Can you imagine how good her drawings will be at twelve? At twenty?” Maggie caught the corner of the pad, angling it toward her. She shook her head. “She didn’t tell me she’d colored it.”

Unable to resist seeing more, Alex flipped through the drawings. Her mind boggled at Jamie’s talent. “She drew a lot at the DEO. Kara encouraged her to keep Jamie busy while you were…” Alex trailed off then bit her lip. “I had no idea, Maggie. No idea Jamie was drawing stuff like this.”

“She mostly drew you.”

Alex’s head came up. “Me?”

Maggie smirked. She reached out, tracing Alex’s jawline from her ear to her chin with a forefinger. “She nailed this part.”

A shiver skittered down Alex’s spine at the touch. “Oh, yeah?”

“Nothing compares to the real thing, but she came damn close.”

Alex turned her attention back to the sketchpad. She thumbed through a few more pages, stopping when she came to an unfamiliar woman. “Who is this?”

Maggie hesitated. “That’s um… That’s Aileen.”

The stab of jealousy was sharp and deep. Alex had stopped herself from running a background check on the woman dozens of times. Now she wished she hadn’t. She might have been better prepared for how stunning Aileen had been.

Alex struggled to keep her features blank. Funny how she could plaster on a poker face in a life or death struggle, but the thought of Maggie with another woman…

“She’s beautiful,” Alex admitted with heavy reluctance.

“She was.” Maggie’s fingers skimmed over the lower half of the sketch, and Alex tried not to imagine them gliding over Aileen’s strong jaw, sliding down the long column of Aileen’s neck. “Jamie gets her talent from her. She was an artist too.”

“How long were you two…” Alex cursed herself for asking. She didn’t want to know.

“Not as long as I wanted to be. I liked her. A lot. Thought we were a good fit until she abruptly broke things off. I always wondered why she bolted. Now I know.” Maggie clenched her jaw, the muscles pulsing in her cheek. She reached across Alex’s lap and flipped the page.

Even with Aileen no longer staring her in the face, Alex’s jealousy remained. She chewed on the edge of her thumbnail as Maggie continued to rifle through the pages. What would have happened if Aileen had lived? If she’d breezed back into Maggie’s life with Jamie in tow? Who would Maggie have chosen? The woman who’d gotten cold feet and sabotaged their whole relationship weeks before their wedding? Or the mother of Maggie’s child?

“Hey. You lost in the brilliant head of yours again?” Maggie nudged Alex in the ribs with her elbow.

“Sorry,” Alex murmured. There was no point in sharing how envious she was of a dead woman. She felt pathetic enough without voicing those thoughts aloud.

Maggie eyed her for a quiet moment, her steady stare seeing too much. “Do we need to talk about her? I figured now wasn’t the best time.”
The shower shut off in the next room, emphasizing Maggie’s point.

“Eventually.” Alex dredged up a smile and turned the page. A sketch of Winn stuck its lead tongue out at her.

Maggie’s gaze continued to linger on Alex’s profile. “For what it’s worth, what I had with Aileen doesn’t hold a candle to this. To us.” Maggie scooped up Alex’s left hand and laced their fingers. “But she’s Jamie’s mom, and Jamie still misses her like crazy. Aileen raised an amazing kid, Alex. I can’t and won’t ignore how much she matters to my daughter.”

A few splintered cracks in Alex’s battered ego soothed with the sentiment, but the envy remained, cold and leaden, in the pit of her stomach. She squeezed Maggie’s hand. “She just… she made a child with you, Maggie.”

“Yeah. I still struggle to wrap my head around that one.”

The bedspread rustled as Alex scooted closer. “I used to imagine what a good mother you’d be. What you’d look like helping our daughter with her homework. How you’d treat her boyfriends or girlfriends when she started dating. What it would be like to watch you cheer her on at softball games.”

“Softball, huh? You’ve seen me at a National City Sharks game, Alex. You sure you’d want me in the stands during our kid’s games at the local ballpark?”

*Our kid.* The words filled Alex with light, with hope. “You’d be intense,” she agreed with a sliver of a smile, “but you’d never push her more than she wanted you to, and you’d be there every damn game you could. You’d play catch with her in the backyard…”

“Your arm is better than mine.” Maggie laid her head against Alex’s shoulder and sighed. “God, how did we get to this? If I’d just…”

“Hey.” Alex closed the sketchpad and shifted to rest their foreheads together. “Not today. Let’s… put that aside and make the most of this day together. Just the three of us. I’ve been looking forward to this.”

“You know something, Danvers?”

“What?”

“Today means a lot to me too.”

They smiled at each other, and a tiny bit of hurt seemed to heal between them.

“Don’t think for a second all this mushy talk will distract me from getting that Super Sawyer sketch though,” Alex joked, determined to take her own advice and keep the mood light this time. “It’s mine.”

“Think so, huh?”

“I’m going to frame it. Put it in my bedroom.”

“So you can look at it and do what, Danvers?” Maggie asked, making Alex splutter. “I could get her to draw one of you too, you know.”

“I would look so good in a cape. Bring it on.”
Maggie laughed, her smile so radiant Alex couldn’t help herself. She closed the distance between them and kissed her. Her soul soared when Maggie kissed her back.

A quiet click drew them apart. Jamie stood in the doorway with her phone, apparently having just snapped their picture.

“I’m so drawing that later,” she announced with a grin.

BONUS:
Boxer had that sketch idea for the longest time so we asked eva to create it for the story. Thanks for bringing this to life, eva!

Also, this chapter had to be cut into two. Next chapter with the zoo will be up in the next week or so. Cheers!
Sorry for the long time between posts. We hope people are still reading. Please leave a comment to keep us motivated if you can. Comments feed the writers.

THANKS to Dani for the awesome banner!
“I bet we’re boring your mom,” Alex mock whispered to Jamie. They were crouched by the penguin habitat, Jamie’s small fingers splayed wide against the plexiglass.

“You’d bet wrong.” Maggie lowered her camera and glanced at the display. An image of Alex, on one knee pointing out the baby puffins, and Jamie, following the line of her arm, faded from view. Their faces, side by side, had been alight with the same wonder.

Maggie had taken dozens of pictures of them bonding. As soon as they’d stepped through the zoo entrance, Jamie had dragged Alex from one exhibit to another, explaining, ‘Mom’s seen it already.’ Maggie trailed in their wake, content to watch them geek out over pandas, elephants, and penguins together.
With a tiny groan, Alex straightened and drifted back to Maggie, leaving Jamie with a gaggle of other children. She shivered in her light sweater and rubbed her arms. “You sure? You’ve been kind of quiet.”

“Yeah.” Maggie didn’t have words to explain how full her heart was. A small, happy sigh escaped her lips. “Yeah. This is… perfect.”

It wasn’t her Rush-fueled vision of Christmas Eve with all of them curled up by the fire in a quaint, snowy cabin, but the moment was still a gift, one she almost didn’t live to receive. Even though she was freezing, and the air smelled like dead fish.

Alex glanced back at Jamie. She’d been so careful, balancing her time between mother and daughter, although Jamie’s enthusiasm made it hard.

“She’s, um, insistent,” Alex said with a soft, charmed laugh. “I just… I don’t want you to think I’m only here because—”

“I don’t,” Maggie promised as she slung her camera strap back around her neck. “You’re good. We’re good.”

Alex took a deep breath and nodded, but she didn’t look convinced.

It would take time, more than either of them wanted, to get to a place where they fully trusted the love between them again. Logically, Maggie knew that, but she couldn’t bear the uncertainty in Alex’s eyes, not when the day had been going so well.

“Come here,” Maggie urged.

“Why?”

“I want you to keep me warm.”

A mischievous twinkle chased away the doubt in Alex’s gaze. She slipped her hands in her jeans pockets and shuffled toward her. “Keep you warm, huh?”

“What? The air conditioner in this place is set to ‘arctic.’” Maggie snaked her arm around Alex’s waist, drawing Alex against her hip so they could both keep an eye on Jamie.

“Mhmm,” Alex murmured, her tone playfully skeptical.

Maggie leaned her head against Alex’s shoulder. The baby puffins floated by the glass, just as fascinated by the children as the children were of them. Jamie clapped and squealed in delight.

“She’s so much like you.” Alex wrapped her own arm around Maggie’s shoulders, her heat banishing the chill. Maggie snuggled closer, breathing in her familiar scent.

“When have I ever been that excited about anything, Danvers?”

“You were pretty stoked about those VIP tickets to Barenaked Ladies…”

That teased a full-throated laugh from Maggie. Jamie glanced over her shoulder at the sound. A smile, an echo of Maggie’s own, came to her lips. Maggie winked at her, and Jamie returned her attention to the puffins.

“So, um… Not to bring the mood down, but are you holding up okay? With, uh, everything?”
Having expected the question all day, it was almost a relief Alex had finally asked it. Maggie allowed herself a moment to gauge her current condition then shrugged. “Whatever you and Eliza cooked up helps. A lot. The cravings are getting easier to fight. They can’t compare to this though.” She gave Alex a gentle squeeze.

“Nothing can.” Alex brushed a kiss against Maggie’s temple.

“Mom! Alex!” Jamie broke from the pack and rushed over, grabbing their hands and yanking them down the path with little resistance. “They just announced they’re feeding the walruses. Come on.”

By the time they got there, a crowd had already formed around the habitat. Jamie craned her neck to see over the taller kids and adults, her mouth scrunched into a pout.

“Alex, be careful!” Maggie warned as Alex hoisted Jamie up on her shoulders.

“I won’t drop her.” Alex sounded insulted.

Maggie leaned in and lowered her voice. “My kid is part alien and made of sturdier stuff than most six-year-olds. I’m worried about your back, not you dumping her on the concrete.”

“I’ve lifted you up a time or two. You didn’t seem worried about my back then.”

Heat bloomed on Maggie’s cheeks, and judging by Alex’s dry, wicked chuckle, Maggie’s tanner complexion did little to hide it. The cold in the enclosure was no longer an issue.

“What will they feed them?” Jamie asked with an excited bounce, the innuendo thankfully going over her head.

Alex wrapped her hands around Jamie’s tennis shoes, her fingers covering the House of El crests on the toes. “Mollusks, probably. Maybe clams. Walruses don’t really chew their food, and…”

Maggie tuned out Alex’s words, captivated instead by the way Jamie soaked up every word of Alex’s long, scientific explanation. She wondered if Alex had read up on zoo animals to be ready with any and all answers to Jamie’s never-ending stream of questions. It wouldn’t surprise her.

With the camera battery nearly dead, Maggie switched to her phone. When she raised it to take a picture, Jamie plucked it from her grasp. “Hey!”

“I want one with you in it too, Mom!” Jamie ordered from her perch.

“Yeah. You too,” Alex coaxed with a slow, easy smile that made Maggie’s stomach flutter.

Maggie cleared her throat and slipped her arm around Alex again. It was all so damn domestic, the type of scene Maggie had walked away from their life together to avoid. But Fate had been a sneaky bitch, and here they were anyway. Now Maggie didn’t want to be anywhere else.

Their gazes met, and for a timeless moment, Maggie lost herself in the warmth of Alex’s eyes.

“Look at the camera!” Jamie huffed in exasperation.

With guilty smirks, Alex and Maggie glanced up, and Jamie took a few photos of the three of them.

“Now silly faces!” Jamie tilted her head and bugged her eyes. Maggie stuck out her tongue, and Alex screwed up her features in a weird grimace for picture after picture. A few people chuckled, entertained by their antics.
They stopped when the zookeepers arrived, and Jamie’s young attention was captured by the two walruses happily stuffing their face full of clams. When they finished with their lunch, Maggie figured that was their cue to grab a meal of their own.

“Anyone hungry?”

“I am,” Jamie piped up as the crowd began to disperse.

Alex dropped to one knee. “Okay, down you go, kiddo.”

Jamie climbed off, already flipping through the photos she’d taken. “Look!” She turned the phone around.

Expecting walruses, Maggie’s breath caught when she discovered their first picture as a family instead.

Alex took the phone from Jamie’s small hands. “We make a good looking bunch, huh?” she asked in a hoarse voice, angling the screen toward Maggie. Her expression a mixture of hesitant and hopeful.

“Yeah, we do,” Maggie breathed as she leaned into Alex’s side. If she had any say in the matter, this photo would be the first of many. Vacations. Holidays. School dances and graduations. Maggie wanted them all.

Jamie latched onto her hip, and Maggie rifled her fingers through her daughter’s hair as Alex scrolled through more images. They both snickered when she found the silly ones.

“Yeah we do,” Maggie repeated, more determined than ever to fight for this. For them.

“You have the cutest family,” a kind, older woman said to Maggie as the crowd parted around them.

Throat too tight to answer, Maggie simply nodded and smiled.

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“Look, Mom. They have a slide!”

Maggie beamed as she let Jamie pull her as close as the barrier allowed. Her silky hair shimmered in the sun when she knelt by her daughter and rested her cheek against Jamie’s, listening to Jamie’s play-by-play of the otters frolicking in the water.

Raising her phone, Alex snapped picture after picture, catching every moment of Maggie’s transition from a wide grin to a hearty laugh, her head thrown back in genuine mirth with her dimples on full display.

Alex was struck anew by her beauty. How it intensified when she was with Jamie. Maggie’s smile was just a little brighter, her laugh a little fuller, like Jamie imbued her with a sense of lightness and wonder. Motherhood suited Maggie far better than she knew.

Jamie turned and whispered something in Maggie’s ear, her words too quiet to hear. The feeling of being an outsider, an interloper, shot through Alex’s gut. Paralyzed by sudden fear, she wondered how their bond, their happiness, could ever expand to include her. Eliza’s advice about treading lightly rang in Alex’s ears, rooting her to the spot to envy their closeness from afar.

Then they turned to look back at her, twin conspiratorial grins curving their lips, and Maggie beckoned. The breath Alex had been holding left her lungs in a rush, and her knees went weak as
Alex stepped closer.

Mother and daughter reached for her as she approached, and when Alex hesitated, Jamie caught her hand and pulled her in with a touch of inhuman strength.

Clasping both their hands, Alex completed the circle. She sucked down a shaky breath, hiding her fears behind a smirk and a teasing tone. “Do I want to know what you two are plotting?”

“Who, us?”

“Yeah, us?”

Their innocent expressions were nearly identical, and Alex mourned the loss of Maggie’s childhood pictures with renewed intensity. She imagined how acutely Maggie was reflected in Jamie and wished she could do a comparison of them at the same age.

“Well,” Jamie said with an exaggerated drawl, snapping Alex out of her daze. “I told Mom I need swimming lessons so we can go to the water park. I want to go on the big slides. Like the otters.”

“Aileen was afraid of the water, with her denser bone structure,” Maggie explained. “She never taught Jamie to swim.”

Alex dropped to one knee to lean into the huddle. “Want to know a secret? Kara doesn’t like the water either. She sinks like a rock.”

“I thought Kara grew up with you? Mom said you grew up by the water and are probably half otter yourself.”

“Half otter?” Mock outrage laced Alex’s tone.

Maggie’s mouth twisted to hide a smirk. “I’ve seen you swim a few times. You’re quarter otter, at least.”

“Did you know otters mate for life?” Jamie’s question cut through their flirtatious moment, and she shrugged when two heads swung toward her. “What? My science teacher said so. They also juggle pebbles and float on their backs. Oh, and they hold hands with their mate so they won’t drift apart in the water. It’s really cute.”

“Just a fount of otter facts, aren’t you?” Maggie’s left eyebrow arched. Clearly she wasn’t fooled by Jamie’s innocent act any more than Alex was.

“So will you?” Jamie asked, turning her pleading gaze on Alex.

“Will I? Will I what?” Alex blinked at the verbal whiplash, wondering if Jamie was asking her if she was going to mate for life.

“Teach me to swim,” Jamie replied as if it was the most logical question in the world.

“Oh. OH. Of course. I’ll even do you one better and teach you to surf.”

“Cool! Does that mean I get a surfboard?”

Alex winced. “Um, you’ll, um, need to ask your mom.”

“Just thinking about that now, Danvers?” Maggie asked, but her tone lacked bite. “Let’s start with lessons. If you like the water, we’ll see if there’s room to store a surfboard in our apartment.”
“Okay! But first, ice cream!” Jamie erupted from their spot, dragging them both away from the otters and toward the ice cream stand.

“What do you want?” Alex asked as they nabbed a picnic table, but Maggie waved off the offer.

“You sit, I’ll get it.”

“Are you…?”

“Sit.”

Alex watched Maggie thread her way through the crowd for a moment, enjoying the confident swagger of her hips. She almost forgot Jamie was there until she glanced to her right and found a dark pair of eyes watching her intently.

“So, are you having fun?” Alex asked.

“Yeah. Mom is too. She’s happy you came.”

“Yeah?” Alex ran a hand through her hair and checked on Maggie, deep in the line for ice cream.

“She’s been happy ever since your date on Friday night.”

Alex’s stomach fluttered at the news. “Me too.”

“When I came to live with her though, she was sad. About you.”

“I know,” Alex admitted after a rough swallow, cursing herself again for being so stupid. “My life has been pretty miserable without your mom. If I could go back and do things differently—”

“I don’t want her to be sad like that again.”

Alex blinked, belatedly realizing she was getting the shovel talk from a six-year-old. A very serious six-year-old. “Me, either.”

“You remember when she was sick?”

“Of course.” Visions of Maggie, pale and lifeless, swam into Alex’s head. It would be a long time before those images receded from her memory, reminders of how she had almost lost it all.

“Don’t forget what you promised, okay? You promised me you’d make her happy.”

“I…” Alex swallowed again, struggling to find her words. So much had changed since that morning on the DEO balcony, when she’d naively believed the only thing standing between her and having a family with Maggie was saving Maggie’s life.

Alex took a deep breath and leaned her elbows on the sun-warmed table. “Remember when I was trying to save your mom?” Jamie nodded, solemn. “I couldn’t promise it would work, but I promised to do everything I could to help her. The deal I made you is... like that. Relationships are complicated, Jamie. As much as I wish I could, I can’t promise your mom and I will always be happy. But I can promise I’ll do everything in my power to make her happy as much as I can.”

Jamie absorbed that for a moment, and Alex wondered what her young brain was thinking. “And what about you? You aren’t gonna run away from being happy again, are you?”

Jesus, this kid. Alex reached out to stroke her fingers through Jamie’s soft hair. “Not if I can help it,”
she pledged. “I want to be happy, with both of you.”

“Okay,” Jamie said with a nod, seemingly satisfied as she enumerated which slides she wanted to go on once she learned to swim.

“Chocolate chocolate chip for my nerds,” Maggie announced as she returned. She handed out the cones and settled beside Alex. “Everything okay?” she asked quietly. “Things looked serious over here.”

Wrapping an arm around Maggie’s waist, Alex drew her closer. “Your daughter just wanted to make sure I understood my life’s mission is to make you happy.”

“Oh really?” Maggie’s glare did nothing to wipe the smug look from Jamie’s face as she licked her ice cream.

“Yup. I happily accepted.”

Maggie’s attention shifted back to Alex and lingered. “You sure about that, Danvers?”

“Well, I’ve been told otters mate for life, and I’m quarter otter, so…."

Maggie’s lips were cold, her kiss tasting of vegan ice cream, but Alex didn’t mind at all.

***

Maggie couldn’t stop staring at them.

*Her girls.*

Alex leaned against the rear of the elevator as it rose to Maggie’s floor. She had her eyes closed and Jamie sacked out in her arms, Jamie’s forehead nestled in the curve of Alex’s neck.

A sappy smile appeared as Maggie lowered her phone and tucked it into her back pocket. There was only a sliver of battery life left, but it had lasted long enough to grab one final photo of the day. The one she’d frame for her desk at the precinct when she finally got to sit at it again.

“Anyone ever tell you it’s rude to stare?” Alex murmured, eyes still shut.

Maggie kept her own voice low. “Don’t be so damn cute then.”

The elevator dinged, and the doors parted. With a weary grunt, Alex pushed off the wall and lumbered into the hallway.

After a full day at the zoo, they’d caught a baseball game at the triple A stadium three blocks away. Maggie’s skin prickled from too much sun, and the top of Alex’s nose and cheeks were dusted with pink. Alex would get a new freckle or two out of this. While they had been zealous about sunscreen for Jamie, they’d been a little lax with it themselves.

“Want me to take her?” Maggie offered as they shuffled toward her apartment. Jamie weighed a ton when she was asleep, and Alex could barely keep her eyes open.

It came as no surprise when Alex shook her head. “You do this all the time. Let me have a turn.”

With a sigh their magical day was ending, Maggie unlocked her door and held it open for Alex to slip inside before shutting it behind them.
“Where should I put her?” Alex asked.

Maggie tossed her camera on the couch and led the way. She left Jamie’s room dark, the city lights peeking through the slats in the blinds all the illumination she needed. Alex followed, waiting for Maggie to pull back the Supergirl cover and sheets.

When she turned to take Jamie, Maggie’s heart squeezed so hard she could barely breathe. Alex had her cheek resting on Jamie’s hair, appearing as reluctant to let the day go as Maggie was.

“Can I?” Alex whispered.

Maggie nodded.

With a sigh of her own, Alex gently laid Jamie on the bed. Jamie didn’t stir as Maggie tucked her daughter in then kissed Jamie goodnight on the forehead. When Maggie turned to leave, Alex greeted her with a soft, smitten smile. Maggie snagged Alex’s sleeve at the elbow.

“C’mon, before those heart eyes get so loud they wake the whole neighborhood.”

Alex’s mouth quirked, but she didn’t dispute the charge. “So maybe Jamie doesn’t have enhanced hearing after all,” she said once they’d closed the door and retreated to the living room.

“Her hearing is better than mine, but she’s just worn out. Too much excitement for one day.”

They stared at each other for a moment in awkward silence.

Alex’s shoulders hunched as she crossed her arms. “I don’t want to jinx it, but this is the best damn day I’ve had in months. Thank you for inviting me.”

Maggie fought the compulsion to cling to Alex, to keep her there and never let her go. They were supposed to take this reconciliation slow, but when it came to Alex, Maggie had a bad habit of throwing caution to the wind. “Pretty sure I could say the same for Jamie and me. Told you she’d like you, Danvers.”

Alex released a weak laugh. “Jamie is a great kid, and I’m grateful for the chance to get to know her, but the best part of today was being with you. I thought I knew what it would feel like, look like, to see you as a mom, but reality was so much better. You’re so good with her, Maggie.”

“Today was easy. There are plenty of other days where I burn dinner, or I miss cues she needs to talk, or I can’t help her with her homework...”

“Give yourself some credit. You two have only been together for a few months, and it’s clear Jamie adores you already. You’ve done an amazing job.”

Maggie warmed with Alex’s praise, startled by how much she needed it. “That first night, we were so damn scared and uncomfortable with each other. We had no idea what to talk about. Guess what finally broke the ice?”

Alex arched a single eyebrow.

“Kara. Jamie found out I’d met Supergirl and Superman and had about a zillion questions.”

A tiny snort escaped, and Alex bit her lip to suppress a cheeky smile.

“Yeah, yuck it up, Danvers, but... Supergirl was common ground. We talked about Kara for a good hour and some change before Jamie fell asleep beside me mid-story.”
“I thought you were playing a practical joke on me when I saw Jamie’s room. You’re sweet to put your issues with Kara aside to make Jamie happy.”

“My issues were never really with Kara, just her alter-ego sometimes, and your sister has been a lot better lately… on a bunch of fronts. I wouldn’t be standing here without her.”

As if all she needed was the reminder, Alex reached out and drew Maggie into a hug. “Sometimes,” she began before the words choked off. She cleared her throat, and when she spoke again, her voice was strained but her words were light. “Sometimes my sister comes in handy.”

“Yeah. Yeah, she does.” Maggie snuggled into the heat of Alex’s body.

“You know, Jamie thinks Supergirl is cool, but she thinks you’re even cooler.”

“She’ll outgrow that fast enough. Aileen painted me out to be some big, hero cop when reality is a lot less impressive. She probably figured Jamie would never learn the…” Maggie trailed off, a cold, sick horror washing over her when she realized she might never have known about Jamie if Aileen hadn’t died.

That she’d nearly done the same thing to Alex.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m sorry,” Maggie ground out. “I can never say it to you enough. I should have called. That first night and every other. I should have—”

“Hey, don’t.” Alex’s arms tightened around her shoulders. “No regrets today, remember? I’m on cloud nine, Maggie. I’ll crash back to earth when I leave, but let’s hold onto this good day as long as we can, okay? Even if it’s just a few more seconds.”

Maggie fisted her hands in Alex’s sweater. “You have no idea how much I wanted a day like today. To see you two together. Alex…”

Alex ran a hand up Maggie’s spine to cup the base of her neck before leaning back to make eye contact. “I saw a whole new side of you. One that…” Alex drew in a ragged breath. “Motherhood suits you. You’ve never been more—”

“Stay,” Maggie blurted, her heart overruling her head. “I’ll text Winn. He can come tomorrow, but stay here tonight.”

There was no hiding the sudden longing in Alex’s eyes. “What happened to glacial?”

Screw glacial, Maggie nearly said, but she bit back the words. They did have to tread carefully. There was too much at stake. But she needed this, and she suspected Alex did as well. “You’re exhausted, and I’m sure Winn would like to sleep in his own bed for a change. You can crash on the couch. Just… please. Stay.”

“If you expect me to say no when you’re looking at me like that, it’s not gonna happen.”

Maggie cradled Alex’s face between her palms, her thumbs stroking Alex’s cheeks.

Alex leaned into her, resting their foreheads together. “Definitely not gonna happen when you bust out the dimples,” she teased.

Maggie pulled Alex in, ending a perfect day with a perfect kiss.
Hours later, Alex kicked the blankets off and sat up. A shapeless nightmare had shaken her awake, but the images faded too fast for her to latch onto them, leaving her with little memory of the dream and an unsettled sensation in the pit of her stomach.

How many nights had she jolted awake and reached for Maggie only to find her side of the bed cold to the touch? Alex had never imagined the sight of an empty pillow could break her, but it had. Over and over again.

Maggie’s apartment settled around her, filled with too many unfamiliar sounds for Alex’s honed instincts to ignore. Being closer to the bay, even the city sounded different beyond the windows.

Hyper aware of Maggie’s presence and the meager distance between them, Alex grabbed the glass of water Maggie had left on the coffee table and took a sip. The temptation to crawl into bed beside her was so potent it hurt. She would give anything, anything, to claw back a shred of the quiet nights they’d shared. The murmured I love yous and soft, sleepy kisses goodnight. Maggie’s heat close and comforting.

“Can’t sleep, either, huh?”

Alex flinched, sloshing a few drops of water out of her glass as Maggie’s voice rolled out of the shadows. She fumbled for the coaster and set the glass down. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah. A lot on my mind.”

“Know the feeling. My brain could use an off switch.”

With a sigh, Maggie joined her on the couch. Alex made out a baggy black t-shirt and gray cotton shorts in the weak light spilling in through the balcony door. She’d always loved Maggie like this, relaxed and a little rumpled, the loose clothes making her softer and more tempting somehow.

“It’s not the Rush, is it?” Alex asked.

Maggie shook her head. “I have my first session with the department shrink in the morning. Guess I’m nervous. What about you?”

Alex clasped the back of her neck and massaged the muscles there. She was sore from Jamie jerking her around all day, but nothing an Advil or two couldn’t cure. “A million little things I wish I’d done differently, and…”

Maggie turned to study her when Alex trailed off. “And?”

“And it’s hard to sleep when you’re… My body knows you’re close, and I…” Alex lowered her head and released another long, rough exhale.

“Yeah,” Maggie said again, quieter this time. She shifted, drawing one foot under her. “It’s funny what you miss about a person. When we first started dating, you’d keep me up snoring.”

“I don’t snore,” Alex said, indignant.

“You totally snore, Danvers. Not real loud, but you do this whistling thing…” Maggie’s expression was fond. “After we ended, I… I craved that sound every night. It’s how I knew you were there with me in the dark. Somewhere along the way, it became reassuring, and when it was gone…” She swallowed.
“Is there anything I can do to help you sleep?”

A smirk appeared on Maggie’s lips, visible even in the low light. “Thought you were worried about Jamie’s super hearing.”

Heated memories brought a flush to Alex’s skin. The way Maggie used to move against her. The sounds she made, her breath coming fast and short as blunt nails sunk into Alex’s back… “That’s, I meant…”

Maggie chuckled as Alex floundered.

“I meant a back rub, or talking until you fell asleep. Get your mind out of the gutter, Sawyer,” Alex teased, breathless.

“Like yours didn’t crawl in there with me.”

“I plead the fifth.”

“Uh-huh.”

They lapsed into thoughtful silence.

“So, um… What would Jamie do if she found me in your bed tomorrow morning?” Alex risked a peek at Maggie’s profile.

Maggie ran her forefinger back and forth along her bottom lip. “I don’t know. I need to sit her down and talk a lot of this out with her. Should have done it sooner.”

“It’s only been a few days since we decided to try again, Maggie.”

“If I’d talked to Jamie yesterday, we wouldn’t be sitting on my couch at three a.m. wishing we in my bed together.”

“Is that what you want?”

“It’s not about what I want—”

“Stop it. Stop putting your feelings last,” Alex urged. “You’re right about us finding a balance with Jamie, but you’re part of that balance, Maggie. Your needs are important too. Especially to me.”

“I told you, it’s not that simple.”

Alex inched closer. “What time does Jamie wake up?”

“Around seven, but—”

“We’ll set an alarm. I’ll slip back out onto the couch before she’s up.”

“Alex…”

“Look, maybe I’m being selfish because I want the same thing, but let me hold you for a few hours. I’ll rest easier knowing you’re next to me.”

Maggie said nothing so Alex sweetened the deal.

“I’ll even snore for you, Sawyer.”
A soft laugh tumbled out. Maggie reached over and clasped Alex’s hand, threading their fingers together before she glanced toward the ceiling. Alex waited in silence, giving her the time she needed to think things through.

“What do we do if she catches you?”

Alex licked her lips, willing herself to remain calm at the prospect of sharing a bed again much sooner than she expected. “We cross that bridge if we come to it, but Jamie’s smart. I think we’ll be okay if all we’re doing is sleeping.”

After a moment, Maggie gave a tiny, almost imperceptible nod.

“You sure?”

Maggie stood and used their joined hands to haul Alex onto her feet. “Come to bed before I change my mind.”

Alex didn’t have to be told twice. She grabbed her pillow and followed Maggie down the darkened hallway.

As Maggie pulled back the covers, Alex couldn’t help but wonder if she was the only woman to share this bed with Maggie since their breakup. The thought was too painful to consider, so Alex slammed the lid on it. She’d address the possibility another time, but right now, the dark belonged to them.

“C’mere,” Alex beckoned in a hoarse voice once she settled beneath the sheets.

Maggie finished setting the alarm on her phone then turned toward her. They reached for each other in the shadows, and Alex sighed when Maggie’s familiar curves molded against her own.

Fingers slipped under Alex’s borrowed t-shirt, and Alex’s breath hitched at the inquisitive touch. She nuzzled closer, soaking up Maggie’s heat as those fingers curved, warm and calloused, around Alex’s side.

Alex hummed in approval and let her own hands wander, careful not to venture anywhere too arousing, but in search of soft skin. When she drifted her fingertips up Maggie’s spine, stopping just shy of the bandages on Maggie’s shoulders, Maggie arched into her with a whimper of pleasure.

Alex tangled their legs and rolled over, dragging Maggie on top of her. She got a sexy smirk for her trouble, one barely visible in the castoff of the bathroom nightlight.

“Didn’t invite you back here to make out, Danvers,” Maggie murmured, dipping her head to trail a series of lazy kisses from Alex’s collarbone to the sharp line of her jaw.

Alex tunneled her fingers through Maggie’s silky, tousled hair. “You started it.”

Maggie snickered, her breath tickling the shell of Alex’s ear. She eased back and met Alex’s eyes, searching them for a long moment. “I want what we had today. The three of us. I’m going to bust my ass to hold on to it,” she pledged, bringing their foreheads together. “Promise me—”

Alex tilted Maggie’s chin and kissed her, taking her time about it. “Whatever it takes,” she murmured when they parted. “You and me will have more dates. More trips to the zoo with Jamie. We’ll figure it all out. We have to.”

Maggie nodded. “We have to,” she agreed in a whisper.
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